



Small Group Guide: Resolving Conflict God's Way - Learn to Forgive

Overview

This session continues the series "Resolved," focusing on one of the most challenging aspects of the Christian life: forgiveness. The sermon examines what forgiveness is, what it is not, and how understanding the redemptive work of Christ empowers us to forgive those who have hurt us. The goal is not merely head knowledge but practical, obedient action that leads to healing and unity within the body of Christ.

Key Takeaways

- Forgiveness is not a feeling, not forgetting, and not excusing the offender's behavior.
- Forgiveness is a commandment, not a suggestion. There are no loopholes.
- Forgiveness is unilateral -- it requires only one person and is an act of obedience to God regardless of whether the other party reconciles.
- Reconciliation requires two people, but forgiveness does not. You can forgive someone who never apologizes, never changes, or has already died.
- Forgiveness is not for the person who hurt you. It is for you.
- When you forgive, you release your claim to revenge and entrust justice to God.
- Understanding the redemptive work of Christ on the cross is what empowers genuine forgiveness.
- Prayer is not optional in the process of forgiveness. Without it, you are attempting to forgive in your own strength.

Discussion Questions

Opening Question (Ice Breaker)

1. Without sharing details that might be hurtful to others, can you describe a time when forgiving someone felt nearly impossible? What made it so difficult?

Section 1: What Forgiveness Is Not

The sermon identified three common misconceptions about forgiveness: that it is a feeling, that it means forgetting, and that it excuses the offender.

1. Which of these three misconceptions have you personally believed or heard others express? How did that misunderstanding affect your ability to forgive?
2. The sermon made the point that our feelings can lie to us and that truth must take priority over emotion. How does this principle apply specifically to forgiveness? What truths from Scripture can we hold onto when our feelings tell us we have not really forgiven someone?
3. If forgiveness does not excuse the offender or erase the memory of what happened, how would you explain to someone outside the church what forgiveness actually does accomplish?

Section 2: Forgiveness as a Requirement

The sermon was direct in stating that forgiveness is a requirement for followers of Christ, pointing to the warning in Matthew 6:14-15, where Jesus connects our willingness to forgive others with God's forgiveness of us.

1. How does it change your perspective on forgiveness to understand it as an act of obedience rather than simply an emotional response?
2. The sermon drew a connection between the parable in Matthew 18:21-35, where a forgiven debtor refuses to forgive a smaller debt, and our tendency to seek God's forgiveness while withholding it from others. In what ways do you see this pattern in your own life or in the broader church culture?
3. The sermon stated, "It is not their fault I don't forgive them. That's me." How does accepting personal responsibility for forgiveness change the way you approach conflict with a fellow believer?

Section 3: Empathy and the Redemptive Work of Christ

The sermon pointed to Hebrews 4:15, which describes Christ as one who can sympathize with our weaknesses because he took on human experience. This empathy modeled by Jesus becomes the basis for extending empathy to those who hurt us.

1. The phrase "***hurt people hurt people***" was used in the sermon. How does understanding that an offender is likely carrying their own pain help you develop empathy without excusing their behavior?
2. The sermon said, "Christian forgiveness draws its power from Christ's redemptive work and becomes a character quality rather than merely an act of willpower." What is the difference between trying to forgive through willpower and drawing that ability from Christ? What does that look like practically in your daily life?
3. Think about what Christ endured and the prayer he prayed in Luke 23:34, asking the Father to forgive those crucifying him because they did not know what they were doing. What does it mean for you personally that Jesus set that example at the moment of his greatest suffering?

Section 4: Addressing Internal Barriers and the Ongoing Process

The sermon identified bitterness, anger, and hostility as internal barriers that must be surrendered to God. It also used the image of releasing a bird to illustrate letting go of an offense, and cautioned against "feeding the bird" by rehearsing grievances through rumination or gossip.

1. The sermon mentioned that sometimes a forgiven offense comes back to mind like a homing pigeon returning to your hand. What habits or practices help you "stop feeding the bird" when old hurts resurface?
2. Philippians 4:8 instructs believers to focus their minds on whatever is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and admirable. How can intentionally redirecting your thoughts serve as a practical tool in the ongoing process of forgiveness?
3. The sermon made a sharp distinction between sharing a prayer request and gossip or slander. How does your group define that line? What accountability can you hold one another to when it comes to how you talk about people who have hurt you?

Section 5: Prayer as the Foundation

The sermon closed by emphasizing that prayer is not optional in forgiveness. It

referenced Mark 11:25, where Jesus instructs his followers to forgive before they even present their requests to God.

1. Have you ever been in prayer and had the name or face of someone you are in conflict with come to mind unexpectedly? How did you respond, and looking back, how do you interpret that moment now?
2. The pastor shared that when he prayed about a difficult relationship, God changed him more than the other person. Has that been your experience? How does prayer shift your perspective from wanting the other person to change to allowing God to work in you?

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to practice before your next group meeting.

1. Write a release prayer. Identify one person you have been struggling to forgive. Write out a short prayer releasing them to God. You do not need to share it with anyone. The act of writing it can help make the forgiveness concrete and intentional.
2. Memorize a truth to counter your feelings. Select one verse that speaks to forgiveness, God's justice, or the redemptive work of Christ. Memorize it this week so that when emotions resurface, you have truth ready to counter them.
3. Stop feeding the bird. Identify one way you have been rehearsing an offense, whether through repeated conversations with others, replaying the situation in your mind, or revisiting old grievances. Commit to one specific action to stop that pattern this week.
4. Pray for the person who hurt you. Set aside a specific time each day this week to pray for the person you are struggling to forgive. Do not pray for what you think they deserve. Pray for their well-being, their relationship with God, and their healing. Notice what happens in you over the course of the week.
5. Take the first step toward reconciliation. If you are in unresolved conflict with a fellow believer, prayerfully consider reaching out to them directly this week. Not by text, not through a third party, but through a personal conversation. Ask God to prepare both your heart and theirs before you make contact.

Closing Reflection

The sermon reminded us that we cannot make disciples if we are not disciples

ourselves, and we cannot model Christ to the world if we are unwilling to forgive as Christ forgave us. Unity in the body of Christ is not conformity to one another but conformity to Christ. Forgiveness is one of the clearest expressions of that conformity.

Close your group time in prayer. Ask each member to silently bring before God the name of one person they need to forgive, and then lead the group in a corporate prayer of release, trusting God with His righteous justice and asking Him to do the work of transformation in each person present.