



The Week of March 6, 2022

God Is... Forgiving

Conversation Guide

This Week's Take-Aways

- About God: (1 Corinthians 8:6) I believe there is one God who exists in 3 persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is perfect in all things. He is the creator of all things. He has made humanity in his image and he desires a personal relationship with each one of us.
- About Salvation: (Ephesians 2:1-10) Salvation is an act of God's grace, not of our works. God offers redemption of anyone who accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior. They become new persons in Christ, have their sins forgiven by God, are set apart to live for God's purposes and anticipate eternity in heaven with God.

How did it go with last week's Next Steps?

- What did God reveal about himself to you as you meditated on Psalms 136 and 1 Corinthians 13?
- Did God answer your prayer for someone who needed to experience God's love through you?

Intro Questions:

- Have you ever held a grudge against someone?
- Has someone ever held a grudge against you?
- In both cases how did that impact the relationship?
- Marianne Williamson said, "Unforgiveness is like drinking poison yourself and waiting for the other person to die." How true is that statement?
- Share a time someone forgave you and what it did for you and the relationship.

A Forgiving God

Have someone read out loud Exodus 34:7

...maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But he will not leave the guilty unpunished, bringing the consequences of the fathers' iniquity on the children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation.

- How can forgiveness and punishment not be at odds?
- How is forgiveness and extension of His faithful love?

Have someone read out loud 1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

- What is the prerequisite for receive God's forgiveness?
- Why is confession essential in pursuing a righteous (holy) life?
- Why are all the pronouns plural and what are the implications? (James 5:16)

Isaiah 55:6-7

Let the wicked one abandon his way and the sinful one his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, so he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will freely forgive.

- God is ready to forgive; how do we access that forgiveness according to these verses?

The Forgiven Forgive

Have someone read out loud these verses:

Ephesians 4:32

And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ.

Colossians 3:13

...bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive.

Matthew 6:14-15

"For if you forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well. 15 But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your offenses."

Matthew 18:21-35

Then Peter approached him and asked, "Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? As many as seven times?"

"I tell you, not as many as seven," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven.

"For this reason, the kingdom of heaven can be compared to a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle accounts, one who owed ten thousand talents was brought before him. Since he did not have the money to pay it back, his master commanded that he, his wife, his children, and everything he had be sold to pay the debt.

"At this, the servant fell facedown before him and said, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you everything.' Then the master of that servant had compassion, released him, and forgave him the loan.

"That servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him, started choking him, and said, 'Pay what you owe!'

"At this, his fellow servant fell down and began begging him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' But he wasn't willing. Instead, he went and threw him into prison until he could pay what was owed. When the other servants saw what had taken place, they were deeply distressed and went and reported to their master everything that had happened. Then, after he had summoned him, his master said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Shouldn't you also have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And because he was angry, his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured until he could pay everything that was owed. So also my heavenly Father will do to you unless every one of you forgives his brother or sister from your heart."

- How much has God forgiven you?
- How quick are we to withhold forgiveness?
- Do we have a right to withhold forgiveness?
- Is our forgiveness unconditional?
- Does their response determine our level of forgiveness?
- Can you forgive, even though you are unable to forget?
- Is forgiveness a choice? (1 Corinthians 13:5b)

Next Steps

- Is there something you are holding on to that you need to forgive. Make a plan to deal with it this week. Pray before, during and after.
- Is there something you need to seek forgiveness for? Make a plan to deal with it this week. Pray before, during and after. (Matthew 5:23-24)
- Continue (or start- it's never too late!) to use the Silence and Solitude resources on the following pages to deepen and strengthen your quiet time.

Silence and Solitude

Knowing God

John 17:3

This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God,

Psalms 46:10 (Amplified Bible Classic)

Let be and be still, and know (recognize and understand) that I am God.

God created us to be in relationship with Him and know Him for Who He is. Adam and Eve had fellowship with God in the Garden of Eden in ways that is hard for us to comprehend. The first Adam through an act of disobedience severed that relationship with a holy God. The second Adam, Jesus Christ (Romans 5:12-20), restored that relationship between us and God as only He could (John 14:6). Although salvation begins in the moment that we truly believe in Jesus and commit our lives to Him, working out that salvation is a journey of a lifetime of learning to walk with God and knowing Him more and more (Philippians 2:12).

To accomplish this, Christians have engaged in activities that were modeled by Jesus and the early church to help us grow spiritually. Being children of the first Adam through our first birth, we are trapped in patterns of this world that steer us away from God and His ways. Through our second birth, we work in cooperation with the Holy Spirit to develop new patterns of responding that draws us into a deeper relationship with God and the ability to live out the commands of Christ (Philippians 2:13, Romans 12:2).

These new patterns of life are called spiritual disciplines. A definition of discipline is “any activity within our power that we engage in to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort.” For example, an old pattern you may still respond with is inappropriate anger. If you try to change it merely by your own willpower or good intentions, it will last about 72 hours and then you will be back to your old ways! If you instead use appropriate spiritual disciplines, you can have the reaction of grace, prayer and kindness that Jesus says will be reflective of a kingdom person (Matthew 5:43-48).

There are two types of spiritual disciplines that are practiced: Engagement and Abstinence. Some common types of abstinence: solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, and secrecy. Some common types of engagement: Bible study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, and confession. Solitude and silence are foundational disciplines for all the other disciplines and are desperately needed in our hectic, frenetic lives.

What is Solitude?

We purposefully abstain from interaction with other human beings, denying ourselves companionship and all that comes from our conscious interaction with others. Though often unaware of it, we have a need for solitude and silence. Jesus calls us from loneliness to solitude.

Loneliness is inner emptiness and often the fear of it drives to noise and crowds. However, solitude is inner fulfillment, a state of mind and heart, and not a place necessarily but a portable sanctuary of the heart.

*Let him who cannot be alone beware of community....
Let him who is not in community beware of being alone....
Each by itself has profound pitfalls and perils."*
-Dietrich Bonhoeffer

What is Silence?

We close off our souls from "sounds," whether those sounds be noise, music, or words. Silence is hard for us to do because it makes us feel helpless. Who is going to speak up for us if we do not? How are we going to make others do what we want them to do unless we tell them until they do it? How are others going to know how to interpret my actions unless I tell them what I meant by what I did? Silence is intimately related to trust! Can you really trust God is in control and give up your control? As James warns us to cease the flow of words: "If anyone thinks he is religious without controlling his tongue, then his religion is useless and he deceives himself." (1:26)

*"Real Silence, real stillness, really holding one's tongue
comes only as the sober consequence of spiritual stillness."*
-Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Steps to Take

1. Little moments of solitude to begin and during our day. Start small and build incrementally. See the following journal for a suggested plan if you are just starting out.
2. Find or develop a "quiet place" to separate yourself from distractions. You need to eliminate what may visually or audibly may keep you from focusing on God and His word. Practically speaking, that means you need to be alone, put your phone on "airplane mode," turn off sources of sounds or alerts and, when able, shut the door.
3. Monthly, quarterly, or annually, it is powerful in the life of the follower of Christ to have a personal retreat. Start with 3-4 hours at a place where you can get away in nature or a retreat like setting to spend time uninterrupted. Combining with prayer and meditating on truths from the Bible, bask in His loving presence attune to whatever He is telling you in His "quiet whisper." (1 Kings 19)

*"It is in deep solitude that I find the gentleness with which I can truly love my brothers.
The more solitary I am the more affection I have for them....
Solitude and silence teach me to love my brothers for what they are, not for what they say."*
-Thomas Merton

- On RightNow Media search for the "Being Challenge" for teaching on engaging in the spiritual disciplines that Jesus modeled. Session 5 is on Solitude. Also, search for "Be Still" for a complete study on the topic. If you don't have an account, go to the church website (icelebration.org) Choose "Watch" from the top menu and then scroll down to the RightNow sign-up section.
- Dr. Donald S. Whitney – "Should I practice silence and solitude": youtu.be/cx9Oe3W4A6M

- Doable Discipleship: Silence and Solitude YouTube video/podcast: youtu.be/pUpmMQW5Xpw
- Article from Curate ministries: curateministries.org/curateblog/2020/1/9/silence-and-solitude
- Article from Outreach magazine: outreachmagazine.com/features/discipleship/32086-8-benefits-silence-solitude-leaders-life.html

How To Begin A Daily Quiet Time To Practice Silence And Solitude

1. Select A Specific Time

The best time to have a quiet time is when I am at my best to spend time alone with God. Many believers find that an early morning quiet time works best. Examples from the Bible include Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Hannah, Job, Hezekiah, David, Daniel, Jesus, etc. It seems logical to begin the day with it. "The best time to tune your instruments is before you play the concert, not after!" It demonstrates that meeting with God is your first priority. You give Him the first part of your day. Whatever time you set, make it a priority, and persevere because eventually you will face opposition and obstacles. Be ready to restart and continue. Remember, it takes 21 days to make it a habit.

How long should it be? If this is new to you, start with 3 minutes and let it double weekly. But do not watch the clock. Emphasize quality, not quantity.

2. Choose A Special Place

Jesus' practice is clear in what he modeled and practiced. "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went to a solitary place, where he prayed." (Mark 1:35 NIV) "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." (Matthew 6:6 NIV). Whether it be a room you can be alone in at your house, your back porch, or an office before other employees arrive, seek that special place.

3. Have A Plan

For the practice of silence and solitude, you will want to quietly meditate on Biblical passages, pray quietly to God and just sit in silence in His presence. Prepare for your time in advance by having appropriate Bible passages in print or electronically to meditate on. The current messages on God's character will be a great source to think about God in deeper ways (see the weekly Conversation Guide on the App or website). A notebook or pad to write down what the Lord speaks to you about, add to your prayer list or jot down things that come to mind that you need to deal with later.