

WALKING IT OUT – WEEK 9 – Forgiveness

Defining forgiveness

Psychologists generally define forgiveness as a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you, regardless of whether they actually deserve your forgiveness. (Dept. of Psychology, UC Berkeley)

Biblically speaking, forgiveness is the act of pardoning someone who has caused you any offence. In the Bible, the Greek word translated “forgiveness” literally means “to let go,” as when a person does not demand payment for a debt. Jesus used this comparison when he taught his followers to pray: “*Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is in debt to us.*” (Luke 11:4)

Whatever society’s view of forgiveness is, whether secular or Biblical, the common thread is the release it brings to the one who forgives. It is as essential to our mental and emotional health as it is to our eternal soul to forgive. It is essential to experience the Shalom (peace/wholeness) of Christ.

Oh to forgive...

On May 13, 1981 a man named Mehmet Ali Ağca attempted to assassinate Pope John Paul II. It was in Vatican Square amongst over 20,000 people that Ağca fired four shots at the pontiff. All four hit – two in the abdomen, one in the arm and one through the finger (hitting another person afterward). The assassin was arrested and put in jail... where he was visited by two years later by his victim. There, in the small Italian jail cell, John Paul sat with the man who had tried to take his life. In just a few moments the conversation moved to one of forgiveness. “I forgive you”, he said to Ağca. It was all over the news. Who could forgive such a crime... such a man? But this is our call as followers of Jesus... to forgive as Christ forgave us. It doesn’t matter the sin committed or the severity of the crime against us... we are to forgive. Period. Let us be the light of Christ to the world!

Questions to talk about at home and with your small group

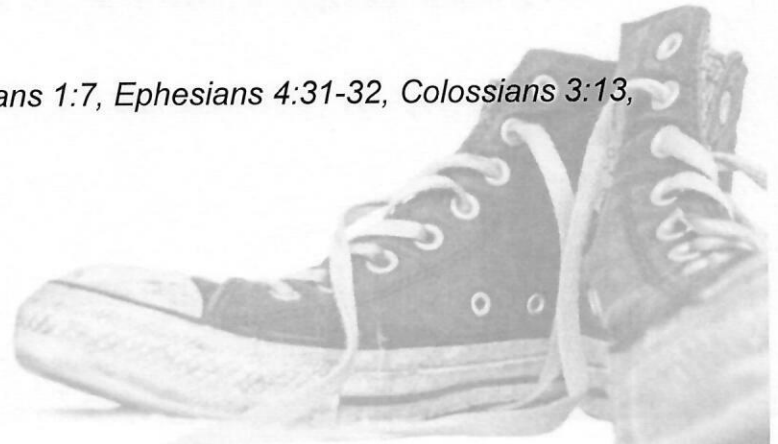
1. What is forgiveness?
2. What is the benefit of forgiving others?
3. What is your favorite Bible verse / story about forgiveness?
4. Describe a time where you were forgiven or where you forgave someone else and the impact it had on your life.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, teach me to forgive. Help me to forgive others who have wronged me. Help me resolve unrepentant sin in my life, so I can forgive others, allowing God to forgive me. Remove the pain and bitterness of unforgiveness in my life. I give it all to you! I thank you for forgiving me – for giving me a second chance (and a third chance, fourth chance, etc.) You are a good, good Father! Free me to forgive others as you have forgiven me. For the sake of Christ, Jesus, Amen.

Additional verses for study

Matthew 6:9-15, Mark 11:25, Luke 17:3-4, Ephesians 1:7, Ephesians 4:31-32, Colossians 3:13, James 5:16, 1 John 1:9



Weekly challenge

Write a letter to God explaining 2 things:

- 1) Sin that you've carried for which you need to be forgiven.
- 2) Things for which you need to forgive others.

As you write this letter, ask for forgiveness, then repent and forgive others in the same manner Christ forgave you. If your relationship is still open with them, call or visit them and ask their forgiveness for holding it in so long. Let them know that you love them and have already forgiven them.

If you have children

Help your children understand the importance of forgiveness. Take the time to explain that it's more than just saying they are sorry, but actually understanding their wrong-doing and how it affects others. There are teachable moments throughout the week – take advantage of them!

Kids' activities

Activity and coloring sheets