

Study Guide
Series: Forgiveness
“As Far as the East is From the West”

Monday - 1 Kings 8:22-30. King Solomon offered this prayer, dedicating the Temple in Jerusalem. He knew his people and he would most often come to the Temple to seek God’s mercy. Through their sacrifices and prayers, God’s Old Testament people counted on God’s grace, and trusted in God’s forgiveness. “When you hear,” Solomon asked God humbly, “forgive.” What if Solomon had prayed the kind of prayer we are tempted to pray: “Lord, hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear...bless us, reward us for being your people, and give us great success.” What different spirit would such a prayer show? Which prayer is more often your prayer? Solomon had built the Temple, a stunning building. But he knew the limits of any physical building, saying, “The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!” Do you tend to see God as present mainly in certain places or structures? How can you more fully sense God with you in all places?

Tuesday - Psalm 130:1-8. “Out of the depths I cry.” This psalmist knew how awful it is to sink deeper and deeper in despair. For emphasis, the psalm repeats the image of watchmen waiting in the darkness for the first gleam of morning light, saying “That’s how eagerly I wait for God’s mercy.” And God’s love is unfailing—God will redeem from all sins. Verse 3 says, “If you, LORD, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand?” Doesn’t God keep a record of sins? Compare Psalm 103:10, 12: “He does not treat us as our sins deserve...as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” What do these poetic images tell you about God’s passion to forgive? Verse 7 says that with God is “full redemption.” Have you ever gotten (or given) “partial” forgiveness, which is the best we broken humans can do at times? The sort that never lets the other person forget they blew it, and holds a small grievance in reserve? What does it mean to you that God offers “full redemption” for any brokenness?

Wednesday - Luke 7:36-50. Jesus was famous for forgiving. Christian counselor, Bruce Narramore, wrote that self-righteous people want those who’ve failed “to walk forever under the black umbrella of permanent shame.” Jesus’ host Simon felt that way about the woman in this story. But, not Jesus. “Your sins are forgiven,” he repeated. Freedom from her guilt before God also gave this woman freedom from feelings of shame before others. If not, she would not have been able to act out her gratitude in such a bold act of love to Jesus. When have you been “ashamed to show your face”? How can opening your life to God’s love and forgiveness set you free to live more fully? Most of us “get” Simon’s reaction. “Jesus must not know about her past,” he thought. “If he did, he couldn’t possibly accept her presence.” Who are you more like: the woman who had been forgiven much, or the Pharisee who thought he was a lot better than “her kind”? How does that affect your life and relationships?

Thursday - 1 John 1:5 - 2:2. When we confess our brokenness and sin, John assured us, forgiveness is always there. But sometimes blindness, fear or stubborn pride make us deny that we need mercy. John urged his readers to let God’s grace give them the courage to assess themselves as honestly as possible: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves.” Many of us say things like, “I can never forgive myself for _____.” John echoed his master Jesus in teaching that God is willing to forgive anything we’re willing to confess. If our hearts

condemn us, he said, we must trust God rather than our feelings (1 John 3:19-20). Where do you need to trust, to rest in God's forgiveness today? C. S. Lewis wrote, "What we call 'asking God's forgiveness' very often really consists in asking God to accept our excuses." If every problem is someone else's fault, if we are always sure we did nothing very wrong, something may be blinding us. Do you ever miss out on God's forgiveness because you hate to admit that you need forgiveness?

Friday - 2 Corinthians 5:14-21. Paul summed up for the church in Corinth the message he believed with all his heart. "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them." The cross, Paul said, made God's eagerness to forgive and accept you, no matter where you've been or what you've done, crystal clear. The question is: can you accept God's gift, and live in the freedom from guilt God offers? Do it, Paul implored: "Be reconciled to God." "If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" In what ways has genuinely trusting in God's forgiveness opened a new world for you? In what parts of your life are you still struggling with guilt, and seeking a new start? Are you open to getting any help you need in order to move beyond destructive guilt and self-hatred? How will you respond to Paul's plea to "be reconciled to God"?