

Study Guide

Series: Forgiveness
“Forgiveness and Marriage”

Monday - Isaiah 55:1-9. When we begin thinking about the process of forgiveness in human relationships, it's easy to see it as simply a human process. But forgiveness is not just a sociological way to get along. The prophet Isaiah suggested that it is not “natural” at all. Forgiveness is God's idea, Isaiah said, springing from One whose thoughts and ways are higher than ours. The Bible's teaching about forgiveness always starts with the fact that all of us, in our brokenness, do things that hurt others. We need forgiveness. Both in relation to God and to others, how clear is your vision that you are, in Isaiah's imagery, “thirsty” and have “no money”? From whom, besides God, do you need forgiveness? Forgiveness is sometimes called “weakness” in global politics, business and legal settings, or even in a family or community dispute. How do you react when Isaiah says mercy and pardon are a “higher” way than the usual human response? Think about a time when you were forgiven. How did it affect your relationships?

Tuesday - Matthew 6:9-15. Jesus did not say that forgiving someone else earns God's forgiveness. Scholar Michael Green wrote that “It is not as though God petulantly says, ‘I won't forgive you unless you forgive those who have wronged you.’” Jesus' parable in Matthew 18:21-35 showed that we can't truly accept forgiveness if we close our heart to forgiving another person. In his classic, *Forgive and Forget*, Lewis Smedes wrote that forgiving is “outrageous. When we do it we commit an outrage against the strict morality that will not rest with anything short of an even score.” What inner fears and defenses do you have to face to even consider the outrageous process of forgiving those closest to you? The essence of God's dealings with us is forgiving grace. How does the prayer that “your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” lead naturally to our willingness to seek forgiveness, as well as to forgive? What healing examples, if any, of forgiving (in deep hurts, not trivial matters) have you seen?

Wednesday - Ephesians 5:21-33. These verses teach us much of value about marriage. Many people miss their value, however, because verses 22-24 have too often been used in abusive, one-sided—and inaccurate—ways. The passage starts at verse 21, not verse 22. “Submission” is a mutual duty, not something only a wife gives while the husband takes. What do you believe it means for a husband to love his wife “just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her”? How does this compare with the “lord of the manor” image in some cultures? How does this image challenge husbands to act at times when they may need to extend forgiveness to their wives? In Paul's day, Greeks, Romans and Hebrews all told wives to submit and obey their (mostly much older) husbands. Only Paul said husbands, too, should submit “out of reverence for Christ.” Think of healthy marriages you've seen. Is mutual “submission” or “respect” (v. 33) part of these thriving marriages? How do you think that works?

Thursday - Hosea 3:1-5. The prophet Hosea married a faithless woman. She bore him three children, but repeatedly left him for a life of prostitution and promiscuity. When she was used up, for sale as a slave, her husband, despite a life of heartbreak, bought her back, saying, “You are to live with me many days.” Be faithful to me now, he said, and I will be too. Hosea's brief account can fool us into thinking it reflects a quick process. That's unlikely. Smedes wrote that “the worse you've been hurt, the longer it takes to forgive.” What hurts have you been working at forgiving for some time? As your own hurts gradually heal, what changes do you find in how you perceive the one who hurt you? Despite the pain and regret, Hosea took his wife back. Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 and 1 Corinthians 7 indicate that, in some situations, it is better and healthier for a marriage to end. When, for emotional or physical safety, is it wiser to leave a hurtful relationship? How can forgiveness be important even under those conditions?

Friday - Exodus 33:18 - 34:9. The prophets used marriage as an image of God's bond with Israel. Early in the relationship, God gave Moses a key lesson. God's glory (33:18) is that God is compassionate and gracious, that God forgives. That did not mean God passively accepted destructive behavior, and neither must we. But forgiveness and reconciliation were always God's desired outcome. This was a crisis point in Israel's connection with God. Exodus 32 says when Moses came down from Mt. Sinai with the first copy of the Ten Commandments, he found Israel dancing around a golden calf, an idol. How does God's readiness to forgive, and God's “righteous anger,” challenge us to relate in our closest relationships? Verse 7 says, “He does not leave the guilty unpunished.” Forgiveness, especially in close relationships, is not easy, glib or self-destructive. Have you known anyone who thought “forgiveness” meant they must accept all kinds of hurtful conduct from their spouse? How would you help someone like that to a healthier grasp of forgiveness?

Sermon Notes

Use this space to write down those things you'd like to remember from today's sermon.