

Study Guide

Series: Forgiveness
“Forgiving Others”

Monday - Matthew 5:38-48. Rewards for friends, revenge on foes are so woven into our cultures that Jesus’ words may seem a recipe for self-destruction. What company, political party or law firm always deals with friends and foes this way? Yet Jesus said this is how God works. And he called us to live out of the same heart: “No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously.” (The Message) In Jesus’ day, many rabbis quoted Lev. 19:18 (“Love your neighbor as yourself”), and then added, “and hate your enemies.” Jesus said that love to the just and the unjust, to evil and good alike, is God’s way. Do you understand “love” more as a feeling or a set of actions? Can you “love” someone even if you don’t like them? John Wesley, Methodism’s founder, said Jesus called us to be “perfect in love,” always growing toward loving with God’s all-inclusive love. He rejected the idea that “perfect” meant never sinning (missing the mark). Does it challenge you more, or less, to see “perfect” as about the state of your heart rather than just your outward actions?

Tuesday - Ephesians 4:25-32. “We are all members of one body,” Paul said. It’s clear he was talking mainly to those in the Christian community. Wow—so even in church it’s quite possible to meet “bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.” Even with fellow believers, we need the call to forgive each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Being as honest as you can, who are the Christians you know who most often and most deeply “get your goat”? Pray for them, and about them. Ask God to help you to find practical, realistic steps to “be kind and compassionate,” in ways that are healthy for you and for them. This passage says that Christians should be “forgiving each other.” Again being as honest as you can, in what ways do you at times see yourself be unloving and hurtful to your brothers and sisters in Christ? What steps can you take to grow in these areas, and to seek relational healing by asking for forgiveness?

Wednesday - Ephesians 2:11-22. Almost all conflict happens because of some kind of difference. As Jesus’ message spread through the Mediterranean world, the early church became more and more diverse. But Jesus pulled off an amazing feat: he “put to death” the hostility of different groups. Our differences still create hostilities today—and Jesus’ power is still at work. The main issue the Ephesians faced was the distrust and contempt between Jews and Gentiles. In a global society, what are some of the differences that trigger hostility in your heart? How can Jesus’ forgiveness help make you willing to tackle the hard work of changing long-standing attitudes, feelings and actions?

Thursday - John 3:14-21. John said Jesus did not come to condemn the world. What amazing possibilities open before us when we’re told that God does not have a condemning attitude toward us. It frees us to let go of our condemning attitude toward ourselves and others. It’s natural to condemn an enemy. Jesus came to offer us his supernatural way of life. How do you understand the meaning of “God so loved the world”? Do you believe God’s love extends to the whole world, or is it limited to a righteous subset of the world’s people? How does your answer affect your own inner responses to those citizens of the world who seem to be “enemies”? John was a realist. Though Jesus did not come to condemn, some chose to remain his enemies. “Light

has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil” (v. 19). How do you as Christ’s follower treat those who reject you, or Jesus? What can Jesus’ example teach you?

Friday - Matthew 18:21-35. Peter thought he could guess what Jesus would teach. The rabbis said you should forgive three times. Peter stretched it—more than doubled it. And Jesus said, “Not even close.” For Hebrews, the number seven meant completeness. Seventy times seven was vast beyond imagining! Forgiveness is not about counting. It’s a continual way of life. Myron Augsburger wrote, “Forgiveness is never easy; it is hard. It is the most difficult thing in the universe.” Forgiving the same person seven times (even three) can seem a great plenty! How many times have you needed God’s forgiveness? How does Jesus’ parable affect your perspective on the issue of forgiving other people? At the end of this passage, Jesus said you need to “forgive a brother or sister from your heart.” Think about times when you might find it useful to forgive outwardly, but hold in bitterness or a longing for revenge. How do such buried feelings affect you? What emotional growth steps are needed to help you truly forgive from the heart?

Saturday - Luke 23:32-46. Jesus taught a lot about forgiveness. We’ve heard too many stories, though, about religious people whose actions don’t match up very well with what they say. Jesus, under the awful stress of the cross, lived the forgiveness he taught. He prayed for those who mocked and tortured him. He offered a bandit, whose only credential was asking to be included, paradise. Jesus asked God to forgive those who nailed him to the cross, and insulted him as he hung dying. What do you learn about how Jesus could do this from the words Luke reports: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit”? What spiritual and emotional growth do you need to move closer to Jesus’ model of forgiveness? What are the next steps for you in the challenging work of understanding all that is at play in your heart?