

Week 1 Teaching: JUNE 08

Cultivating a Heart of Forgiveness

When someone hurts us, we will often hold on to that pain because we don't know what else to do with it. Those hurtful feelings turn into resentment towards the person or situation that has caused us to feel so bad. Our nature is to want to bring closure to the pain through vengeful acts, but this is not the way that God has told us to handle situations like this.

Matthew 18:21,22 NLT

21 Then Peter came to him and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?"

22 "No!" Jesus replied, "seventy times seven!"

Perhaps Peter had the idea that seven times was plenty enough to forgive a friend who had offended him; reckoning that after eight offenses, he could certainly cut him off. Jesus Christ replied, "seventy times seven!" which suggests that the act of forgiveness is limitless. We must forgive each and every offense that is committed against us.

It may not always be easy to do this. My great grandmother would say that when someone puts it on you the first time, you feed them out of a long-handle spoon thereafter. I interpreted her advice to mean that you remain kindhearted towards the person, but you don't give them an opportunity to hurt you again. This advice has really helped me through the years, but it must be taken with a healthy dose of compassion and understanding too. We have to realize that we are all at different levels of spiritual growth, and we cannot fault others if they are not where we think they ought to be or desire them to be spiritually.

To "resent" is to hold on to something that isn't healthy, to "forgive" is to release it. Cultivating a forgiving heart is internal work. Each of us must do this work within to ensure that we are not holding on to anything that will weigh us down and keep us from being our best for God. It is developing a heart to not take it so personally when we are offended, but to release it from our minds and hearts. By doing this we will also release it from the person's charge so that they are free to see the Christ in us rather than a reaction that is not motivated out of love.

The fear of releasing something is always that it will not come back in a way that will fortify our personal well-being. This is especially true when it comes

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to the most precious relationships of our lives. We may feel that God will not take care of that person the way He would if they were next to us all the time. Or we may feel that we will lose something that is irreplaceable, that if we let it go--God will not give us another little piece of wonderful to replace it.

We are in the best position to see how important forgiveness is to our walk of faith when we have to turn a person we love completely over to Jesus Christ. Hebrews 4:15 (NIV) tells us that *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.”* It is a comforting thought to know that whatever we are going through, Jesus Christ, our lord and savior, understands. He knows how difficult it is for us to let things go, and he will help us.

Philippians 3:13,14 NIV

13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

The Apostle Paul said in Philippians 3:13,14 that he may not have been all that he could have been in Christ at that moment in time, but the one thing he could say for sure was that he forgets what is behind him and presses forward to what is ahead. He could say this with such confidence and conviction because he believed wholeheartedly that pressing forward to what is ahead would yield a reward.

Sometimes our feelings of resentment and hurt are too much for us to handle, and it may seem as though the need to cling to things we should let go of is overwhelming. Be confident that you can release them with a heart of forgiveness, forgiving yourself for wanting to hold on, and forgiving the person for wanting to be free. You are never the worst for doing this. Know that as you release these things to God's care, you will receive. As you begin to cultivate a forgiving heart, God will elevate you to new levels of peace, love, understanding, and blessings. You will reap a harvest of real intimacy with Him as you forgive others the same way He has forgiven you.

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Week 1 Prayer:

Most Gracious and Heavenly Father, I humbly ask that You forgive me for the words I have spoken, thoughts I have thought, and deeds I have done that are contrary to Your Will. Just as You forgive me for my sins, please help me to cultivate a forgiving heart towards those who have offended me in some way. Teach me how to recognize when I am holding on to things I need to let go of, and help me to do so with grace. Thank you for loving me so tenderly, and for sending your son, Jesus Christ, as my redeemer and example. I pray this prayer in His wonderful name, Amen.

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WEEK1 Focus:

Be open to the possibility of New Beginnings as you forgive others and yourself!

WEEK 1 Scripture Focus:

Day 1:

[Matthew 6:14,15](#)

Day 2:

[Matthew 18:21, 22](#)

Day 3:

[Mark 11:25](#)

Day 4:

[Philippians 3:13,14](#)

Day 5:

[Isaiah 43:18,19](#)

Day 6:

[Ephesians 4:31](#)

Day 7:

[Romans 12:21](#)

Prayer FOCUS:

To cultivate a forgiving and compassionate heart.

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