



WEEK EIGHT: FORGIVENESS THE PATH TO FREEDOM

Last week we learned that conflict is normal in relationships—but it can also lead to hurt, anger, and bitterness which can destroy both us and our relationships. This is why forgiveness is so important. Forgiveness has the power to free us from our anger so we can love others as God has loved us. But learning to forgive is not easy. In fact, it is one of life's hardest lessons. But it's also one of the most important lessons if we want to live a life of love, build healthy relationships, and move into the future God has for us.

This week we will study several important passages of Scripture that explore the topic of forgiveness. We will also read selections from *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them* along with several quotes from Dr. Archibald Hart's book, *Unlocking the Mystery of Your Emotions*. You do not need to download a PDF this week; the quotes from this book will be provided within this study.

DAY ONE

DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Matthew 6:9-15
- ◆ **READ:** *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*, pgs. 149-150
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On how forgiveness is a spiritual non-negotiable

◆ EXPLORE

Today we will be reading the Lord's Prayer, which is one of the most famous passages in the Bible. Read **Matthew 6:9-15** in the Good News Bible (GNB) and then answer the following questions. (You can find this on YouVersion.)

- 1) Take a moment and reread **Matthew 6:12**. How would you paraphrase this verse in your own words?
- 2) After the Lord's prayer, Jesus highlights the importance of forgiveness again. Reread **Matthew 6:14-15**. How would you summarize these verses? Does anything in this teaching surprise you? If so, explain.

◆ READ

Read pages 149-150 in *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them* (Audible ch. 5: 25:11-28:53).

◆ REFLECT

- 1) How would you define forgiveness in your own words?
- 2) In the reading today, John shares Beth's painful story of betrayal by her best friend. Have you ever been deeply hurt, disappointed, or betrayed by someone in your life? If so, do you feel like you have forgiven them? Why or why not?
- 3) Dr. Archibald Hart is a highly respected Christian psychologist and writer. His book, *Unlocking the Mystery of Your Emotions*, addresses the issue of forgiveness and the role it plays in our lives as Christ-followers. This week, we will be reading several quotes from the chapter "Freedom from Anger." In this section, he writes,

It has been my sad experience to observe that many Christians who claim to have received God's forgiveness know little of how to forgive others. By some strange logic they exclude anyone who has hurt them from the list of those to whom they should now have a forgiving attitude.

-Unlocking the Mystery of Your Emotions, p. 66

Have you found this to be true of yourself and other Christ-followers?

Why do you think we, as Christ-followers, sometimes ignore Jesus' clear teaching about forgiveness?

4) Take a couple of minutes to journal any new insights the Holy Spirit is showing you today. Ask God to help you to be open to whatever He wants to teach you this week about forgiveness.

DAY TWO

DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Matthew 18:21-35
- ◆ **READ:** *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*, pgs. 151-157
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On God's forgiveness in our lives

◆ EXPLORE

In Matthew 18, Jesus tells a powerful story to illustrate the importance of forgiveness. Read **Matthew 18:21-35** in the New Century Version (NCV) and then answer the following questions. (You can find this on YouVersion.)

- 1) What prompted Jesus to tell this story?
- 2) Why do you think the "evil servant" was so harsh with his fellow servant? Why do you think he could be so blind to his own hypocrisy?
- 3) What are the implications of this story for our lives?

◆ READ

Read pages 151-157 in *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*. Start at the heading *The Law of Lamech* and end at the heading *Some Things Forgiveness is Not* (Audible ch. 5: 28:53-44:20).

◆ REFLECT

- 1) What was your favorite insight, principle, quote, or illustration from today's reading, and why?
- 2) On page 151, John describes "The Law of Lamech" (Audible ch. 5: 28:53-33:51). How would you summarize this law in your own words?
- 3) In today's reading, John writes,

This is why the cross is at the heart of Christianity. It shows us the heart of God. He feels compassion, his eyes fill with tears, his lips tremble a little out of love for his children. He chooses to pay the debt we never could. He longs to forgive. And what Jesus does at infinite cost, he invites us to do as well, though at much lesser expense.

-Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them, pgs. 156-157

Have there been times in your life when a fresh experience of God's love and forgiveness has led to a new level of gratitude, praise, or freedom in your life? If so, explain.

4) On the topic of anger, Christian psychologist Dr. Archibald Hart writes,

*I must stress that this need to hurt back is present **every time** you are angered by hurt. It can take a subtle form so that you may not be able to recognize it. Your need to deny may be stronger than your need to get revenge. But it **is** there and must be dealt with before you can lay aside your anger.*

It is the law of our lower nature that we want to hurt back when we are hurt.

-Unlocking the Mystery of Your Emotions, p. 62

How quickly are you able to recognize this “law of our lower nature” when someone hurts you?

5) On the topic of forgiveness, Dr. Hart writes,

***Forgiveness** is the key to giving up your need to hurt back. **Forgiveness** is the antidote for hurt anger. There is no other satisfactory solution to our urge to take revenge.*

***What is forgiveness?** I am often asked this. ... I would define forgiveness as follows: forgiveness is surrendering my right to hurt you back if you hurt me.*

-Unlocking the Mystery of Your Emotions, p. 65

Have you ever thought of forgiveness in this way?

What is your favorite statement in this quote—and why?

6) Spend a few minutes praying and journaling any insights the Holy Spirit is giving you through this study.

DAY THREE

DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Ephesians 4:17-24, 4:32-5:2
- ◆ **READ:** *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*, pgs. 157-160
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On what forgiveness is (and isn't)

◆ EXPLORE

Today we will revisit a passage from Ephesians to remind us of **God's vision** for our lives and the role **forgiveness** plays in it. Read **Ephesians 4:17-24** and **4:32-5:2** in the New Living Translation (NLT), and then answer the following questions. (You can find this in YouVersion.)

- 1) How would you summarize God's vision for our lives (Ephesians 4:17-24)?
- 2) How would you describe God's *relational* vision for our lives (Ephesians 4:32-5:2)?
- 3) How important is forgiveness to the fulfillment of this vision—and why?
- 4) How did Jesus model this vision of love and forgiveness (Ephesians 5:1-2)?

◆ READ

Read pages 157-160 in *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*. Start at the heading *Some Things Forgiveness is Not* and end at the heading *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Audible ch. 5: 44:20-53:01).

◆ REFLECT

- 1) What was your favorite insight, illustration, or quote from today's reading, and why?
- 2) On pages 157-158, John describes what forgiveness is *not* (Audible ch. 5: 44:20-47:16). What was most helpful in this section?
- 3) On pages 158-160, John describes what forgiveness *is* (Audible ch. 5: 47:16-53:01). What was most helpful in this section?
- 4) What would you like God to do in your life based on today's study? Write your prayer in your journal.

DAY FOUR

DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Colossians 3:9-10, 13-15
- ◆ **READ:** *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*, pgs. 160-164
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On the high price of bitterness and revenge

◆ EXPLORE

Today we will revisit another great relational passage in the New Testament. This passage reiterates **God's vision** for our lives and the role **forgiveness** plays in it. Read **Colossians 3:9-10** and **3:13-15** in the Complete Jewish Bible (CJB), and then answer the following questions. (You can find this on YouVersion.)

- 1) How would you summarize God's vision for our lives, according to this passage (Colossians 3:9-10)?
- 2) How would you describe God's *relational* vision for our lives, according to this passage (Colossians 3:13-15)?
- 3) How important is forgiveness to the fulfillment of this vision—and why?

◆ READ

Read pages 160-164 in *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*. Start at *The Miracle of Forgiveness* and stop at *The Rest of the Story* (Audible ch. 5: 53:01-1:01:04).

◆ REFLECT

- 1) What was your favorite insight, principle, illustration, or quote from today's reading?
- 2) In today's reading, John writes about the result of living with bitterness. Read the two quotes below and answer the following questions.

• *We are always to pursue forgiving people who have hurt us, even when the offenders don't ask for or deserve it. God commands us to forgive because it is the best way to live. He commands us to forgive others because he has forgiven us; he is the Great Forgiver. He commands it because the only other way is to remain a prisoner of the hurt for as long as I live. God commands forgiving because to refuse to forgive means I allow the one who hurt me to keep me chained in a prison of bitterness and resentment year after year. No human beings are more miserable*

than the unforgiving.

- *If you don't forgive—if you let pride, resentment, stubbornness, and defensiveness stand in your way—you become a hard and bitter person. You carry a burden that will crush the humanity out of your spirit. You will grow a little colder every day. You will die.*

-Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them, pgs. 160, 164, in order

Have you experienced this principle at work in your own life (or witnessed it in someone else's life)—where a refusal to forgive someone only led to an emotional prison? If so, explain.

3) Are there any insights you want to remember from today's study? If so, jot it down in your journal and discuss it with Jesus in prayer.

DAY FIVE

DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Micah 7:18-20
- ◆ **READ:** *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*, pgs. 164-167
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On God as our model for forgiveness

◆ EXPLORE

One of the clearest pictures of God's love and forgiveness is the way He **responds** to Israel in the Old Testament. In spite of their ongoing rebellion and sin, God **continues** to love and forgive them. Read **Micah 7:18-20** in the Good News Bible (GNB) and answer the following questions. (You can find this on YouVersion.)

- 1) How would you describe God, based on this passage? Make a bulleted list of His character qualities and attributes.
- 2) What is your favorite character quality from this passage—and why?
- 3) If this is how God related to Israel, what are some implications for our lives as God's children?
- 4) Which of these character qualities would you most like to see grow in your life—and why?

◆ READ

Read pages 164-167 in *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*. Start at the heading *The Rest of the Story* and read until the bottom of page 167 (Audible ch. 5: 1:01:05-1:10:01).

◆ REFLECT

1) In this section, John finishes his story about the CEO and the embezzler. What did you learn from this story today?

2) On the topic of forgiveness, Dr. Archibald Heart writes,

Forgiveness is at the heart of the Christian gospel. It is the "genius" and explosive domain of Christianity, and not without reason. God knows who and what we are and He has given and demonstrated forgiveness in a

remarkable way. He knows that we need to both give and receive forgiveness. ... No person is emotionally or spiritually mature who has not mastered the art of forgiving.

-Unlocking the Mystery of Your Emotions, p. 58

Do you agree with this idea—that our ability to forgive is a measure of our emotional and spiritual maturity?

3) Take a few minutes and flip back through this week's study. Quickly review the Scripture passages, the quotes, and the study. What is the Holy Spirit teaching you this week? Is there anyone God is calling you to forgive? Spend some time praying about what you've learned.

WEEKEND MESSAGE REFLECTION

After you listen to the eighth message in this series (*Forgiveness...The Path To Freedom*), answer the following questions.

1) This weekend, Pastor Michael introduced seven important principles about forgiveness. Which of the seven was the most helpful to you, and why?

2) At the end of the message, Pastor Michael suggested three practical steps to take when we need to forgive someone. Which of the three was most helpful, and why?