

# LIFE with Jesus in Community

## Forgiveness

### FORGIVENESS

One of the most other-worldly facets of Jesus' character is his forgiving spirit. As he hangs nailed to the cross, bloody from scourging and gasping painful breaths, he prays, "Father, forgive them," (Luke 23:34). He does not want the sin done to him to be held against those who torture him. In fact, he is dying to pay for their sin so his murderers may be forgiven.

Jesus is doing what he teaches his disciples to do.

In what we call "The Lord's Prayer," he teaches them to pray, "forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors," (Matthew 6:12).

In another place, he says, "And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses," (Mark 11:25).

Paul takes up the theme and applies it to Jesus' community of followers when he writes to the Colossians, "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive," (Colossians 3:12-13).

So to follow Jesus we must learn to practice forgiveness, and living in community with one another gives us lots of opportunity to practice!

And, as with all God's commands, forgiving those who sin against us is good and healing for us—forgiveness can work to free us from anxiety, depression, and chronic health issues and open us up to the life-giving power of God's spirit of joy, gratitude, love, and peace (Galatians 5:22). Even secular research confirms this.<sup>1</sup>

### THE PRACTICE

"Father, forgive them," Jesus says.

What does he mean by forgiveness? In starkest terms, it means he does not want to see his tormentors punished for the evil they are doing to him. He is not angry at them, and he asks God to forgive them, leaving open for them the possibility of a restored relationship with God., their sins removed from them as far "as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12).

We can learn a few things about forgiveness from Jesus:

- Because Jesus died on the cross for sin, forgiveness is not saying that someone's sin or harmful actions are "okay." Jesus' death was required as payment.

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<sup>1</sup> [Forgiveness: Your Health Depends on It | Johns Hopkins Medicine](#)

- Forgiveness happens in prayer.
- Forgiveness is releasing and rejecting anger or a desire for vengeance against those who have offended or sinned against us.
- Forgiveness means we, along with God, are content for Jesus' suffering on the cross to pay for another's sin so that they won't pay the eternal cost. When forgiveness is finished, we have a heart-posture that allows us to want blessing—God's everlasting life—for those who have sinned against us.
- Jesus doesn't entrust himself to people who are not trustworthy until he knows it is his time (John 2:24; John 7:30). So, forgiving someone doesn't mean we have to entrust them with things they have demonstrated they are not trustworthy to handle.

Jesus possesses a matchless beauty of character and can instantly forgive his torturers.

For us, forgiveness may be a one-time event like this, or a long process. Often, we need God's help and people to pray with us as we attempt to forgive. Don't hesitate to reach out to a trusted friend or prayer minister to help you seek the Lord for the grace to forgive. Jesus, with his beautiful power, can move in us to help us forgive. Corrie Ten Boom's story below is an example of this.

Here are some helpful steps toward forgiveness. You will find these in graphic form if you click the "Cross Exercise" button below.

#### Preparing to Forgive

1. Ask for God's help and power to forgive. Jesus said, "apart from me you can do nothing," (John 15:5; Eph 1:19-20).
2. God is called the "Father of mercies" (2 Cor 1:3). Is there something you are grateful that God has forgiven you for? It can be helpful to spend a little time thanking him for this.
3. Clarify what you are forgiving. Be honest—what did this person or persons do to you? What did their actions, words, or intentions cost you?
4. Take time to pour your heart out to the Lord about these things. The freedom to grieve and be in touch with our feelings is necessary for true forgiveness.
5. Consider: Have you sinned, retaliated, or nurtured bitterness in your heart in response to being hurt in these ways? If you are ready, confess these things to the Lord and thank him for his forgiveness.
6. It can be helpful to ask God for help to see the ways in which his redeeming love is working for you, "causing all things to work together for (your) good," (Romans 8:28)—even through this evil done to you. This does not mean all things are good or that God causes evil; it means that because he loves you, he never stops working for your good in all things.

#### FORGIVING

Forgiveness is a mysterious process, and you may find a way that works for you. Some of these steps might also help. You will find a forgiveness prayer if you click below.

1. Can you see the person's sin entering Jesus' body on the cross? Can you lay down or release your anger and desire for revenge as you see Jesus paying the price for this person's sin? Perhaps you can see the cross between you and this person and entrust them to Jesus to do with as he desires. With these

thoughts in mind, can you pray your forgiveness as Jesus did, "Father, please forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_."

2. Or picture the person in front of you with Jesus standing near you. Imagine they ask you to forgive them. Speak your forgiveness aloud in prayer, "In the name of Jesus, I forgive you, \_\_\_\_\_."
3. Can you trust God to deal righteously with the person and ask him for the grace to be content if he extends forgiveness to them?
4. Forgiveness has fully blossomed when we can pray blessing on those who persecute or have injured us, as Jesus did when he prayed, "Father, forgive them" and as he taught, "Bless those who curse you; pray for those who abuse you," (Luke 6:28). Are you able to pray that God will bless this person with forgiveness and a restored relationship with him? If so, take a few moments to do so. If not, don't rush yourself. Perhaps ask God to lead in you a direction where one day this will be possible.

### INTERESTING QUOTES

"Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies," Nelson Mandela.

"Forgiveness is setting the prisoner free, only to find out that the prisoner was me," Corrie Ten Boom.

"Forgiveness is the key that unlocks the door of resentment and the handcuffs of hatred. It is a power that breaks the chains of bitterness and the shackles of selfishness," Corrie Ten Boom.

"To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you," C. S. Lewis.

"Forgiveness is the economy of the heart. Forgiveness saves the expense of anger, the cost of hatred, the waste of spirits," Hannah More.

### HELPFUL VERSES

"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you," Ephesians 4:30-32.

"Love keeps no record of wrongs," 1 Corinthians 13:5.

"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive," Colossians 3:12-13.

"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors," Matthew 6:12.

### SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Before you try this practice:

1. How confident are you that God has forgiven you? May your small group pray for you in this area if needed?

2. Can you tell any remarkable stories you know about someone forgiving someone else?
3. How would you have defined forgiveness before reading this practice? Has that definition changed?
4. What have you found helpful as you have tried to forgive someone?
5. What is most difficult for you about forgiveness?
6. How do you feel about giving this practice a try?

Please practice forgiving something that feels less harmful first.

Sometimes we need others to pray with us if we need to forgive something that has wounded us deeply. Please reach out the Healing Presence prayer team or a trusted friend if necessary.

After you have tried this practice:

1. What were your experiences with forgiving a less harmful offense?
2. What did you find helpful as you tried to forgive?
3. Where did you get stuck? How may your small group pray for you?
4. If you were able to forgive, what changes do you feel it has made in your heart or your life?
5. Do you sense a next step for you in this practice of forgiveness?

If a foot were not attached to a body, could it walk?

If an ear were left to itself, apart from its head, could it hear?

This is the way the Bible talks about Jesus' people: we cannot thrive apart from connection with one another. And only together do we express the fullness of the body of Christ. Jesus calls us to practice community, and one of the most powerful ways we do this is by gathering with one another in small groups.

Jesus lives this practice from eternity. God is a community: A Trinity of love. But here on earth, Jesus expanded His community to include men and women. In the Gospels we see Jesus doing almost nothing alone. At the beginning of His ministry, He collects a group of twelve disciples who then go with Him everywhere. At other times, He draws an even smaller group out of that group to accompany Him when He is doing something especially remarkable or needs the support of His friends: when His body is changed into His glory-self, when He heals a little girl who was dead, and when He prays in the Garden of Gethsemane before His crucifixion.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus then tell His disciples to love one another as He has loved them—to wash each other's feet and to lay down their lives for one another. He commissions Peter to lead His church after His death. Clearly, He intends for us to do this Christian life together.