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The Art of Forgiveness

From the pages of *The Lost Art of Relationship*, page 31:

Have you ever heard the expression, “*I forgive you, but I will not forget*”? There are still others who say, “*If you don’t forget, then you have never really forgiven.*” There are problems with both of these expressions.

For those who say, “*I forgive you, but I will not forget,*” I doubt forgiveness was really given. It sounds like a veiled threat. The next statement, “*If you don’t forget, then you have never really forgiven,*” is impossible. You can never really forget what someone has done to hurt you. We were designed to remember. From the day we were born, our brains turn on the memory banks, and we retain massive amounts of information. When we are hurt by someone, or if we hurt someone else, whether intentionally or unintentionally, we remember.

In relationship, two phrases we should focus on more are,

“Please forgive me,”

and

“I forgive you.”

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This week, we will unpack the concepts of forgiveness and unforgiveness, and the impact each one has on relationships. As you dive into these sections, take a moment to think of an offense you need to forgive someone for (and maybe need to continually forgive). Then pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal anything you may need forgiveness for. This lesson may bring up past

hurts and issues you haven't thought of in years, so if that is the case for you, I pray for healing, peace, and reconciliation where needed. I hope this lesson is a blessing to you.

1. *Relationships are messy.* (5-10 minutes)

When you read that sentence, what comes to your mind? Does a circumstance or person pop up in your memory? Do any emotions come into play? Spend a few minutes as a group sharing what “relationships are messy” means to you.

2. *We are given two choices regarding forgiveness.* (5-10 minutes)

In this world, as soon as sin entered, pain, hurt, offenses, confusion, and disorder entered with it. Whenever someone hurts us, whether intentionally or not, it creates pain, anguish, confusion, feelings of betrayal, and more. It is inevitable that we will hurt others and be hurt.

God gives us *two* legitimate responses to being hurt or offended. We are given a choice to either *not forgive* or *forgive*.

I think we can agree, we have *all* been hurt or offended by someone we know. Maybe someone gossiped about you. Maybe you were physically injured or abused. Maybe someone stole from you. Whatever it was, I'm truly sorry you were hurt. My question is this: Where are you in the forgiveness process regarding this hurt?

Of these quotes about forgiveness, which one speaks to your heart and why? Discuss these with your group.

“It is one of the greatest gifts you can give yourself, to forgive. Forgive everybody.”— Maya Angelou

“We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies.”— Martin Luther King, Jr.

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”— Martin Luther King, Jr.

3. We are to forgive those who hurt us. (5-10 minutes)

With your group, take a minute and reflect on this phrase: *Forgiveness is a choice.*

Discuss how forgiving others is a choice. Is it something that can just be affirmed in your heart, or does it require action? What kind of action might it require?

Look up Matthew 18:15–22.

What does the Bible say to do when someone has hurt you?

What is at the heart of this passage?

Who benefits from this instruction?

What are some of the benefits of choosing to forgive?

4. Choosing to not forgive is also a choice. (5-10 minutes)

Not forgiving someone for something they have done against us is also a choice God gives us as we relate to others. When we do *not* forgive someone, we are in danger of allowing unforgiveness to fester in our hearts. We are actually in *worse shape* than the actual damage or pain that was done to us!

In *Lost Art of Relationship*, I describe unforgiveness in terms of bondage, or placing ourselves in a prison cell and giving the person who hurt us the keys to let us out. Take a look at this quote and discuss it with your group. Do you agree or disagree with what it says and why?

“Unforgiveness chains us to the past, poisons the present, and keeps us from what the Lord has for our future.” (Source Unknown)

Look up the following scriptures to assist with your discussion:

- Matthew 5:9; 6:15
- Romans 12:18
- Luke 11:4

How does *not* forgiving someone match up with Scripture?

Are there other consequences we experience if we choose not to forgive?

5. When we hurt others, we need to take action. (5-10 minutes)

We would be naïve to think we have never hurt anyone, caused emotional pain, or damaged someone. I recognize this takes vulnerability and humility, but our last discussion question will focus inward. If ever we should remember our oath (what is said at our table, stays at our table), now is the time.

With your group, think of a time when you know you caused another person pain or damage. Is there someone God is bringing to your mind, who you might have hurt directly or indirectly?

What does the Bible say to do when we think we might have offended or hurt another person?

Read Matthew 5:21–24.

What does verse 22 say specifically? If we were to obey this teaching on forgiveness, what might that look like in practical ways? Why do you think Jesus takes this so seriously?

6. Forgiveness is not a burden God decided to put on us; it is a powerful tool to build us up. (5-10 minutes)

In any relationship, you will need to utilize this tool if you desire to keep, maintain, or grow in your relationships. It can be difficult to forgive—it might even be incredibly uncomfortable and even feel unnatural! But God’s desire for us is to be people with deep,

meaningful relationships, so He asks us to forgive. He set the example for us in how He forgave us. He forgave us before we even knew we needed it. He offered it to us freely. He even pursues us to let us know that we can live truly forgiven lives.

Read these powerful verses about forgiveness as we close today.

“If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.” (Matthew 6:14–15, NLT)

“But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too.” (Mark 11:25, NLT)

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9, NLT)

Discuss these with your group.

How have you personally witnessed the power of God’s forgiveness in either your life or someone else’s life?

What would it look like if we lived in forgiveness, offering it to others before they hurt us? Is this even possible? I believe it is.

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Dear Lord Jesus,

I pray you will help me learn the art of forgiveness in all of my relationships, new and old. Will you help me to know when I have hurt someone, and will you give me the courage and wisdom to reconcile with them to the best of my ability? And for the people who have hurt and offended me in some way (Lord, you know what they are), will you give me your peace, strength, humility, and the ability to forgive them? Not *my* will, but *Your* will be done.

Thank you in advance for healing, restoration, unity, and peace in my relationships as I obey you and follow your commands.

In Your Name I pray,

Amen