

REVIEW: JUDGING

In the previous studies we discussed how we are NOT to JUDGE or condemn others. What do you recall were the reasons for this?

- We are not to judge because we are not THE judge. God alone is judge and he will take care of evaluating everyone's behaviour.
- We are not in a position of personal authority over anyone else.
- We are not to judge because we are spiritually guilty and our perspective is limited.

If we are not responsible to judge, then it is also **not our responsibility to condemn** and punish others for their actions. (We are discussing relationships and personal interactions – not societal justice).

How can you give a consequence if the person has not yet been judged?

It is God's responsibility to take vengeance and punish wrongs – not ours.

If we are not responsible to JUDGE or CONDEMN others, how are we told to relate to them?

If we trust God will take care of all the judging and condemning, and that we are freed from this heavy responsibility, then we are free simply to LOVE, showing people the grace of God.

Only this type of freedom can make it possible for us to LOVE our ENEMIES as Christ commanded.

In what practical ways does judging trap us in our personal lives?

When I choose to judge and condemn another person, I am bound to them and the hurt they caused me. I can never let it go because I must remain the one who continually judges and punish them. In my mind I am thinking, "If I don't punish them, who will?" We demand justice and feel we must be the ones to continually exert that justice against them.

This act of judging and retaining anger against a person is extremely stressful and takes away the joy available to us in the present. Sustaining such emotions requires a great deal of energy and can be emotionally exhausting. Holding on to anger can not only affect our emotional and spiritual health, but we may discover it also affects our physical health as well.

By refusing to be another person's judge, I am freeing myself from the responsibility to condemn them. When I let go of judging, I am also making a decision to let go of bitterness against the other person, as bitterness is simply a form of punishment we feel the other person deserves.

Personal freedom comes through not being bound to another person's actions against us by not sustaining judgment against them. It was never our position to judge, never our position to condemn, and never our responsibility to do anything but LOVE.

James 4:12 (NIV)

There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you--who are you to judge your neighbour?

**NOT JUDGING must be rooted in the theological understanding
that GOD IS JUDGE
and he will take care of justice.**

Ephesians 4:32 (NIV)

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

How have you heard forgiveness explained in the past?

Often forgives is explained as something necessary for “us” to find freedom, that unless we forgive we stay trapped to the other person. It describes forgiveness as a decision we make to “take the hooks” out of ourselves and become free from the bondage to the past hurtful event and offender.

How might our understanding of being free through “not judging” affect our perspective on forgiveness?

We have discovered that **freedom** comes through the decision to trust that God is judge, that he will take care of any offense against us, and therefore we don't have to worry about the outcome, we don't have to make sure justice is served against our offender. Through not judging we are free then to love our enemies.

Forgiveness – whatever it is then, has nothing to do with setting us free, because we are already free before we even come to the issue of forgiveness. Forgiveness then, has nothing to do with our freedom or benefit.

**FORGIVENESS then is NOT about setting ourselves free
because we are already freed by the act of
not judging and choosing to love our enemies.
This happens before we come to forgiveness.**

If NOT JUDGING sets us free, then what is the role of FORGIVENESS?

What DOES Forgiveness mean?

To forgive means to:

- offer a pardon to someone who is guilty or
- release a person from a debt that they owe you.

Forgiveness involves 3 elements:

1. An Injury
2. A Debt resulting from the Injury
3. A Cancellation of the debt

Go through the following checklist and see if you have embraced any of these beliefs in the past.
Forgiveness does NOT mean:

- ☐ Approving of what someone else did.
- ☐ Pretending that evil never took place.
- ☐ Making excuses for other people's bad behaviour.
- ☐ Ignoring abuse.
- ☐ Letting others walk all over you.
- ☐ Pretending that you were never hurt.
- ☐ All negative consequences of sin are cancelled.

What are some times when you may forgive a person, but LOVE will not let the past behaviour continue?

A wife who continues to be abused by her husband

A person asking for money only to use it in destructive ways: gambling, drugs, etc.

We need to deal with any situation where it is not beneficial for the other person to continue in a destructive life pattern. Love for the person compels us to intervene.

Benefits of Forgiveness

Psalms 32:5 (NLT)

Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, "I will confess my rebellion to the Lord." And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.

Psalms 51:8-12 (NIV)

Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

What is the benefit for the one who is forgiven?

The one who is forgiven is set free from their guilt and restored to joyful relationship. There is no barrier between the offender and offended any longer. Since we have been set free from our refusal to judge and condemn, the goal of forgiveness is to **set the other person FREE**.

Forgiveness is about setting the OTHER PERSON free.

Can you recall a time when you felt emotionally free despite the fact that someone wronged you, but they however, were plagued by guilt and shame? Share how that situation concluded.

You were already free due to the fact you chose to let God be judge, but they were not free due to the guilt of their actions. What would they need to do in order for THEM to be free from the wrong they perpetuated against you?

Luke 17:3-4 (NIV)

So watch yourselves. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. ⁴ If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."

What is the relationship between REPENTANCE and FORGIVENESS?

Repentance paves the way for forgiveness. Only through repentance can a person be freed from the guilt of their sinful actions. When a person repents and asks for forgiveness, then forgiveness can be received and healing in the relationship can occur.

Ezekiel 18:30b, 31 (NIV)

Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. ³¹ Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit.

What does it mean to repent?

- 1) To **acknowledge** personal wrong doing.
- 2) To **feel regret** for wrong behaviour.
- 3) To humbly and sincerely **ask for forgiveness**.
- 4) To change one's mind and **turn from sin** and to live righteously.

**If the goal of forgiveness is to set the other person free,
they can only become free when they come to a point of repentance.**

Colossians 3:13 (NIV)

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

What is the example God gives us with regard to forgiveness?

- 1) God acknowledges the wrongs we have committed against him
- 2) God understands that those wrongs have created a barrier in the relationship
- 3) God initiated healing in the relationship by paying the consequence for our wrongs – even when we didn't care.
- 4) God offers us the gift of forgiveness at expense to himself.
- 5) God lovingly waits for us to receive his forgiveness through repentance and restore relationship with him.

Note: God does not provide forgiveness apart from repentance.

Why do you think people in relationship with God are told to forgive?

- We are to represent God's character and love so that he can bring grace to people through us.
- Forgiveness recognizes God's desire for there to be peace in relationships, especially within the family of believers. Offering forgiveness declares that we long to remove every obstacle that prevents love from flowing to others.

Why would we be willing to forgive someone if they repeatedly wrong us?

We are to forgive in the same way we have been forgiven. We have repeatedly sinned against God (much more than seventy times seven) yet we are willing to receive God's gift of forgiveness to cleanse us and set us free to approach unhindered relationship with him once again. Only through forgiveness can we receive joy and peace in our relationships.

What if the person refuses to repent?

If a person refuses to repent then they stay trapped in their guilt and shame, yet we will be free because we have chosen not to judge, but to love our enemies. Unfortunately, there will be no relational peace or joy when a sin barrier still exists, but that cannot stop us from loving and serving the other person as Jesus did for us when we were in rebellion against him.

Can you share an example of how *others* have forgiven you?**Can you share an example of someone *you* have had to forgive?**

Romans 5:8 (NIV)

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

How have you typically responded when you've been relationally hurt?

- Did offering forgiveness play a role?
- Were you willing to **initiate** forgiveness?
- Did you wait for the other person to **come to you**?
- Why do we often wait for the other person to initiate?
- What process did Jesus use? – He initiated even when we were still his self-declared enemies.

Forgiveness is not about ignoring history, nor is it about ignoring changes that need to occur. Forgiveness is about giving the other person the opportunity to move forward in their relationship with you as opposed to being trapped in their past sin.

Matthew 6:12-14 (NLT)

¹² *And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

¹³ *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.*

¹⁴ *For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.*

¹⁵ *But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*

How would you paraphrase what Jesus is saying?

Forgive me in the same way that I forgive others

Forgiveness is something to be **Received** and **Given**

Unless we show a forgiving spirit we can't expect to be forgiven

Why does Jesus connect God's forgiving us with how we forgive others?

When we say that we have received God's forgiveness, but cannot forgive another, we are declaring that the other person's sin against us is worse than our sin against God. We trivialize our own sin against God and elevate their sin against us – reversing the order of the two greatest commands. In so doing, I am making myself out to be God, Judge, and executioner against the one who would dare sin against me. Jesus is implying that such an attitude reveals that we had no real sense of repentance for our own sin against God, and as a result, we remain unforgiven.

Jesus has set us free and he doesn't want us to be bound again by hate and unforgiveness. His grace is something to be received and shared. He established the model of freeing others when it is not deserved and he expects us to follow his example.

When we refuse to forgive, what does that imply about our view of God as Judge?

When I refuse to forgive, I declare that God is NOT JUDGE and I am, he is unworthy and I am worthy. I declare that God is unreliable as judge and therefore I must vent my wrath at the offending party in order to have justice. I become very proud, arrogant, and blind in my perception of life, my own guilt, and my self-righteousness. A person who sustains this perspective has never seen God or known his forgiveness in their life.

Additional reading:

Parable of the Unforgiving Debtor (Matthew 18:21-35)

Personal Reflection:

Who has wronged you that you are still judging and condemning, and have not offered forgiveness.

Pray for the group that God would reveal to them any relationship (God, themselves, others) where there is unforgiveness he wants them to address. Then give them a few minutes to allow the Spirit to speak regarding any relationship reconciliation they need to address.

Write down any names you believe the Holy Spirit is prompting you to forgive.

Next week we will discuss HOW to stop judging and HOW we can initiate offering forgiveness.