

2017 Small Groups Weekly Lenten Series



Five Conversations about life, faith and hope

TriCon's Small Groups series are sponsored by the Christian Education Committee.  
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# f o r g i v e n e s s of God: The Way of Jesus

## MAIN POINT

The love and forgiveness of God are complete and unconditional.

## IDEA

The Bible repeatedly tells us of Jesus' love for us and his forgiveness of us. Nevertheless -- and especially when we feel estranged, lonely, confused, or simply tired -- it can be very difficult for us to internalize and accept the forgiveness of God. The spirit of God may seem inaccessible to us when we are lost in our own inner wilderness. It is at these times, when we feel separated from our spiritual selves, that we would do well to seek God's forgiveness. And it is at these times especially that God offers himself to us.

## SCRIPTURE

**Luke 6:37** *Forgive, and you will be forgiven.*

**Ephesians 4:31-32** *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.*

**John 7:53-8:11** *Then each of them went home, while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?' They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened*



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*up and said to them, 'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.' And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.*

*Jesus straightened up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, sir.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.'*

The story of the adulterous woman and Jesus' radical departure from a legalist interpretation of the Mosaic law provides several lessons about God's "new covenant" of forgiveness instead of legalistic justice. First, God does not judge us according to a rigid application of either earthly or heavenly law. Second, those who are quick to condemn others would do well to look at themselves. And there is also the understanding that all of us have sinned and fall short of God's standard. Furthermore, God wants us to learn from our mistakes and not repeat them.

- What other lessons do you take from this story?
- Which resonates with you more, the justice of God or the forgiveness of God?
- Do you believe that God uses a righteous scale in order to judge our virtues and our sins?
- Does our faith implore us to reach to God for forgiveness?

**Luke 23: 33-34** *When they came to the place called The Skull, they crucified Him there, along with the criminals, one on His right and the other on His left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up His garments by casting lots.*

**Romans 3:23-24** *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*



No doubt we have made errors and we will continue to make errors -- some small and some large. Sometimes we intentionally do things we know are wrong and yet we do them anyway. At other times we unintentionally make errors through lapses of judgment. And sometimes our internal response to having erred is to feel remorse, guilt, and/or contrition. God's grace is ever present in all these times. Forgiveness is in front of us, it is there to be embraced.

- There is no fall so deep that God's grace cannot reach it. Do you experience this grace, this forgiveness?
- Is Jesus the ultimate personification of forgiveness?
- Can you visualize God's forgiveness?

### **SILENT TIME**

If you choose, feel free at this time to spend five minutes in silence. This quiet time can be used to reflect upon the forgiveness of God.

**Matthew 6:12** *And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who have trespassed against us.*

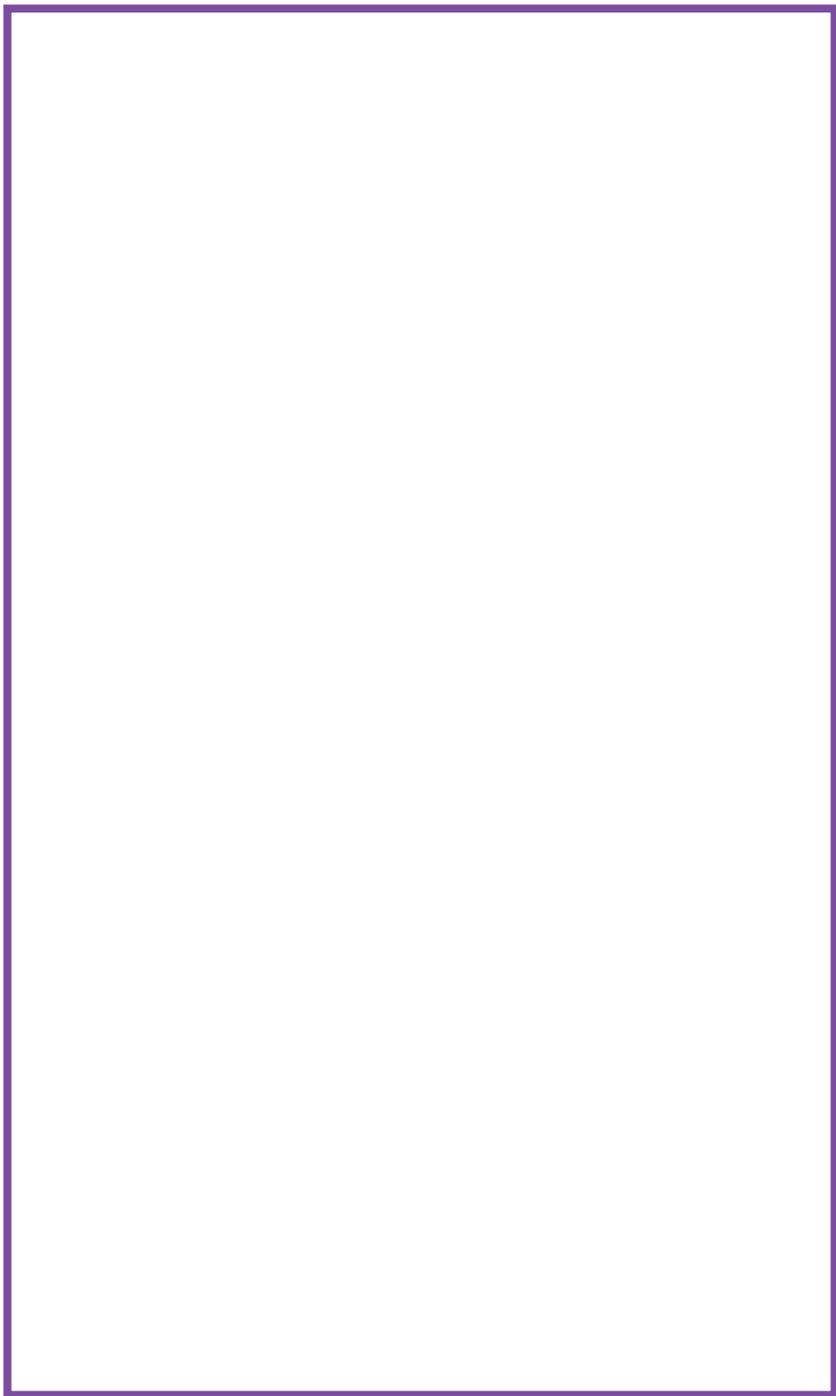
- What sorts of things do you pray for? Do you pray for forgiveness?
- How does God inform you that you are forgiven?



- Have you experienced the forgiveness of God? Is it amenable to description?
- Have you ever felt that God has shut you out?
- Have you ever shut God out? Why might this happen?

**Numbers 6:24-26** *May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*

- How is God's forgiveness related to the peace of God?





## WEEK Two

# f o r g i v e n e s s to another: The Way of Release

### MAIN POINT

Forgiving others can be very difficult, but doing so relieves our own suffering and brings us closer to wholeness with God.

### IDEA

We need and seek the companionship of other people in our lives in various forms including friends, family, teammates, acquaintances, and soul mates. As much as others enrich our lives, they also cause us disappointment, hurt, injury, and even betrayal. Sometimes this injury is unintentional, at other times it is very intentional, and in either case we may feel loss, pain, anger, resentment, and/or bitterness. At its worst this pain can linger for years and immobilize us emotionally. As Christians we look to Scripture for inspiration about forgiveness of others, and we look to Jesus as a model of forgiveness of others.

### SCRIPTURE

**Ephesians 4:32** *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God has forgiven you.*

**Luke 15: 11-32** *Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country, and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in the whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.*



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*When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' So he got up and went to his father.*

*But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.*

*Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'*

*'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'*

***[We will revisit the story of the prodigal son from another vantage point in Week Five.]***

**Matthew 18:21-22** *Then Peter came up and said to him, Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?* Jesus said to him, *“I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-times-seven times.”*



The story of the prodigal son abounds with meaning. We cannot help but be impressed by the generosity of spirit and the forgiveness shown by the father to his son. Yet we may also feel justice was not served -- despite the time the younger son spent in desperate poverty -- and indeed we might feel that the younger son got off “easy.” These feelings of internal conflict can easily arise when we consider whether to forgive someone in our own lives. Jesus teaches that we are forgiven by God and we are to follow his example and forgive one another.

- Does the prodigal son deserve to be forgiven?
- Do you think you would be so quick to forgive a loved one for similar wasteful behavior? Would you worry that your kindness would be taken advantage of or would set a poor example?
- Where is justice served in the story of the prodigal son?
- 70 times 7 is a lot of times to forgive. Can anyone be expected to do this?
- What other Bible passages about forgiveness come to your mind? Do you have a favorite passage from the Bible about forgiveness?

“There is a hard law...When an injury is done to us we never recover until we forgive.” -- Alan Paton

Forgiveness is like an unknown road in front of us, and we may (or may not) make a conscious decision to take that road. Forgiveness involves a measure of risk and uncertainty. Indeed, forgiveness does not necessarily guarantee restitution, justice, or



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“Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies.”  
— Nelson Mandela

reconciliation, and we may be disappointed with the response given to our act of forgiveness. Ultimately, though, the purpose of forgiveness is to free us of the pain of the past and to diminish the power of the other person’s action. Forgiveness enables us to avoid bitterness and resentment, and gives us the ability to heal and make peace with our world. Forgiveness helps us to achieve wholeness. While we do not forget what has transpired and while we might still need restorative justice, forgiveness helps to remove the shackles of the past, and forgiveness enables us to more fully live in the present -- in the light.

- Is it sometimes asking too much to forgive?
- Is it always (or almost always) in one’s best interest to forgive?
- Are there conditions which need to be met for you to forgive? What if the other person rejects your forgiveness? if they do not show remorse? if they keep doing the same thing? Do you continue to forgive or is your forgiveness dependent on the other person’s response?
- Who benefits more, the forgiven or the forgiver?

### **SILENT TIME**

If you choose, feel free at this time to spend five minutes in silence. This quiet time can be used to reflect on the act of forgiving another person.

It is very natural when you are hurt to strike out at the source of the pain -- to make the other feel as badly as they have made us feel. Whether or not to attempt to forgive is a very personal decision that depends on many factors including the extent of the injury and the time that has passed. We start to forgive when

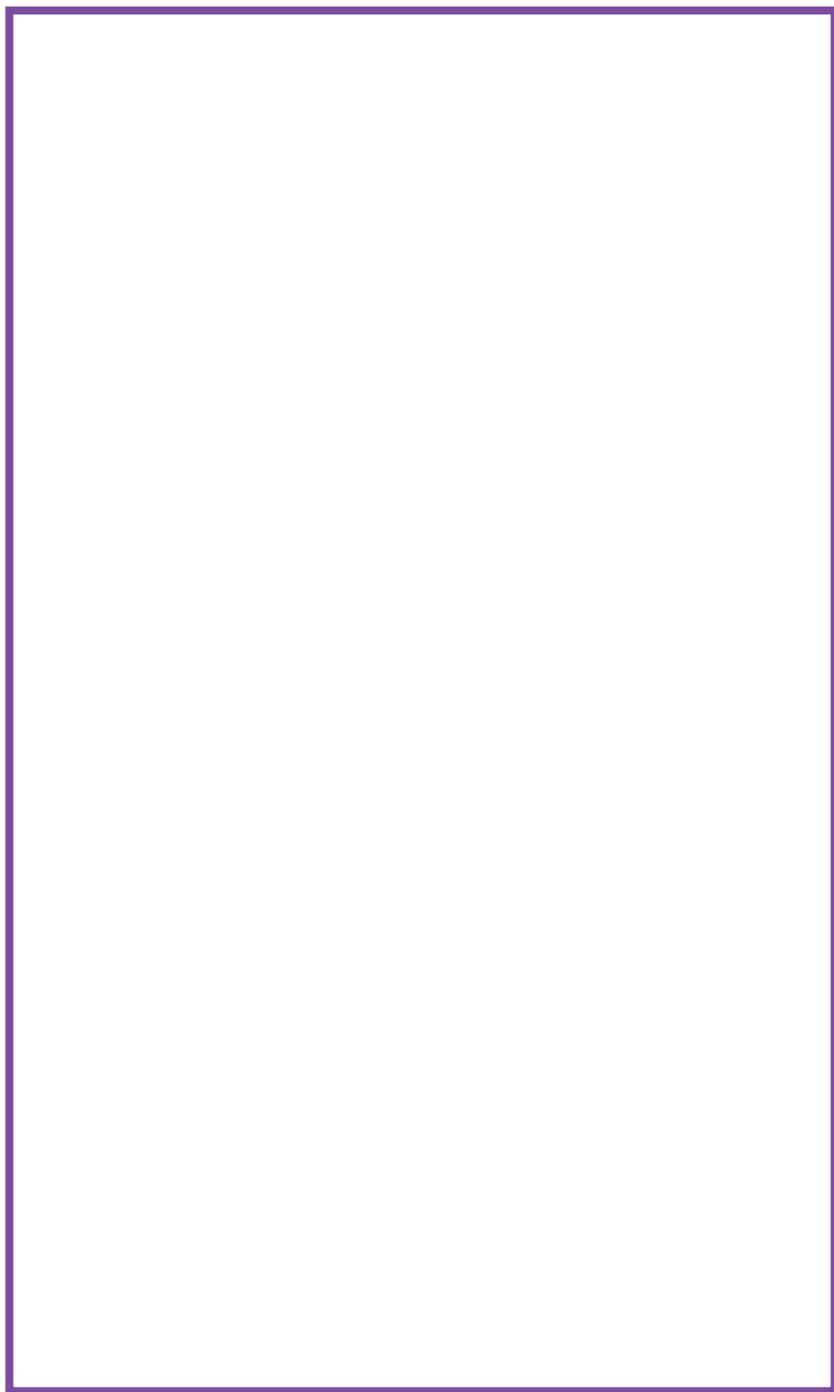
we recognize the humanity in the person who has caused us harm. In order to forgive we must release our desire for revenge, and we must be able to revise our view of the person who has injured us.

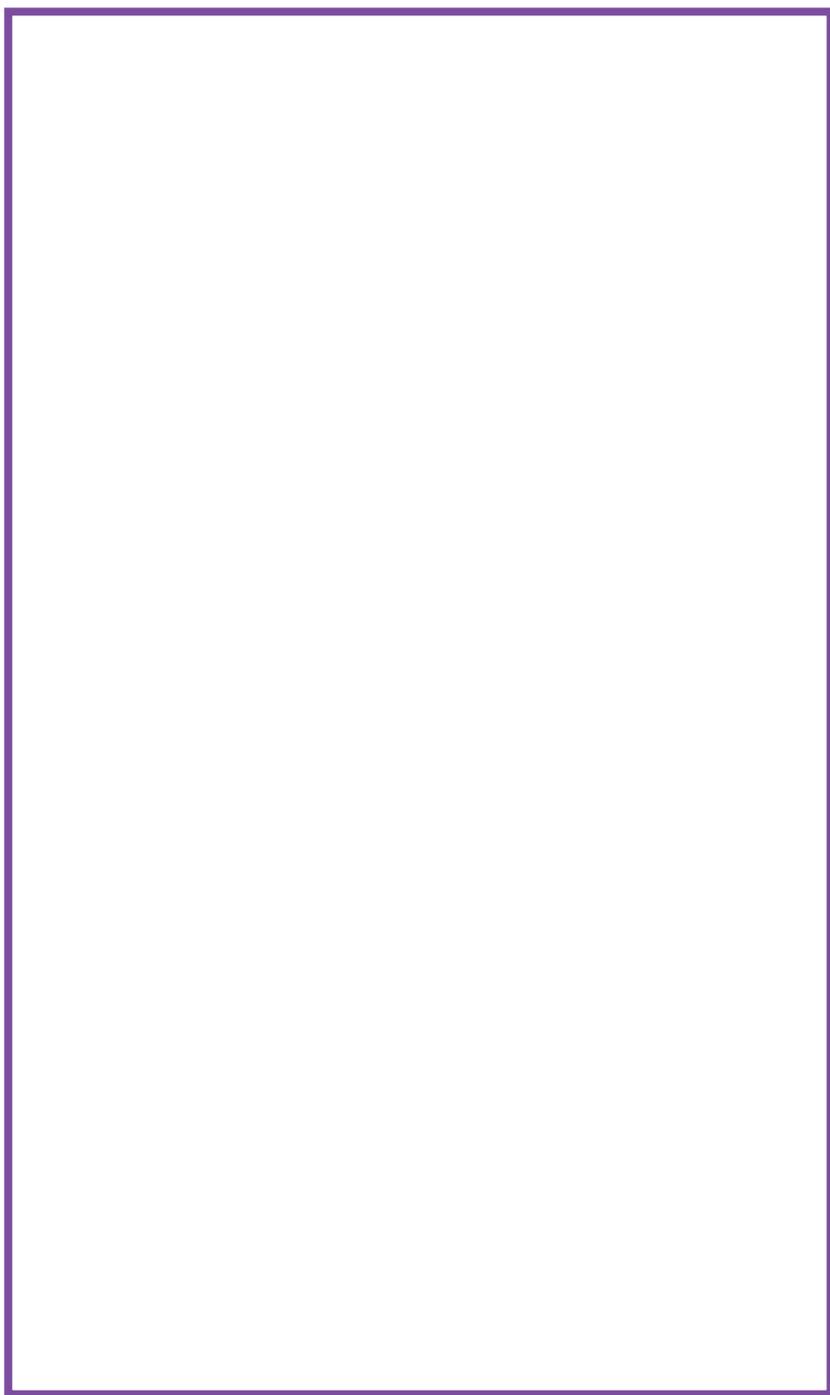


- Has there been a time in your life when you forgave someone and were happy you did so?
- Has there been a time in your life when you forgave someone and regretted that you did so?
- Has there been a time in your life when you decided that you cannot/could not forgive? What led you to this conclusion?

“Hope for a great sea-change on the far side of revenge. Believe that a further shore is reachable from here.  
Believe in miracles and cures and healing wells.”  
— Seamus Heaney

“People ask me what advice I have for a married couple struggling in their relationship. I always answer: pray and forgive. And to young people from violent homes, I say: pray and forgive. And again, even to the single mother with no family support: pray and forgive.”  
— Mother Teresa







## WEEK Three

# f o r g i v e n e s s of self: The Way of Vulnerability

### MAIN POINT

If we forgive ourselves we can more fully enjoy God's grace and become more whole.

### IDEA

Self-forgiveness involves one's inner relationship with the self. Self-forgiveness can be very challenging, as it requires -- at a minimum -- recognizing that something has gone wrong, acknowledging our role in this wrong, feeling some form of contrition/regret, and admitting culpability (at least to oneself). In this context we need to truly desire to make things right and, when possible, to try to correct what we have done wrong. Our faith in God gives us the guidance and strength to see ourselves honestly, take appropriate responsibility for our actions, develop a correct course of action, make amends, and (last but not least!) to forgive ourselves for our behavior.

“Although you should not erase your responsibility for the past, when you make the past your jailer, you destroy your future. It is such a great moment of liberation when you learn to forgive yourself, let the burden go, and walk out into a new path of promise and possibility.”  
—John O’Donohue

Most of us engage in self-criticism in a variety of forms including remorse, guilt, and shame to name a few. Indeed, guilt and shame occur when we do something that we understand is wrong or otherwise falls short of our internal standard. Our self-label of “bad behavior” can easily cause us to feel guilt or shame. Whereas



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remorse or regret can lead to restorative justice, guilt and shame can make us feel distant from God's grace. And in habitual form, guilt and shame can immobilize us and prevent us from fully engaging with God and the world, resulting in self-alienation and/or depression.

- The very first story in the Bible tells of the fall of man due to original sin. Do you think we need forgiveness of our fundamental failings?
- It has been said that we are never as hard on others as we are on ourselves. Do you feel this is accurate? Do you feel this is fair?
- Some people feel that others would never love them if they were seen for who they truly are. What counsel would you offer to people who feel this way?
- Most of us are capable of both wondrously good deeds as well as horrible deeds. Do you feel people are by and large more good or more bad? Do you feel this way about yourself?

Forgiveness has been called the true mind-body connection. Forgiveness of others helps us to become untethered from past wrongs that cause us to feel resentful, and it helps us to achieve mental equilibrium. Forgiveness of the self is the way through our self-criticality. Forgiveness induces calm in the soul and the body. Self-forgiveness helps us see ourselves more graciously and provides a way out of the dark corners of our mind. Self-forgiveness relieves depression and settles anxiety. Forgiveness of others and of ourselves brings us closer to our friends, family, neighbors, and our inner self. Forgiveness reduces stress and improves both physical and mental health. Forgiveness binds us to God's covenant of love, allowing us to pay forward the grace shown to us by a loving God. If we wish to live our life in the way of Jesus, we must forgive others and ourselves as well.



- Does forgiving ourselves let us off the hook for our errors?
- Do you feel guilt is necessary for personal growth? Do you think that reduced guilt yields a greater capacity for good deeds?
- Do you think religion in general promotes guilt? Why or why not?
- Which words of Jesus help you to forgive yourself?
- How does faith in God and Jesus move us away from guilt and shame?

“The more you know yourself, the more you forgive yourself.”  
– Confucius

There are many cognitive distortions that trigger guilt. These include labeling (calling ourselves weak or sinful), magnification (believing our misdeeds to be greater than they really are), and personalization (assuming responsibility for a negative outcome that we did not cause). To the extent we can identify cognitive distortions and replace them with more accurate self-statements, the greater we can pull ourselves out of the trough of guilt.

We can breathe – both intentionally and mindfully -- in order to clear our mind, slow our thoughts, and gain more present awareness of our body and our mind. The ancient Hebrew word for Spirit is *ruah*, which also is associated with breath.

We can pray and ask for forgiveness. We can admit to God the exact nature of our wrongs. We can ask God to remove these defects and our shortcomings. We can pray to improve our conscious contact with God and to access knowledge of God’s will for our lives.



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### SILENT TIME

If you choose, feel free at this time to spend five minutes in silence. This quiet time can be used to reflect on the act of forgiveness of the self, and to breathe, pray, or plan an action.

- To what extent is forgiveness a consequence of empathy and understanding? What does it mean to have empathy and understanding of the self?

In response to recognition of past errors that cause remorse or guilt, we can resolve to not make the same mistakes again. Through acknowledgement of our errors, we can then make amends. We can aim to rectify the injury we have caused others. At all times we can empathize with those around us.

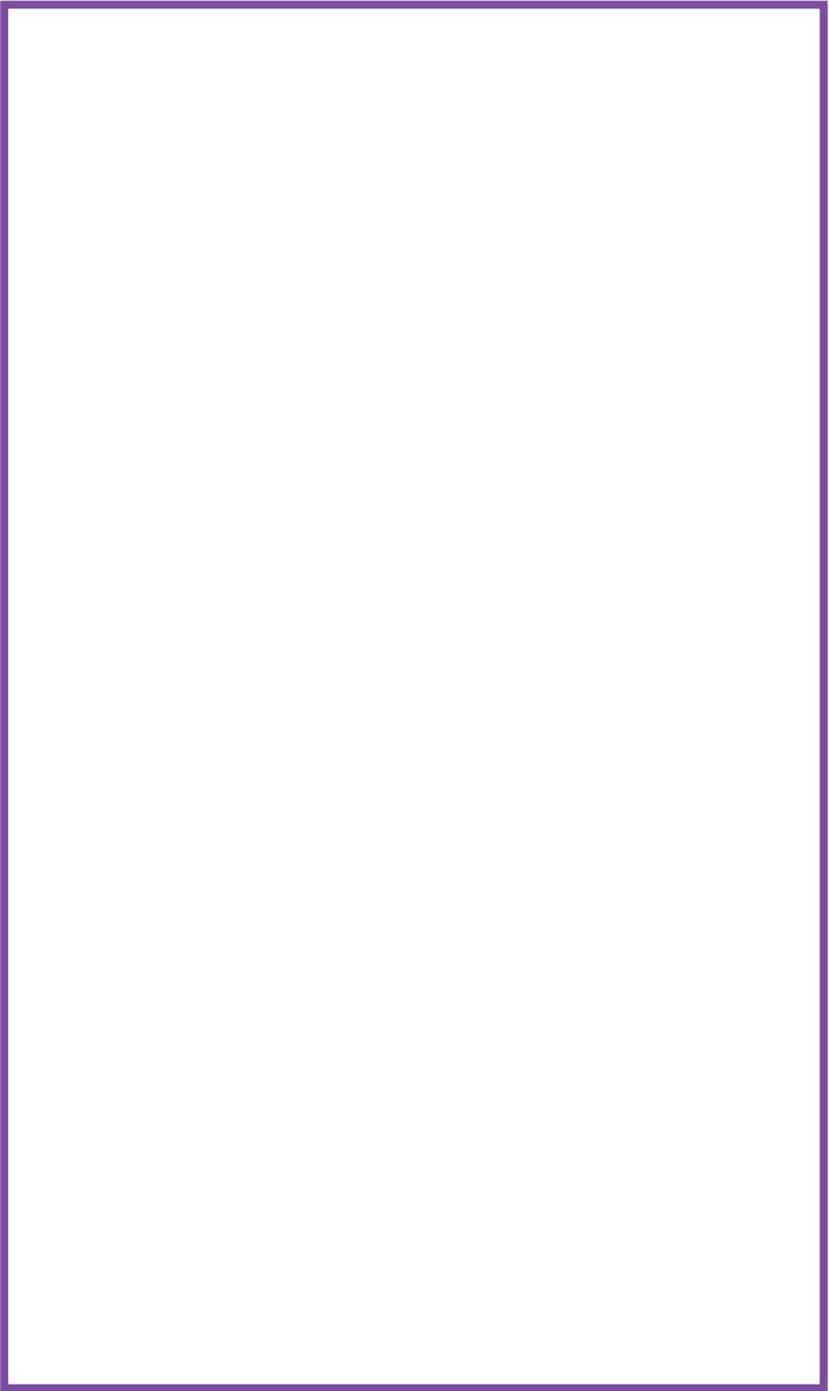
**Matthew 5:13-16** *“You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”*

- Have you felt a need to forgive yourself?
- Do you feel the need for forgiveness of your self now, at this moment?
- How might things in your life be different if you were more forgiving of yourself?
- Moving ahead, what might you try to do to achieve the goal is self-forgiveness?

“Forgive yourself and welcome love back into your life.”

— Wayne Dyer







## WEEK Four

# f o r g i v e n e s s from another: The Way of Humility

### MAIN POINT

Either on purpose or by accident we have all engaged in acts, words, and thoughts that have caused pain -- either great or small. The opportunity to rectify these wrongs and recover grace is central to Christian faith.

### IDEA

Why is receiving forgiveness so difficult? Just imagine saying to someone "Without your forgiveness I am still tethered to what happened between us. Only you can set me free." Having the strength (and humility) to utter these words requires us to admit and confess that we have hurt the other person; it also demands us to have the humility to express that our state of mind is dependent on the other person's response. And of course, when we are able to receive forgiveness we are then better equipped to give forgiveness to another person.

We all struggle to a lesser or greater degree with pride, shame, hatred, bitterness, jealousy, fear, insecurities, self-centeredness, and other negative expressions of the human heart. Therefore, we are often not so surprised when someone is unkind, ungracious or unforgiving to us; after all, this is familiar territory. Indeed, if we have lived long enough, many of us have come to expect that we will not be forgiven. And so, when we are forgiven in spite of all that we are and all of our actions, our positive surprise is all the more palpable.

Humility is a prerequisite of asking for forgiveness. Humility says that I am no better than you, you are no better than I, and that we all make mistakes and are in need forgiveness occasionally or routinely. Humility says that I am sincere when I say that I am



sorry; please forgive me; and I will try to do better in the future.

When we receive forgiveness from another person, our hearts are softened. We no longer need to disguise our flawed selves. We can live in and through our imperfections because we know that love covers a multitude of sins (I Peter 4:8). When we come to know forgiveness, we also come to know that inadequacies do not mean the end of love; instead they give love and forgiveness a chance to shine through our imperfections. In this way receiving forgiveness opens us up to receiving love.

## SCRIPTURE

**Psalm 32:1** *Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.*

**Acts: 2:38-39** *Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'*

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

Make direct amends [to those you have wronged] whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others ... The generous response of most people to such quiet sincerity will often astonish us. Even our severest and most justified critics will frequently meet us more than half way on the first trial.”

— **Step 9 in the Alcoholics Anonymous Handbook**

To be in a position to potentially receive forgiveness requires our self-understanding that we have done something to harm another. It requires us to have an honest assessment of our motivations and

actions, and it requires us to feel contrition and remorse, as well as empathy and respect for whomever we have injured. None of this is easy, and it is often quite painful.



Genuine remorse leads to genuine humility. A true desire to change starts with an admission of wrongdoing. As we reflect upon whether we are to be forgiven it is important to be aware that our repentance is hollow and insincere if it is not accompanied by a genuine and permanent change of heart not to recommit injury. We will continue to suffer and will never achieve redemption if upon being forgiven we allow ourselves to slip back into old patterns of hurtful behavior.

Admission of guilt and responsibility, asking for forgiveness, and commitment to change -- all these acts require great effort. Fortunately, as Christians we have a powerful ally through our constant and ongoing relationships with God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and our broader church community. The lessons, insights, and strengths of these relationships can guide us along a path towards forgiveness and reconciliation.

**Matthew 5:24** *'If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God.'*

### **The Four Steps.**

There are widely considered to be four steps in the process of being forgiven by another person:

**Step 1:** Admit to yourself you have hurt the other person. This is also known as "the uncovering phase." As painful as it is, you have to come to the place where you admit you are responsible for the wrongdoing, with no excuses.



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*(Step 1 continued....)*

Asking someone to forgive you requires a contrite heart and a willingness to repair the damage you have done. It is not just saying, 'Forgive me if you think I happened to have done something wrong.' Indeed, you need to grasp the amount of pain you have caused, and accept responsibility for it.

**Step 2:** Talk to God. Ask God to forgive you for what you have done and to give you the strength to talk to the person you have wronged. God wants you to seek his forgiveness. Note that Matthew 5:24 speaks to the urgency and extreme importance of seeking forgiveness from the injured person.

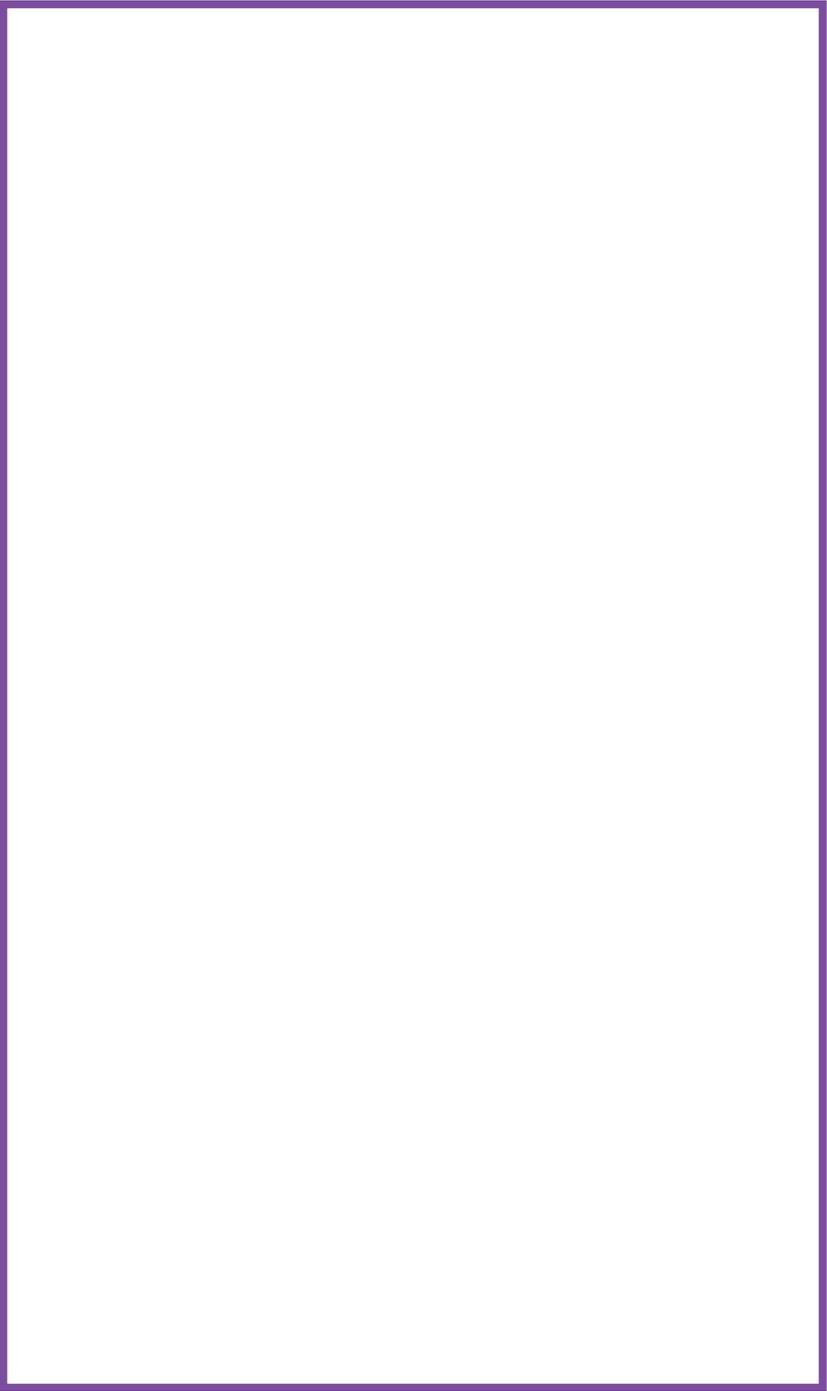
**Step 3:** Ask for forgiveness from the person you hurt. If you are going to meet in person, you may want to write down your apology beforehand and practice saying it out aloud to become truly comfortable with it. What should you say? Be honest, and do not simply apologize just to make an uncomfortable situation go away. You need to clearly explain what you are sorry for. Depending on the circumstances, you might want to engage a third party to help you. And you may even want to have a peacemaker who can help bring some objectivity to the conversation.

**Step 4:** Give the other person the time/space to respond. You may need to give the other person time to sort out their feelings. It is important, if possible, to make sure the person you have hurt says "Yes, I do forgive you." In so doing, they are saying, "I'm not going to keep bringing this up or hold what you have done over your head." Sometimes when you seek forgiveness, the other person will actually turn things around and seek forgiveness from you as well. And even if the other person refuses to forgive you, you have done your part to clear your conscience and your spirit and show them that you want to change. In time, they may come around and forgive you.

**Matthew 18:1-4** *At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, 'Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.'*

Asking for forgiveness requires us to subordinate our egos, soften our hearts and let God in. Do you think that this process is what Jesus meant when he said "Become like children"? Do you think the softening of your heart "entering the Kingdom of Heaven?"

- Is it necessary to forgive your self in order to ask for and receive forgiveness?
- Which is easier for you: to forgive, or to be forgiven?
- What do you need to do (mentally, spiritually) in order to open yourself up to be forgiven?
- Do you pray to God for forgiveness? Do you pray to God for humility?
- Would you like to discuss an instance when you have been forgiven? How did this affect your ability to forgive others?
- There may be circumstances when insufficient time has passed or when the harm is too great for you to ask to be forgiven in the present. What then might you do or say?
- How would you feel if someone forgave you for something you did not think was harmful and therefore did not warrant forgiveness?
- Might it sometimes be enough or perhaps even better to ask to be forgiven by God and to not ask another person directly for their forgiveness?





WEEK  
Five

The f o r g i v e n Life:  
The Way of Acceptance

### MAIN POINT

A forgiven life is to both forgive and be forgiven; to be the one who is both welcomed home and the one who welcomes home; to provide rebirth to the present and release of the past.

### IDEA

The lessons of forgiveness are inherently ones of sacrifice. Whether sacrifice of pride or pain or perhaps injustice, forgiveness requires some sacrifice of the past. Christ's lessons on forgiveness are lessons of rebirth -- not just of life but of every minute of every day. We can always start over. We can always allow others to start over. We can be present. We can live in the moment. And in doing so, forgiveness can carve a path to inner peace and happiness.

### SCRIPTURE

**Luke 15: 20-24** *"So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But his father ordered his servants, 'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' Then the celebration began.*



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“All negativity is caused by an accumulation of psychological time and denial of the present.

Unease, anxiety, tension, stress, worry - all forms of fear - are caused by too much future, and not enough presence. Guilt, regret, resentment, grievances, sadness, bitterness, and all forms of non-forgiveness are caused by too much past, and not enough presence.”

– Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment*

**II Corinthians 5:1** *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*

## Letter to My Daughter

**My Dearest Daughter,**

**I love you so much. I will always love you. You and your brothers are the best thing that ever happened to me. I feel so blessed to be a part of your lives. I am so proud of all of you. There is so much I want to say to you....**

**First let me say**

**Please forgive me.**

**Please forgive anything I might have said or done that caused you pain. That was never my intention. I have only ever wanted what is truly best and right for you.**

**I forgive you.**

**I forgive you any slight that you think you might have done to me. There is nothing you could ever do or say that is negative that would stay with me. I love you too much.**

**Thank you.**



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**Thank you for all you have done for me. From the joy you gave me growing up from babyhood through your teens, all the way to the woman you have become. I have learned so much from you. I know that I would not be the person I am today without your questions, your pushing back, and your love. I admit there were times when I didn't want to grow and learn any more in response to your questioning, but I always ended up in a stronger more powerful place. You are a shining light in my life. Most of all, I want to thank you for being you and for being part of my life.**

**I love you.**

**Honey, I love you now. I will love you forever. I love you for who you are, not for the person you think I want you to be. I also love that person deep down inside of you waiting to be released to the world — the person you truly are meant to be, the person you are meant to grow into, to become.**

**My wish for you is that, when you are ready, you take a journey of discovery. You have so many gifts and talents to share with the world. My wish is for you to emerge into the light of your life where you will find joy, and in turn you will find your true self.**

**I know that this journey will be scary beyond imagination. Just like back in college when you were terrified to go back to school. Even so, I am still going to ask you to consider taking this journey. I will be with you every step of the way.**

**I love you now and forever.**

**Love, Mom**

There are three pillars to a forgiven life. As we have discussed together, there is looking deep within ourselves to forgive the trespasses of others; there is the courage to seek the forgiveness



## WEEK Five

of others for our own trespasses; and finally there is the reality that we must also forgive ourselves if we are to truly find peace and the path to a forgiven life.

Revisiting the parable of the Prodigal Son, Luke highlights all three facets of Jesus' teachings on forgiveness. Regret drives the young son back to his family to ask for and receive forgiveness. The father, overwhelmed with joy, seizes a moment of rebirth. But what about the brother? The brother is tortured by injustice and jealousy: "How can my father forgive him?" Anger, frustration, and resentment pull this brother's focus into the past. For the older brother, the past overwhelms the present and carries him backward in time. The present evaporates and the ability for the older brother to even discern the present evaporates. The moments of joy, surprise, laughter, and love that only live in the present become shrouded and unrecognizable.

Christ teaches that forgiveness shows us the way back to fulfillment and joy. By releasing the past we can embrace the present. And forgiveness is, in this sense, the release of the past. In doing so, we open the door to hope and love and peace.

- Can you think of moments when you have felt resentment or anger? What happens to your presence in those moments?
- Do you sometimes anticipate future injustices and trigger anger or frustration before an action has even happened? What happens to your presence?
- Can you identify any personal benefits from these feelings?
- What role does forgiveness play for you in the path to joy, laughter, and love?
- When you think of forgiving others, being forgiven, or forgiving yourself, which is the most difficult? Why?

“Forgiveness in the past brings joy  
in the present.  
Forgiveness in the present stimulates hope  
for the future.  
Forgiveness in the future allows dreams to  
be seen again.  
Forgiveness, the unspoken gift.”



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