

STUDY #1 - FORGIVENESS

Reflecting the Heart of Christ

BE TRANSFORMED

JOHN R. MURPHY

Series Theme Verse

Romans 8:29 AMP

“For those whom He foreknew [of whom He was aware and loved beforehand], He also destined from the beginning [foreordaining them] to be molded into the image of His Son [and share inwardly His likeness],...”

Study Verse

Matthew 18:33-35 AMP

“I forgave and cancelled all that [great] debt of yours because you begged me to. And should you not have had pity and mercy on your fellow attendant, as I had pity and mercy on you? And in wrath his master turned him over to the torturers (the jailers), till he should pay all that he owed. So also my heavenly father will deal with every one of you if you do not freely forgive your brother from your heart his offenses.”

Key Concept

It is God's desire that every follower of Christ progressively have more of the heart of Christ - not just act like Christ. As we comply, living out our faith will produce more of the spiritually abundant life Christ offers us and provide access to God's plan to fulfill our life purpose.

Forgiveness as practiced by Christ is uncommon to man. Modeling Christ's forgiveness requires an act of the will, and transforms our heart from being in conflict with others to having a heart of love, grace and ministry toward them. As we forgive more like Christ did from the cross, we reflect more of His character and share in more of His peace.

Despite the obvious call of Christianity to be a person with the character of forgiveness, as a new believer, I did not operate in this foundational tenet of the faith. The consequences of my lack of forgiveness hit me when I was 31, after about five years of being a Christian. At that time, the emotional misery from my pre-Christian life had returned. Much of my initial excitement about becoming a Christian had faded, unmasking familiar negative emotions like anger, depression, and a sense of low self-worth. I had not reverted to my pre-Christian condition, but I was hurting and

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frustrated that my faith was not providing any more relief.

The answer came when a Christian counselor challenged me with her conclusion that I had a forgiveness problem. My first reaction was anger, something I experienced a lot in those days. The very thought of doing a “good deed” for those that had hurt me in the past was almost more than I could bear. Months later, I came to the conclusion that it was my responsibility to forgive because God required it. No matter how undeserving I felt these people were, and despite all my justifications for not forgiving, the clear and simple requirements of God were not open for debate. He forgave a debt I cannot repay, and I am required to pass it on without condition. If I don’t, I will share in the suffering of the unmerciful servant.

So with God’s strength, I sat down one day and forgave the abusers of my past. I didn’t really feel like it, but the greater purpose to honor God carried me through. The result was nothing particularly remarkable at the moment, but soon after, years of severe depression and the temptation for self-destructive worldly behavior lifted. Forgiveness is a foundational characteristic of the heart of Christ. And it is required if we are to please God and remain free of the torment that unforgiveness causes.

Most Christians claim to have forgiven people, and I am sure they have - to the extent they understand forgiveness. If we are to have the heart of Christ in forgiveness, we need to understand how different His forgiveness is from the typical forgiveness that Christians practice - the kind of forgiveness I practiced during the first five years of my faith with poor results.

Consider the crucifixion scene. There is Jesus, beaten without mercy and riddled with pain as His exposed bones grate on the wooden cross. He looks out over the gathering of His abusers and murderers. He knows that the eternal fate of everyone in His sight, as well as all of mankind, is riding on His next move. He would have preferred that this “cup” had passed Him by, but He was the only one who could have satisfied His Father’s will. He loves the Father and shares His love of His creation. Jesus knows there is no other way for the creation to be reconciled to the Creator than for Him to bring reconciliation through forgiveness.

Jesus knows better than to expect a plea of forgiveness from those He came to save. He understands that they just can’t do it. Drawing a pain-filled

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Heavenly Father, I forgive [Name]. I forgive [him or her] for: [list everything you can think of that caused the offense and how you suffered as a result of the behavior]. I ask that You forgive [Name] as well. Father, I ask that I would lose sight of the offense, and if I am ever reminded of it, that I will dismiss that memory as an old, resolved conflict. Father I ask for the strength to simply forget the incident and move on with rebuilding that relationship as You lead me to do so. Father, please show me how to love [Name] the way You do. Father, show me how to turn my offense into concern for [Name's] well-being. Father, I am moved to forgive [him or her] because I desire to be obedient to You and desire for You to be glorified. Father, I ask that You would forgive me for not forgiving [Name] before now and remove from my heart any consequence or torment from not forgiving them in the past. Father, I confess that I will need Your help to live out this forgiveness and I ask You to give me the strength to have the character of forgiveness. Father, please bless [Name]'s in every way and heal [Name] of any emotional or physical wounds that cause [Name] suffering. I ask these things in the name of Jesus. Amen.

[illegible]