



Looking Inwards (15 mins)
Caring For Each Other

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however: 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!')* for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins)
Concern For Others

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?

emmanuel**church**billericay

Phone: 01277 632120 Email: emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org
Web: www.emmanuel-church.info Twitter: @EmmanuelCM12



HG94: Listening To Jesus On ...
Forgiveness

Matthew 18:21-35

Home Group Study Notes

25th May 2014 - Pauline Woolnough



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

If your financial debts were paid off in full, how would you celebrate?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1: Are you quick or slow to forgive, have you got better or worse as you have got older?

2: If you were the master how would you have felt when the servant refused to forgive a fellow servant's debt right after you had forgiven his debt?

3: What have you found helpful in forgiving others who have wronged you?

He had gone to the woman's home a number of years back, taken her son, shot him at point-blank range and then burned the young man's body on a fire while he and his officers partied nearby. Several years later, Van der Broek and his security police colleagues had returned to take away her husband as well. She vividly remembers that evening, going to a place beside a river where she was shown her husband, bound and beaten, but still strong in spirit, lying on a pile of wood. The last words she heard from his lips as the officers poured gasoline over his body and set him aflame were, "Father, forgive them."

"And now the woman stands in the courtroom and listens to the confessions offered by Mr. Van der Broek. A member of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission turns to her and asks, "So, what do you want? How should justice be done to this man who has so brutally destroyed your family?" "I want three things," begins the old woman, calmly but confidently. "I want first to be taken to the place where my husband's body was burned so that I can gather up the dust and give his remains a decent burial." She pauses, then continues. "My husband and son were my only family. I want, secondly, therefore, for Mr. Van der Broek to become my son. I would like for him to come twice a month to the ghetto and spend a day with me so that I can pour out on him whatever love I still have remaining within me."

"And, finally," she says, "I want a third thing. I would like Mr. Van der Broek to know that I offer him my forgiveness because Jesus Christ died to forgive. This was also the wish of my husband. And so, I would kindly ask someone to come to my side and lead me across the courtroom so that I can take Mr. van der Broek in my arms, embrace him and let him know that he is truly forgiven." As the court assistants come to lead the elderly woman across the room, Mr. van der Broek, overwhelmed by what he has just heard, faints. And as he does, those in the courtroom, friends, family, neighbours - all victims of decades of oppression and injustice - begin to sing, softly, but assuredly, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me."

Such outrageous grace, that when the world sees in action it is stunned and it falls silent. Grace is irrational and grace is unfair, and only makes sense if we believe in a merciful God who always offers another chance. C.S. Lewis has said, *"To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you."* So where are you today, do you need to ask for forgiveness from another, is there a barrier between yourself and another, have you hurt a friend or a family member, if so choose to own the wrong and make things right. Do you need to forgive someone? Have you had enough of holding grudges, that makes you keep up the silent treatment? Do you want to move on and restore a relationship, if you do then be a giver of grace and forgive. Do you in fact need Divine forgiveness? Have you ever come before the Lord and confessed your sin, have you thanked Him for Jesus and then asked Him for forgiveness? If you haven't then you need to do it, forgiveness is our deepest need and God's greatest gift. Once you experience God's forgiveness, you'll be better equipped to forgive others.

The Purpose of Forgiveness: Because God has been gracious to us we are to show graciousness to others and when we remember what He has done for us in Christ this should make us think twice about making others pay for what they have done to us, - God doesn't make us pay! The ultimate example of forgiveness is Jesus Christ. As he hung on the cross he prayed a prayer of forgiveness, *"Father forgive them for they know not what they do."* (Lk. 23:34) Jesus loves you he created you and He knows what is best for you. Before social scientists, discovered it, He knew, that forgiveness is good for you and that unforgiveness will damage you emotionally. He also knows how hard it is for you to ask for it and to give it but His way offers life and he has left us with His Holy Spirit who we can ask to help us when it gets to hard for us to do on our own.

On his site www.virgin.com/richard-branson/forgiveness-the-miracle-medicine Richard Branson highlights 3 remarkable stories. 1 of a Holocaust survivor who returned to Auschwitz and declared that she forgave those who tormented and abused her, she calls forgiveness a "miracle medicine." and says "It is free, it works and it has no side effects." 2. The story of an Iranian mother who stopped the execution of her son's murderer at the very last minute when she removed the noose from around his neck and forgave him and 3. how in Rwanda, after hundreds of thousands were brutally slaughtered, 20 years on the country undergoes transformation following South Africa's example of reconciliation.

Barriers to Forgiveness: The king in the story cancels the debt, all is forgotten and the slate wiped clean but its not easy and there are barriers that keep us from forgiving others. We have limits that we don't want to, and sometimes find impossible to cross. Things such as revenge, we are hurt and we want to get even, anger which results in resentment that eats away at us and makes us bitter, and an unwillingness to let go and forget are all barriers for us and stop us from forgiving. No-one underestimates just how difficult and costly forgiveness can be at times, who does not understand and sympathise with those who have lost loved ones due to another's violent act, especially where a child is involved, but in the story Jesus tells, he said that the king had the servant imprisoned and handed over to torturers until he had paid the debt back in full. What on earth does he mean by that?

Unforgiveness Imprisons Us: Researchers are finding that forgiving even the most horrible acts can do more than just bring peace; the act of forgiving can affect one's emotional and physical health, social scientists are discovering something the Bible has been teaching for years, that forgiveness is important spiritually, psychologically and emotionally, it releases us from the people that have hurt us. Stormie Omartian says "Forgiveness doesn't make the other person right, it makes you free." If we don't forgive, we remain emotionally bound to the people we cannot forgive, we are held tightly in their grip. and Lewis Smedes has said, "When I genuinely forgive, I set a prisoner free and then discover that the prisoner I set free was me." The servant in this story did not deserve forgiveness it was purely an act of grace and mercy on the part of the king but the servant had the other servant thrown in prison and this is what we do daily, we put people in prison by our actions in various ways, we use the silent treatment, we avoid them, we attack them verbally, we want people to suffer because they have hurt us but Jesus warns us of becoming imprisoned when we fail to forgive. Anger and bitterness become hidden torturers that eat us up inside. The anger, spite and bitterness that can give us ulcers, high blood pressure, migraine headaches, and so on, hidden torturers that keep us awake at night as we go over every wrong that someone has done to us. These things squeeze the very life out of us and drain every bit of joy out of our lives because we can't or wont forgive. When we don't forgive we end up being tortured, we hurt, we get stuck, its like being shut up in a cell, relationships can't move forward as we hold onto the past, we fail to release people as we choose to remember how they have hurt us. Jesus' teaching wants to save us from living like this and from compounding hurts, he wants to set us free. Free to realise the truth that we are all fallible humans in need of forgiveness -and in desperate need of grace.

A Lesson In Grace: Nelson Mandela taught the world a lesson in grace when he was released from 27 years in prison and he appointed Archbishop Desmond Tutu to head an official government panel, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission., (TRC). Mandela wanted to break the pattern of revenge when one oppressed race or tribe took control from another. The TRC rules for hearings were simple, if a white policeman or army officer voluntarily faced his accusers, confessed his crime, and fully acknowledged his guilt, he could not be tried and punished for that crime. He would go free. One such hearing involved a frail black woman of about 70 years of age. Her story emerges from a sitting of the TRC. White police officer, Mr. van der Broek, was tried and found implicated in the murders of both the woman's son and her husband some years before.

4: How has God's forgiveness affected your life and your willingness to forgive?

5: Do you find it harder to forgive others than forgive yourself?

6: What do we deny ourselves when we refuse to be merciful to others?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Listening To Jesus On ... HG94: Forgiveness

Matthew 18:21-35

Home Group Sermon Notes

25th May 2014 - Pauline Woolnough

Introduction: The old saying that its better to give than receive doesn't seem to apply in today's scripture because most of us would say its better to receive forgiveness than to give it, or at least its a whole lot easier, because forgiveness is costly, its hard to ask for and often even harder to extend it to someone who has hurt us. Forgiveness is the virtue we most enjoy and the one we least employ. We struggle with forgiveness. Its hard to do and at times it just doesn't seem fair or even natural that one day someone may hurt or wrong us and yet the next day following forgiveness, everything is supposed to be forgotten because while you may still be hurting and living with the consequences, why should the offender simply get off scot-free...but of course that is the whole point of this story. We who offended God, who alienated ourselves from God because of our rebellion, mistrust of Him and our sin, were reconciled to Him through one act of atonement when Jesus died on the cross. All our sins were forgiven at that time and each time we mess up and ask for forgiveness our Father freely gives it, no questions asked, its a gift that he loves to give when he sees a repentant heart. He also does something amazing, He forgets all about it, unbelievable, you bet it is, too good to be true, not at all. Psalm 103:12 (NIV) " *as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.*" You cant get further than that and you cant get better than that.

The Unmerciful Servant: This parable is about a servant, who was forgiven an incalculable debt by his master because he was unable to repay it. V 24 says the man owed 10,000 talents, this is an astronomical sum, a talent was worth about £240 so 10,000 was around £2,400,000, more than the total budget of the ordinary province which was around 600 talents. This same servant was owed a tiny sum in comparison by another servant who owed him 100 denarii. A denarius was worth about 4p so the debt was less than £5. The poor servant was again unable to repay the debt but in this case the servant who was owed the money, grabbed the other by the throat and demanded his money back. Now you'd think that since he had been forgiven the huge debt he owed that he'd let the other fellow off, not so. When the master hears what's gone on he is furious, vs32-34. This parable is not teaching that we will lose our salvation if we don't forgive. If that was the case then we would all have lost our salvation a long time ago. We do not lose our salvation due to unforgiveness because the bible tells us that we are saved by *grace alone* and not by works. Neither do we keep our salvation if we forgive others because if that was the case it would mean that our salvation was achieved in some measure by our own works, (Eph 2:8-9 and Romans 11:6).

No Formula for Grace: Peter understood that at the heart of Jesus teaching was forgiveness so he knew that forgiveness was something he should do. He would also have known that among the rabbis in ancient times there was consensus that someone might be forgiven for a repeated sin 3 times only. If someone committed the same offence against you 4 times then you didn't have to forgive them. The rabbis taught that on the fourth time you could retaliate and get even. In fact, they mistakenly taught that God only forgives three times. 3 strikes and you're out.

Peter magnanimously suggested 7 times. He doubled the number that the rabbis taught and added one for good measure. I think he thought his answer would impress Jesus. Peter, himself had needed personal forgiveness on around 7 different occasions and he now wanted to know how many times he had to forgive someone else. He wanted a mathematical formula for grace. Jesus must have smiled to himself and taken great delight when he answered Peter and said "*Not seven times but seventy times seven,*" or 490 times. In other words Jesus is saying there is no limit. Jesus tells us that true forgiveness is unconditional however great the offence. Peter thought he was being generous and saying something truly remarkable for the times, but he was nowhere near and totally unprepared for what Jesus said. No matter how great the offence is, there is forgiveness. Whatever disgusting, heinous sin we bring to the Lord, if we are sorry and He sees genuine repentance in our hearts, He will grant his forgiveness.

I can only try to understand this if I separate the offender from the victim. I watched a series recently about inmates on Death Row, where according to the inmates there is not a guilty man imprisoned, they all maintain their innocence! The programme followed several men on their journey to execution and told their stories, horrible in all cases, they had taken other lives often in moments of drug fuelled madness. One thing I found interesting was how in the main their families maintained contact and visited and in particular the unrelenting love of their mothers which would not give up on their sons. Their own lives had been shattered by the crimes of their sons, they hated what their sons had done, they were repelled by the gravity and the impact of taking of another's life, yet they still saw some goodness in their own child, and they were still there for them. Maybe when they looked at their sons they still saw the child himself, remembering the potential, and the hopes and dreams they had had for this child, but now filled with regret over their choices, and the questions, *what if*, and, *if only*. Maybe the men are right in maintaining their innocence because if they have come before God and repented then he has pronounced them not guilty and set them free. Not free to be released into society, justice needs to be served and punishment imposed, not free from regrets and memories that will haunt, but free to maintain a relationship with the Living God who sees and knows all and who understands a man's heart better than even he himself will. The thought of such offenders being forgiven may in fact offend us but Jesus taught this parable to underline for us that we have been forgiven an incalculable debt. We are the servant owing the king an enormous amount of money and yet the king took pity and exercised mercy, the king wiped the slate clean. God is so rich in mercy that he is willing even to forgive a debt of such astronomical proportions.

We All Need Forgiveness: God expects us to show mercy to others because he has shown mercy to us and it is inconceivable that we should make others pay and suffer for what they have done to us because we can see clearly how unjust the servant was to the other servant when he demanded payment of such an insignificant sum. The king was furious with the first servant just as God is angry with us when we behave in such a manner, it saddens Him when we are ungrateful. He knows all about the things he has forgiven us for and thankfully he keeps it all to himself, all the times we have been disobedient, all the times we have hurt other people, done things, said things, thought things. Can you imagine if your whole life was on film for all to see at the UCI at Basildon Festival Leisure, we would be mortified if people really knew what we are like deep down on a daily basis yet God knows and he accepts us and he forgives us and he loves us, and he keeps our secrets. We should be grateful and willing to show mercy and forgiveness to others.

We Need To Forgive Others: There are some remarkable testimonies of people forgiving others of the most terrible crimes against them or their loved ones. Many of us will remember Gordon Wilson whose daughter Marie was killed in the IRA Enniskillen bombing, he was recorded as saying only hours later, "*I bear no ill will. I bear no grudges.*" Archbishop Desmond Tutu has launched the Global Forgiveness Challenge which encourages people from all over the world to practice forgiveness and then share their stories.