

WEEK ONE: FORGIVEN PEOPLE FORGIVE

Statement...we get hurt by others; we hurt them. We remember those hurts long after they occur. Our minds are like warehouses of unsorted grudges and grievances. We may have been wounded long ago but the memories still bring fire to our eyes. Our only choice: do we GET BETTER or BITTER. We can let pain fester, nurture grudges or we can heal, let go of the bitterness, and allow God to work.

CHRISTIANS AS FORGIVEN PEOPLE...we play both parts: the WRONGED and the WRONG-DOER, the GIVER and RECEIVER OF MERCY. As FORGIVEN PEOPLE, Christians are called to be FORGIVING. For us, forgiveness isn't a NICE THING TO DO, an OPTION WE TAKE/LEAVE. It's a key part of our discipleship, what it means to follow Jesus. Forgiveness is a WAY OF LIFE, consistent with WHO GOD IS, and what GOD WANTS US TO BE. Sadly, most Christians are no better at FORGIVING than the average pagan on the street.

WHY FORGIVE...there is an obstacle getting in our way: the nagging doubt of WHY TO FORGIVE. Is it ESSENTIAL in all cases? But before we can grasp WHAT FORGIVENESS IS, we must UPGRADE OUR VIEW OF SIN. We often reduce the severity of our sins and exaggerate the mistakes that others make. We don't WIN AGAINST SIN by trivializing it as a NUISANCE. It is a LIFE-LONG BATTLE, and not a slight flaw in otherwise stellar character. We all sin and do it MORE OFTEN, and in MORE DIVERSE WAYS, than we know.

JESUS TOOK SIN/FORGIVENESS SERIOUSLY...we wouldn't know "what sin meant" had Jesus not come, shown us a better way. He took both SIN and FORGIVENESS SERIOUSLY. He was forgiveness personified: it was the HEART OF HIS MESSAGE, the CORE OF WHO HE WAS. For him, it was a way of life, a GUT-WRENCHING PROCESS that involved COURAGE/RISK. He didn't forgive just when it suited him, excusing only OCCASIONAL OFFENDERS. He urged people to REPENT, to change directions, shift their priorities.

WHAT FORGIVENESS IS AND IS NOT...forgiveness is not an APOLOGY or just feeling bad for what we did? It is not EXCUSING HURT or pretending that a wrong didn't happen or that it didn't hurt. It isn't SMOTHERING CONFLICT; it is FACING/MOVING BEYOND it. Forgiveness isn't just ACCEPTING PEOPLE. We accept them for the GOOD PEOPLE THEY ARE; we forgive them for BAD THINGS THEY DID to us. It isn't something GOD OWES US or that someone owes us, or we owe them. It is a gift: an undeserved ACT OF GRACE, what God does because He is GRACIOUS, what we do as HIS CHILDREN.