

WEEK THREE: FROM FORGIVEN TO FORGIVING

FORGIVENESS NOT OPTIONAL FOR CHRISTIANS...we go from BEING FORGIVEN TO FORGIVING; from receiving God's mercy to becoming merciful people. God wants us to BE MERCIFUL, be quick to right wrongs, to seek healing. Christians should take the lead; we mend relationships that others leave broken. We aren't perfect, only forgiven/accepted, and slowly getting better. If we don't lead by example, learn how to forgive, this world is doomed.

HE WHO LOVES GREAT...great forgiveness inspires great love; bad sinners can become lovers of Jesus by grasping his mercy. A woman barges into a dinner party hosted by a Pharisee, who is annoyed by her action, and shocked by Jesus' inaction. Jesus tells him..

Truly, her sins, though they are many, have been forgiven since she has shown great love. The one to whom little is forgiven loves little

In his eyes, she was no longer SINNER TO BE AVOIDED, but a FORGIVEN FOLLOWER to be WELCOMED. If we trivialize sin, we will also trivialize forgiveness; we have little reason to pour out our love for Jesus. His words to this woman stand in memorial:

HE WHO HAS FORGIVEN LITTLE, LOVES LITTLE

NOVICES AT FORGIVING...we are all novices at forgiveness. There isn't a STAR AMONG US. God doesn't read resumes or focus on status. We come to God EMPTY HANDED. His grace allows us to be SOMEONE WE ARE NOT, to do SOMETHING WE CAN'T. We have no claims to make or rights to defend. Grace is unmerited: a gift reserved totally for the undeserving. There is nothing we can do to make God love us more or less. Our desire to do good should be driven by GRATITUDE, as a response to how God treated us. Being honest with God doesn't disqualify us or distance us from his grace; it draws us to him.

FROM FORGIVEN TO FORGIVING...Peter asked Jesus if there were limits to forgiveness, maybe 7 times. Jesus invites him to toss his CALCULATOR- the way we track what others owe us- and Jesus took forgiveness to a new level. "No, Peter, not 7 times, but 7 times 70" Forgiveness is like passing a KIDNEY STONE; it hurts like crazy at the time, but it feels good when it is gone. Forgiveness is a way of life, not a ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME ACT. We forgive till it becomes HABIT-FORMING, a part of our nature. We retrain ourselves in how we react to situations. If we acted more like Christians, we'd win the world for Christ.