



Lesson Title: The Balance of the Spirit – Forgiveness



Key Concept: As disciples of Christ we must learn to live a life balanced by the Spirit. We forgive because we need forgiveness. We can only forgive if we choose to believe that God is just.



Scriptures:

That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart.

(Matthew 18:35 *New Living Translation*)

So it is God who decides to show mercy. We can neither choose it nor work for it.

(Romans 9:16 *New Living Translation*)

Context Scriptures: Matthew 18:21–35; Romans 9:10–16



Lesson Thoughts:

We are told in the gospels about Peter asking Jesus how often he is required to forgive someone who has sinned against him. Peter proposes what he feels is a generous guideline of seven, but Jesus rejects it by first multiplying it by seventy and then telling a story illustrating heaven. In this story a servant owes his king the equivalent of 200,000 years of labor. When the king requires him to repay, he cannot and asks for mercy. The king is gracious and grants forgiveness. But this same servant then goes out and finds another servant who owes him the equivalent of 3 months of labor. He requires immediate payment with no mercy. The king finds the first servant and throws him in prison to be tortured until he can repay, which he will never be able to do.

Jesus closes this story and his answer to Peter's question with the verse from above. Forgiveness is beautifully illustrated in Jesus' story: the king releases the indebted servant—he lets him go. Forgiveness is the release of a person from your judgement. You simply let it (the issue) and them go. And Jesus emphasizes

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that this forgiveness cannot simply be lip service but must be from the deepest part of your being. And the reason our Creator requires us to forgive is because it is the only just way. Every person is guilty, none is just, and therefore, none has the right standing to judge another. We forgive because we need forgiveness. The first servant is expected to forgive because he has been forgiven.

The true challenge of forgiveness is that it requires us to trust the one who has right standing and is just—namely God—that he will balance the scales of justice between all persons. But this trust is challenged because God does not always act in a manner we feel is just. We know he can heal and yet he does not always heal. We know he could stop disaster in our lives and yet disaster still comes. We feel he could do a better job because he can do all things and yet he does not act according to our will. The question of theodicy (why evil exists if God is good) stops us in our tracks. If I am to forgive others by releasing them to the justice of God, I must be sure that he is just. But God does not always seem to act justly.

And this brings us to the heart of forgiveness. In order to release my fellow human from my judgement, I must also release God from my judgement. I must accept that I am incapable of judging anyone because I am not just. My brokenness reaches so deep that I am even unable to see (at times) the justice of God. In order to forgive others and release them to the judgement and justice of God, I must also forgive God and release him to be judged according to his own justice. In other words, forgiveness requires a choice on my part to believe that God is just. I choose to forgive—to release—both him and others.

**Discussion Questions:**

- 1) A) Identify (and share if possible) a time in your life when God acted in a manner that you feel is unjust. He owes you.
B) Now, choose to release him. Don't explain, rationalize, minimize or anything else. Simply release him.
- 2) A) Identify one person you have not really forgiven. Name them in your mind and remember what they owe you.
B) Now choose to release them. Don't explain, rationalize, minimize or anything else. Simply release them.
- 3) Can true forgiveness be given in a moment? Or does it require a process occurring over time?

Notes and Reflections

- 1) Slowly read Luke 22–23. Return to Luke 23:34: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Meditate on this act of forgiveness.

- 2) Various versions of the following quotation have existed for the past several hundred years: “We judge ourselves by our intentions and others by their behavior.” Use this quotation as a lens for examining our own hypocrisy when it comes to forgiving.