

Discussion Questions

Session Nine: The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

APPLICATION

This is a difficult text to be read in congregations in the USA during the week of September 11 with all the memories of that horrific day. Does Jesus intend Christians to forgive the terrorists? How far-reaching is forgiveness?

1. Does Jesus expect people to forgive the terrorists or others who commit horrific crimes?
2. Where does the Christian draw the line concerning forgiveness?

On the one hand, it would be easy to dismiss this passage by restricting the implications to church members alone. After all, Peter qualified his question to Jesus. He didn't mention terrorists, malicious non-Christians, and others. Maybe forgiveness is just to be extended to other Christians.

On the other hand, we know that isn't true. The images of Jesus hanging on the cross, forgiving those who killed him as well as the thief on the cross are etched in our memories. Jesus forgives Jews and Gentiles, male and female, young and old. Jesus forgives them—and us.

3. What have you learned in your own life about forgiveness?

Jesus doesn't just forgive us and draw a line. Instead, Jesus extends forgiveness to us again and again. He forgives us seventy-seven times and then, forgives us more. That number seventy-seven prods us. It is perfection times perfection. How can we forgive, but by the grace of God?

4. What role has forgiveness played in your own faith journey?

Forgiveness is not easy, especially when it comes to the deep wounds of life. It might be done quickly when someone steps on our toes or bumps into us in the hallway; but when we face significant hurt, all good reason stops. We freeze in the trenches of resentment, bitterness and revenge. The only thing is—we lose. Our energy is zapped. Hatred and resentment eat away at joy and life-giving activities. Thus, we become victimized again. There is no room or energy to follow Jesus Christ in mission and ministry.

5. What makes forgiving so difficult?

Forgiveness does not happen with a snap of the fingers. Sometimes it takes a lifetime to forgive. Forgetting is not proof that forgiveness has or hasn't occurred. We can learn from the past wounds so they are not repeated. Yet, in forgiving, our life is changed. We are not the same. Our relationship with those we forgive, and with those who have forgiven us, is different.

One of the most challenging things for disciples of Jesus Christ is not just to receive forgiveness for ourselves, but also to extend forgiveness to others. By the grace of God, disciples of Jesus are forgiven and forgiving.

6. Who do you need to forgive? (Take a moment for silent prayer.)