

Studies in Generosity

Part 2: Relationships

TALKING WALKING

Leaders' Guide

2022.7.10



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Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

- 1 What from Sunday's message interested you? ...made sense to you? ...confused you? ...intrigued you? ...upset you? ...encouraged you? ...and **why?**
- 2 Pastor Doug called our readiness to forgive "one of the most important characteristics of a Christian," explaining that biblical forgiveness involves the wounded party absorbing the cost of the offense. How does biblical forgiveness differ from simply saying, "I'm sorry"?
- 3 Tell us about a time when another person forgave you. Who initiated that encounter? How did it impact you personally? How did it change your relationship moving forward?
- 4 When was the last time you asked someone to forgive you? How hard was that for you to do?
- 5 Jesus warns us that when we've been sinned against, we need to "be on our guard" (Luke 17:3)—to pay attention to what's going on in our hearts. **What** does Proverbs 4:23 command—and **why?**
- 6 We're commanded to "guard our hearts diligently", but can we really do that (read Jeremiah 17:9)? So, is there any hope of us succeeding? Why or why not? Explain.
- 7 Pastor Doug quoted theologian Miroslav Volf: *"Forgiveness flounders because I exclude the enemy from the community of humans, even as I exclude myself from the community of sinners."* Toward which sinful tendency do you tend: dehumanizing those who've sinned against you, or elevating yourself above the status of "sinner", thinking, *"I would never do what he did to me!"*
- 8 Read Romans 1:18-32, noting the progressive degradation ("God gave them over..." v. 24, 26, 28) leading to a catalogue of sins (v. 29-31). Put an "X" next to every practice which you deem to be "evil".
- 9 Romans 1:18-32 describes true debauchery—and almost makes Volf's observation excusable, doesn't it?! But before you go there, circle the word "practice/do" (three times in 1:32 and four more times in 2:1-3). Now, looking back at the practices in v. 29-31 you marked with an "X", what astounding charge does Romans 2:1 make? Do you believe it? Why or why not? How can it be true? What warning does v. 3 make?
- 10 What do you think Matthew 6:14–15 means?

Take One Step: What is one small, concrete step of obedience you will put into practice this week?

 I will restore my relationship with [NAME] **11**

- 1 The generic “starter question”. Don’t take too long on it, or get led down any rabbit trails.
- 2 “I’m sorry” is simply a statement of the offender’s feelings of regret. It is not an admission of guilt. (How often have you heard “I’m sorry” followed by something such as “...that you were offended by...” ? —which means nothing more than “*I’m sorry that you have such thin skin!*”) Biblical forgiveness involves a concrete, specific admission of guilt, followed by a request for the offended party to forgive the debt you’ve incurred (ie, that they would bear the “cost”, rather than requiring justice.
- 3 You likely will need to “prime the pump”, so be prepared with your own answer to this question. (But wait for others to think and answer. Check your watch—20 seconds feels like an eternity!) **Note:** If one group member answers this question, that’s probably sufficient. Then move onto 4 .
- 4 Unfortunately, few people seek genuine biblical forgiveness, so you likely will need to “prime the pump” on this one, too. Be prepared.

Note: The next two questions make reference to the human “heart”. In biblical thought, the “heart” is not the organ in your chest which pumps blood; it is the “inner man”, the “control center” of the human being. “Heart” is the most comprehensive word for our thoughts, intentions, desires, will, feelings, etc. Also note, that the heart is **not good—or even neutral!** The human heart is **wicked and deceitful.**

- 5 Proverbs 4:23 commands us to make the “guarding” or “watching over” our hearts of utmost importance, because your heart determines everything you do. Compare to Mark 7:20-23.
- 6 Whereas Proverbs 4:23 commands us to make the “guarding” or “watching over” our hearts our #1 task, Jeremiah 17:9 says that our hearts are tricky, wicked, sick and unknowable to us! An impossible task! But then note that Jeremiah 17:10 says that Yahweh knows our hearts just fine. Bottom Line: We’re responsible to watch over our hearts, but we must allow God’s Word to renew our minds if we are to be able to fulfill that task.
- 7 First, make sure your group members understand the quote, and the question. Then, have them each mark their answer. Then ask who tends toward the first option vs. the second. Finally, have a brief discussion over why our hearts tend toward those two options.

8 **“God gave them over...”**

- “in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.” (v. 24)
- “to degrading, perverse, sexual passions.” (v. 26)
- “to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper.” (v. 28)

Catalogue of sins:

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unrighteousness | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> strife | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> arrogance |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> wickedness | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> deceit | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> boasting |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> greed | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> malice | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> disobedience to parents |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> evil | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> gossip | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> untrustworthiness |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> envy | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> slanderer | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> lack of love |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> murder (aka, “anger”. See Matthew 5:21–22) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> insolence | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> lack of mercy |

Remember—you only have to have ever done it **once** to be guilty of it!

- 9 Romans 2:1 says that everything you judge wrong **in others**—you condemn yourself, because you’ve done the same thing! (“How so?” you ask. Remember—heart attitude is as guilty as outward action!) Romans 2:3 promises us that God will hold us accountable for all our hypocritical judgment of others.
- 10 Whatever it means, it ain’t pleasant and you don’t want to experience it!
- 11 Make sure you take one minute for everyone to fill in a name. Read Matthew 7:21!

Sermon Summary

We are studying generosity from the Gospel of Luke. Generosity is about more than just money. You can give away large sums, and still not be radically generous in the ways you deal with others. None of us is as broadly generous as we might think. Currency is a medium for exchanging value, and there are many kinds. Today, we're going to focus on **relational currency**. What does it mean to be relationally generous? Think back to Jesus and His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane. He asked them to stay awake and pray with Him, but instead they fell asleep. They let Him down, but He still gave them the benefit of the doubt—"At least your spirit was willing." That's being relationally generous. If you're the type of person who constantly criticizes others because they never meet your standards, you're not giving them the benefit of the doubt. If you always focus on people's weaknesses, you lack relational generosity. A generous person glances at someone's weaknesses, but gazes at their strengths. That's one form of relational currency; another is the relational currency of forgiveness. Maybe someone has mistreated you, and you're holding that against them. Being relationally generous means releasing that hurt and anger, and refusing to hold their offense against them—you forgive them. Christians should always be ready to forgive. Jesus talked about what that means in Luke 17:3-10 (also Matthew 18). He teaches about the **difficulty**, the **practice**, and the **key** of forgiveness.

The difficulty of forgiveness – Forgiveness can be extremely difficult. In Hebrew idiom, seven is the number of fullness or completeness. When Jesus said, "seven times" in verse 4, He meant, "If someone wrongs you as much as a human being can possibly be wronged, still you must forgive him." "Imagine the worst thing someone could ever do to you. Now, I want you to forgive them for it." That's a super-human standard! No wonder the disciples said, "Increase our faith!" But we can't neglect the responsibility to forgive. In verse 3, when Jesus said, "Be on your guard," He meant that when someone hurts us, we must pay attention, not to the offense, but to our response. We have to look at what's going on in our hearts. If we're not careful, anger and bitterness can take root, destroying our lives and the lives of others. We can become resentful, vengeful, suspicious, hard and exacting. When you're hurt, do you look closely at what's going on in your heart? If not, **beware—danger is lurking**. We must practice forgiveness, no matter how serious the offense.

The practice of forgiveness – So how do we do that? Can we really forgive someone, even if we still feel angry toward them? Yes! The Bible teaches that forgiveness is granted before it's felt. There are 3 things we must do. First, **identify with** the person who hurt you. Maybe they're your Christian brother or sister, but even if not, you're both human. When someone wrongs you, remember that you are capable of just as much a sin. And both of you are made in God's image, with dignity and worth. Don't reduce them merely to the sin they've done ("I am a human being, but you're a liar, a thief, a _____"). Second, **cancel their debt** and don't it against them any longer. You must release them, but that doesn't mean the debt goes away—YOU choose to absorb the hurt and pay it yourself. Forgiveness is costly. You give up the right to demand payment, exact vengeance, and punish the offender. But absorbing the debt doesn't mean never saying anything. Jesus said "rebuke" them (v. 3), but with the goal of restoring fellowship and getting them to truly repent (Matthew 18:15). You must forgive inwardly first, or you'll never rebuke them with the right spirit. Third, **desire the best** for them. Jesus taught us to love our enemies, not just tolerate them. If you don't desire their best, there's still bitterness in your heart.

The key to forgiveness – Forgiveness is difficult and costly, so where do we get the power to do it? In verses 7-10, Jesus tells the story of a slave—a person who has sold himself to another to pay off a debt. No one would expect a master to thank his slaves for doing what they're supposed to do. Likewise, when we forgive others, we shouldn't expect special favor from God—we're just doing what we're supposed to do! When the disciples cried, "Increase our faith; we don't have the spiritual power to forgive that way," Jesus responded by saying they only need mustard-seed-faith—in other words, they already had enough to forgive. As Christians, so do you and I. You will never be gracious toward others until you see how Jesus suffered for you. You will never forgive others their tiny debts until you see Jesus dying on the cross to pay your great debt. You will never stop judging others until you see the real Judge of the universe, condemned and killed for you. Jesus only commands us to do what He has already done for us. Will you choose to forgive as you've been forgiven? Will you extend to others the same generosity God has extended to you? Is God prompting you to forgive someone now?

Don't miss this thrilling class!

For more info, write to:
Dan.Clement.TCC@gmail.com

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**PARENTS
CORNER**

Think back to a time when you sinned against a family member—either one of your children, or to your spouse. It may have been rudeness, impatience, abusive language, or disciplining in anger.

Have you sought forgiveness from that family member?

- If the answer is "yes", what did you say and what was the result?
- If the answer is "no"—why not? Do it now.

Then, one night at the dinner table, tell your "sin story".

(But make sure you don't moralize or pontificate—just tell *your* story.)

Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

“You choose a victim, work out an exacting revenge, and then go to sleep. There’s nothing sweeter in all the world.” —Joseph Stalin
“Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil.” —God (Isaiah 5:20)
Aren’t you glad we serve King Jesus rather than Stalin!
Let’s learn about genuine, biblical forgiveness...

Monday

- Read Matthew 20:30-34 and Luke 7:7-11. What is one prominent characteristic of Jesus?
- Read Matthew 14:13-18. How does Jesus view the multitude before him?
What prior event makes Jesus’ compassion in this situation even more remarkable (v. 6-12)?
- Read Deuteronomy 30:1-3. How is compassion essential to genuine godliness?
- Read Psalm 51:1. What is the essential connection between compassion and forgiveness?

Tuesday

- Read 2 Corinthians 1:1-6 and James 5:10-11. According to these verses, what is God like?
Why do you think compassion is essential to love?
- Read 2 Samuel 12:1-6. Why is lack of compassion so ugly?
- Read Psalm 103. List everything you learn about God’s compassion toward us.

Wednesday

- Read Matthew 18:21-35. **Why** do you think Peter asks the question in v. 21? What was Jesus’ reply?
How does Peter’s question reveal his **heart**?
In what ways is Jesus’ reply shocking to you? Why is continuing to forgive scary?
From v. 27, write a short description of forgiveness.
What is so shocking about the behavior of the servant (v. 28-30)?
Google to find out the value of 10,000 talents and of 100 denarii. How do these amounts relate to you?
In what ways are you similar to the servant in this parable?

Thursday

- Craft a **biblical** response to the following excuse for unforgiveness:
“If I forgive, this person will then take advantage of me, abuse me, or control me.”

Friday

- Craft a **biblical** response to the following excuse for unforgiveness:
“If I forgive, I am excusing the sin and ignoring the evil committed against me.”

Saturday

- Craft a **biblical** response to the following excuse for unforgiveness:
“If I forgive, this person will become more deeply entrenched in their sin.”