



**1. Sunday Summary:** This Sunday in our series on *Cultivating Community* we explored Forgiveness and why it's essential. The answer to the question of why it's so essential is that when we are unforgiving we are in essence condemning ourselves to a life apart from God where we're imprisoned by our own anger. The way out is forgiveness, and the way to forgiveness is to follow the example of the King in our story who, "took pity on [the servant], cancelled the debt, and let him go." (Matthew 18:27)

- A) Took pity. The phrase "took pity" means to have your heart go out to the person. In other words, we identify with the person. We recognize that this person is not so different from us, and that we also do things that hurt people. We stop caricaturing, and demonizing, and acknowledge the person who hurts us as a real person.
- B) Cancelled the debt. This is the heart of the passage and the heart of forgiveness. When we forgive, we are recognizing the pain that someone has caused us as a real debt. But we cancel the debt. It doesn't disappear, but instead we absorb it. This is why forgiveness is so difficult to really do.
- C) Let him (or her) go. Forgiveness is an act of the will. Feelings will eventually come along, but we may have to forgive the person who has hurt us over and over, until we no longer feel angry, and we feel like we've forgiven them. Then we'll know that we have truly let them go.

How do we do it? By admitting that we ourselves are debtors that need to be forgiven much, and by looking to Christ who gives us the power to forgive, and who so identified with us that he took on the penalty our sins deserve on the cross.

**2. Connecting Questions:** (Interactive, life sharing, thought & feeling type stuff)

- Talk about a time that you've had a hard time forgiving someone (maybe you're still presently having a hard time with it). What's made it so difficult?
- Pastor Mike shared this quote from Frederick Beuchner in his sermon: "Of the Seven Deadly Sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savour to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back--in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you." In your experience is this true? Have you ever felt imprisoned by your un-forgiveness and anger?
- Of the three steps of forgiveness listed above, which do you have the hardest time with? Why? Talk about it.
- What insights from today's message were most helpful for you?

### **3. Truth Questions:** (What does the Bible say?)

- Think together about some other passages that deal with the topic of forgiveness. Can you think of any? What might they add to the conversation?
- Read Numbers 14:19-23. In this passage God forgives the Israelites for their rebellion, but there are still enduring consequences. How can this be? Doesn't forgiveness mean that the debt has been paid, and cancelled?
- Read Matthew 5:23-24. Are forgiveness and reconciliation the same thing? What might be the difference? Can you reconcile without forgiving? Can you forgive without reconciling?

### **4. Formation Questions:** (Taking it further, How does the Truth change the way I live?)

- What concrete steps can you make to sink the gospel truth that we dealt with today deeper into your life throughout this week? What will you do about the message you heard today?
- Will you forgive the person that's hurt you? How will you begin?

### **5. Resources for Further Study:**

1. Volf, Miroslav. *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*. (Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN. 1996).
2. Smedes, Lewis B. *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve*. (Harper One, New York, NY. 1984).

