

Equipping Hour: Dec 7

Dec 7: Forgiveness (part 6)

Just another quick reminder that you can find Equipping Hours notes on the Church Center App as well as the audio recordings for the past couple of months. This is our last time to gather for Equipping Hour this semester. Next week our Equipping Hour will be a special time of sharing and prayer with our missionary partners the Hamm's, then the week after is the Christmas reception, then a holiday break before beginning again January 4th with more worldview. Our format for the Spring will look familiar initially as we explore two more worldview topics. The first will be decision-making, which we did not get to because our discussion on forgiveness went extra, and that's okay. Our second topic will be a biblical view of sexuality and gender.

Last week we did a quick examination of the dynamic heart, exploring the three mechanisms, or functions, of the control center of what makes you, you. The cognitive heart. The affective heart. And the volitional heart. In other words, your believing, desiring, and choosing heart. Our controlling beliefs are in need of God's transforming grace. Our controlling desires are in need of God's transforming grace. And our controlling commitments are in need of God's transforming grace. The dynamic heart is a conversation we will continue to explore thoroughly next semester, for five weeks, after covering decision-making and sexuality in our standard three-week format. Why are we exploring our dynamic hearts? Because Scriptures tells us to.

Proverbs 4:23

Guard your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow springs of life.

You can't guard it if you don't know how it operates. We will also have a break for the Pennington's coming to share during an assembly along with the pause for Easter, then we will shift gears a little. We, as a class, are going to practice reading Scripture with worldview in mind in order to digest it at the deepest possible level, looking past the behavior, looking past the values, looking past the beliefs. All of those are important, mind you, but they are informed by the reality you have embraced at the deepest level of what makes you, you, which is your heart. After unpacking a biblical understanding of your heart in February and March, for seven weeks you will be challenged to assess your spiritual metabolism by digesting Scripture using worldview. Each week we will examine a familiar passage of Scripture using our worldview goggles in an effort to move information to transformation. We're talking about spiritually healthy digestion. This is how growth occurs. I'm terribly excited for what God has in store for us next semester, and I hope you are, too.

One of the greatest challenges you will face as a disciple of Jesus Christ isn't believing that God forgives you in the general sense, but believing that God forgives you personally, fully, and right now. Many Christians carry a strange contradiction in their hearts: we cognitively believe forgiveness is available, but we struggle to live as if forgiveness is actually. Meaning real, that forgiveness is real as part of our reality. Cognitive faith versus functional faith. If your cognitive faith does not line up with your functional faith, if those don't line up, then

we need God's Word and the Holy Spirit to expose our hearts to see what's disconnected and then make choices in our willful hearts accordingly. Otherwise we'll carry guilt long after God has removed it. We'll rehearse sins God has already buried. We'll hold onto self-condemnation even though Scripture says it does not exist.

Today we will examine what it means to embrace God's forgiveness. Last week we took a deep dive into what it means to believe God's forgiveness. Believing means it's settle in your heart. Embracing is the action you take to lean into this in your daily life.

These two ideas are mutually inclusive, meaning you cannot have one without having both. If you try to have one without the other, it doesn't actual work and you'll walk through this journey incredibly frustrated and confused as to why Christlikeness isn't developing in you. So what does it look like to embrace God's forgiveness? We're talking about actions now, action in your heart and then action in your behaviors to practice in your daily life.

Scripture teaches that the purpose of forgiveness is not self-improvement, emotional relief, or personal empowerment. The purpose of forgiveness is worship and obedience. If forgiveness does not lead to worship and obedience, then there's a disconnect. Scriptures says so. The Lord declared to the rebellious Israelites through His prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 43:24

"I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins."

The psalmist, declaring worship to the Lord, reveals God's motives:

Psalms 130:3-4

If You, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? ⁴ But with You there is forgiveness, that You may be feared.

Notice that forgiveness leads to fear of the Lord – to awe, to reverence, to obedience, to worship – not to terror and fear of His judgment, and certainly not to self-focus. God's forgiveness of us is first and foremost for His glory, for His sake, that He would be rightly feared, rightly worshiped, and rightly obeyed. Too often the message from well-meaning Christians is that God's primary motivation is love for us. For instance, the message that on the cross Jesus was thinking of you sounds really good, sounds potentially encouraging, but that twists God's motivations to be about you rather than His glory.

Does God love you? Of course. Was God the Father thinking of you when He put the plan of creation into place? "For God so loved the world that He sent His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." You were certainly included since He knows all things and directs all things for the good of those who love and fear Him. But the plan of creation is first and foremost about His glory. With just a little tweak, we can easily twist our theology to be human-centric rather than God-centric. Egocentric theology

vs. theocentric theology, and only one of those is correct. Good theology first and foremost provides us with a better, clearer picture of God's glory, and when we gaze at that picture, the byproduct will be a changed heart that views self through God's eyes, not the other way around. Your ultimate good IS His glory. We covered this last Spring. Everything God is and does is first and foremost for His glory. Including and especially forgiveness.

So the question is: How do forgiven people live forgiven before a holy God? If you believe God's forgiveness, meaning that reality is now settled in your heart, there is no longer any debate, what then does it look like to embrace God's forgiveness in practice? I want to share with you several practices you can begin today to embrace God's forgiveness of your sins.

First: Practicing God's Forgiveness Means Returning to God Instead of Hiding

All of the other practices are contingent on this first one, so we'll spend extra time on it. When we sin, our instinct – ever since the garden – is to hide. Why? Because of the mechanism of the conscience producing guilt in our hearts, and a guilty conscience produces the fear of God's judgment if we don't move towards confession and repentance.

Guilt and fear are yucky feelings we run from, try to flee from, try to mitigate – even through self-righteousness at times. But that also means we withdraw, avoid prayer, avoid Scripture, avoid worship, avoid community, turn to harmful thoughts and behaviors in order to escape or at least temporarily mask those gross feelings. Again, we talked about this last Spring. Our sin, just like in the garden when God approached Adam and Eve, is an invitation to come running back to the Father for His grace, peace, and presence. But this is a commitment we need to make in our hearts because our nature is to run and hide. We have to make the willful choice to come back to the throne room of heaven instead of running.

Hebrews 10:15-22

The Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, ¹⁶ “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,” ¹⁷ then he adds, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.” ¹⁸ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin. ¹⁹ Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Scripture makes it clear that Forgiven people move toward God, not away from Him. If you believe God's forgiveness, meaning it is settled in your heart and mind, then move toward God!

1 John 1:7-9

If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Confession is not therapy – it's a return to fellowship with God and with each other.

The secular world says: "Just move on. Don't think about your failures. Let go of negativity." But Scripture says: Don't ignore sin – bring it into the presence of God as quickly as possible. Why?

Psalm 32:1-4

Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. ² Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. ³ For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.

The lies of the enemy whisper that you are disgusting and gross, unlovable and irredeemable, feeding the insecurities you already have about having to earn the privilege of coming into the presence of God, as though you can and have to self-cleanse. Take that thought captive based upon the truth of God's Word and kill it! Why? Because of the power of the blood of Jesus Christ that makes us blameless in His eyes!

The prodigal son in Luke 15 was covered with pig poop, and the Father took off running towards him as he approached and hugged and kissed him. He didn't make him go take a bath first. He didn't punish him for his unloving attitude and behavior. He didn't put him in time-out until he proved his worth. James 5 promises that when you draw near to God, He draws near to you! God moves toward you as you move toward Him! So how do you do this? By make confession a regular, normal rhythm of your walk with God. Make a practice of praying Psalm 139:23-24 intentionally and regularly.

Psalm 139:23-24

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! ²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

And when the Holy Spirit pokes your conscience, deal with it immediately and return to walking in step with the Spirit.

Second: Practicing God's Forgiveness Means Submitting to God's Word Instead of Our Feelings

Remember what we covered last week from the dynamic heart. "People feel their wants." Many of our desires can be good desires...until they becoming controlling desires. How do you know if it's a controlling desire? Based on your response. If your response is sinful, it's a

controlling desire. Even a good, godly desire can become sinful, and it starts when a desire becomes an expectation. That's how you know you're on a slippery slope, when you start thinking "I want" or "I need" these desires to be met in order to be happy and whole. At this moment you have placed one foot out of sync with the Spirit.

This expectation, if not addressed quickly through a reorienting of your thoughts and motivations at the heart level, then moves into a demand. Now both feet are in the sin pool and idolatry has taken root. Here we say, "I must have" or "I deserve to have" my desires met, which immediately leads to emotions like anger, and remember that anger is a whole-personed active response of moral judgment against a perceived evil, and the "evil" is that you didn't get what you demanded, expected, and desired. Our anger, or hurt, from not getting what we want is a moral judgment, and moral judgments require punishment, so we lash out. "Because you did or did not meet my desires, I will respond by doing x, y, and z." We lash out at God, other people, or internalize it into harming ourselves through other sinful behaviors. This is why our affective heart needs God's redemptive power and presence.

Forgiveness is not about how you feel – it is about what God has declared. I wish there was a magic "I feel forgiven" pill I could market and make trillions, but feelings reveal desires and if the glory of God isn't your number one desire, then you will struggle to "feel" forgiven. Nothing gets in the way of humble submission faster and stronger than relying on feelings. Living a life of humble submission is living out the statement, "God, I trust you. I trust that I am forgiven." How we live proves this reality, which means doing things God's way rather than our own. The psalmist declares in Psalm 119:

Psalm 119:105

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

That's a worldview statement saying, "God, I trust you know what's best and will lead me best."

Psalm 19:7-11

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; ⁸ the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; ⁹ the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. ¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

¹¹ Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

Hear all the desiring language David declares in this song. Do you desire God's Word, God's way for you to live this life? Do you believe God satisfies? If the answer is yes, prove it. How, you say? By desiring and living this life in a manner consistent with His Word. That includes our emotions. Secular thinking tells us we must "forgive ourselves." But Scripture never

commands that because it's make-believe. In Mark 2 four friends commit some petty property damage in order to present their paralyzed friend to Jesus.

And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."⁶ Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, ⁷ "Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

They were 100% correct. Only God can. So the practice of forgiveness is responding to what God declares, not what our emotions cloud. Painful memories will return. I promise you they will, and that's normal because God hasn't taken it away yet. And what about the sin struggle lingering in your heart that keeps weighing you down? Time after time this temptation rears its ugly head, and sometimes you experience victory; too frequently you don't. The solution for both is actually the same. When the painful memory resurfaces, even when it's long after you have confessed and repented, when you stumble and fall, what do you do? You actively, not passively...you actively respond with Scripture:

Micah 7:18-19

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.¹⁹ He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

Folks, believing means it's settle in your heart. Embracing is the action you take to lean into this in your daily life. You have to have both! It becomes settled as you actively embrace by doing. You do because the debate has been settled in your heart! As your practice this, it actually gets easier.

Third: Practicing God's Forgiveness Means Receiving God's Means of Grace

I want to take a moment and talk about the word receiving. Biblically speaking, this word carries with it a sense of warm hospitality, of a welcoming spirit where the guest is made to feel at home. Imagine inviting God into your house. There's dishes in the sink and the carpet desperately needs to be vacuumed. No big deal, no problem. Your house is a mess, but that doesn't mean He's not welcomed inside, nor is it His stipulation that everything be in order before His arrival. Quite the opposite, actually. But your attitude makes it clear He's not actually welcomed, so He's relegated to one chair in the corner of a room you hardly ever use and summarily ignored and avoided. But He came in order to partner with you in cleaning up the entire house because He's not a guest; He's moving in. At least that's what your invitation read. When we "receive" God, it means He has access to the entire house, the fridge, the cluttered garage, everywhere! And your attitude and welcoming spirit reveals whether or not He's actually welcomed. This same is true for what God offers us through community.

Forgiveness moves us into the life of the church. Acts 2:42 shows us that the early church devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. In other words, forgiven followers of Jesus Christ willfully choose to commit themselves to communal spiritual formation. It's not "my" spiritual growth; it's "our" spiritual growth.

1 Corinthians 12:12

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

Ephesians 2:19-22

For those who are in Christ Jesus, "... you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,"²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."

Our togetherness is God's appointed means of shaping forgiven people.

We gather together as the Bride of Christ to be washed clean by the Word each week, for our hearts to be knit to Scripture and each other as we worship our great and worthy God with one voice and heart. We also gather to pray, together, as part of what it means to rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. Both of these are corporate spiritual disciplines gifted to us by God for the means of sharing in the common identity as forgiven saints.

Together, the Body of Christ celebrates Communion as a continual reminder. Of what? Of what it cost for your sins to be forgiven. That the forgiveness of your sins is complete. That you are now blameless in God's eyes. That you ought to examine yourself before taking Communion to ensure the right humble attitude, the acknowledgement of your continued need for His grace. Communion is an invitation to walk with Jesus, and we do this together as a mean of communal spiritual formation.

Fellowship goes beyond hanging out, playing games, and sharing a meal, though those are certainly settings for fellowship to occur, but more importantly fellowship is intentional time spent together for the sake of growing in relationship with each other and God. Fellowship is discipleship and it's a means of God's grace we have to choose to participate and engage in as part of what it means to be forgiven.

Folks, forgiven people don't drift away from the church; they lean into it.

And finally. Fourth: Practicing God's Forgiveness Means Walking in Reverence, Not Self-Condernation

I want you to picture a fork in the road. In one direction is reverence for God Almighty, and the other self-condemnation. Consider what we covered last week for a moment regarding the lies we face when it comes to forgiveness. Self-condemnation is the lie that God forgives you but you can't forgive yourself, but it includes a dangerous controlling belief and dangerous controlling commitment: first is the controlling belief that YOU have the power and the control to release yourself from the debt of sin because that's what it means to then also condemn yourself. If you can do one, it means you also believe you can do the other. You make yourself judge, jury, and executioner. Folks, that's pride. The controlling commitment, then, is that you are committed to building a life centered on self rather the glory of God. But remember Psalm 130:

Psalm 130:4:

With You there is forgiveness, that You may be feared.

The alternative to living as though you have the power and the control over your own sinful state and therefore committing your attention to self rather than God, the alternative road is a life entirely consumed by the awe and reverence due God, otherwise known as the fear of the Lord. Walking in reverence means walking humbly you're your God as it says in Micah 6:8. Why? Because forgiveness leads to reverence. Reverence leads to obedience. Obedience leads to joy. We do not practice forgiveness by analyzing our emotions, rehearsing our past, or weighing our sins. We practice it by responding to God with worship and obedience.

Forgiven people look to God and walk before Him with reverence, humility, and joy because practicing forgiveness is a God-centered life. God centered beliefs, desires, and commitments. It is rooted in God's character, it receives God's presence, it is fueled by God's grace, and it results in God-honoring choices. Folks, that's called freedom. And it's truly amazing.