



Jesus the Game Changer - Episode 3: Forgiveness

Introduction

'Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us' is the closest thing to a command in the Lord's Prayer, the most famous prayer in history. Jesus taught extensively about forgiveness and His words have echoed down the centuries to be some of the most significant ever spoken.

Watch: Episode 3 'Forgiveness'

Getting started

1. [When have you found that you were able to forgive and when has it been too difficult?](#)

The life and teaching of Jesus

Read: Matthew 6:12-15

These verses are from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1 to 7:28). While Jesus is preaching to a large group of people on a mountainside He teaches us how to pray.

Jesus is not setting a specific form of words for all people to recite exactly but provides a template of the sorts of things we should be praying about. It is significant that the Lord's Prayer includes forgiveness (v12); immediately after the prayer Jesus continues the theme.

2. [What strikes you as significant about what Jesus is teaching here?](#)
3. [This seems to be a conditional caveat on our ability to receive forgiveness. Why do you think Jesus makes such a significant issue out of forgiveness?](#)

Read: Matthew 18:21-35

In this passage Peter has asked Jesus how many times he (Peter) should forgive someone who has wronged him. Many of us have heard Jesus' response that we should forgive others 'not seven times but seventy times seven!' (v21-22).

At that time Jewish rabbis taught that you should forgive others three times, but not on the fourth occasion. By offering to forgive seven times, Peter has offered to double that number plus one; it seems like a very generous offer. Jesus' response though redefines forgiveness. 'No', he says, 'it's seventy times seven' - not a number but rather an attitude; always be ready to forgive.

4. How do you respond to this story?
5. Why do most of us feel the servant's actions are unfair?
6. How could the content of this story relate to people today?
7. Do you think Jesus' words here are possible to achieve?
8. What stops people forgiving 'seventy times seven'?
9. What difference does it make if we forgive someone when they are feeling only remorse (sad for being caught out) rather than real repentance (a complete change of heart)?

Game Changers

In this episode Paula Gooder (writer and lecturer, Birmingham) defines forgiveness in these words ...

"the thing I love about the Greek word ... the word for forgiveness simply means 'let go' ... the people who do the forgiveness 'let go' ... like a balloon - you let it go and off it goes. Then also the people who need forgiveness have to let it go as well."

10. How have you experienced this sense of letting go?
11. Why is it that we struggle with letting go?
12. Who is freed when we do let go?

Hashim Garrett (Speaker, New York) quotes Martin Luther King Jr who says about forgiveness ...

"Forgiveness is not an occasional act; it is a constant attitude."

Both Hashim Garrett and Miroslav Volf (Professor of Theology, Yale) comment on the ongoing nature of forgiveness and the struggle to continue to forgive and not 'take it back'.

13. Why do we want to take back forgiveness?
14. What would be the outcome if we did?
15. What would change if we were more ready to continually forgive?

Personal Reflection

The basis for much of Jesus' teaching on forgiveness, such as Matthew 6:12-15, is that we are challenged to forgive in the way that we have been forgiven. The underlying assumption is that forgiveness has been offered and accepted by people.

Jesus was clear, as were His followers, that forgiveness from God is available to all who ask. Jesus' close friend John put it in these words ...

"... if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and forgives us our sins" (1 John 1:9)

At the end of the episode Rico Tice (Minister, All Souls, London) takes some time to explain what forgiveness is and how it is received from God through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

If you have come to the place where you want to ask for and receive forgiveness from God, pray this prayer that Rico outlined in the episode ...

Lord Jesus, thank you for dying for me on the cross. I'm so sorry for my wrong doing. Please come into my heart by your Holy Spirit and be my Lord and Master.

Further Reading and Research

Ortberg, J. Who is this man? The unpredictable impact of the inescapable Jesus. Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2014. (see chapter 7)

Arnold, J.C. Why forgive? Walden NY: Plough Publishing, 2010.

Volf, M. Free of charge: giving and forgiving in a culture stripped of grace. Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2005.