

Home Study Material – Session Four

Unmending the Veil Companion Study

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Day One – Called to Forgive

This is one of the more thrilling weeks for me. Honestly, teaching on forgiveness is not typically exciting, considering it usually brings up many painful memories in people. But in this case, having witnessed God so clearly step in to this study and redirect my intended direction, I know this is from Him.

As I began to write the foundational material for the pilot study, I sketched out the topics. Session Four, in my earliest thoughts, was to be about purpose, a truly exciting topic for all of us. But when the time came and I sat down to write it, I was stumped. Since I was writing each session the week before our class met, I did not have much time to work through each week’s material. I admit, when nothing came, I was disturbed. Most often, when I sit down to write, it just *comes*. It’s the Holy Spirit to be sure. That week, nothing came. Having walked with God long enough to know when He was redirecting me, I prayed and asked Him to show me the way. I decided not to panic but simply walked away from my computer until I received His direction.

In the small group I was leading for this study, we would each write out a specific prayer request, and each person would take one of the slips of paper home to pray for that person during the week. That week, and I am ashamed to admit this, I had tucked my sheet with the prayer request in my Bible and forgotten to pull it out during my morning quiet time. Our class was on Tuesdays, and it was Friday morning before I read the prayer request. It was from my sweet friend Ruth and simply asked for prayer that she could forgive others.

That was it! Forgiveness! Of course there should be an entire session on forgiveness. There is no more pervasive theme in the book than forgiveness. How I missed it, I’ll never know. After I wrote the session and as I prepared for the next week, the Lord showed me something extraordinary. The topic of forgiveness touches us all. It is the topic closest to the Saviors heart and hands and feet. He died so that we could know forgiveness.

Also, the idea of relational forgiveness is just as critical. In our story, every single person required forgiveness of some sort. Mike from Robin, Robin from Mike, Emma from Robin, it is a thread that is woven throughout the fabric of the story. It is a thread woven throughout the fabric of each and every one of our stories. So let’s begin with why? Why do we need to forgive all things?

Matthew 18:3 says, “And he said: ‘I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.’”

I take Jesus’ words in the above verse quite literally. I believe the innocence and teach-ability of a child is partly what the Lord has in mind for us to model when He spoke these words. One primary method a child uses to learn is their propensity to ask questions. Can’t we all recall a time when we have had a



“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another.

_____ as the Lord _____ you”

Colossians 3:13



child ask us nearly every question under the sun? Questions lead to answers, answers lead to knowledge. This is how they grow and develop – they ask questions, same with us as God’s children.

*Chris once told Robin, “Hold nothing back.
Ask the tough questions.”*

Wise advice from a wise man. God can handle any question you throw His way. He will not consider you irreverent for asking. As a matter of fact, digging deeper into the why questions are often how He shows you something about His character, or at least it has been so in my case.

Since I am such a why person, I had to ask: Why does God call us to forgive? The same reason Chris asked Robin to forgive all things. Chris knew, without forgiveness, Robin would never really make it into God’s intimate presence. It is the same with you. Not only is that our defined goal throughout this series, to find our way into His presence, but it is also His goal for you. He wants to make you His. He wants you to be near. What does that tell you about Him? He loves you. It really is that simple. He knows that if you hold on to that grudge, if you refuse to forgive, it will remain a stitch between you and Him. Again, He wants you near, so the stitch has to go. You must forgive.

Consider the following verses.

- ❖ Luke 6:37 “Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”
- ❖ Matthew 6:14-15 “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

I am by no means a Bible scholar. But I am a reader, and the verse in Matthew is pretty clear. I would not dare to try and get all technical about the meaning of this verse as I have heard others do. I’m a simple girl. This is red letter reading here. Jesus Himself says if we don’t forgive, we will not be forgiven. Just for the sin of unforgiveness? I don’t know. I do know that since unforgiveness is a sin (since He tells us *to* forgive), when we do not forgive, that is active, current sin in our lives. Active sin separates us from God, not relationally, but it hinders us in our closeness with Him. There is a barrier created, which robs us of peace with Him. No matter what we choose to believe, forgiveness is not optional, so when we refuse to do so, we are, in essence, taking a step away from God.

When we look at the character of God, it is easy to see that His insistence for us to forgive is for our benefit. Just as He offered us forgiveness to bridge the gap between a Holy God and sinful man, His intention is the same when He calls us to forgive. When we hold on to unforgiveness, a bitter root grows up. (Hebrews 12:15) That is the beginning of a stitch, something that prevents of from being near to

God. Remember, our entire goal throughout this series is to draw near to Him so that we may know Him. His presence is our Promised Land. It is only when we know Him that we can know His love and love Him in return.

Time to do some digging.

On the following lines, write the name or initials of the person or people whom you have not forgiven.

For each person, give a brief reason why you feel they do not deserve forgiveness. Maybe they have never asked for forgiveness or even acknowledged they have done anything wrong. Whatever the case, why do you feel they do not deserve to be forgiven?

Now, think of three sins you have committed in your life. If you are brave enough, think of the worst offenses. On the following lines, write why you deserve to be forgiven by God.

In your case, whatever you came up with is not a good enough reason. Truthfully, God forgave you because Jesus died on the cross to pay for each and every sin you committed. It wasn't because of what you deserved; it was because of who He is. When that payment was made, He redeemed you, which ultimately means He bought you.

Write 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 on the following lines.

Now, complete the verse found in Isaiah 49:16.

"See, I have _____ you on the _____ of my _____."

You should remember this verse from our time discussing how we get to know God through relationships. I use it in a different context today. In 1 Corinthians where it says that we are not our own, we were bought at a price, I have to believe that this engraving on the palms of Jesus' hands is proof of His payment. Once we accept Him as Savior, we are giving up our right to ourselves, and he has proof of His ownership of us right there on the palms of His hands. If you acknowledge that you are not your own and you use His name, Lord, when you pray, then the bottom line is this: you must forgive, if for no

other reason, than because He calls you to. He is in charge. He is our Adonai, our Master. As a matter of obedience, we are called to forgive as we have been forgiven.

Sure, you know all this. Most likely, you have known this for as long as you have been holding a grudge. So why then is it so difficult to allow ourselves to forgive? What is holding you back?

Acknowledging what holds us back gives us a place to begin with God. You may have to work through that part first. For example, if the person you refuse to forgive has never asked for forgiveness, then that may be your hold up. Realize this - they may never ask. In that case, do you understand the power you continue to allow them to have over you? If nothing else, get mad enough about it to say, "no more!" Whatever is holding you back, acknowledge it before God and allow Him to speak His truth in the situation. Unforgiveness is a yoke of slavery around your neck. Complete the verse in the margin.

*"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not _____ yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."
Galatians 5:1*

Focal Passage: *"Forgive as the Lord forgave you." Colossians 3:13*

Reminder: *Unforgiveness is active unforgiven sin.*

Call to Action: *Acknowledge what holds you back.*

Day Two – Forgiveness Frees Us



“She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her _____.” Luke 8:44



God calls us to forgive because He knows that holding on to unforgiveness causes us to hemorrhage on the inside. It is like a constant bleeding that weakens our faith and ultimately destroys us. I have shared how bitterness and unforgiveness was a tremendous stitch in the veil that prevented me from drawing near to God. I can think of no better term for it than it was a hemorrhaging on the inside of me. From the outside I looked perfectly fine. No one would have guessed the bitterness I felt toward my husband. The verse above is one of the earliest verses God used to speak directly into my heart. He showed me how it took only one touch from Him for the bleeding to stop.

Read the remainder of Jesus’ encounter with this desperate woman in verses 44-48.

The account of this woman became intensely personal to me. Even now, when I read it, I remember with great tenderness the healing I have known. I remember the power of the touch of Jesus and how free I immediately felt when I no longer was hemorrhaging bitterness and unforgiveness. There is a new found freedom I now experience, and I never want to let go of again. I know, in order to maintain this freedom, I have to forgive in each and every circumstance and relationship as it arises – I let no bitter root grow up.

Hebrews 12:15 says, “See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”

Certainly, unforgiveness grows into bitterness, and as we read in the verse above, we see that a bitter root causes trouble and defiles. (Defile = polluted or stained) Consider the phrase in the verse above, “See to it that...” This clearly indicates that this is a choice, our choice. If we are told not to allow it, then it must be within our power to prevent, or at least with the power of the Holy Spirit. So no matter what you need to forgive, you must proactively choose to forgive in order to be free from the tangled mess that is bitterness.

Who benefits when we forgive? Just as we need to be forgiven to be free of sin’s hold on us, we need to forgive to live in freedom. When God is adamant through His Word that we forgive, maybe it is because He alone knows the detriment to a person when they hold on to unforgiveness. His Word says He came to set the prisoners free, so it would stand to reason that He would instruct us on how to live free.

Robin, thinking back to how Chris turned and walked away without a long goodbye - *“He was the first time she truly saw God. Thinking back to how he walked away, the bandage analogy, she smiled to herself. He was God’s bandage in her life. Though unaware herself, she was hemorrhaging on the inside. God knew, and He sent Chris to help her begin to heal.”*

While you may not realize it now, when you hold on to unforgiveness, you are bound and held hostage. You are anything but free.

List common reasons people give as their refusal to forgive.

What do we fear when we forgive? We fear:

- ❖ It will mean that what the person did was okay
- ❖ They might do the same thing again
- ❖ That we will let them “off the hook”

Holding on to unforgiveness gives us a false sense of control when we feel a lack of control. So to forgive might mean the person has control over us. We all have within us this sense of justice, so when we are wronged, it seems contrary to what is just to simply forgive and let them go unpunished. Our thoughts regarding justice go something like this:

How could they?

That’s just not fair.

They should be punished.

Do you realize that while you are sitting around, hemorrhaging on the inside, the person you refuse to forgive is going on about life? Most likely, they do not even know you are still angry. Or if they do, in many cases, they simply do not care. So there they are living in complete freedom while you are bound. How does that make you feel? They are free, you are chained.

This may seem like a left-turn, but just bear with it.
Read the verse in the margin.

Marah means bitter. When Moses cried out to the LORD, the LORD showed him a piece of wood. Moses threw it into the water, and the water became fit to drink. What this wood represented was the cross. When brought to the cross, even what is most bitter, like past wounds, can become sweet again. It can become bearable.

“When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.)”
Exodus 15:23

Also, the cross here can represent the cross you have been asked to take up. Sometimes forgiving can mean dying to self, dying to our feelings, dying to our sense of justice.

Supernatural

Recently, I read something to this effect: The cross is where the natural dies and the supernatural begins.

Because we are Called to Forgive and Forgiveness Sets Us Free, by faith, we can *decide* to trust what God's Word says about forgiveness, but it is only through the Spirit within that we are *able* to forgive. That is the supernatural part.

Common misconceptions that hinder our forgiveness

- *Once you forgive, you will forget.*

Well, unless you have a lobotomy, you will not simply forget. The memories will come. The key is what you do with the memories when they do come. It is a process that may take much time, but ultimately, it is worth it. The freedom you feel when you forgive is like lifting a heavy load from your shoulders. Life becomes lighter when you are free. Is that not what you want? A lightened load? So what do you do with them? Lay them at the feet of Jesus. Allow Him to carry the load.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I
will give you rest." Matthew 11:28
His offer stands. He will carry the load if only
you will give it to Him.

- *Forgiveness says that what they did is okay.*

Clearly, that is not the case. The act of forgiveness is one of shifting your burden onto Jesus. It means you are letting go of the offense with confidence that the Lord will seek justice. Only the Lord knows the heart of the one you are to forgive. You have to trust that He will discipline the person, even if you do not ever see proof of it. We may have to die to what we think should have been and to our sense of justice. We may have to trust that God will seek justice on our behalf, even if we never see it.

If you were able to forgive, what might that look like in your life? What would be different about you? Maybe you would sleep better. Certainly you would feel less agitated. Think for a moment of all the time and energy you waste by holding on to unforgiveness.

By faith, we can decide to trust what God's Word says about forgiveness.

Then, it is the Spirit within who enables us to forgive.

You truly may *feel* as if you can never forgive. You may have tried over the years and have come to the conclusion that the wound simply runs too deep. In this case, you believe a lie. As you read above, it is the Spirit who will enable you to forgive. All you have to do is allow Him to work this out inside of you.

Focal Passage: *"She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped." Luke 8:44*

Consider: *Unforgiveness is like a hemorrhaging within us.*

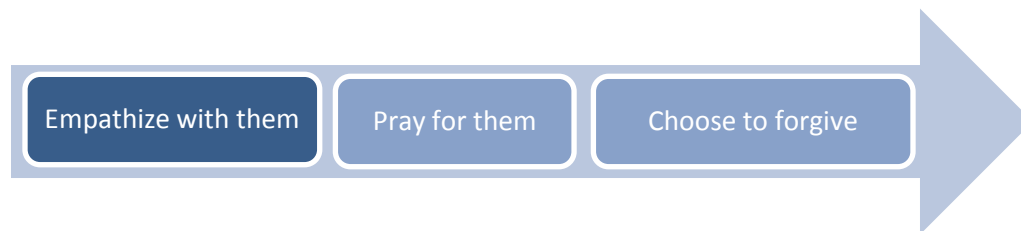
Solution: *My only option is to lay this burden at the feet of Jesus.*

Day Three – The Process

On days one and two of this week, we concluded that God calls us to forgive and that forgiveness frees us. So once we allow those two truths to sift into our belief system, what's next?

When telling Robin about how he eventually forgave his mother, Chris outlined the process he used. In this session, you will walk through this process and then apply it to your own situations where forgiveness is necessary but does not come easily.

“It took longer than necessary, simply because I didn’t know how. For me, when I finally got to a point where I could empathize with her, that was a first step. I tried to put myself in her position, what she was feeling, and that broke my heart for her. Then I started praying for her, regularly. Something about that gave me tremendous freedom. From there, I don’t know, it became a choice to forgive her. I chose it. So when an ugly memory would surface, instead of allowing anger to control me, I chose to recall how damaged she was, I prayed for her, and then I reminded myself that I forgave her. After some time, it became part of how I dealt with bad memories. I did this over and over until eventually it became so automatic, that I didn’t have to even think through it. I went from ugly memory to automatically recalling I had forgiven her.”



Empathize with the person Put yourself in their place. Try to feel what they may be feeling.

This may be especially difficult when someone has hurt you deeply.

- Consider their past wounds
- Remember that hurting people hurt people
- Lost people act lost
- Consider their current insecurities or afflictions

Begin to pray for them Chris said, “Something about that gave me tremendous freedom.”

Pray good things.

- That they would grow close to God or know God at all
- That their wounds would be healed
- That their eyes would be opened

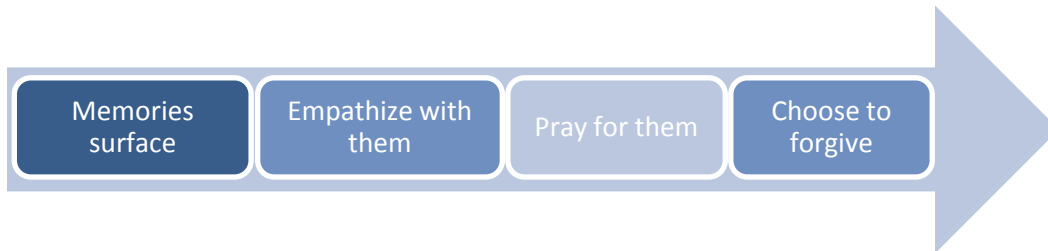
Prayer can help you develop God’s heart toward that person. In His heart all are loved and valued, even those who may have wounded us. You can continue to pray for this person until your heart catches up with the choice your mind has made to forgive.

Forgiveness is a choice Chris said, “From there, I don’t know, it became a choice to forgive her. I chose it.”

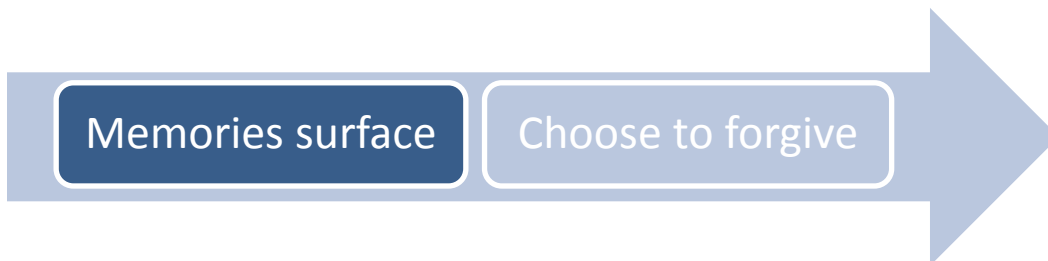
- Does not mean what they did is okay
- Does not mean you will forget

When the memories surface, repeat the process over and over.

Chris went on to say, “So when an ugly memory would surface, instead of allowing anger to control me, I chose to recall how damaged she was, I prayed for her, and then I reminded myself that I forgave her.”



Chris continues, “After some time, it became part of how I dealt with bad memories. I did this over and over until eventually it became so automatic, that I didn’t have to even think through it. I went from ugly memory to automatically recalling I had forgiven her.” From there, Chris kept moving forward.



Robin followed this process.

Empathy

For Mike

- Researched PTSD
- Alcohol often used to self-medicate
- Considered the fact he lost his son too

“It was in praying for him that she found her truest freedom. No longer did she feel haunted by the end of their marriage, rather, she could look back on those times with a new level of compassion for him.”

For Herself

- She was battered and broken
- Feared getting pregnant again

By empathizing with Mike and even looking back and finding empathy for herself, she was able to forgive and find freedom. Please remember, empathizing with the person who has hurt you does not mean that what they did was okay. These points of empathy are not excuses, instead, they are a way of looking at the person with God’s perspective and His heart.

Now that you have revisited Chris’ and Robin’s process, it is time to begin the process for yourself. For each person that you listed in Assignment One, you will follow the process on the flow chart. This may take days or weeks or even months. But if you stick with it, you will find that, before you know it, you go from ugly memory to choosing to forgive rather quickly. Eventually, you will be able to say with certainty that you have forgiven.



In the section below, write the name or initial of the person you are called to forgive. Then pray about how you might find a way to empathize with them. By putting yourself in their place, you may find your heart is able to soften toward that person. This may take some time, so don’t work on this lesson today only. Keep it handy for a while as you work through this.

In some cases, if you know the person well enough that you have information about difficulties in their childhood, it may give you insight to empathize with them. They might possibly be living out the same patterns they were raised with. Or maybe you are aware of some traumatic event they have experienced. So often, hurting people hurt people. After you find a way to empathize, or even before if you are having a difficult time finding that one thing that will soften your heart, pray. Through prayer, the Lord will certainly prepare your heart to forgive.

Name

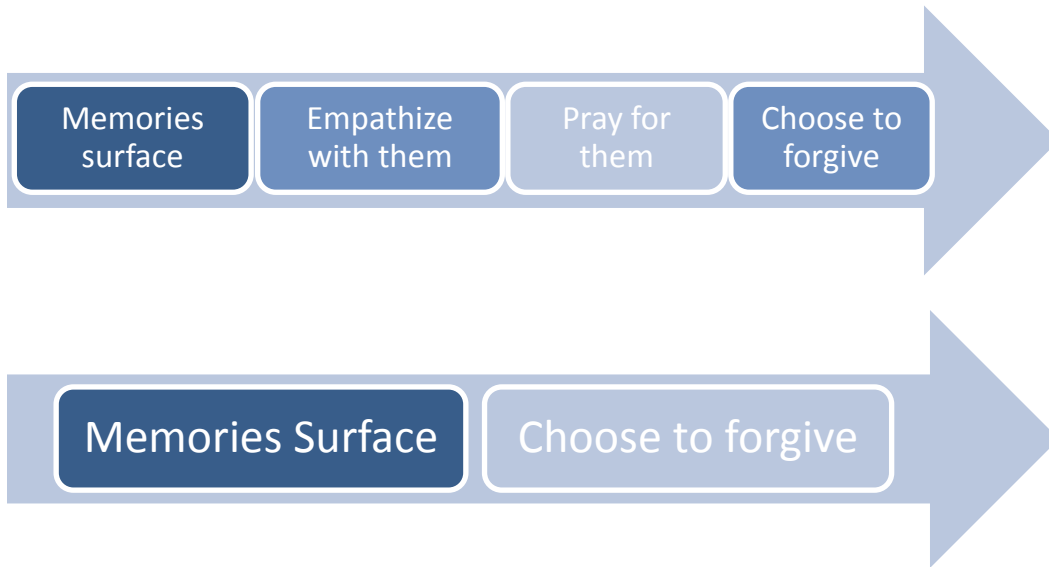
How you might empathize

Write out a few prayers for this person. _____

Remember, this is a process, not a one day assignment. If you journal, it may help to transfer this information over to your journal so that you will remember to continue to lift this person up in prayer.

Also, this process will work in areas where you may need to forgive yourself. Each of us have things in our past that can haunt us, condemn us even if we allow it – divorce, abortion, wrong choices, withholding love when we should have given it, giving love when we should have withheld it – as in cases of intimacy. One of these spaces may need to be reserved for you.

The memories will come! When they do, follow the pattern below again and again, until eventually, you go from ugly memory to reminding yourself that you chose to forgive.



Name

How you might empathize

Write out a few prayers for this person. _____

Name

How you might empathize

Write out a few prayers for this person. _____

Name

How you might empathize

Write out a few prayers for this person. _____

Ways you might pray:

“Father, I lift _____ up to You in prayer, knowing you are the Righteous Judge. I leave them in Your capable hands.”

“Lord, I know that _____ is wounded. That is why they hurt me the way they did. I pray that you will heal them. Thank You for forgiving me so that I might, in turn, forgive.”

“Father, today I choose to forgive _____. I know you chose to forgive me when I did not deserve it. I want to be more like You, so I make the same choice You did.”

“Lord, I pray for _____, that they will come to know You and Your love. If they have You in their lives, all things will be new.”

You might personalize your prayer based on the way you have come to empathize with the person. In that case, you can ask for their healing in more specific terms. There is something incredibly freeing that occurs when you pray for the person you were once determined to hate. Malice fades and the Spirit will allow you to supernaturally love that person. Based on the circumstances of how you were hurt, you may never find reconciliation of the relationship. Our goal in this exercise is not restoration of your relationship with them, rather to restore your closeness with God through forgiving others as He has forgiven you. This is a lesson in obedience to what the Word of God says, much less about the other person and all about you.

Day Four – Receiving Forgiveness

Feeling forgiven for sin may prove difficult to achieve for some. Our minds, like a computer, have recorded every wrong thing we've done and often the playback of events is debilitating. Choices made cannot be undone and consequences follow as a reminder. Shame and condemnation can follow a person who does not understand the completeness of God's forgiveness. As I said in our previous day's study, the process we are using to work through forgiving others is the same process we can use to forgive ourselves. It must begin with acknowledging that, if you are repentant of the sin and have confessed it, it is forgiven. Complete the verse in the margin.

The meaning here is that the forgiven sin is removed so far from us, it can never revisit us. But it does, doesn't it? It revisits in our memory. Sometimes it revisits because others remind us of our past sins.

“...as far as the _____
is from the _____, so
far has he removed our
transgressions from us. As a
father has compassion on his
children, so the LORD has
compassion on those who
fear him; for he knows how
we are formed, he
remembers that we are dust.
Psalm 103:12-14

As we learned in our Session Two Home Study, sometimes stitches are inflicted upon us. For the most part those are the things that we need to forgive others for, those things they did which left emotional scars, which in turn, became spiritual scars. The act of choosing forgiveness is so vital, God calls us to do it. It is His command that we do.

Some stitches, however, are a result of our own choices and sin. In that case, God's call to forgive is the same. At times, we must look inward? The person we must chose to forgive is ourselves.

I have been in numerous women's Bible studies over the years, and I cannot count the times I have heard a woman say, that because of what His Word says she believes God has forgiven her, yet she cannot forgive herself. I have struggled with that same issue in years past. I believe it is something I am free from now, and it is my hope that you will find that same freedom. My freedom truly came when I came to the conclusion, if God can forgive me, can I not forgive myself? Am I better than God? Am I so much more holy that my standards are higher than His? Of course not. But wasn't that, in essence, what I was saying in my refusal to forgive myself for something God long sense forgave?

There is a tremendous difference in living with regret over our actions, or even having to suffer the consequences of our decisions and forgiving ourselves. The truth is, regret and consequence are part of missing the mark of God's standard and they sting. But forgiveness is a different issue entirely.

Forgiveness is removing the penalty of sin, or at least shifting that penalty over to Jesus. The penalty you faced was separation from God, but when He forgave you, the price was paid. When you refuse to forgive yourself, you are holding on to that penalty, which is separation from God. How so? When you maintain unforgiveness of past sins, shame is the result. If you recall, shame was on our list of stitches. Shame causes us to believe the lie that we are not worthy to be in God's presence, so we do not draw near.

“Christ is the end of
the law so that
there may be

for everyone who
believes.”
Romans 10:4

Complete the verse in the margin. I guess we could debate our worthiness of being in God’s presence, or we could simply accept the fact, that because of what Jesus did, if we have accepted Him as our Savior, then He has **made** us right (righteous) before God. Worthy or not, we have a right to be there, to go boldly before the throne of grace. (Hebrews 4:16)

While we don’t usually focus in so narrowly on the novel, in this case, I think doing so will be a safe way to discuss a few difficult issues. As you have gotten to know these characters, you have gotten to know intimate issues they face, and for the majority of them, areas where they not only needed God’s forgiveness, but to forgive themselves.

Let’s begin with Robin. Name some areas where she needed to be forgiven.

I would love to know what you listed. In the original class there was some unresolved disagreement about one thing in particular. It was the fact that Robin shot Mike and felt as if she needed to be forgiven by him. She also struggled with forgiving herself. Many of the women in class felt that what Robin did was justified, in self-defense, yet Robin clearly indicates that she no longer felt her life was in danger. Ponder this: What are your thoughts?

Read 1 Corinthians 2:11 and rephrase the first sentence in your own words.

I hope you mentioned or considered the word motive. Each of us knows our own motives, even when we do not admit them to others. Robin knew her true motive in shooting Mike was her debilitating fear over having another child. It was Mike’s insistence that he would get her pregnant again, not fear that he would harm her that drove her to do what she did. Again, debate all you want, but it was Robin’s admission of what she knew deep down in her spirit.

Another issue Robin had to deal with was pride. During the dreadful year when Mike was abusive toward her, she admitted that she did not seek help because she feared what people would think. Even prior to that, she refused to acknowledge the problems Mike was having and reach for help. While there is no excuse for his behavior, Mike was mentally unstable, unable to reach for help. Yet Robin refused to leave or seek help because then people would know her perfect life was not so perfect after all.

I realize how controversial this may have sounded. I do not, in any way, shift the blame for what happened to Robin, or to any abused woman back onto their shoulders. Abuse is such a secret and tragic way of life for many women. For most battered women, the abuser has made threats and

that woman does fear for her safety. Please do not think I am trying to tackle such an issue in too limited a space to do it justice. I am instead trying to focus solely on Robin's motives. Only you know the deepest motive of your heart. You know your areas of pride, where you constantly strive for perfection in order to maintain others' approval. If you struggle with pride or hidden motives and agendas that prompt your actions, you should offer these to God in prayer.

Now for Mike. His are much more obvious. List as many as you can think of.

Since most are so obvious, let's instead look deeper into Mike's heart. For as long as he had known Robin, Mike had played the pretender. He went to church to be with Robin, so already his motives were off. Mike went to church as long as things were good. After Michael's death, he only went on special occasions. He was not the real deal all along. A touching moment when we really see Mike's heart revealed was just after Robin's visit to ask for his forgiveness.

Mike prayed, "God, forgive me for how much I hated You." He had said it a million times, and deep down he knew he was forgiven, but anytime a memory such as this stirred him, he reminded the Lord of his regret. If only he had known Him then, he would have healed and been able to help his wife heal. Instead, he battled God and lost."

Imagine the regret a man would feel after such tragedy. Mike lost everything, but he acknowledged a simple truth. If he had been the real deal with God, things would have taken an entirely different turn after Michael died. Mike would have turned toward God rather than away. He would have had the strength of the Holy Spirit to heal and help Robin in her slow internal death. Somewhere along the way, closed in behind prison walls, Mike had to face the fact that because he was a pretender, his family was decimated and his freedom lost.

At this moment, I am so deeply affected by this day's subject matter. Realizing Mike and Robin are merely fictional characters does not settle my heart, because they are so representative of our church today. Going back to our first session together, the idea of being a pretender, do you see the danger in pretending? No matter what it takes, no matter the cost, you must become real. You must settle in near to God. If not, you will live a life full of such regrets and consequences. With God's strength, with His wisdom, you will live out your life entirely differently. You will raise your children entirely differently. Take it from someone who knows that last truth so personally and deeply that I often pray for the Lord to redeem what I did wrong with my children while I was so far away from Him, trying to do life on my own power and strength, yet failing miserably. This is an area where I struggled with forgiving myself greatly. I had so many *if onlys*. My oldest son now sits in a prison cell. How can I not wonder and regret? Still, forgiving myself was vital in drawing near to God. I had to allow Him to show me His perspective. He helped me to empathize with the mother who did the best she could with what she had at the time. It was a process. And don't think accusations don't arise from the enemy and sometimes from others.

What are your greatest regrets in parenting? If this does not apply, in other relationship?

You have to believe first that you are forgiven for your failures. Next, you need to work through the process of forgiving yourself. Then, the place you need to camp for the remainder of your life is in God's presence, getting His way of thinking into your mind and heart through His Word. Once that happens, you will make the better choices. It is never too late to begin.

What are areas you struggle with from your past, things you have trouble letting go of?

Now that the number of divorces is equal in the church to those outside of it, this may be something you have struggled with. Me too. Have you noticed that I have every problem you do? Now ask yourself, was I lying when I said I was a hot mess?

“Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have _____? ”

2 Samuel 7:18

You can't imagine how many times I have asked the same question as David. I have so much sin in my past that it totally makes no sense that God would use me in any way. Thankfully, we don't have God figured out. True, to us, He often makes no sense. But for whatever reason, He forgave me and then restored me, even though I was this sinful, divorced, immoral woman. My story may sound familiar.

Read Luke 7:44-50 Record your insights.

This is one of my favorite passages in all of Scripture. It is my story. “Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – for she loved much.” (v.47) After I received His forgiveness, and once I chose to forgive myself, something life altering came along with it, love. I accepted His love and loved Him even

more in return because of the unimaginable extent of His willingness to forgive me. If He saw something redeemable in me, surely there was. He helped me find the good that can come of it. He will most certainly do the same with you

Focal Passage: “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” Psalm 103:12

Believe: No matter what it takes, no matter the cost, you must become real.

Conclusion: God can redeem even the ugliest of pasts.

Day Five – Admitting the Need

In today's lesson, we will cover two additional characters, Emma and Becky. Their situations are so common that we cannot possibly discuss forgiving ourselves without discussing them.

For each, list what they needed forgiveness for and for what they both had trouble forgiving themselves.

Emma: _____

Becky: _____

Both of our character's pasts are pretty straight forward and are much more likely to be identified with than what Robin and Mike experienced. Emma's struggle with giving up her child caused her to remain distant from God for over thirty years. Even once she knew Him as Savior it was something she struggled with, not His forgiveness, but her own. And because of that, she did not draw near to Him. Giving up a child for adoption, as well as past abortion, both are quiet killers of the faith. Both can easily keep a woman steeped in shame and unwilling to draw near to a merciful God. Neither act is beyond God's redemption or forgiveness.

Just this morning as I was doing my homework for the Beth Moore study of The Patriarchs, I read this, "Redemption is when the pain is treated and turned around so thoroughly that it not only loses power to do you harm but also gains the power to do some good." It was so meaningful at the time that I even copied it over onto an index card, not knowing at the time that I would use it today. Such is the sovereignty of God. He knew.

Even after God forgives, when we hold on to shame, it maintains some sort of control over us. But once given to Him fully, and allowing Him to help you work through the hurt and heartache, it will lose control and ultimately do some good. While you may never feel a call to publicly share either past history, the Lord will invariably lead you into relationships where you may more privately share your own story of healing, which may promote healing in a wounded and grieving sister.

Becky's regret is the most prevalent of all we have covered. The decision to be intimate with a man prior to marriage is now so common, those who do not are depicted as weird. As I write fiction with the intent of keeping this godly model, I find my own self skeptical about a young woman who decides to wait. I have to come up with a good backstory as to why. How jaded has the world made me? Maybe it is my own history that has sculpted my mindset. Along with Becky, I share the regret of intimacy prior to marriage. There are countless things I would do differently in my life if given the chance, and this one is among my top five. I can hardly imagine the beauty of beginning my married life without the baggage of my sordid history. My husband feels the same. We both brought this regret into our marriage, and we both try our best to

convey the sadness of it to our younger son. This is one of those cases where we preach, “Don’t do what we did; do what we say.” We did learn the hard way.

Have you had an open dialog about intimacy before marriage with your young adult children or nieces or nephews? If so, how well was the message received?

Today’s culture hardly allows for such a position as waiting until marriage. It will require living out a truly godly walk to influence your children in this area. You cannot have a “cultural Christian home”, professing Christ while living just like the world, and expect your children to be any different than you really are. They will become what you model. No matter your history, if your belief system has truly changed, as ours has in our home, you can share your new, godly belief without being a perceived as a hypocrite. Isn’t that what most parents fear, seeming hypocritical?

In the previous lesson, when you were given the opportunity to begin to forgive others, you were invited to use some of the spaces for forgiving yourself. I had to do that in this area. In empathizing with that girl who chose intimate relationships prior to marriage, I had to consider early childhood abuse. Since the statistics show that one in four women have suffered sexual abuse, the likelihood of this being the cause of many poor intimacy decisions is staggering. Twenty-five percent of those who read this have suffered such abuse. If you are among those, in your case, begin by empathizing with the little girl who was inflicted with a wrong sense of sexuality. I was a textbook example of promiscuity in my young adult years, and as God has tended to me in these areas, He has shown me the root of the sin and behavior stemmed from such abuse. Remember our root analogy? He took me to the root and then firmly removed it from the soil of my heart. God takes such matters seriously and has the greatest desire to heal you of the shame that accompanies childhood sexual abuse, as well as the aftermath of what it does to a young girl’s heart.

In the verse in the margin, He assures us that He deals severely with those who wreak such havoc on the young. I will go on to share this. God has given me such healing in this area and such forgiveness toward my victimizer that I have prayed for him to be forgiven. I have pled for his forgiveness even if he never had the presence of mind to ask for himself. I have let go of the hatred I once had for him. How did it begin? I was able to empathize with him. Crazy how this proves my point! I didn’t even consider this whole process in my own life when I wrote Chris’ character. See how the Holy Spirit can take what once had power over me and give it some power to do good?

I don’t want to end without addressing those who were not abused, yet chose intimacy outside of marriage. Where might your source of empathy come from? Your root may be insecurity. It is more likely a desperate need for God’s

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“But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”
Matthew 18:6

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love, yet you chose a lesser human love. Every woman who seeks love and acceptance from a man is in actuality seeking God's love. Sadly though, the empty human heart distorts the desire for God's love into a desire for romantic love.

I suppose this is the perfect opportunity to cover something that has been rattling around in my head for days now. The empty-hearted woman, she comes in all shapes, sizes, situations, and circumstance. This is the woman who has such a need for romantic love that she will often seek unhealthy ways of temporarily filling the void. We have covered intimacy outside of marriage as much as we need to for our purpose. This next observation, however, may really sting. So pray now for the ability to be honest with yourself.

We are talking about the empty-hearted woman who seeks to fill the void through fantasy, no matter its form. It may be through books you read or movies you watch, or, it may even be an over active imagination, whichever, it is an escape from where you are into where you want to be. Often, that place of escape is into a world where you are loved and desired unconditionally. You are the heroin of your own story. Books and movies simply help you to develop new and exciting plots. You may do this just a little or to a great extent, live within this fantasy world with whichever leading man was in the last movie you watched.

Some of you have no clue what I'm talking about, so just bear with me. But many, if not most know exactly what I'm referring to. This is so critical to work through. I am desperate for you to understand this. What you desire is not human love. Can I repeat that? What you desire is not human love. What is happening is that your spirit is longing for more of Jesus. I shared a verse with you on Day Four of last week, "What a person desires is unfailing love..." Proverbs 19:22 Even God's Word confirms that we all desire unfailing love. What we can't seem to grasp is the simple truth that, only God can love us that way. Only He has unconditional love to offer. So for any woman who has this deep need for romantic love, if she can turn her hope and expectation toward God and receive that complete love from Him, her life will be transformed. If there were any way I could open up your heart and mind and deposit this one truth in, I would do it.

I know this may seem like an odd direction we are taking since we are flowing out of a section on needing to forgive ourselves and currently into a section called, Admitting the Need, but what I have done is to take you the gentle way toward a possibly new concept. If you are trying to fill your empty-heart with the things of this world, including the human love of a man, real or imaginary, then you are committing the sin of idolatry, and you need to admit your need for forgiveness. While it may seem harmless to fantasize, it is anything but harmless.

"Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." James 1:15

Jonah 2:8

"Those who cling to
worthless idols
_____ the grace
that could be theirs."

Your thought life can easily become your actions. Even if you do not believe the degree of danger you are placing yourself in, at least know you are placing yourself in a permanent place of lack. As long as you try to meet this deep need you have with anything other than God's love, you will lack what could be yours. Complete the verse in the margin.

God's Word makes clear, when we hold on to counterfeits; we will never know the real thing. I think this topic is so vital to women, I sense I will someday get the opportunity to go into much greater detail on the subject. It was a stronghold for me, this desire for human love. Having a romantic heart and vivid imagination, I was easily able to create a world that counterfeited what I truly desired, which was an intimate and passionate relationship with Jesus. Now that I have the Real Thing, I find every other relationship lacking by comparison.

Now, to more narrowly focus on our actual topic of Admitting the Need (for forgiveness), we will really get personal. This section deals with unrepentant sin. While some have difficulty receiving forgiveness or forgiving themselves, others have the opposite problem. They refuse to admit the need for forgiveness. To use two of our earlier examples, sex outside of marriage and abortion, delicate topics to examine without question, we will see how easy it is to excuse our behavior or become defensive about it. The problem with this way of thinking is that there is no repentance, which means turning from the sin, or admission of guilt. Without admission and repentance, we hinder our closeness with God.

Both are sin, no matter the reason for the choice. Even with my childhood victimization and the outcome being promiscuity, I cannot use victimization as an excuse for the later behavior. As I said earlier, God showed me that victimization was the root, but promiscuity is still sin, no matter what led me to it. I had a choice to continue in the hurtful behavior. I chose it.

In other cases, when there is no victimization as the root, some women still justify the behavior. For many reasons, they defend their position, but ultimately, God has designed sex to be within the bounds of marriage between one man and one woman. Just as He has done for me, He offers forgiveness when we admit we missed the mark. Holding on to any defense only hurts you and prevents you from receiving the freedom giving power of forgiveness and the restoration of the intimate relationship.

To cover one of the most difficult topics, abortion, I will begin with those who sit in defense of it. While some women are traumatized over such a choice and live with lifelong regret, others defend the choice as their right. The truth is, every human life is valuable, created in God's image, and only He has the right to end that life. Rather than add statistics about how many lives are lost each year, I feel for our purpose it would be more productive to focus on the women's lives that are destroyed by it.

Studies show that instances of alcohol, drug abuse, and depression are higher in women post-abortion. Because abortion is so detrimental to women, the enemy has no greater desire than to keep them bound by such destructive patterns and emotional scarring. In order to do that, he perpetuates the lie that abortion is not a sin. Because in doing so, he knows that healing will never come. The reason is, with admission and repentance come forgiveness and restoration. With restoration of the close relationship between the woman and God comes

“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of _____ may come from the Lord...”
Acts 3:19

healing. With healing comes ultimate freedom. Remember though, it all began with calling abortion what it is, sin. Until then, healing from its destruction to the heart of the woman will never be achieved.

Some of our topics have been difficult and all of them were not given the time they deserve. The complexities are so numerous that such a small study can hardly do them justice. But at least we have a beginning point for those affected. Many preachers steer clear of the topic of abortion. Because there are so many wounded women in our churches, preachers have become convinced that addressing it would do harm to those who have had an abortion. But the contrary is true. There are two types of women who have suffered the severe consequences of abortion, those who can hardly continue on in life due to regret and shame and those still in defense or denial. In each case, the only way for healing to come is to seek the Healer with a repentant heart. So if you are either, you must know that beginning an open dialog with God is the first step.

End today with writing out a prayer in the space below. If you have or know of anyone who has suffered the long term consequences of abortion, pray for them. Pray for their healing and restoration. If this is not a topic that hits close to home for you, you might be surprised at how many Christian women you know have this in their past and are suffering still. Pray for those who still defend their actions. Pray for their eyes to be opened to the truth. It is only the truth that will set them free.

Finally, so much time was spent on such deeply intimate topics there seems little time for what we might consider the “lesser sins.” It is to the devil’s delight that we consider them so. As I conclude today’s writing, I simply cannot get past some of the more obvious needs for admission of guilt. The greedy, the unkind, cheaters, liars, hypocrites, the unwilling, gossips, haters, the selfish, those who lust, thieves, etc... I think maybe I covered all of us to some extent in this list. We can all use a good dose of Psalm 26:2-3. Write it in the space below.

It is very easy to minimize the severity of our own sins when compared to the sins of others. God’s Word is clear though, His expectation for us is high. How can He expect so much from mere humans? Because He has given us the Spirit of His very own Son to reside within us. 2 Peter 1:3 says, “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his

1 John 1:8-10

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.”

glory and goodness.” We are left without excuse. Our need for forgiveness for those sins that seem lesser or minor is just as vital as for the ones we are eager to condemn.

I will end today’s lesson with a verse that sums up this entire session. See the verse in the margin. Notice that twice in this passage the phrase is used, “If we claim,” as if the Apostle John was anticipating that people would claim that their actions were not sinful. Of course he anticipated it. It is our human nature to defend our own actions while condemning others for theirs

Read the verse from Psalm 26 again and be brave enough to sit with the Lord and ask Him to test you and try you. Ask for a thorough heart examination. Whatever is unearthed, admit your need for forgiveness, repent of the sin, and turn from it. It will serve to bring you into a closer walk with your Savior.

If you are participating in the group study, you will need to read Chapters 19-21 prior to your next session.

Weekly Recap:

Day One: *We are called to forgive as we have been forgiven.*

Day Two: *Forgiveness frees the forgiver.*

Day Three: *Walking through the process of forgiving others.*

Day Four: *“...as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” Psalm 103:12*

Day Five: *For freedom’s sake, you must admit your own need for forgiveness.*