



HEALING THE HURTS WE DON'T DESERVE

Standalone Message

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LEADER'S GUIDE

1. What does the word "toxic" mean?

This opener will get your group thinking about what unforgiveness does inside us, how it affects our relationships with people, but also our relationship with God.

The dictionary definition of toxic is "containing or being poisonous material, especially when capable of causing death or serious debilitation."

Toxic = poison

What is the effect of toxicity?

Expand on both the "causing death" and "serious debilitation" with regard to our emotional and spiritual health. What does it mean to be debilitated? (weakened, hampered, impeded). How do negative emotions debilitate? What do you miss out on when you're debilitated?

2. Which direction do you tend to go toward when someone has hurt you: anger, resentment, bitterness? Some other reaction?

Spend a few minutes defining these three emotions to make sure everyone is on the same page; resentment and bitterness are similar but different. One person said this: "It's a subtle nuance, but I think for me resentment is normally aimed at a specific person or incident, whereas bitterness is more general. I resented the way my parents beat me as a child, but I'm bitter about the way my life has turned out."

3. Take a look at Matthew 6:12-15.

Matthew 6:12-15 (NIV)

12 And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.'

14 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Why do you think Jesus paired the forgiveness God extends to us with the forgiveness we extend to other people?

Just like we learned last week that we understand and appreciate the matchless grace extended to us when we extend grace to others, we understand and appreciate our limitless forgiveness when we forgive others.

Your group might wonder if verses 14 and 15 are saying that God's forgiveness is conditional, that we can only get God's forgiveness if we do something to earn it (forgive others). Because that notion is contrary to other scriptures (we must always interpret scripture in light of other scripture) we know there is a different connotation here. Elsewhere in scripture we are assured that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ (Romans 8:38,39) – not even anger and bitterness – and that we have been forgiven freely by God's grace through the redemption that came by Jesus (Romans 3:23,34).

Keep in mind Jesus is speaking to us here as fellow sons and daughters of the Father, there is already a relationship of love and redemption between us and God will not end. Our legal problems if you will, our SIN condition, has already been dealt with on the cross, so what we're talking about now is living out our new life in Christ. As **loved** and saved sons and daughters, our heavenly Father will not ignore anger, resentment, bitterness and all the other toxic fruits of unforgiveness especially if we harbor them. We are instructed (not merely encouraged) to "get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:31,32). If we hang to sin, which is what unforgiveness is, it will affect our ongoing relationship with God. It will be like our line of communication between us and the Father will be messed up with the static of our bitterness. Use this verse in Matthew to round out this point:

Matthew 5: 23-24 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

Your relationships with other people matter to God because they affect your relationship with Him. We learn how to love Him by loving other people.

4. Pastor Harry said forgiveness is not excusing, forgetting, condoning, or overlooking an offense. What is it instead?

One blogger said this: *Forgiveness means releasing the other from blame, leaving the event in God's hands, and moving on.* Discuss that.

What makes forgiveness hard to give?

In this excerpt of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus tells us to pray that our debts would be forgiven as we forgive our debtors. Thinking of offenses against us debts, talk about this idea that we feel owed something when we've been wronged.

5. Read Genesis 50:17-21. How do you think Joseph was able to forgive his brothers? How did he keep his heart pure?

Genesis 50:17-21 (NIV)

17 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

18 His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said. 19 But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? 20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. 21 So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

Pastor Harry made the point that in every terrible circumstance the LORD was with Joseph. How do you think Joseph knew God was with him? Talk about how you know God is with **you**. How do you know? Share and encourage one other with your assurances.

What is a pure heart?

Free of impurities (like anger, resentment, and bitterness.) How is something made pure? What kind of process is usually involved? Is it easy or hard? Talk about that.

6. Pastor Harry said it takes faith to forgive. What did he mean?

You can either hold onto God's promises or hold onto your hurt. You can't hold on to both. What are God's promises toward you? Here are just a few (which are good to keep in mind when you are being hurt or have been hurt). There are hundreds more like these...

Isaiah 41:10 So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Psalms 145:17 The LORD is righteous in all his ways and faithful in all he does.

John 16:33 I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

7. “Forgiveness isn’t a feeling. It’s a decision.” – Pastor Harry. What’s the difference?

Forgiveness is a deliberate choice to release negative feelings toward people who have wronged you as opposed to the equally deliberate choice to hold on to them. A feeling comes over you, a decision is an active choice. Forgiveness doesn’t mean you must reconcile with that person or release them from legal responsibility. It’s more something you do for you than something you do for them. It’s often an everyday decision you must make, for many days, or weeks or months or years, depending on the impact of the offense.

How do you decide to do something that you don’t feel like doing?

Theodore Roosevelt said, “With self-discipline most anything is possible.” To do something you don’t really want to do, you must discipline yourself. You need to concentrate on what it is you really want: which in this case is freedom and peace and joy. To adopt a new habit you need to practice every day. People who aren’t disciplined will never learn to play the piano or run a marathon or recover from an addiction.

What else besides self-discipline will help you follow through on a decision? What about seeking God’s help or the accountability from a friend? Discuss.

8. Jesus said in Matthew 5:8 that the pure in heart will see God. What do you think it means to see God?

Pastor Harry told us this verb Jesus uses for “see’ is more than just seeing something with your eyes, it is experiencing what you are seeing. Talk about that.

Great quote from Got.questions.org: (underlines mine) “Being pure in heart involves having a singleness of heart toward God. A pure heart has no hypocrisy, no guile, no hidden motives. The pure heart is marked by transparency and an uncompromising desire to please God in all things. It is more than an external purity of behavior; it is an internal purity of soul.”

Talk about the underlines.

MEMORIZE Colossians 3:13 “Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

MEDITATE: This week in your prayer time, ponder the breadth and depth of what God in Christ has forgiven you. Consider this ratio of what you’ve been forgiven to what God asks you to forgive others of. Thank God for all that you have in Christ and pray for the strength to extend the same grace to others.