

FORGIVENESS--PART 1: FORGIVENESS OF OTHERS

LAY MEDITATION

NOTE: All three forgiveness meditations should be given by the same lay person.

In the skit you just saw the king forgave the servant for everything he owed. Why? Because the king loved the servant like God loves us. The king loved him and had mercy on him. He forgave him the debt just as God forgives our sins.

The servant was forgiven all, and he in turn should have forgiven all. Instead of showing the same mercy he received, the first servant showed no mercy. He demanded payment of the few cents the other servant owed him.

What is our response to God's loving mercy? Like the King, God forgives all our sins, if we only ask. God is willing to wipe the slate clean, as if everything bad we have ever done never happened. But God expects something from us in return. He expects us to forgive others, just as He has forgiven us. When we sin, we hurt God. But God forgives us. Are we willing to forgive those who have hurt us? Or are we going to be like the ungrateful servant and refuse to forgive others? Let me share from my own life.

(Personal Witness on how you have been hurt by someone and how you have forgiven someone. Briefly tell the story emphasizing your struggle, vulnerability and willingness to be real, and the process of forgiveness.)

Forgiving someone doesn't mean the person didn't do wrong. Forgiveness doesn't mean forgetting what happened either. But it does mean I'm not willing to let it drag me down anymore. When you fail to forgive, it doesn't hurt the person you're not forgiving - IT HURTS YOU! It is like 10,000 tons of bricks are weighing you down. When you have unforgiveness in your heart, you can't be happy. But when you forgive, you let go of the hurt and the anger you feel toward that person and turn it over to God. It is one of the best things you will ever do.

(Personal Witness about how forgiving others changed your life.)

If you are like me, it bothers you that some people who do wrong never seem to get punished. But God says punishment is His job. We are not to practice revenge - that's God's business. "Vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord (Romans 12:14-19)." We must trust God to punish others correctly. Punishment is not our job. It is God's job.

Life's hard, isn't it? And it is not always fair. Life hurts. We have no choice where or when we are born. No choice about eye color or how tall or short we'll be. We don't get to choose our parents or our school. All of us have things we wish we could change about our lives -but often times we can't. But, although we can't often change what life gives us - we can change how we deal with it and we don't have to do it alone - God is with us.

(Personal witness on how God has helped you deal with life's circumstances.) Closing Prayer

FORGIVENESS--PART 2: ACCEPTING GOD'S FORGIVENESS

LAY MEDITATION

(Text: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Ephesians 1:6-8)

I can't see me through your eyes, but I guess you think I have it altogether - no problems, no stress, no mess. I wish it was true, but it's not. I've done some very bad things in my life. I'm not proud of them at all!

(Personal Witness - Tell concisely of several incidents in your life.)

It's hard to forgive yourself, isn't it? When I was dealing with all I had done in my life I kept thinking, "I can't forgive myself. I've been too terrible. I've hurt too many people." Then I realized, all I needed was to tell God that I was sorry for what I had done and ask God's forgiveness, and guess what? God forgave me! It's not our job to forgive ourselves! That's God's job. The Bible says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9)." Our job is to know we have done wrong and ask God for forgiveness. Christ died on that cross for my sins and your sins! Jesus died so that our sins could be forgiven. He took our punishment for us.

Ephesians 1:6-8, "Let us praise God for His glorious grace, for the free gift God gave is in His dear Son! For by the sacrificial death of Christ we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven. How great is the grace of God, which He gave us in such large measure!"

If I tell myself my sins are too bad for God to forgive me, it's like telling God that Jesus' death wasn't enough, that God's grace isn't big enough to cover my sins. We don't have to understand God's love - we only need to accept it. God wants to forgive us so much. He is waiting to erase our past mistakes with a giant eraser. God wants us to accept the gift of forgiveness He offers.

When I have done wrong, I do three things. First, I tell God what I have done wrong. Second, I ask God to forgive me. Finally, I thank God for His forgiveness.

(Personal witness on the process of forgiveness and how you have experienced it.)

God is quick to forgive. What a loving Father we have. .Now what I'd like us to do is bow in prayer. Remember, all God asks us to do is tell Him what we have done wrong and ask His forgiveness. Please pray with me.

(Please add a prayer of confession. Close with the line - PRAY FOR ME - A SINNER)

FORGIVENESS--PART 3: FORGIVENESS LISTS

LAY MEDITATION

Note: Large wooden cross should be in place. It is the responsibility of the coordinator to have the hammer and nails, providing them when needed and accounting for all the nails before and after the service.

You see before you the cross - a reminder of Jesus' terrible suffering. It is a sign of God's grace. While Jesus was on the cross, He prayed for the people who had put him there. He prayed for those who had beaten Him, made fun of Him, spit on Him. He prayed for us. He said, "Father, forgive them; they don't know what they're doing." (Luke 23:34). Today we have been working on our lists of people we need to forgive. Some of us have long lists, others have shorter lists and that's fine. It makes no difference to God how long or how short your list is. All He wants is for you to forgive those who have hurt you. Let us pray. (Team member leads prayer asking the Holy Spirit to bring to our minds the names of those who have hurt us, etc.)

If the Lord calls other names to mind, please continue to write them down while I'm talking. Forgiveness is so important to God that God let His only son, Jesus, die on a cross like the one you see here, so that we could be forgiven. It is through Jesus' death that we are offered forgiveness for all of our sins. Remember the skit you saw this morning about the King and his servants? The King forgave his servant for the debt he/she owed, just as God forgives us our sins. But God, like the King, commands something of us in return. He commands that we forgive other people, just as He has forgiven us. "What if I don't want to?" you ask. What if we refuse to forgive? What happened to the unforgiving servant this morning? Maybe there is someone you want to forgive, because you want to obey God, but you don't think you can. Someone who has really made you mad, someone who has hurt you physically or mentally or emotionally. A teacher, a parent, a friend, a brother, a sister, the person who put you here, a stranger, even. (Personal witness)

All you have to do is be willing to forgive. Then ask God for His help. Let Him do the rest. He wants you to forgive them, and he will help you to forgive, but you have to take the first step. If you are ready to ask God to help you forgive someone, add that person's name to your list. Jesus taught His disciples to pray the Lord's prayer. Open your Star Guides to the Lord's Prayer. Look with me if you will right in the middle of that prayer, right under the part about "Give us today our daily bread." You see what it says there? It says, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." "Forgive us our sins as we

forgive those who sin against us." God expects us to forgive others because He has forgiven us through the death of His son and our Savior - Jesus Christ. Please pray the Lord's Prayer with me now.

(Pray Lord's Prayer)

(Pause) Take one more minute to add to your list the names of any people you want to forgive. Remember Christ's words, "If you forgive others when they sin against you then your heavenly father will forgive you."

(Pause: until the Stars have added additional names to their lists)