

TERM 4 2022

3 STUDIES ON
F O R G I V E N E S S

CONTENTS

STUDY 1 | FORGIVEN PEOPLE FORGIVE

Psalm 32 | Matthew 18

STUDY 2 | FORGIVENESS IS COSTLY

Hosea 3 | Luke 7 | Genesis 50

STUDY 3 | FORGIVENESS IS CONSTANT

Proverbs | Matthew 18 | Colossians 3

STUDY 1 | FORGIVEN PEOPLE FORGIVE

1. How would you define/explain 'forgiveness'?
2. What place does forgiveness seem to have in our world? Is it seen as *necessary* or *optional*?

READ | Psalm 32:1-5

3. In w.1-2, what is the assumption about people transgressing/sinning?
4. Since sin is ultimately against God, what does this mean for us (cf. the description in w.3-4)? What does it mean we all need?
5. According to the psalmist, what was the result of confessing his sin to God?
6. How does the psalmist describe the person forgiven by God?

In terms of worldview and religious texts, the Bible is unique in its frequent and consistent teaching that God completely forgives sin (e.g. Psalm 103:12; Hosea 14:4; Ephesians 4:32; Hebrews 10:17; 1 John 1:9). In the OT this forgiveness was connected to and expressed in the sacrificial system. In the NT this forgiveness is made possible by faith in Jesus' sacrificial death on our behalf. Thus, forgiveness is a key part of Christian identity: *Christian believers are forgiven people.*

- How does knowing that (in Jesus) you're fully forgiven by God make you feel:

About yourself?

Towards God?

In his 'model prayer', Jesus connects God's forgiveness of us and our forgiveness of others (Luke 11:2–4). While God's forgiveness of us isn't quite contingent on our forgiveness of others, there's a clear assumption that we practise forgiveness towards those who wrong us (*for we also forgive*). Jesus makes this assumption explicit in one of his parables.

READ | Matthew 18:21–35

7. The servant of the parable has an incredibly large debt – for all intents and purposes it is *unpayable*. As per ancient practice, the consequences are severe (he and his family sold into slavery as 'payment').

What is the master's surprising response when the servant pleads for more time to pay?

8. The servant then has an encounter with a fellow servant. How is the situation the same? How is it different?

9. What is the master's response when he hears of this? What reason does he give for this response?

- In your opinion, is this a reasonable response? Why/why not?

10. Jesus describes our forgiveness of others as needing to be 'from the heart' (v.35). Why?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND APPLICATION

11. It's clear from Jesus' teaching that for a Christian believer there is an *obligation* to forgive others – it isn't optional, it's *necessary*. Why? How would you explain to someone the 'logic' of this obligation?

12. How does forgiveness actually change life? Give some examples.

13. What are some things that make forgiving others hard?

14. The Bible makes a clear connection between repentance and receiving forgiveness (cf. Psalm 32:5). How might this apply to us forgiving others? Should we only forgive if they're sorry? Why/why not?

STUDY 2 | FORGIVENESS IS COSTLY

Three great gospel truths, which come through in Psalm 32, are that God's forgiveness of us is FULL, FOREVER and FREE. It's *full* (we're not forgiven partially, we're forgiven *completely*); it's *forever* (we're not forgiven temporarily, we're forgiven *permanently*); and it's *free* (we don't earn our forgiveness, we receive it *without any cost*).

And yet, that third truth, that forgiveness is free – that it comes without any cost – is not the whole story. Indeed, the very nature of forgiveness is costly; it's about bearing the inherent consequence, debt or penalty incurred by wrongdoing. That cost has to be borne by someone.

READ | Hosea 3:1-5

In the last years of the northern kingdom of Israel, God raised up the prophet Hosea to declare his judgment on their persistent unfaithfulness, but also to proclaim the hope of restored relationship in the future. In order to make this message as vivid as possible, God instructed Hosea to 'live out' in his own marriage the relationship between the Lord and Israel (1:2-3). And so Hosea married Gomer, who was serially unfaithful to him – just like Israel had been to the Lord – to the point of leaving Hosea and ending up as a slave. But even that wasn't the end of this enacted parable.

1. What is shocking about verse 1?
2. What is shocking about verse 2?
3. What is the spiritual truth highlighted by these actions?

4. Read **1 Peter 1:18-19** ('redeemed' means 'bought back'). How do Hosea's actions point us towards Jesus' death?

READ | Luke 7:36-50

5. Consider the parable Jesus tells after he and the woman are criticised for their actions (her washing Jesus' feet and his accepting it). What image/metaphor does Jesus use?

6. In the world of the parable, who bears the cost that the debtors have incurred?

7. The 'cost' itself isn't the primary point Jesus is making in this parable. What is his main point?

- What about the woman's response resonates with you?
- What might it look like for us to show our love and gratitude to Jesus for bearing the great cost of our sin?

READ | Genesis 50:15-21

8. Why were Joseph's brothers worried that he might hold a grudge against them (v.15)?

9. What were the brothers worried Joseph might *do* as a result? Consider the language they used; what does it indicate?

Despite their fears Joseph didn't 'repay' them for all the sufferings they caused him. Instead he forgave them. But the cost of doing so wasn't easy for Joseph – the emotional toll of the process of forgiveness was significant (see 42:24, 43:30–31, 45:1–7, 50:17c). Like with the debtors of Jesus' parable, in the truest sense, justice *wasn't* served; instead, its cost was *absorbed* by Joseph.

FINAL THOUGHTS AND APPLICATION

10. What ways does the cost of God's forgiveness – of Jesus' death in your place – change the way you feel:

- About yourself?

- About God?

11. What might it look like for you to 'bear the cost' of forgiveness when it comes to those who wrong you?

STUDY 3 | FORGIVENESS IS CONSTANT

READ | Proverbs 10:12 and 17:9

1. These proverbs address relational hurt/breakdown. With that in mind, how do you understand 'love' here?
2. What do you make of the language that love 'covers' or 'conceals' offences? How do the contrasts (between love and hate, peace and division) help your understanding?
3. How does the fact that this is a *proverb* help us to understand the relational picture being painted here?
 - Think of some examples of what 'promoting forgiveness' might look like: With your family? Among your friends? In our church?

READ | Matthew 18:15-22

4. What is Peter's question (v.21)? What is the 'question behind the question'?
5. What is Jesus' response? What does it mean? What does it tell us about the nature of forgiveness?

- What do you find encouraging about Jesus' teaching here? What do you find challenging?

Here and in 16:18 are the only two places where the Gospels speak of the 'church'. The word for church is *ekklesia*, which means 'gathering' or 'assembly'. It most often referred to a physical gathering of people. It's disputed that it has this meaning in 16:18 (some argue that Jesus is talking about the 'worldwide church', i.e. all believers), but it's certainly the meaning in 18:17 – the 'church' here is the *local congregation*.

READ | Colossians 3:12-17

6. In v.13, what two actions are the Colossians exhorted to do with one another? How are they connected?

7. How are love and forgiveness characterised in these verses?

8. Once again, our forgiveness of others is to be modelled on Jesus' forgiveness of us (v.13b). How does this help us to be *constant* in our forgiveness?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND APPLICATION

9. What are some areas of our church life where we might be called to 'constant forgiveness'?

10. What are some areas of church life where you find the call to 'constant forgiveness' relatively *easy*? What are some areas where you find the call especially *difficult*?

11. In both the Proverbs verses and the Colossians passage there is a strong concern here for *unity* in the church (love is described as 'the perfect bond of unity'). Does this mean we should pursue unity at all costs (e.g. at the cost of justice)? Why/why not? How do we balance these things?