

Life of Christ

A study of the life and teachings of Jesus

Forgiveness

—by Calvin Barnes

Wow. What a thing to talk about...forgiveness.

I think all of us at some point have dealt with a hurt...a betrayal...a wound from someone close to us. And though this experience may be a normative one on this earth, the response God has asked of us as His children is anything but. Look at this with me.

“...and forgive us our sins,
AS we have forgiven those who sin against us.”

Jesus goes on to say...

“If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.”—*Matthew 6:12,13-14*
(emphasis added)

Oh man. Am I the only one intimidated by those passages? The Greek word for “as” in verse 12 can also be translated as “like.” So you mean to tell me that when Jesus taught us how to pray, He said we should ask the Father to forgive us like we’ve forgiven others who have hurt us? Then on top of that, tying our own forgiveness to our willingness to extend the grace and forgiveness that God has granted us?

Indeed. How is this possible? How can we, as humans, forgive like God forgives? After all, He is God! Am I the only one who feels like crawling under a rock and hiding? And it’s not that Bob Seger, Americana, raspy voice, Chevy-tough kind of rock. More like a rock and a hard place kind of rock. Like a “hide and please don’t find me” kind of rock.

“Lord, do you realize what they’ve done??? Do you realize how badly they’ve hurt me?? How am I supposed to just forgive something like that!?”

After all, we know we were wronged; we know we were betrayed. And now we just have to let them go? Really?? Perhaps you’ve heard this before, but it bears repeating here. Our living in unforgiveness and bitterness is like drinking poison, expecting it to hurt the person who hurt us. But things don’t work that way, do they? What happens is that we become the ones who are continually hurt by our own unforgiveness. And holding onto that bitterness is akin to allowing that person or that situation to continually cause you pain...like you’re reliving the pain over and over again.

I get it. Honestly. This is something I’ve personally struggled with at times over the years. And it’s not easy. It is painful. It can be agonizing, excruciating even. But God never asks us to do something He will not strengthen us to walk through.

I think it is also important to address an unfortunate misunderstanding that many Christians have. While our forgiveness is a command from Jesus, we are never commanded that we must forget what has happened, nor to continue to allow ourselves to be abused. So many conflate the ideas of forgiving and forgetting. Only God is truly able to forget our sins, as He chooses to throw them as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12) and remember them no more (Hebrews 8:12).

Last I checked, I’m not God. I’m human, and I remember. But I actually believe the power of forgiveness is our remembering what happened... remembering the hurt...the offense...and choosing forgiveness anyway. Forgiveness sets you free. Jesus came and set us free to be free—not to live in bondage to our own bitterness and unforgiveness. So I challenge you today as I challenge myself: Be the one to forgive. Be the one to extend grace, to extend mercy. For as you do, you will indeed be healed and be free.

Question: How often have you sinned against God or grieved Him? Has He forgiven you? Can you extend that same forgiveness to others like God has extended it to you?

Prayer Starter: Jesus, please forgive me for trying to get even. Forgive me for striving to control and manipulate my life, my family, and my relationships to keep from getting hurt. I choose to receive Your forgiveness and extend this same forgiveness to those who have hurt me, even if they never make it right.

Family Chat: Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart and show you anyone you need to forgive.

Take Action: What is your next step? Talk it over with your life group or accountability partner.