



ENTER God's presence

Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you. I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.

– Psalm 130:1-5

Lord Jesus, we gather around your word today and broken and sinful people. Yet we come with faith and trust that in you is healing and forgiveness. We ask that you would pour your spirit out on us again and through your word, draw us deeper into your arms of grace and love divine. Amen.



SHARE life together

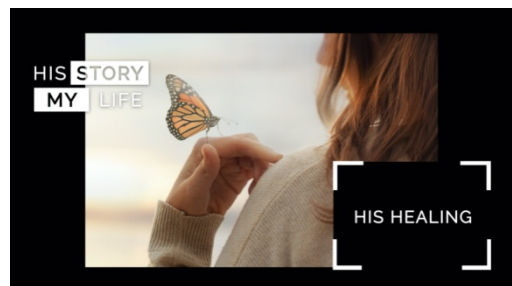
1. Share your highs and lows with each other.
2. How did you go with your living purposefully from last time?
3. Share a time when forgiveness has been difficult for you.
4. How do you see God's forgiveness and God's healing (the theme from last week), being connected?

"I forgive you". These words might be three of the hardest words we ever speak or hear. The truth is we've all been on both sides of that sentence. We've been the forgiver - hurt, disappointed, betrayed. We've been the forgiven - embarrassed, guilty, ashamed. What happens in us when Christ forgives and then offers us our very existence as a gift? What does it mean to cancel the debt someone owes you in your relationship because all your debts have been cancelled by Jesus' death & resurrection? The words "I forgive you" are incredibly powerful words, capable of re-writing the narrative of a life or the story of a relationship. They are words which bring freedom, restoration, and release, transforming hearts, minds and attitudes. We'll explore and experience that together today as we celebrate the Reformation truth that Jesus has already written you into his story of life, love and joy with his forgiveness.

Week beginning:
Sunday 25th October 2020

Worship series:

His Story...Your Life



VERSE for the week
Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.” Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

- Luke 7:47-48



REMEMBER this week

Forgiveness gives you a blank page on which to write the next chapter of your life. When you have been forgiven, all that is left is gratitude. When you forgive others, all that's left is freedom and possibility. Forgiveness is the ultimate miracle of God's grace alone.



LISTEN attentively

Read Luke 7:36-50

- 5. What key words/thoughts/ideas/questions arise for you as you hear this text?**
- 6. What do you hear this scripture saying to you right now?**
- 7. Think about your place in Jesus' parable. How do you perceive yourself? As someone who has been forgiven a large or a small debt?**

The way we perceive our standing with God determines much of our reaction to him and his forgiveness. This is part of the challenge for Simon, the Pharisee, who is hosting this meal. Often, these kinds of meals were held in open courtyards or dining areas. Part of the reason for this was so that you could display to the public the kind of company you kept. To be hosting a meal with Jesus, the man who healed the sick, cast out demons, and taught scripture with authority, was likely to bring Simon some serious reputation points. This was also likely to be Simon's main motivation for hosting the meal. With his mind distracted by his own agenda and sense of importance, it is little wonder he failed to show the proper forms of hospitality to Jesus (v44-47). He figured all there was for him to gain from Jesus was a reputational boost. In comparison, this sinful woman who entered this open space uninvited, gives what she can to honour Jesus the way an important guest ought to be treated. She recognised that Jesus had the greatest gift that she could receive, the forgiveness of her sin.

- 8. Simon's disregard for the conventions of hospitality suggest that he saw himself on equal terms with Jesus. Afterall, he was a Pharisee, one who was devoted to teaching and keeping the Laws of God. How often do you find yourself falling into the trap of believing that you need less forgiveness than others, or that you do enough good to outweigh the bad? Discuss.**

It has been a while since there have been examples of outrageous forgiveness shown on our televisions. However, a few years ago there was a documentary on the television that explored the aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks in America on some of the families who had lost loved ones as a result. As you can imagine there were a wide variety of reactions to the events, and people processing their grief in many different ways. What was striking though was the stories of families who had found a way to forgive those who perpetrated the attacks. While they still had grief, they still were sad, they still were confused and dumbfounded at the senseless violence and loss of life, in practicing forgiveness, they had clearly found a way forward. They found a way to slowly work their way out of the darkness of the tragic events they had endured. This was in stark contrast to those who were still focussed on payback and revenge. In this passage of Luke's gospel, Simon the Pharisee recognises the sinful woman and immediately judges her and wants to keep his distance. Jesus may or may not have known the woman personally, but he recognises the sin in her life and he allows her to come close to him and offers her forgiveness. In the eyes of those gathered at the table, this was outrageous forgiveness (v49)

- 9. How do you think the world at large views forgiveness today? How far does forgiveness extend?**
- 10. What would outrageous forgiveness look like today?**

God has written each of us into his story of forgiveness. The reality is each of us is a sinner, a debtor in the eyes of God's law. Romans 3:23 reminds us that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. In God's story a sinner is a sinner and according to his own decree, the judgement for sin is death. It does not matter how little or how much sin is a part of your life, even a speck of sin condemns you to death. Thank goodness God's story does not end there. God's story is one of forgiveness. Like any good story, the characters grow and develop. You are a character written into God's story of forgiveness. By participating in the story and entering the forgiveness that Jesus offers you through his life, death, and resurrection, God transforms you from a sinner to a saint. When God forgives you, your sin is removed from you. In that moment of forgiveness you are rewritten into His story, not as a sinner, but as his precious child.



GROW deeper

Jesus comments that “her many sins have been forgiven – as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little”. This can often be one of the reasons that people who come to faith in Jesus later in life have a very significant conversion experience. They suddenly receive forgiveness for a lifetime of sin and are relieved of a burden of guilt that they may have been for years. This often results in an exuberant expression of praise and thanks to God and a passion for sharing this good news which burns as bright as the sun! Unfortunately, for many of us, we either grew up knowing God's forgiveness or as time has passed from that initial experience of forgiveness, we have become accustomed to having it in our lives. This is where the power of story comes into play. As we tell stories, we reconnect with or replay the events of the stories in our minds. The really crazy thing is that we can do this with the stories of other's experiences almost as easily as we can with our own. Jesus even uses a short story (parable) in this encounter to have Simon place himself 'in the shoes' of the two debtors.

- 11. What is a story from your own life that might help you or others to connect/reconnect with the reality of God's forgiveness?**
- 12. Have you ever been deeply moved or convicted by the stories or testimonies of others? Can you recall or retell that story?**
- 13. How is the forgiveness of Jesus evident in your life through your love?**

God's great love for us is expressed in many ways, but perhaps most profoundly in what he was prepared to do to offer us forgiveness. That love and forgiveness that we have received, changes the way we interact with God's unfolding story. Having received it for ourselves, we are now called to be agents of God's love and forgiveness to those around us.



LIVE purposefully

Read Matthew 18:21-22

C.S. Lewis once wrote, “Everyone thinks forgiveness is a lovely idea until he has something to forgive”. At times it can be extremely hard to practice forgiveness. Perhaps the pain we have been dealt is just too great to overcome, perhaps we have forgiven the same person multiple times already and we are just tired of being hurt or taken advantage of. Often we fail to forgive because we don't want people to just 'get away with it'. This is a question Jesus' disciples asked him and it is one many people still ask today.

- 14. Who is someone in your life who you should be reaching out to with forgiveness? How might you go about that this week?**
- 15. How can we practice forgiveness yet guard ourselves from being taken advantage of or hurt again in the future?**



PRAY intentionally

- Praise God for his steadfast love and never ending grace and mercy.
- Thank Jesus for taking upon himself the guilt of all our sin and offering us forgiveness.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you show forgiveness to others.



BLESS one another

You might like to address one person in your group and make the sign of the cross in the air as you say...

[Name], Christ has written his story of forgiveness in your life. Amen.