

JOURNEY TO FREEDOM

UNIT II Key 4 FORGIVENESS

SCRIPTURE PRINCIPLE: Father, forgive them; for they do not know not what they are doing. Luke 23:34

How are you doing at forgiving the ones who wronged you? By now you may realize that forgiveness is less like flipping a switch and more like peeling an onion. Layers of pain need to be faced, and many tears may be shed.

The process of forgiveness is a spiritual discipline. Forgiveness is a path we are called to follow; and Jesus will walk beside us every inch of the way, ready to help us with every bit of the pain we must face. He has already faced the pain himself. He faced it when He was on the cross. He became the full satisfaction for the sins that were done to us as well as the sins we have done (I John 2:2). We need not struggle alone with our painful memories. He is in the midst of the pain with us and has already gone there before us. He wants to go through it with us; He has no intention of leaving us to deal with our pain alone.

Forgiveness begins with total honesty: honesty about the reality of what they did, honesty about the damage that was done, and honesty about the consequences their sins brought into our lives. Sometimes we do not even give ourselves the chance to face the damage that was done to us until we begin the process of forgiveness.

Anger brings us a phony sense of power, which needs to be surrendered at the foot of the cross. We spent years hiding our hearts from the pain behind a wall of resentment and hatred, fooling ourselves into believing that the wall made us strong. Jesus on the cross could have done exactly that; He could have chosen to crush His enemies. He had every right to do so. Instead, He chose to extend His mercy to fallen humanity.

So we surrender our anger, surrender our demand for compensation, and surrender our desires to seek revenge. We accept that those who wronged us no longer owe us anything, and we leave the issue of vengeance with God. What then? We need the Shepherd, Who in Psalm 23 promises that though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we need fear no evil.

The memories of hurt, helplessness, and humiliation can come at us like an avalanche. We can feel as though we are lost in the pain. For the first time in a long time, we face old fears: the helplessness before someone's violence, the humiliation of sexual abuse, the anguish of emotional neglect, the wounds caused by careless or hostile words, the endless maze of confusion caused by lies, and the list could go on. Perhaps for the first time we come face-to-face with the self-hatred a child victim feels, as we blame ourselves for our powerlessness to stop a predator's cruelty. We finally realize just how much damage was done.

The pain is devastating; we feel destroyed by it, and only when we refuse to flip into rage do we truly face it. Here, in the middle of our pain, we more deeply bond with the suffering Christ, Who walked through the valley of the shadow before us. He bore every bit of our griefs and sorrows on the cross; Isaiah 53 can now become very real to us. He took the stripes and the nails so He could feel your hurt, your helplessness, and your humiliation. He took the stripes and the nails to forgive those who hurt you and to forgive you when you hurt others.

He completely identified with suffering humanity but without sinning, while experiencing more temptation to strike back than we ever will. Hebrews 4:15-16 assures us of that. He felt every temptation to wreck vengeance and was completely capable of doing so. Instead, He went to the cross of His own free will and accepted the pain. He carries the scars that we helped put there.

He meets us in the middle of our pain, and in our pain He can bring truth into our hearts. He can teach us that the protective wall of resentment was no real protection, but a

deception of the enemy of our souls. When we let the Shepherd into our pain, He can show us the truth that will set us free.

SCRIPTURE: Write out what each of these verses or passages mean to you and your situation.

Luke 23:34

Mark 11:25

Hebrews 4:15-16

Isaiah 53

Luke 18:9-14

Acts 7:51-60

STUDY GUIDE

8. What new things about forgiveness have you learned?

9. Have you been able to identify any lies that you have believed, that may have been in your thinking from the time you were young? If so, what are they, and what does the Word tell you differently?

10. On a scale of 1-10, how victorious have you been lately? Please explain your answer.

11. On a scale of 1-10, how much memory work have you done?

12. Did you use any memorized Scripture to battle temptation lately? What was the result?

13. How is your spiritual life in general, how are your private devotions, and how are things at your church/fellowship group?

Plan of Action: