

JOURNEY TO FREEDOM

UNIT III Key 4 FORGIVENESS

SCRIPTURE PRINCIPLE: Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Matthew 6:12

How have you been doing in your struggle to forgive those who have hurt you over the years? Hurt, helplessness, and humiliation are hard to face directly. Sometimes we spent years of our lives just surviving the abuse and shame. In order to cope with our environments, we may have made a series of bad decisions. By the time we came to faith in Christ, our lives had been devastated by decades of pain and bad decisions. We have mountains of negative thoughts, emotions, attitudes, habits, and reactions to overcome, and enormous messes to clean up.

You have gotten this far because you have the desire to receive everything God wants to give you. You have gotten this far because you have faith to believe that if you do things God's way, He will move the mountains on your behalf (Matthew 17:20). You have gotten this far because you trust God's promises in His Word, and His Word showed you the right path.

In previous Units, several factors of forgiveness were discussed. To forgive, we need to realize that what they did was wrong, and that what they did damaged us as a result. To forgive, we need to face the hurt, helplessness, and humiliation directly so that we are no longer weakened by our fear of facing raw pain. To forgive, we need to surrender at the foot of the cross any and all claims to our "right" to resent, and we also need to surrender the "power rush" that anger gives us.

We forgive when we decide that the ones who wronged us no longer owe us compensation, and when we let God be their judge if they refuse to repent (Romans

12:19). We forgive when we pray for them to repent so that they can receive the same mercy that we have.

If you have done all of that, and you still feel stabs of anger, the crushing sensation of shame, or sudden fear, there is something else you may need to do. Sudden unexpected emotional reactions are often triggered by something in the environment that reminds us of earlier situations of fear and shame. A spoken word or phrase, a smell, or the sight of something that was present during an abusive episode, may bring back painful memories with the emotions that we felt during the abuse.

Those moments of anger, shame, and fear are opportunities to face the truth and discern the lies. Our instinct is to avoid them, because who wants to face all that pain? Yet at such moments, if asked for wisdom (James 1:5), the Spirit is ready to shine His light into the dark corners of our minds, identify the lies, and set us free in the truth.

During episodes of pain, the devil used our helplessness to inject his lies into our minds (Matthew 18:5-7, 10, 14). Even after the abuse has stopped and the pain is gone, the lies live on. Because we are determined to never get hurt again, we put out our feelers, stay alert to the possibility of being used and exploited again, and fear the worst. As a result, we selectively look for evidence that supports the lies, thereby causing the lies to gather strength.

What are some of the lies? Their numbers are legion, and they are specific to each individual. We might believe lies about ourselves: that we are worthless, that we caused the abuse, that we are good for nothing except to be used by others, that the abuse was actually good for us and not really abuse, that we deserve nothing, or that we have no right to protection. We might believe lies about authority: that authority must be resisted at all times, that authority never has our best interests at heart, that all authority is exploitative and uncaring, and that our acceptance of authority will result in further abuse. We might believe lies about the same sex and about the opposite sex: that one sex

is more trustworthy than the other. We might believe lies about God: people sometimes believe that God is like the parent they had the most trouble with while growing up.

Because the combination of lies is specific to each individual, the devil knows just how to use them as leverage to tempt and harass us. He uses the lies to cause us mental torment, because then we are most vulnerable to temptation and most likely to develop addictions to mood-altering chemicals or behaviors.

However painful, our memories are not our worst problem; the lies that we have believed are our worst problem. We can ask the Spirit to expose the lies that we have believed. He can show us the truth from the Word of God. When the power of the lies has been replaced by truth from the Word, we more easily forgive the ones who lied to us.

SCRIPTURE

Luke 17:3-5

James 1:20

Colossians 3:12-15

Mark 5:1-19

STUDY GUIDE

1. On a scale of 1-10, how forgiving are you at this point?

2. Does this represent an improvement since you began the Keys? Please explain your answer.

3. What are some of the things that you have been able to forgive others for?

4. What are some of the things you have not yet been able to forgive others for?

5. Do you sometimes blame others for sins that are actually your responsibility? Please explain your answer.

6. Do you sometimes blame yourself for sins that are actually the responsibility of others? Please explain your answer.

7. Have you been able to pray that those who wronged you would repent and receive God's forgiveness?

8. Do you really accept Romans 12:19?

9. Have you become aware of some of the lies that you have believed, and if so, have you found Scriptures that speak against them? How did that make you feel? Please share to the extent you feel comfortable.

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

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

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

Plan of Action: