

WELLSPRING

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Sermon Series Devotional

2/21/21 - 3/21/21

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The Journey Begins!

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Are there people in your life you have a hard time forgiving? Have you ever wanted something from God that didn't happen and you still resent it? Have you ever felt like you stepped across a line that you can't uncross and have a hard time forgiving yourself?

Forgiveness is an easy thing to talk about. It's not such an easy thing to offer to other people, to yourself or even God. This study is going to ask you to go beyond Sunday School answers and take an honest look at how you feel about forgiveness, what God says about it, and how your life can be enriched by doing the hard work of forgiveness.

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“Forgive one another, as God has forgiven you through Christ.”

-Apostle Paul

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Suggested Use:

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Our devotional is designed to be a resource for you and can be used in a variety of ways. Each week, you will be provided a series of questions, reflections, and prompts to engage with. You can complete them all in one setting or divide them up throughout the week. Whether you are using it in a group or for your own personal time, we suggest keeping a journal that can be used to respond to the questions each week and for prayers.

Week 1 - The Journey No One Wants

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Let's face it, no one wants to start the journey of forgiveness. We humans tend to avoid pain and discomfort. We'd much prefer feeling comfortable. But God calls us to do things that are tough. One of those tough things is forgiveness. Why does God want us to forgive?

1. Have you ever worked toward something that took effort and focus but you thought it was worth the effort? What was it? How hard did you have to work?
2. What makes your life peaceful? In what ways does forgiveness help make for peace?
3. Read Luke 9:51-53. What journey was Jesus on? What was the destination?
4. How is forgiveness a journey rather than a destination?
5. How does Paul respond to his difficulty in II Cor 12:6-10? How do you think he got to that conclusion?
6. Is weakness bad? What is the connection between weak and vulnerable?
7. Frank Heile, a physicist and software engineer, has said that forgiving is difficult because the human consciousness has a hard time living in the present. Heile states that with language intertwined in the human consciousness, we use it as a time machine to roam in our memories. Does this statement reflect your own experience?
8. How does choosing to forgive force you to live in the present?

Week 2 - Finding Our Way

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The process of forgiving someone is not just a checklist. It is organic and layered. We'll take a look at Joseph and his choice to forgive his brothers to see the dynamics involved.

1. Read Genesis 37:3-11. What reason do Joseph's brothers believe they have to harbor deep resentment for Joseph?
2. Joseph's brothers decide to sell him into slavery and disguise it as a murder for their father. Can you imagine Joseph's feelings about this betrayal? Have you ever experienced a serious betrayal or hurt?
3. Joseph is later falsely accused and put in prison while in Egypt. How does this just compound his likely resentment for his brothers who put him in this situation?
4. Read Genesis 45:1-2. What is the burden of withholding forgiveness on Joseph? How is it displayed? How does assessing the personal cost of withholding forgiveness play a role in deciding to forgive?
5. Read Genesis 45. How is Joseph able to forgive when he finally confronts his brothers (who are justifiably frightened)? What are the things Joseph cares most about? What things are possible because Joseph is put in his position?
6. Read Genesis 50:19-21. How does Joseph see his role, given the power he possesses? Is he to take the place of God? How does looking at the larger picture allow for forgiveness to take place?
7. How does God bring about good things from awful times? How does Joseph see the difference between people's intent and God's intent?
8. Read Luke 23:34. From the cross, Jesus forgives those who are crucifying him. What does he utter in his prayer? Is it easier for you to forgive someone if you realize they may have not had any idea the hurt they were causing or the stakes involved in their actions?

Week 3 - Forgiving Others

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We all know that forgiveness is something that is required of us as followers of Jesus, but have you been inclined to make exceptions for some people? Certainly there are some people who don't "deserve" forgiveness, right? Let's see.

1. Read Matthew 18:21-35. The apostle Peter prompts this teaching by Jesus by asking the question of how many times one should be expected to forgive, offering 7 as a number. What is Jesus's reply? What could have prompted Peter's question in the first place? Is he wondering if there are exceptions based on the number of times someone has hurt another?
2. The story that Jesus tells talks about the relationship between being forgiven and our willingness to forgive others. What is it and what is the point of the story?
3. In the story, God is portrayed as anything but passive. How much investment does God have in our forgiving because we have been forgiven?
4. How easy is it to forget how much we have been forgiven for? Why is that?
5. Read Colossians 3:12-17. How is "clothing ourselves" with the willingness to forgive, along with other traits mentioned, a reflection of being chosen by God? How is our community of believers dependent upon these traits and our willingness to make allowance for other people's faults? What is it we are called to remember that allows us to forgive?
6. What is the guiding principle for all we say and do? How does this help prevent everything just being about us?

Week 4 - Forgiving Ourselves

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We have all made a decision (or, many decisions) that we regret. How do we forgive ourselves so that those choices don't define us?

1. Describe Peter's actions in Luke 22:54-62.
2. How do you think Peter felt? What clue does vs 62 give?
3. Read John 21:15-19. Why do you think Jesus asks Peter these questions? Why 3 times?
4. What was the solution to Peter's regret that Jesus gave him? (see vs 19) What do you think that means? How does Philippians 3:13 relate?
5. Peter responds to Jesus' directive by looking to fellow disciple John and asking about him. What is Jesus's response? How easy is it for you to compare yourself to someone else? Why is that not helpful?
6. Another disciple, Judas, is known for betraying Jesus. His true intent was most likely to prompt Jesus to become the revolutionary messiah that he desired Jesus to be. Things didn't work out the way he wanted. What is Judas's response to his regret told in Matthew 27:3-5?
7. Both disciples betrayed Jesus. Why do you think the two men had such different responses to their actions?
8. What do you think being in relationship/connection with others has to do with the ability to forgive yourself? Does Mark 12:31 give you any clue?

Week 5 Forgiving God

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Have you ever been disappointed with God? Have you ever really been angry with God and didn't think you could ever get over it? This week we'll consider how to move toward forgiving God

1. Read Psalm 22:1-5. What kind of anguish is expressed in the opening verses of this Psalm? Have you ever felt this? How does disappointment with God get translated into a feeling of distance? What movement takes place in these few verses? Why would Jesus choose to utter these words from the cross?
2. How does remembering who God has been in the past help us forgive God in the present?
3. Read John 11:32-37, 40-45. How is Mary's disappointment with Jesus reflected in what she says? How easy is it for us to be angry with God because we don't get specifically what we want, when we want it? Is it possible that sometimes we can't forgive God because we don't know the larger story?
4. Are there times we blame God for things God never instigated? (other people's choices, accidents, natural disasters, our own decisions?)
5. Read Job 30:20-23. Have you ever felt like you have asked God to answer your prayers but didn't hear an answer you could discern? What are the possible reasons we don't sense that God is answering our prayers and petitions?
6. Read Job 42:1-6. Job comes to a realization in his argument with God. What is it? Is it possible that sometimes our anger with God is because of OUR limitations or inability to see a larger picture? Have you ever been really angry with another person who refused to answer when you wanted them to only to find there was a reason you knew nothing about?

NEXT STEPS:

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The purpose of this study isn't to just learn and finish lessons. It is designed to lead us into difficult areas of our lives that prevent us from living abundantly, as Jesus calls us to live. Please take the time to reflect on a) those whom you haven't forgiven...and why, b) ways in which you are angry with God and whether you want to live with that feeling of distance, and c) ways in which you haven't forgiven yourself. What are you holding back? And is it worth the fatigue that comes from the weight you hold on to? Jesus says, "No." Step into the circle of grace and let go of the burden you are carrying.

