Forgiveness Class
Session 1: What is Forgiveness and What is *Not* Forgiveness?
Rev. Dr. Ryan Brodin November 4, 2026

Opening Prayer

Introduction of the Course

Discussion:

1. When you hear the word forgiveness, what words or images immediately come to mind?
2. How would you define forgiveness in your own words?
3. What questions about forgiveness do you hope to have addressed in this class?

Forgiveness is not…

1. Forgive and forget
    a. Forgiveness does not erase history. We don't forget important events in our lives.
    b. Forgiveness does not mean reconciliation of a damaged relationship
    c. Forgiveness is not pretending the offense never occurred
2. Forgiveness is not acquittal
    a. We still pay the price for what we do in life
    b. To be acquitted means they didn't do it (but they did!)
    c. Forgiveness does not mean we have to trust the person again immediately
3. Forgiveness is not pardon
    a. When we are pardoned, there are no consequences for your action
    b. When you are forgiven, the consequences do not go away.
    c. Forgiveness does not excuse or minimize the wrongdoing
4. Forgiveness is not a feeling
    a. We don't have to wait until we feel like we can forgive, wee may never feel that way.
    b. Instead, we forgive even if we don't feel like forgiving
5. Forgiveness is not about the past
    a. Forgiveness is about the present and the future
    b. I can't control the past. There's nothing I can do to change it
    c. I can control the present and the future and how I want to show up in the world
6. Forgiveness is not enabling abuse or continued wrongdoing
    a. The giving of forgiveness is not a reason for someone to hurt you again
    b. If they were truly asking for forgiveness, they also would be admitting they did something wrong and will not do it again

What is Forgiveness?

1. Forgiveness is the conscious decision to release resentment, anger, or the desire for revenge toward someone who has caused harm, while acknowledging that the harm was real.
2. Forgiveness is choosing not to let a past injury continue to control your thoughts, emotions, or actions
3. Forgiveness is often understood as letting go of the burden of bitterness and choosing a different way forward.
4. Forgiveness is giving up the desire to make someone suffer for the pain they caused.
5. Forgiveness is the act of acknowledging a wrong while refusing to be consumed by bitterness.
6. Forgiveness is the act of releasing a person from the debt of resentment we hold against them, entrusting justice to God, and seeking freedom from the power of the offense
7. Forgiveness is releasing a debt you believe another person owes you because of a hurt, offense, or betrayal.
8. Forgiveness is a movement from vengeance to mercy, from retaliation to grace.
9. Forgiveness is an inner act of freedom that loosens the grip of anger and opens the possibility of healing.
10. Forgiveness is seeing the humanity of the offender without denying the reality of the offense.
11. Forgiveness is entrusting justice to God, to the community, or to appropriate processes rather than carrying it alone.
12. Forgiveness is the courageous choice to respond to wrongdoing with a desire for restoration rather than destruction.

Reflection Questions:

1. Why do you think forgiveness is often difficult?
2. Which misconception about forgiveness do you think people struggle with most?
3. Can you forgive someone and still maintain healthy boundaries? Why or why not?
4. Why is forgiveness often confused with reconciliation?
5. How does refusing to forgive affect our spiritual and emotional lives?
6. What prevents people from forgiving?

Forgiveness is an impossible task on our own. So we have to come to God for help in order to receive forgiveness and to give forgiveness. This forgiveness is a gift!

1. What is grace?
2. What is the relationship between grace and forgiveness?

From a Christian perspective, forgiveness reflects God's grace toward humanity. Christian forgiveness seeks the healing of relationships when possible, while still recognizing the need for truth, justice, repentance, and healthy boundaries.

Bible Study:

Psalm 103: 8-12

8 The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
9 He will not always accuse,
nor will he keep his anger forever.
10 He does not deal with us according to our sins
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
11 For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
12 as far as the east is from the west,
so far he removes our transgressions from us.

1. What images or phrases in this psalm help you understand the depth of God's love and forgiveness for us?
2. How does God's willingness to remove our sins "as far as the east is from the west" influence the way we view ourselves?
3. In what ways can God's example of forgiveness inspire us to forgive others?

Matthew 6:12-15

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

1. Why do you think Jesus connects receiving God's forgiveness with forgiving others?
2. How does regularly praying the Lord's Prayer challenge us to examine our relationships?

If you forgive, you know what means to be forgiven. If you don't forgive, you are not able to accept the gift of forgiveness. God is always offering us forgiveness, we have a choice whether or not to accept forgiveness or we can choose to remain in the anger, resentment, jealousy and revenge.

Matthew 18:21-22

Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if my brother or sister sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

1. What do you think Jesus is teaching when he tells Peter to forgive not seven times but seventy-seven times?
2. What situations in life make repeated forgiveness especially challenging, and how might Jesus' words guide us in those moments?
3. How does keeping count of offenses affect our ability to forgive others?

Physical and Emotional Toll of refusing to forgive:

- Unresolved anger, bitterness, and resentment keep the body in a prolonged state of stress.
- Research from the Mayo Clinic indicates that holding grudges is associated with increased anxiety, depression, hostility, and stress, while also contributing to poorer relationships and diminished emotional well-being.
- Conversely, forgiveness has been linked to lower blood pressure, improved heart health, a stronger immune system, and better mental health.
- Johns Hopkins Medicine reports that chronic anger and unforgiveness can trigger a persistent "fight-or-flight" response, affecting heart rate, blood pressure, and immune functioning, and increasing the risk of depression, heart disease, and other health problems.
- People who cling to resentment find themselves trapped in past hurts, unable to fully enjoy the present, while forgiveness brings greater peace, hope, and freedom.

Matthew 11:28-30

Come to me to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

- We carry things around and burden ourselves with anger, resentment, and revenge because we don't really know we can put them down through forgiveness.
- "What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear…Oh what peace we often forfeit; oh, what needless grief we bear."

Luke 23:34

Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

1. What stands out to you about Jesus offering forgiveness to those who are killing him?
2. What does this prayer reveal about the nature of God's love and forgiveness?
3. How might Jesus' example challenge the way we respond when we have been deeply hurt or treated unfairly?

4. Forgiveness is an act of self-love. It is a gift to myself. It is primarily for me that I need to forgive.

Ephesians 4:31-32

Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

1. How can bitterness, anger, and resentment keep us from practicing forgiveness?
2. What connection do you see between kindness, compassion, and forgiveness toward self and others?
3. What does this passage teach us about living in community?

Taken together, the Bible teaches that forgiveness is:

- A response to God's grace.
- A way of life rather than a one-time act.
- Rooted in mercy rather than revenge.
- Essential for healthy relationships and spiritual growth.
- Expressed through reconciliation when possible.
- Extended even to enemies.
- Modeled by Jesus himself on the cross.

Reflection Questions on Biblical Texts:

1. As you look across all six passages, what common themes emerge about the meaning and practice of forgiveness?
2. Which passage speaks most directly to your life right now, and why?
3. What is one relationship, situation, or wound where God may be inviting you to take a step toward forgiveness?

Wrapping up:

What new insights about forgiveness stood out to you today?

Questions? Concerns?

Next Week: Forgiveness from God and Forgiving Ourselves

Closing Prayer