

LIFE Group Leader Handout

February 14, 2016

Why Some Christian Cannot Grow—Part 3: Forgiveness

Pastor Ayars

Scripture—Matthew 18:21-35

[21] Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” [22] Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

[23] “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. [24] When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. [25] And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. [26] So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ [27] And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. [28] But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ [29] So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ [30] He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. [31] When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. [32] Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. [33] And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ [34] And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. [35] So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

Main Idea—To Grow in Grace, We Must Forgive When We Are Wronged

Why can't some Christians grow? God is resisting them. They have pride; they have not chosen humility. To grow in grace:

- We confess our sins to God and others
- We forgive those who have hurt, offended or wronged us.

Why we don't forgive—because we don't want to.

- We want them to know how much they have hurt us—we shut them out
- We want justice—and they deserve punishment
- We don't want them to do it again
- What they did was really wrong
- We don't feel forgiveness

How to Forgive—remember the story of the visiting missionaries

Application—

- Can you share a testimony that affirms the truth of this teaching?
- How is God using this message to bring you freedom from those who have wronged you?

- We believe we cannot forgive

Understanding Forgiveness

- Only the guilty need forgiving
- It is an act of the will—a choice
- Leave retribution to God—Romans 12:17-19 (Overcome evil with good)

If we don't forgive—we lose the ability to enjoy life, we lose sleep, we take our offenses wherever we go.

Motives to forgive:

- Unforgiveness brings our own destruction
- We become the prisoner of the one we will not forgive

ENCOURAGING THE RELUCTANT PRAYER

by Pat J. Sikora

Beth, a woman new to our church, took me aside one Sunday morning. “Pat, I’m excited to be in your new group, but I just wanted to let you know in advance that I don’t pray out loud. Please don’t ask me to and please don’t call on me to pray. I just don’t do that.” Her look and tone of voice told me not to even try to change her mind. It was already set in concrete. I smiled and assured her there was no pressure. I told her I wanted her to be comfortable, and I was sure that she would be fine in the group. Inside, I wasn’t so sure. I wasn’t sure how to handle the situation. I wasn’t even sure that it was a major issue. So I prayed--for her, for me and for the group. I was concerned that if she maintained this stance, it could both affect her growth and the group’s cohesion. It probably wouldn’t be critical in the beginning, but it could eventually create a rift. And I sensed that Beth would miss out on something important.

What would you do? Would you just let it go and hope that eventually the group member would come around? Would you set aside a small group meeting to talk about group prayer?

I realized as I prayed and talked with other leaders that this is not a unique situation. There are several reasons why people don’t pray out loud in a group.

- Some have no experience with it.
- Some find it scary
- Some feel intimidated
- Some people are just naturally shy

Here’s what I did:

- I let everyone know they were under no compulsion to pray out loud. Before the prayer times in my first few meetings, I casually mentioned that I understood that everyone was not comfortable with praying audibly. I affirmed that silent prayers are as effective as audible prayers, but encouraged members to join in as they felt comfortable.
- I encouraged short sentence prayers. Just in case the long-winded prayers of others might intimidate Beth, I encouraged group members to keep prayers brief and to the point, even offering them a sentence to finish, such as “Lord, I thank you for....” (this helped keep the group on time as well!)
- I encouraged conversational prayer. While some people are comfortable praying in King James English, others are terrified of making a mistake or not sounding spiritual enough. So I made sure to model prayers that reflected my honest feelings, that were contemporary and conversational. I found being real was an encouragement.
- I formed smaller groups for prayer. After Beth had become comfortable with the group, we would occasionally break into groups of three for prayer. I would let people choose their own groups or partner Beth with the people she was closest to. I hoped it would be easier for her to break the silence with just a couple of close friends rather than the whole group.
- I avoided going around the circle for prayer. I knew Beth would spend the entire time in terror. Any time it looked as if members were “praying around the circle” my co-leader or I would jump in and upset the pattern.
- I never call on Beth to open or close in prayer. I would ask for volunteers or simply invite someone else to do this.