

SESSION 4

THE REASON FOR FORGIVENESS

Leader pages on pp. 144-147

THE POINT:
GOD LOVES US AND
WANTS TO RESTORE
US FOR HIS GLORY.

ISAIAH 43:1-7,21-25

¹ Now this is what the LORD says — the one who created you, Jacob, and the one who formed you, Israel — “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are mine.

² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and the rivers will not overwhelm you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, and the flame will not burn you.

³ For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, and your Savior. I have given Egypt as a ransom for you, Cush and Seba in your place.

⁴ Because you are precious in my sight and honored, and I love you, I will give people in exchange for you and nations instead of your life.

^{5a} Do not fear, for I am with you;

.....
^{5b} I will bring your descendants from the east, and gather you from the west.

⁶ I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ and to the south, ‘Do not hold them back!’ Bring my sons from far away, and my daughters from the ends of the earth —

⁷ everyone who bears my name and is created for my glory. I have formed them; indeed, I have made them.”

.....
²¹ The people I formed for myself will declare my praise.

²² “But, Jacob, you have not called on me, because, Israel, you have become weary of me.

²³ You have not brought me your sheep for burnt offerings or honored me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with offerings or wearied you with incense.

²⁴ You have not bought me aromatic cane with silver, or satisfied me with the fat of your sacrifices. But you have burdened me with your sins; you have wearied me with your iniquities.

²⁵ **I am the one, I sweep away your transgressions for my own sake and remember your sins no more.**

MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Jacob... Israel (v. 1)– The Lord changed the name of the patriarch Jacob to Israel. All of the descendants of Jacob were known as Israelites, and under the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon the nation was known as Israel. The Lord referred to the two nations as Jacob and Israel, not as Judah and Israel.

Not bought...satisfied me (v. 24)– God cannot be manipulated. While the sacrificial system was an integral part of the worship of God, without a life lived in obedience to God such sacrifices were meaningless (Is. 29:13). Jesus quoted this passage in relation to the scribes and Pharisees of His day.

HOW DOES KNOWING GOD'S CHARACTER HELP BELIEVERS TO FORGIVE?

Children often take on the attributes of their parents. Sometimes the attributes are physical, such as children's facial features being nearly identical to those of their parents. In other cases, children adopt the mannerisms exhibited by their parents. Whether physical or behavioral characteristics are considered, the common denominator is being able to tell that children are like their parents. People even say that some children are the spitting image of their parents.

In a similar way, believers ought to be easily identifiable as being children of God. An important aspect of God's character that believers should model is forgiveness. Whether we struggle with forgiving others or ourselves, we can learn from the example that God sets for us. God's forgiveness is not based on our merit or worthiness, but rather it is based upon His own character. As each one of us grows in our relationship with God, we too should be known for our capacity to extend forgiveness. Part of the beauty of forgiveness is that it allows us to move beyond our sin and into stronger relationships with God and other people. We look like our Father when we forgive as we have been forgiven.

Forgive Out of Love // Isaiah 43:1-5a

At the end of Isaiah 42, the picture looked pretty bleak for the people of Israel. The prophet Isaiah indicated that God had caused the people's troubles by "giving Israel to the plunderers" and pouring out His "furious anger and the power of war on Jacob" (Is. 42:24-25). The Babylonian exile the people faced was thus due to receiving God's punishment for their sinful behavior. God, speaking through the prophet, does not leave His people in this state of despair, however.

Isaiah declares that God still loves and cares about His people. The lesson passage begins by reminding the people of their history: God created the nation of Israel. God had formed this nation of people just as He had created and formed Adam as described in Genesis. This connotes an intimate relationship between God and His people. God specifically chose this flawed, fallible group of people to be His and He cared for them despite the numerous times the Israelites were unfaithful to their covenant with God. Even though the people regularly forgot the importance of this relationship, God never did.



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He redeemed them when they were in trouble, by repeatedly coming to their rescue. God's commitment to His people is not relegated to the past, however. He indicates His continued commitment to the people as they face trials going forward. The people's identity of belonging to God outweighs their guilt from sin. Though God owns all and controls all, He views Israel as special to Him. God forgives the people because of His love and promises to remain with them. The promises to be with the people when they pass through the waters and the rivers would likely remind the people of the stories of how God was with their ancestors.

Just as God had accompanied the people of Israel through the Red Sea in Exodus 14 and through the Jordan River in Joshua 3, so too He will accompany members of the generation hearing the words of Isaiah. God's promise to protect His people when they walk through the fire is exemplified by the story of Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego in the fiery furnace in Daniel 3.

God continually reminds the people of the special concern He has for them. This concern is not because of their merit but is because God has chosen to interact with them in this way. His instructions not to fear are because He is with them. The people are facing exile and the end of the world as they know it, but God says not to fear. As Israel's Savior, God has delivered the people from Egypt, and so they have hope of being delivered from the Babylonian exile. The nations and people mentioned as being given in place of Israel underscore the great lengths to which God is willing to go to preserve His people. God's people truly are precious to Him.

WHY DO YOU THINK GOD STRESSES THE DURATION AND DEPTH OF HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH ISRAEL?

Forgive to Restore Relationships

//Isaiah 43:5b-7

Having reminded the people of the fact that He is with them, God speaks through the prophet to remind them of His commitment that spans generations. God intends to act by bringing the people of Israel together from everywhere the people are dispersed. The book of Daniel talks about the experiences of some exiles living in Babylon, while the book of Esther discusses experiences of God's people exiled in Persia. In both cases, the people's lives are far removed from what they experienced while living in the land that had been promised to their ancestors.

While the people of Israel may feel their situation is hopeless and they will never be able to return home, God offers them assurance that He will gather the people home from wherever they may be. God assures the exiled people, that whether they are displaced



DIGGING DEEPER WE ARE REDEEMED

Speaking to the exiles in Babylon, God says, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you" (Is. 43:1). The idea of redeeming (ga'al in Hebrew) someone or something refers to buying back and is often used in reference to God's miraculous delivery of Israel from Egypt, though humans can also be referred to as redeemers. Boaz acts as a kinsman-redeemer for Ruth and Naomi, allowing their family line to be maintained (Ruth 4:6). In Isaiah, God reminds the exiles of His redeeming power. Christians recognize that Christ is our Redeemer. The apostle Peter reminds believers "for you know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of an unblemished and spotless lamb" (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

What images come to mind when you think of Christ's redeeming sacrifice for you?

in the east, the west, the north, or the south, He is willing and able to bring them back home. Their return will be a complete one, something that only God Himself can accomplish.

While God has said that He will bring the people's descendants back, now He identifies them as His sons and daughters. The value of the people is in their relationship to God because they bear His name and have been created for His glory. The people have not always prioritized this relationship, as they have been blind to their faults and deaf to God's repeated warnings through His prophets and His law that He had given them.

In promising to deliver their descendants, God promises the people a future. Israel would not be wiped out. God would not allow foreign political powers to thwart His will for His people. This must have comforted the exiled people who heard the prophet's words. While foreign powers have appeared to be in control of Israel's destiny, God reminds the people that He alone is in control of their future.

Israel is tied to God and He wants to restore their close relationship. The people are called by God's name, they have been created for His glory, and they have been formed according to His design and plan. Everything God has done for the people is in line with His character. He is loving, compassionate, and slow to anger, as the people's songs of worship have declared. God's restoration of Israel would bring Him glory as other people in the surrounding nations recognize the care and concern, He has for those He loves.

Again, the creation of Israel and the relationship God has with the nation has echoes of the creation story in Genesis and the relationship between God and humanity as a whole that it describes. As God was intimately involved in creating and providing for humanity, so too does He care for Israel in an intimate way. Therefore, God is willing to go to great lengths to forgive and restore His chosen people to Himself.

HOW CAN YOU FOLLOW GOD'S EXAMPLE OF FORGIVENESS TO RESTORE RELATIONSHIPS?



Forgive to Lift Burdens

// Isaiah 43:21-25

Even though God has reminded the people of their history, the focus is on what God will do for them in the future. God speaks to a future reality that seems unimaginable given the people's current predicament. Their exile is due to their failure to worship God alone, but He says that His people that He created to worship Him will do so in the future. Again, God reminds the people that they have a relationship with Him and their reason for being is to declare His praise. The promise that the people of Israel will praise God in the future gives them hope that they will survive their current circumstances and be able to tell the story of how God has sustained them.

This contrasts with the ways the people have behaved during their worship practices in the past, however. The people have not followed the worship instructions God had given them. While the people had not been able to perform their religious ceremonies during the period of exile, the focus may be on their actions before the exile. When they were able to perform sacrifices, their hearts were not in them. Even during the exile, the people's hearts may be far from God as they lament their circumstances. Interestingly, the idea is that God has not burdened the people with the weight of performing sacrifices, but they have burdened God by not honoring Him. The people should be grateful to worship God in light of all He has done for them, but that has not been the case. Unlike the false deities of Israel's neighbors, God does not burden His people. Despite this, the people of Israel may

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be viewing God's standards and commands as being burdens on them, when their disobedience has been a burden on God.

God has remained committed to the people, however. He promises to remove their transgressions, making things as though the people had done no wrong. There is to be no doubt that God forgives and restores His people. God emphatically declares that He alone accomplishes this. The people's sins will be obliterated. He forgives the people for His own name's sake, not because of anything they have done. God's willingness to forgive His people is in keeping with His self-revelation as being compassionate and slow to anger (Ex. 34:6). This certainly lifts the burdens associated with sin from the people. These burdens include the punishments for sin as well as the guilt that disobeying and disappointing God often causes. When God forgives the people, He will not bring their sins to mind anymore. God will choose to remember the people's sins no longer. This serves as a model for believers to follow when seeking to forgive. Choosing not to bring up the wrongs that have been committed can serve to lift the burden of guilt from those who have offended in the past.

WHEN HAVE YOU FELT BURDENS LIFTED AS A GIVER AND RECIPIENT OF FORGIVENESS?

DID YOU KNOW?

There may be times when God's promises do not seem to match what we experience in our given circumstances. This reality does not negate the promises, however. In the lesson passage, God promises the people of Israel that He will be with them and that they will survive their ordeal and give Him praise. Even though the people receive these promises, their exile does not end immediately. The period between promise and fulfillment can be long and agonizing, however. While in a waiting season, believers must remember that God is with us. Problems in life are not evidence of God's absence, but rather are indications that God is at work. God may be chastening us, teaching us, or strengthening us. Seeking God will help us realize which one is occurring.

Biblical Truth: "The Lord is the one who will go before you. He will be with you; He will not leave you or abandon you. Do not be afraid or discouraged" (Deut. 31:8).

How will you remain faithful to God during the waiting seasons of your life?

LIVE IT

Has your appreciation for God's forgiveness enabled you to forgive yourself?

God wants to forgive ALL your sins. And then He wants you to forgive yourself. Record some of your sins on small slips of paper, especially those that most weigh upon you. Take the pieces of paper outside and burn them. Let them trouble you no more, because God has already forgotten them. Since God has forgiven your sins, there is no reason for you not to forgive yourself. Prayerfully, let the past go.

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- **Think about your identity.** Understand that who you are is not bound by what you have done. In Christ, you are a child of God and a new creation.
- **Take stock of your worship.** Think about whether worship has become routine for you. Consider changes to make worship meaningful again, such as sitting in a different section at church or attending another service time.
- **Tell others what God has done.** Declare God's praise to people you know. Remind them that as God forgives us, we can forgive ourselves.

DAILY READINGS

1. SMITTEN BY YOU // ROMANS 2:4

Have you ever had a moment with God, a special moment that you felt was designed just for you? Maybe you noticed something unusual or received an unexpected gift at just the right moment or maybe you just felt seen. In these moments, His love feels almost tangible. It's like God personally reaches out to show us that He's there just because He wants to put a smile on our face. He only sees us, redeemed. Our past doesn't matter. We've been forgiven and cleansed. When we truly understand the sacrifice Jesus affords us, we can't help but want to live more pleasing lives. God is the perfect gentleman. He never makes us do anything

God's love alone draws us to repentance.

2. EXCHANGE, PLEASE // ISAIAH 53:4

Remember that time you said something careless to someone that you wish you could take back? Maybe you did something and apologized but couldn't quite get rid of that pit that settled deep inside. We've all had those moments. We just want it to be over, but that feels easier said than done, especially when the other party may or may not forgive us when we try to make it right. Jesus provides freedom. All we have to do is offer it to Him, repent, and receive His forgiveness and peace. Whether they forgive us or not, it would be a shame to choose to continue to carry something He died to take away.

Some of us have carried burdens for far too long. It's time we chose rest.

3. OFF THE HOOK // MARK 11:25

If you are a resident of earth, then you've likely seen the fallen nature of humanity in action. Sadly, sometimes the biggest offenders are those closest to us, the ones who should have known better, loved us more, protected us. But they didn't. These are often the most painful wounds. The problem isn't that we know we should forgive; it's that forgiveness could feel like they are being

let off the hook. In these moments, we must remember that forgiveness is for us, not them, and it has enough power to free us from any pain inflicted on us. Jesus paid the price with His life. Have you recognized Jesus's blood as greater than your situation?

Give Christ your burdens today, there's room at the cross.

4. A SECOND CHANCE? // 2 CORINTHIANS 5:18

Was there ever someone in your life who was once very dear to you, but something happened that damaged that relationship, and now reconciliation seems impossible? What if you could be close again? What if God wanted to restore the relationship? What seems impossible to us is easy for God. Forgiveness and restoration are available through Jesus. In fact, it was always a part of His plan, a gift from Him to you. Though undeserved, Jesus made it possible to submit even the "hard" requests to God, and as a part of His family, He delights in bringing His perfect will to pass in our lives! Sin doesn't have to separate us from God or each other.

Through Jesus, we can wipe the slate clean and begin again.

5. DEFINE "GOOD" // EPHESIANS 2:8-9

Over the last several years, I've read numerous stories of missionaries who uprooted their life and family and moved across the globe to minister to nations who never received the Gospel. Thousands of nonbelievers have given their lives to Christ as a result. Glory to God! But even this is not enough to get us into heaven. On our best day, nothing we can do can earn us access to heaven. No matter how good, it would never be enough, but Jesus's blood offers grace and covers us so that when God sees us, He sees His Son. Thank God that though we were born into sin, we don't have to stay there.

Now and forever, we are made right by the blood of the Lamb!



As We Forgive: Living the Words of Jesus

DR. MARK CROSTON

Aretha Franklin, “the Queen of Soul,” sings a soulful ballad about relationships, “Willing to Forgive.”² It tells the story of a woman who caught her partner cheating. She details all the evidence she has uncovered about his affair – a picture, perfume, telephone bill and community gossip. She then gives the same mixed message we hear from many other Christians:

Well, I’m willing to forgive you but I can’t forget

*Cause you really, really, really,
really hurt me this time (You really hurt me)*

And I guess I can go on although I must admit

I’ve been busy, busy, busy, busy

*Thinkin that I’m gonna mess around some time.*³

She owns the fact that she has been hurt; she “says” she is offering forgiveness; but at the same time admits she is contemplating getting even. She then spends the remaining three verses of the song ruminating on how much she has done and how faithful she has been, concluding that she may simply give back what she has received.

I certainly sympathize with the brokenness of the woman whose story “the Queen” tells in song. I too have been deeply wounded, likely, all of us have in one way or another. Such wounds are a part of the human experience.

As Christians, we are charged, challenged, and empowered to do more. In Matthew 6:12-14, Jesus instructs His disciples through prayer and says, “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from

the evil one. “For if you forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well.” There are a few great truths we can learn here.

The first is that **forgiveness is reciprocal**. Verse 12 shows there is a dual nature to forgiveness. It says, “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” The forgiveness we need to receive is coupled with the forgiveness we are willing to give. No wonder the woman in the song seems so tied up in knots. She is only “willing” to forgive. She has not actually forgiven! Her lips say one thing, her heart something else. She is stuck. Maybe that’s why this verse uses the word “debt.” Whether financial or emotional, debt is a weight that holds us back and keeps us down. Our reluctance to forgive is sinful and it causes the weight of the things we ourselves need to be forgiven to continually grow.

All the Gospel writers agree. Mark 11:25 affirms, “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you your wrongdoing.” Luke 6:37 warns, “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”

The second truth is that **forgiveness sets us free**. Matthew 6:13 says, “And do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” This is a reminder that the debt of unforgiveness binds us up and can drag us down. The woman in the song can’t stop reflecting on how she has been offended and at the end of her internal debates she is considering plunging herself into sin, thinking it will make she and her partner even and ease her pain, but it will actually do neither.

The word forgiveness is the Greek word *aphiemi*. It means “to send forth or send away.”⁴ So, to forgive is to set free; to let go; to release; to discharge; or liberate completely. We can’t be free until we have set the offending party free.

Are there places you don’t go anymore; people you don’t want to see; or pleasures you deny yourself simply because something went wrong in the past? Forgive those who have offended you. Seek the forgiveness of those you have offended. Forgive yourself so you won’t be tied up in knots ---- and be set free!

God’s forgiveness is always ours for the asking. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Relinquishing the sin of unforgiveness opens our lives to **fully forgive and fully receive forgiveness**. Too many people never get free because we never decide to forgive. Yes, I said, “decide.” There is no need to wait. We don’t need a word to forgive. We don’t need time to get over our feelings to forgive. We don’t even need the perpetrator to feel sorry to forgive. We simply need to make a decision and then act on it. This is being a Christian. Remember, the gospel is not just for memorizing, quoting, meditating, enjoying or knowing; the gospel is first and foremost for living.

I know, some of you are thinking right now, it’s not just a decision and we do have to see remorse in the offender. Well, can I talk about Jesus? Luke 23:34 is the first word from the cross. Jesus has just been whipped, stripped, nailed, crowned, mocked, and pierced. “Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing’. And they divided his clothes and cast lots.” No time had passed. They had not apologized. Just like Jesus decided to die, He decided to forgive!

Whatever is in your past – Whatever you have done or has been done to you – the devil may keep throwing it up in your face. Whatever it is, you need to know that God saw the whole thing. He has seen your whole life. He wants you to know that He loves you and that forgiveness is yours for the asking and yours for the giving. Ephesians 4:32 encourages us, “And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ.”

Allow the song, “Lord Help me to Forgive,” sung by Linda McCrary, to become your prayer and find strength to live the words of Jesus:

*Lord, help me to forgive, as I have been forgiven. Lord, help me to forget sorrow and pain, help me to forgive, Clothe me in your mercy, Lord, fill me with your grace. When peace like a river, flows through me, Lord I can forgive.*⁵

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