

STEP OF MANASSEH

WEEK 12

MANASSEH - מְנַשֶּׁה

“Forgetting”

THE WEAKNESS WE ARE STRENGTHENING

Many Christians are struggling with bitterness and hurt. They need to be free of this to move into full spiritual strength!

FOCUS

Forgiveness.

KEY VERSE

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.
(Matthew 6:14)

KEY POINTS

- Forgiveness is a legal transaction, NOT an emotion or feeling.
- Name to God the people who hurt you and how they affected you.
- Then ask God to “not hold them accountable.” This is dismissing the charges.
- Forgiving this way is the will of God for us.
- Forgiving does not mean forgetting. Remembering what took place in order to not repeat the same situation is wisdom.

The Step of Manasseh is about learning how to truly forgive.

ICE BREAKER

What is your biggest pet peeve in life?

GROUP DISCUSSION

1.) **READ** the following passage:

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

"At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

"But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

"His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.'

"But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

"Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

*"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."
(Matthew 18:21-35)*

We often think of forgiveness as an emotional release of a grudge, but in the parable above, Jesus is equating a sin against someone with the creation of a legal debt.

Many Christians feel they have forgiven everyone in their life because they let things go easily, or they don't tend to hold grudges. But ignoring slights or releasing grudges are really just forms of extending grace. True forgiveness is a bigger thing. **It is to *legally* cancel a debt before a judge.**

Other Christians realize they have people in their life they should forgive, but can't bring themselves to do it because the injury is too large.

2.) *Do you struggle with forgiveness? Is there anyone in particular you've struggled to forgive?*

3.) *Have you ever thought you forgave someone only to realize later you were still holding onto hurt and bitterness?*

Many times, Christians think they have forgiven someone, but then they get surprised when that person's name comes up and they realize they still feel a tension, an uneasiness about that name. They don't want to think about the person at all. They believe they are not holding grudges, but they don't have a peace whenever that person is in their thoughts.

Joseph was the second-to-last son of Jacob (who was later renamed Israel by God.) His last son's name was Benjamin. Yet, we are not going to get to Benjamin for another two lessons.

The reason is that Jacob loved Joseph so much that at the end of his life, he blessed Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim and raised them each up to full Tribe level, giving Joseph a double inheritance portion in Israel. (Genesis 48:8-21)

And it "happens" to be that the meanings of the names of the sons of Joseph correspond very well with two important steps on the Path2Strength!

The TWELFTH Step in the Path 2 Strength is the **STEP OF MANASSEH.**

The name Manasseh means "forgetting," and on the Path 2 Strength, we connect it with Forgiveness.

This may sound like an unusual lesson to include at this juncture, but Path2Hope has observed that a deeper understanding and practice of forgiveness is necessary for a believer to move into Strength, and we believe this is actually the perfect place for it in the order of the steps.

All Christians know forgiveness is a big part of Christianity. Of course, the focus is usually much more on our personal forgiveness through the Blood of Christ, and less on forgiving others.

Nevertheless, most Christians understand forgiving others was very important to Jesus, and they make an effort to do it. After all, Jesus said:

*For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.
(Matthew 6:14)*

Clearly, this is an important lesson. *Yet, most Christians think of forgiveness as an emotion.*

Let's repeat that: Most Christians think forgiveness is an emotion.

They try to let go of the feeling of being hurt or offended, they try to give grace. But then, when they remember past events and suddenly experience bouts of bitterness again, they beat themselves up, saying, "What? I thought I forgave them! I will have to forgive them again. Or maybe I will just have to keep forgiving them over and over again in my heart."

Others struggle to forgive because they aren't emotionally "ready" to forgive. The hurt is too great.

Both problems are because we are wrongly treating forgiveness like an emotion or a feeling.

***Forgiveness is a legal transaction.
It is to legally forgive a debt before a judge.***

Years ago, God took the Executive Director of Path2Hope, Zack Mason, on a very interesting journey of forgiveness.

Listen to his story:

I was headed to weekend spiritual retreat as part of a ministry training program I was a part of. I was supposed to spend the weekend in a cabin, alone with God in prayer, and I wasn't even supposed to bring my own agenda to pray about. I was supposed to just listen for God and ask Him what He wanted to talk about.

Frankly, it was a pretty intimidating concept, but I agreed to do it. Right after I began the drive to the cabin, I told God, "Okay, I'm all yours."

*To my great shock, He **immediately** began speaking to me very clearly. And what He wanted to talk about was even more surprising.*

He began pressing me to call out loud to Him the name of every single person who had ever hurt me in order from my elementary school years to the present. And He not only wanted me to call out their names, He also wanted me to name the charges, meaning He wanted me to tell Him what they had done to me, as well as express to Him how it had made me feel.

It was like He was the judge, and I was pressing charges in His court.

*In that moment, he made me understand that **He had not forgotten any of these things**. He had not forgotten what these people had done to me, and He was not letting what they had done go, even if I had stopped thinking about it.*

This greatly surprised me. I think I had this impression, like I think most Christians feel, that God just wants us to go around letting stuff go and not be hurt by anything. Subconsciously, I'd been believing that He would say I was out of line if I treated any sins against me as being serious. I realized this had hurt my understanding of His love for me. Feeling like He just wanted me to let everything go all the time, subtly made me feel like He didn't care about me.

Realizing that He hadn't forgotten anything and that He intended to "prosecute" everyone who'd hurt me greatly magnified my appreciation of His love for me.

Nevertheless, I knew I had sinned against other people, and that He had canceled my debt through the payment of the Blood of Christ. Because I had benefited in this way, I understood that He wanted me extend the same benefit to others. He wanted me to say to Him, "Father, please don't hold them accountable for what they did to me."

It was a legal transaction. He was asking if I was willing to "dismiss the charges" in a final way, never to be brought up again, so He wouldn't have to "prosecute" them.

I also understood that if I didn't say that to Him, then He was absolutely going to hold them accountable for whatever they'd done. Without me dismissing the charges in a formal way, He as the perfect judge, would execute judgment.

It meant if the person were not a follower in Christ, then what they had done to me was going to be part of what sent them to hell.

And if they were a Christian, then because their sins had all been paid for by the work of Christ on the Cross, then what they had done to me was going to be part of the sin burden Jesus carried on the cross.

Understanding this, I knew I didn't want to be part of the reason someone went to hell. I figured if someone went to hell for whatever else they had done to God or other people, so be it, but don't let them go to hell because of me.

*And I DEFINITELY did not want to add to the sin burden on Jesus on the cross in any way. I felt like if I would ask God to "dismiss the charges" through formal forgiveness, then in a very tiny way, I could lift a little bit of the sin burden off of Jesus. **I definitely wanted to do that.***

So, as I did this, running through one name after the other, every time I said to God, "Father, please don't hold so-and-so accountable for what they did to me," I literally felt a physical knot release in my back!

The crazy thing is, I thought I had forgiven all of these people already. I had already made a big effort to forgive people emotionally. But God showed me that I was still holding onto those things as "offenses" even if I thought I'd forgiven them.

The only way to truly forgive someone and fully release it was to formally and legally ask the Judge to dismiss the charges. This is very different from just trying to "not feel angry or hurt anymore."

It took me almost two hours to go through everyone, and the process was unexpectedly exhausting. When I finally got to the cabin, I was so tired I crashed and slept for three hours.

I have repeated this process several times since then whenever I am hurt again by others. Every time, I have found that this process brings me great peace.

For example, a few years ago, a group of three people betrayed me in a very hurtful and lasting way. Since then, whenever I would think of their names, I would immediately begin to feel uneasy, tense, and upset.

Then, God reminded me of what I needed to do. He said, "Zack, isn't it time you did the process with them?" I said, "Yes, okay I guess." (Thinking maybe I wasn't ready but was willing to try.)

I did, and the next day, when I thought about their names, for the first time I no longer felt tense or uneasy. Their names meant nothing to me anymore and I had a tremendous sense of peace.

I cannot recommend enough that every believer learn to treat forgiveness as a legal transaction between them and God like this. The benefits are enormous and wonderful.

4.) Does the story change your understanding of forgiveness? If so, how?

The exercise Zack described is very powerful. Rather than try to “feel” forgiveness for someone while you’re hurt, it allows the believer to directly communicate with God and allow Him to do His job as judge.

Calling out to God the name of someone who has hurt you and telling Him what they did to you is like declaring the charges to the Judge. Explaining how it made you feel is bearing witness to the Judge of the impact of these offenses on you.

Asking Him to “not hold them accountable” is essentially asking the Judge to dismiss the charges. Only you have the legal authority to do that. Otherwise, the Judge will hold them accountable, either by having them pay the penalty personally, or by Jesus paying it for them.

God would not be the perfect judge if He just canceled everyone’s debts against you without your permission. If you don’t cancel the debt, the debt remains. It must be paid by that person, or by Jesus Himself if He has agreed to pay their debts for them.

NOTE: This does not mean a person could somehow escape the need to be saved through the Blood of Christ. Even if you and everyone else theoretically forgave a person their sins, everyone has also sinned against God Himself, and He requires the Blood of Christ as payment for those debts.

Jesus teaches us is that if we wish to be shown mercy, we must show mercy to others.

Here are some important points to remember:

Forgiveness is a legal transaction. We must ask God to dismiss the charges.

Dropping the charges against someone doesn’t mean forgetting. If you let someone borrow your car and they steal it, you don’t let them borrow it again even if you’ve forgiven them. That is just wisdom.

Don’t attempt this Forgiveness Exercise with your biggest hurts first. Start with smaller injuries, people that didn’t hurt you that badly. Those will be easier and as you experience healing and freedom from those, it will encourage you to keep going and trust God with the larger ones.

Much healing should follow.

The Step of Manasseh is about learning to truly forgive.

