

CARING



NEW BEGINNINGS THROUGH FORGIVENESS

A SCRIPTURE STUDY FROM *CARING*

HARRYETTE O'BRIEN, CAPTAIN





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INTRODUCTION



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“A new year, a new you.”

Typically, this phrase is associated with the celebration of the new year. Happy 2020, friends! Along with most people out there, I am sure you have made some resolutions to be better, do something better, to start something or to end something. Resolutions are the goals we make.

Let this be a year of new beginnings! 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”*

When you accept Christ into your heart and decide to follow Jesus, he has made you a new person. Your slate has been washed clean, and you get to start over. Sure, there may still be consequences to deal with, and logistics to figure out, but you are a new person—stand firm on that promise.

Part of this equation is the need to forgive—to find new beginnings through forgiveness of others, of God, of ourselves—and then finding the will to move forward. In this study, we’ll look deeper at all four.

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PART 1: FORGIVING OTHERS



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One of the things that holds us back from embracing new beginnings is the grip we have on those people and situations that have hurt us. Without totally forgiving others, we cannot live fully into that new creation title we have received.

In the book of Matthew, there is a conversation recorded between Jesus and Peter. Peter asks Jesus how many times he is expected to forgive his brother when he harms him. Jesus says, “...not seven times, but 70 times seven!” (18:22). Jesus was telling Peter that the point of forgiveness was not to keep track of the number, but to forgive freely. Don’t be focused on keeping score.

In Genesis 37-50, we read a story about a man named Joseph. If there was anyone in the Bible who was done dirty by those he loved, it was Joseph. Poor Joseph was hurt time after time, yet at the end of the day, he forgave—repeatedly.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Read what Scripture says about Joseph’s situations in:

- Genesis 37, when he was sold into slavery by his brothers.
- Genesis 39, when he was purchased by Potiphar and then Potiphar’s wife had Joseph thrown into jail for false sexual assault allegations.
- Genesis 40, when he interprets the dreams of the cupbearer and baker while in jail, which gains the attention of the guards.
- Genesis 41:1-40, when he interprets Pharaoh’s dreams.
- Genesis 41:41-57, when he was made second in command of Egypt.
- Genesis 42-50, when he was reunited with his brothers and father after a mass famine.

BEYOND THE SURFACE

Joseph’s life was not perfect. He lived a roller coaster of extreme highs and even lower lows. As you read the story of Joseph, you will see that through it all, God was with him. When family and friends abandoned him, God stayed with him and allowed him to prosper. When others around him

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were confused and needed help, God provided Joseph with wisdom and guidance.

Joseph could have reacted with anger, judgment and resentment in all situations—and you might even say he would be justified in doing so—but he didn't. He began every reaction with forgiveness and glory to God.

BETWEEN THE LINES

As you think about forgiving others as Joseph did, consider these reflection questions: Have you ever been accused of something you didn't do? How did it make you feel?

1. What are some ways you identify with Joseph?
2. Think back to a time when you withheld forgiveness. What was the situation?
3. After reading Joseph's story, would you react differently?
4. Has there been a time in your life when someone hurt you desperately—be it abuse, an affair, being left to be a single parent, and so on? How did you react?
5. What got you through those emotions and feelings?

In Jesus, you are a new creation. Let go of those people and situations that have hurt you. Forgive them, just as Jesus has forgiven you, and move on. Forgiving someone does not justify or excuse the behavior or action. The act of forgiveness is not so much for them, as it is for you. As you finish this study, I pray you find the strength, wisdom and courage to forgive others. Enter 2020 with the confidence that God is with you.

CLOSING PRAYER

"Dear God, Forgiveness is hard. On my own, I am unable to do this. I want to be like you. I want to embrace the title of New Creation that you have given me, but my grip on the past is too strong. I pray that your Holy Spirit would help me through this. I ask that you walk beside me and give me divine strength to see past the hurt and pain caused by others. I want to be free. I want my heart to only have room for you, and not the grudges I hold onto. Amen."

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WEEK 2: FORGIVING GOD AND ACKNOWLEDGING HIS GOODNESS



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In part 1, we explored embracing new beginnings by forgiving others. Another part of the equation is to forgive God. Just like forgiving others is more for us than them, forgiving God is necessary for us to move forward. God does not need or desire our forgiveness. He has done nothing to us to need forgiving.

The act of “forgiving” God and acknowledging his goodness is for us to align ourselves back to him. Psalm 61:2 says, *“From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”*

God is that rock, our foundation, that steadies us in times of trouble. As pain, hurt, anger and sorrow surround us and cause our feet to be unsteady, we need to plant them in the truth of God’s promises to us.

The Bible does not tell us that life as a Christian will be easy. There are no promises of a carefree existence that is devoid of troubles, hardships, or difficulties. In fact, in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, he says, *“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for, in the same way, they persecuted the prophets who were before you”* (Matt. 5:11-12).

When bad, devastating or frustrating things happen to you, they are not God’s fault. You are not being punished for something. God is not holding anything back from you.

In the Bible, there is a guy named Job, who is introduced in the book that bears his name. From the text, we can gather that he is successful, popular, friendly, well known and respected. He has a family, lots of wealth and a strong faith in God.

In chapter one of the book of Job, we read that God and Satan have a conversation about the attitudes of those who professed to love God. Satan said the only reason a man named Job worshipped God and loved him

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was that God blessed him. God allowed Satan to test Job multiple times. God knew that it wasn't the blessings Job received that positioned him to worship, but his heart.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Read what Scripture says about Job's tests and responses in:

- Job 1, when he lost his animals, property, servants, sons and daughters.
- Job 2, when he contracted a skin disease that caused painful sores from the bottoms of his feet to the top of his head.
- Job 3-32, when he received advice from friends.
- Job 38-42, when he had a conversation with God.

BEYOND THE SURFACE

After every test and conversation, when Job could have lamented, screamed and cursed God, he answered, *"Naked, I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised"* (Job 1:21).

Job's life was one of those theme park roller coasters that have three loopy-loops, go upside-down and invoke nausea. However, instead of screaming about wanting to get off the ride, Job held on tight to the God he knew loved him.

It is easy to praise God when we are on the mountaintop and everything is going smoothly—when your marriage is like the ending of a RomCom, when your children don't argue but choose to play together, when you get that raise and promotion at work, or when the cancer is cured. It is an entirely different scenario when you are crying out in agony in the valley—when your marriage is in shambles, your children fight all the time, you are overlooked (again) for that promotion, or the treatment didn't work.

Friends, bad things happen to everyone. As humans, we are not



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privity to understanding God's ways. Only God knew the depth of Job's suffering.

BETWEEN THE LINES

As you think about forgiving God and acknowledging his goodness as Job did, consider these reflection questions:

1. What are the valleys you have experienced in your life?
How have you reacted to God?
2. What can you learn from Job's reactions to the situations that you can apply in your life today?
3. What is something that you need to let go of? Is there tension between you and God because you think you are being punished?

CLOSING PRAYER

"Dear God, I am sorry. I have been holding onto this pain for so long that it feels more like an old friend than unnecessary baggage. My heart aches for _____ (insert situation). For so long, I blamed you. I thought you were holding out on me or punishing me. I thought there was some lesson that I was supposed to be learning. I know now, that is a lie from Satan. Please forgive me and take this pain away. Just like Job, I pray that at the end of the day, I can say, 'May the name of the Lord be praised.' Amen."

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PART 3: FORGIVING YOURSELF



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So far, we've explored our embracing of new beginnings by forgiving others (part 1) and forgiving God (part 2). Many of us are champions of forgiving others, but when it comes to extending that forgiveness to ourselves, we fall short. When you ask God to forgive your sins, he is faithful to do so. Psalm 103:12 says, *"As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."*

If the creator of the universe, the Alpha and Omega, can forgive you of your mistakes, surely you can forgive yourself. God did not create you so you could realize your sin, and then sulk in that valley until you are called home to Heaven.

Jesus tells us, *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full"* (John 10:10).

Satan is the thief that tries to convince you every day that you are not worthy of forgiveness. Stop listening to that garbage. Accept your failure, seek forgiveness from God, forgive yourself and then move on. You are loved.

Arguably, one of the greatest leaders in the Bible is King David. He is known as a shepherd boy, giant killer, artist, poet, leader and king. He is even an ancestor of Jesus! Yet even with all that glory behind him, he was not perfect. David made terrible decisions in his life and then tried to cover those decisions up instead of facing his consequences. It wasn't until David's friend Nathan called out his sin and helped him to see that he needed forgiveness that David was truly free.

David knew right from wrong. He had studied Scripture, and the Lord was with him through every aspect of his life. However, he still managed to royally mess up. After coming face-to-face with his sin with Bathsheba and the events that followed, David wrote Psalm 51.

Woven within the words and phrases of Psalm 51 is David's lament to God. He was genuinely sorry for what he had done, and he chose to express those feelings through song. David had complete faith in the never-ending forgiveness and grace of God.

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The prayer to God was also a way for him to forgive himself. David knew better, but he chose to succumb to his sin. For David to move on, he had to forgive himself. *“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me”* (Ps. 51:10).

In Acts 13, God refers to David as *“a man after my own heart.”* God gives this title to David even though he knows all the sins and anguish David will commit. God saw past the sinful acts and looked at David’s heart.

God’s love for David—and for you—is overwhelming. God showed his true character by forgiving David—even when David struggled to forgive himself. God set the example of forgiveness for us to follow. This example is meant for us to exercise on ourselves as well as others. Forgive yourselves, friends, because God forgave you the moment your heart cried out to him.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Read what Scripture says about King David’s downward spiral to forgiveness in:

- 2 Samuel 11:1-5, with David and Bathsheba.
- 2 Samuel 11:6-11, when David tries to cover up his sin the first time.
- 2 Samuel 11:12-13, when David tries to cover up his sin for the second time.
- 2 Samuel 11:14-27, when David has Uriah murdered and covered up.
- 2 Samuel 12:1-13, when Nathan speaks truth to David.
- 2 Samuel 12:14-31, when David and Bathsheba’s son dies.
- Psalm 51, when David laments to the Lord.

BETWEEN THE LINES

As you think about forgiving yourself as King David struggled to do, consider these reflection questions:

1. What sin(s) do you need to forgive yourself for?
2. How does Psalm 51 fit into your life?
3. Why do you think it is so hard to forgive yourself?

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CLOSING PRAYER

“Dear God, Thank you for forgiving my sin when I call out to you. I pray that you would help me learn to forgive myself. I put higher expectations and standards on myself than I put on others. Often, I fall short of those standards. As I am reminded of my failures and shortcomings, I pray that you would help me to forgive myself. Please look into my heart and fill it with your Holy Spirit. Amen.”

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PART 4: MOVING FORWARD



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In this study, we've covered how to embrace new beginnings by forgiving others (part 1), forgiving God (part 2) and forgiving ourselves (part 3). Now, after experiencing that forgiveness, it's time to explore how to move forward.

2 Corinthians 5:17 says, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"* Friends, in Christ, you are free! You are no longer held back by old habits, lifestyles or sins. You have been made new; now, it is time to own that. Stepping into change can be hard, especially if you are abandoning a lifestyle that you have become accustomed to.

Few people like change, and that's OK. One of the primary motivators for people's uneasiness toward change is fear. Fear can be crippling and debilitating. Fear can stop dreams from becoming a reality, stifle growth and silence hope.

2 Timothy 1:7 says, *"For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love and self-discipline."* Shut down those feelings of fear and apprehension about moving forward and embrace who God has created you to be.

There is a story in the Bible about a woman who embraced fully what God had created her to be, even though society told her she had no right to do so. In John 4, we read about a conversation between Jesus and a Samaritan woman. We don't know her name, but we have her story to learn from.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Read what Scripture says in a life-changing conversation:

- John 4:1-15, when Jesus offers the Samaritan woman living water.
- John 4:16-18, when Jesus calls out the Samaritan woman's past.
- John 4:19-26, when the Samaritan woman accepts Jesus' truth.
- John 4:39-42, when the Samaritan woman introduces her town to Jesus.

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BEYOND THE SURFACE

Friends, Jesus didn't call the Samaritan woman out in a negative way to make her feel bad for her past. He was pointing out that he knew what she had done, and yet he still offered her that living water. He knew everything, but that didn't stop him from telling her to move forward with her life. He encouraged her to change her ways and then start living.

For numerous reasons, this conversation was extraordinary. The Samaritan woman had so many cards stacked against her. She was a Samaritan, she was a woman and she was known to be living in sin.

Men like Jesus, respectable men, were not seen talking to such people in public. Yet Jesus wasn't concerned with how society viewed the Samaritan woman. His primary concern that afternoon was telling the woman that God loved her, she was forgiven and to encourage her to go and live faithfully.

The woman not only listened to the words from Jesus, but she acted on them. "Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony" (John 4:39).

After receiving the life-giving message from Jesus, she ran into the very town that she was trying to stay away from, to the various people she was trying to avoid, telling them about a man who could offer more than they could ever imagine. About a man who could free them and provide eternal life.

Jesus knew the Samaritan woman was lost. He sought her where she was, showed her a different way and encouraged her to move forward. She was no longer bound by the sins of her past, her lifestyle or the gossip spoken about her. She was free in Christ, free to move forward into the woman God had created her to be.

The freedom that Jesus offered the Samaritan woman is the same freedom he provides you and me. A few months back, I was helping my daughter with her math homework (a tough task for both of us). After a while, she

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finally understood the concept we were going over. After tears, frustrations and exhaustion, I looked at her and said, “How was that, sister?” She replied, “It was hard, mom.”

With all the courage I could muster up, I took her in my arms, held her close, looked her in the eyes and responded, “My sweet girl, you can do hard things.” I made her repeat that phrase a few times so that it would sink in.

My sweet friends, you can do hard things. Let go of the past that is holding you back. In this New Year, step into who God created you to be by moving forward. I’m praying for you and cheering you on!

BETWEEN THE LINES

As you think about moving forward as the Samaritan woman did, consider these reflection questions:

1. What is the biggest “thing” holding you back from moving forward?
2. As you read the story about the Samaritan woman, did you see any similarities in your account?
3. If Jesus were to sit next to you today and have a similar conversation, how would you respond?

CLOSING PRAYER

“Dear God, Thank you for reminding me that I am enough. Thank you for not only forgiving me when I come to you but for encouraging me to go and live life to the fullest. When I get lost, thank you for finding me. I pray that you give me the courage and strength to move forward. To embrace this beautiful world that you have created and to enjoy life. Thank you for your unfailing, relentless love. Amen.”

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