

WC ENCOUNTER GROUPS CURRICULUM
WEEK TWO: COMPASSION & FORGIVENESS
MERCY



Mercy: Compassion & Forgiveness

OPENING PRAYER (The Lord's Prayer):

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth, as it is in
heaven. Give us this day our daily bread;
And forgive us our debts, as we have also forgiven our
debtors; And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from
evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever
and ever. Amen.

ENCOUNTERING GOD:

How have you seen God at work in your life this week?
What good have you done this week?

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WEEKLY SCRIPTURE READING:

Read 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.”

REFLECTION:

In last week's discussion guide, I shared a story about being pulled over by a policeman for speeding. I was guilty and I deserved a ticket. However, the policeman showed me mercy. He gave me a warning rather than a speeding ticket. Therefore, I did not have to pay the cost for missing the mark. We sin when we break God's law. When we fail to love God with our entire being and fail to love our neighbor as ourselves, we sin and deserve punishment. Yet, God gives us mercy instead.

What is debt?

In our scripture lesson, sin is a debt owed to God. Sin is a debt that humanity cannot afford to pay. None of us are perfect. We all miss the mark in one way or another. Therefore, everyone who comes before God in prayer is guilty and needs forgiveness.

Who pays our debts?

God sent the Son, Jesus, who died on a Roman cross for our sins. A petition for a pardon did not precede the sending of God's Son nor was it even necessary. God took the divine initiative. Jesus' sacrificial act on the cross atoned for our sins. Jesus took the punishment that we deserved. Jesus made a pardon available to all of humanity. When we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we accept the pardon by responding to the grace of God.

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at work in our hearts. By entering this new relationship as forgiven people, it calls for and makes possible forgiveness of others. Just as God took the Divine initiative in our forgiveness, we do not need to wait for the other party to ask for forgiveness. We should forgive even when the other party believes they owe us nothing. Releasing people from the debt that they owe us does not mean continuing to give them our time, money, or hearts. Once people have demonstrated that they are not trustworthy, we should not place ourselves in a position to be further harmed or abused. Implicit in the command to love our neighbors is the command to love ourselves. Sometimes, the best thing we can do is love people from a distance. In some cases, trust can be restored over time. So, don't hold grudges and don't delight in thoughts of revenge or wishing the worst on them. Treat them with respect and kindness.

When a person cuts me off in traffic or tailgates me, the proper response is not the middle-finger-salute or to yell profane-laced insults. The proper response is to forgive, which means releasing them from what I believe they owe me—an apology. I need to own the fact that I am not going to get an apology from a person in a car moving at speeds exceeding 60 miles per hour. I need to remember the time when the police officer gave me a warning rather than a ticket and show others the same measure of grace and mercy. The same is true for every area of our lives. I am not advocating behavioral adjustment through self-help exercises. We alone are not strong enough and we do not possess enough will-power to forgive in the radical way that Jesus calls us to forgive. We must lay claim and operate in the power of the Holy Spirit. The activity of the Holy Spirit is the grace of God at work in and through us. Prayer is a powerful tool in helping us utilize the power of the Holy Spirit. Through prayer, we ask for forgiveness, thus recognizing our own sinfulness. We ask God to move in our hearts to show compassion and to forgive those who have wronged us.

GROUP REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Connect Heads:

Define forgiveness in your own words.

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What are debts?

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How do we create disciplines of forgiveness?

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Connect Hearts:

Why do we feel entitled to keep grudges?

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Share a time when you were forgiven for a wrong you had committed. What did you learn about the person who forgave you? What did you learn about yourself? What did you learn about God?

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GROUP REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Share a time when you forgave someone for a wrong that had been committed against you or a loved one. What did you learn about yourself? The other person? God?

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Connect Hands/ Homework:

Write down a list of wrongs that have been committed against you and the names of the people who have committed those wrongs.

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Have you forgiven those people? If not, commit to praying for those people until you are ready to forgive them.

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PRAISE AND PRAYER REQUESTS

Encounter The Hands:

Please go around the group and have each person share a praise for this week and a prayer request/concern.

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CLOSING PRAYER

Have a volunteer lead closing prayer: asking for prayer concerns and lifting up the needs of the group.

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DAILY REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

We encourage everyone to do a daily reflection. This can be done alone, as a couple, or with your family. This spiritual practice will help answer the questions you have and it will improve your ability to see where God is at work in your life, and in the lives of those around you. Please answer the following questions during your personal devotional time at the end of the day.

Where have you seen God today? For the children, we say, “what made you happy today?”

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What broke your heart or made you sad today?

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What good thing did you do for someone else today?

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What are you thankful for today?

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