Week 4

Forgiveness

"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have
against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."
Colossians 3:13

When someone does something that hurts you, how do you typically react? Do you yell at the other person? Do you seek revenge and try to hurt that person in return? Do you demand that the other person pay for what they've done? Do you tell other people about how unkind that person who hurt you is?

Most of us want to do all of these things. But Colossians 3:13 gives us a completely different way to respond to people who hurt us: We should follow Jesus' example and forgive them. After all, if Jesus was willing to forgive us of our sins, then shouldn't we be willing to forgive others as well?

If you've ever tried to learn to play an instrument, to learn another language, to play a sport, or to learn how to do something new, you know that it usually takes a lot of commitment and practice to keep getting better at that activity. In the same way, becoming a forgiving person is also a big commitment and takes a lot of practice. Fortunately, every conflict and every disagreement we have is another chance for us to practice becoming more forgiving people!

Here are some important points about forgiveness that we need to keep in mind:

- **Forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling.** It's a choice to let go of the hurt that somebody caused you. And as we saw in last week's devotional reading, you don't have to wait for an apology before you forgive.

- **Forgiveness is an ongoing process.** Just because you choose to forgive someone doesn't mean that you will immediately feel better about what happened, and it doesn't guarantee that the person won't hurt you again. In Matthew 18:21-22 Jesus taught His disciples that we may need to be ready to forgive multiple times. (Just think about how many times God has forgiven you!)

- **Forgiveness is not the same thing as forgetting.** Forgiveness doesn't mean acting as if the person never hurt you, but it does mean not holding that person's sin against them anymore. 1 Corinthians 13:5 says that love keeps no record of wrongs.

- **Forgiveness is a gift.** Have you ever noticed that the word *give* is part of the word *forgive*? Forgiveness is an incredible gift from God that we have received, and it is an incredible gift that we can offer to others as well.

Remember that whenever you forgive others, you are showing the whole world that God has forgiven you.

Do

- Choosing to not forgive others is like carrying a big weight around with us. It's a burden that you put on other people, and it's a burden to carry around yourself. To help teach this concept to your kids, place a backpack on someone's back. Start adding different items (e.g., books or soup cans) to the backpack in order to make it heavier. As you do, talk about how the extra weight is like carrying around unforgiveness in our hearts. Then gradually begin to remove weight and talk about the freedom we begin to experience as we choose to forgive those who hurt us. (If you don't have a backpack available, you can use a shopping bag or suitcase.)

- Jesus said that we are to be willing to forgive others "seventy times seven" in response to Peter's question about how many times we should forgive someone who sins against us. To reinforce the idea of "70 x 7" forgiveness, choose a task that each member of the family needs to do 490 times (e.g., take 490 steps, do 490 jumping jacks, draw 490 smiley faces, etc.). Discuss afterwards that, while Jesus was not actually limiting forgiveness to 490 times, He wanted to get across the point that we should be willing to forgive someone as many times as necessary.

Discuss

- Share an example from your own life when someone forgave you. What was that experience like?

- What type of offense do you find most difficult to forgive?

- How might extending forgiveness to someone heal a relationship? How might it heal the other person? How might it heal you?

- What steps do you need to take in order to love and to pray for someone whom you need to forgive?