

Small Groups

SERMON-BASED STUDY GUIDE

Sermon on the Mount – Week 16 – *Sermon on the Mount, Part 3* – Alex Walton
February 25, 2024

[Leader Note: This session will involve some quiet space for personal reflection and writing. Group members will need paper & pen or an available device to write some personal note.]

DIGGING IN:

1. How do you define forgiveness?
2. Read the following quote. How does this coincide with or challenge your understanding of forgiveness?

Our misunderstanding of forgiveness or our refusal to forgive only hurts ourselves. Someone wisely once said “Unforgiveness is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.”¹ Forgiveness does *not* mean that what a person did to us was OK; it does not always mean that we take down boundaries and fully accept that person back into our life (sometimes that would be a *bad* decision). Forgiveness means that we give the hurt and pain to Jesus to carry and that we release the person from our need for revenge, leaving that person in the hands of God.”

(June Wiegert, *Whole for the Holidays*, 2023)

3. Read Matthew 18:21 – 35

MAKING IT REAL:

4. How did Alex’s object lesson with the scales resonate with you? (Believing that our spiritual practices, our confession, our acts of righteousness, “tip the scales” to make up for the wrong things we have done). Do you tend to see your relationship with God in terms of balancing the scales? Do you see your relationships with other people that way?

“Jesus invites us to say ‘no’ to the scales,” in our relationship with Him and with others. The following personal reflections are designed to help you on the journey of receiving God’s forgiveness and offering it to others.

5. Read these scriptures aloud:

Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

- God does not give us what our sins deserve but offers complete forgiveness because of the blood of Jesus. Take a few minutes to sit with awareness of the forgiveness He is offering you. Consider the parable Jesus told (that you read at the beginning of this discussion), and imagine yourself as the servant who owed the master an unthinkable amount of money. Consider the wrongs you have done, big and small, and how God's forgiveness in Christ wipes all of it away. No more scale. Write a few sentences to describe your response to God's forgiveness. If you're willing, share your response with the group.

6. Jesus does not want us to take our forgiveness lightly, but to receive it with joy and extend the same forgiveness to others, to say "no" to the scale in all our relationships. **[Allow some quiet time for group members to go through the following].**

- Who in your life do you need to forgive? Sometimes this can be as small as forgiving the guy who cut you off in traffic. Or as huge as forgiving a neglectful parent or an abuser. Write a list of who you need to forgive.
- As you look at your list, remember that forgiving is *not* saying that what the person did was OK. (Jesus doesn't tell us that our sins were OK; He forgives them knowing that they are so *not* OK that He had to give his life for them).
- Psalm 68:19 says "Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens." 1 Peter 5:7 says "Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you." We can forgive others, not only because of the forgiveness we ourselves receive from God, but also because He is willing to bear the pain of what others have done to us. Look at your list of who to forgive. Choose one (for now) and consider the pain that you have experienced in that relationship. In prayer, imagine placing that pain in a dirty drawstring bag, and handing it to Jesus. Allow Him to take it from you and feel the release as it disappears into the light that surrounds Jesus.
- Then, forgive. Say aloud (this can be a whisper since you're in a group), "I forgive [name] for [what they did]." Say it again twice more – this helps your brain to cement it. Then (either now or on your own later), move on through your list to forgive the others.

7. If you wish, share with the group what this experience was like for you.