GROWTH GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
Fall Quarter - Lesson 6 - Week of October 13, 2024

Lesson: THE BEAUTY OF FORGIVENESS AND MERCY

Bible Verses: Philemon 1:1-25; Micah 6:8; Matthew 5:7; Mark 11:25; Luke 6:36; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13; James 2:13

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

1. What's one thing that can instantly make your day better?
2. How do you stay healthy and active?

DISCUSSION

"So, if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.
If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me." - Philemon 1:17-18

Reflection: Think back over your childhood, especially your adolescent years. What were one or two of your most regrettable choices or hurtful actions that you made? More importantly, how did those you hurt treat you after the fact?

Situation: Read Philemon 1:1-21. The letter of Philemon is linked to Colossians in that the recipients were all located in the same city of Colossae. However, while Colossians is a letter of instruction to a community of believers, Philemon is directed to a particular person. In the letter, Paul makes a personal plea on behalf of Onesimus, a slave from Colossae, who stole and fled from his master, Philemon. Paul led him to faith in Christ, and now he is sending Onesimus back to his master with this letter that encourages mercy, forgiveness, and Christian love. How good are you at forgiving others and showing mercy to those who wronged you?

1. In Paul's day, the wives held the day-to-day responsibilities of the slaves in the household. Why is this fact significant considering that Paul included Apphia, Philemon's wife, in his greeting?
2. Onesimus was a thief who eventually became Paul's "very heart" (verse 12). How can you account for such a change? How do you think Philemon would have responded to these words?
3. What lessons on respect do you see in this epistle?
4. What reasons does Paul give why Philemon was "separated" from Onesimus for a time? How might this have compelled Philemon to take him back?
5. Some might argue that the situation between Onesimus and Philemon was none of Paul's business. Paul obviously felt otherwise. What are the implications of this for you?
6. At some point, Paul suggested that Onesimus return to his master. What do you think was said? How do you think Onesimus responded to the idea?

Inspiration: Jesus says the merciful are shown mercy. Sometimes Christians are not very merciful (withholding punishment). We often want to be the recipients of mercy but may be slow to show mercy to others.

People who show mercy also witness grace. They are blessed because they are testimonies to a greater goodness. Forgiving others allows us to see how God has forgiven us. The dynamic of giving grace is the key to understanding grace. When we forgive others, we begin to feel what God feels.

Jesus told the story of a king who decided to close out his accounts with those who worked for him (see Matthew 18:23-35). He called in his debtors and told them to pay. One man owed an amount too great to be repaid. But when the king saw the man and heard his story, his heart went out to him, and he erased the debt.

As the man was leaving the palace grounds, he encountered a fellow employee who owed him a small sum. He grabbed the debtor and demanded his payment. When the fellow begged for mercy, no mercy was granted. Instead, the one who had just been forgiven had his debtor thrown into jail. When word got to the king, he became livid. And Jesus said in Matthew 18:34, "In anger, his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed."

How could someone be forgiven a debt of millions and be unable to forgive a debt of hundreds? How could a person be set free and then imprison someone else? You don't have to be a theologian to answer those questions; you only have to look in the mirror. Who among us has not begged God for mercy on Sunday and then demanded justice on Monday? Who has not served as a bottleneck instead of a conduit of God's love? Is there anyone who does not at one time or another *"show contempt for the riches of God's kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you towards repentance* (Romans 2:4)?"

Notice what God does when we restrict our compassion. He turns us over to be tortured by anger; choked by bitterness; and consumed by revenge. Such is the punishment for one who tastes God's grace but refuses to share it. But the reward is a blessed liberation for the one who tastes God's grace and then gives it to others.

1. When have you been most amazed and moved by God's mercy?
2. What are the risks of seeking forgiveness? What are the risks of not seeking it?
3. What are the dangers of forgiving one who has betrayed you?
4. When does anger become unforgiveness? When does forgiveness become bitterness?
5. In what relationship might God be leading you to serve as a peacemaker this week?

Life Lessons: What do we do when someone slights or rebuffs us? We always have a choice, you know. We can continually relive that affront, slowly building a wall of resentment and bitterness around our hearts. Regrettably, lots of people do that. Or, by God's grace and in His strength, we can elect to show supernatural mercy. Despite our wounds, and irrespective of our feelings, we can choose to forgive. What exactly is forgiveness? It is canceling the moral and personal debt another person owes us because of his or her failure to treat us with love and respect. When we forgive, we give our offenders and the world a peek at God's heart. And we ensure that our hearts do not become hardened.

Devotion: Father, forgive us for holding a grudge against others. In the same way you have forgiven us, we want to forgive them. Help us to learn the beautiful and rare skill of showing mercy. Remind us daily of the promise, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."

Journaling: What steps will you take today to forgive those who offended you, even if they have not tried to reach out to you?

Prayer Focus: God, help me to be more merciful and forgiving!