

Reconciled Relationships

Goal

To grow together in generously giving the radical forgiveness we have been given in Christ, and to seek God honoring reconciliation in our relationships.

Key Passages

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Ephesians 4:32

Week 1

Group Discussion

Goal: Stir up conviction that because we have been forgiven by God, we must forgive others.

Welcome: 5 minutes

- Chit chat, ice breaker, or quick personal updates
- Share group and/or church announcements

Read “Practice Introduction”: 5 minutes

- Read the article (can take turns by paragraph)

Discussion: 30 minutes

- Open the discussion by asking for people to share experiences/testimonies of being forgiven, or forgiving others
 - What makes forgiveness difficult?
 - What happens in your heart when you forgive someone? When you receive forgiveness?
- How does our experience of God’s forgiveness affect our ability to forgive others?
- What are the consequences of harboring unforgiveness in our hearts?
- Read Matthew 18:21-35 (parable of servant whose debt was forgiven)
 - How does this passage put forgiveness into perspective?
 - Peter asked Jesus how many times we should forgive - is there a limit?

Prayer / ministry time: 10 minutes

- Spend some unhurried time ministering to each other in prayer
 - Ask if anyone is struggling with unforgiveness in their hearts
- Ask if anyone can identify a broken relationship in their life that needs forgiveness and reconciliation

Practice Introduction

Module Note: This module is primarily designed to help us practice forgiveness and reconciliation in our everyday relationships. There are some instances where abuse is involved where reconciliation and restoration of relationship would not be wise. For help, or more resources please reach out to Aaron King at aaron@fellowshipjonesboro.com

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

-Ephesians 4:32

Life is about relationships. What makes life really wonderful isn't acquiring more stuff, but enjoying relationships. God made us this way. It is His good design that we thrive - first in relationship with Himself and also in relationships with the people around us. But as we all know, we can't go very far in relationships without experiencing conflict. Many of us avoid conflict like the plague. We know that as good as life can be with thriving relationships, it can also turn very sour when relationships are broken. But, unless we resolve to never experience relationships deeper than "how's the weather" (which is a very bad idea by the way), we cannot avoid conflict. We cannot avoid getting hurt. So what do we do?

The world's answer to that question is to *get a new relationship*. There's literally billions of people in the world. You're not going to run out of people to try to connect with. When you find the people you really "click" with, you won't experience conflict.

The problem with this idea is that it doesn't work. The more we freely toss out relationships, the more isolated and broken we become. This kind of isolation is a real growing problem in our culture. We've forgotten how to relate to one another. We've forgotten how to work through painful conflict seeking reconciliation. We've forgotten how to forgive those who hurt us. Instead, we can choose to continually seek out new relationships, having never learned to seek reconciliation, ask for forgiveness, and give forgiveness freely.

Jesus offers a better way - *forgive one another as God has forgiven you* (Matthew 18:21-35). God has forgiven us! He has sought reconciliation with us! He has worked through the painful conflict and secured a beautiful relationship with us. It is in the strength of our relationship with God that we find power to forgive. When we have been hurt, we find in God what our souls desperately need. We find refuge, acceptance, and peace that no hurt or offense can take away from us (Psalm 27). We find confidence that God is just and promises to set every wrong right, so we don't retaliate

(Matthew 5:38-42, Romans 12:19-21). And we find perspective. *If God has forgiven me so much, how can I not forgive them?* We find power to forgive because of our own powerful experience of God's forgiveness for us.

As we begin this module, let us define both forgiveness and reconciliation. Forgiveness and reconciliation are not the same thing. Forgiveness is an act of releasing someone from an offense or debt against you and not exercising your 'right' to personally pay them back for what they've done. It is also a fundamental change of heart toward that person from desiring their harm to desiring their good. Reconciliation, on the other hand, is the next step of movement towards one another to restore a broken relationship. Forgiveness is a mandate for followers of Jesus no matter the response of the other person. Reconciliation is a pursuit that takes two people working together to restore what was broken.

Jesus' way changes our hearts. A heart orientation to forgive makes thriving relationships possible between sinful people. It frees our hearts from the bondage of unforgiveness, and it opens the door to beautiful reconciliation (which we will cover in more detail in the next article).

Week 2

Group Discussion

Goal: Understanding the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation, and identifying steps to take to pursue reconciliation in our relationships

Welcome: 5 minutes

- Share group and/or church announcements

Read “God’s Way for Pursuing Reconciliation”: 5 minutes

Discussion: 40 minutes

- Discuss the distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation
 - What does it mean to “Do all we can do to live at peace with others”?
 - How can you tell if you are avoiding reconciliation because you just don’t want to deal with the person or situation vs a relationship truly being unable to reconcile?
- Why do people avoid reconciliation? What makes reconciliation difficult?
- Discuss the grid on the 2nd page of the article (can be done in smaller groups)
 - *When someone has wronged you (left side):* why are the first two steps vital to the reconciliation process? Why are they easy to skip?
 - Read Matthew 18:15-20
 - When you confront someone, why is it important to first go alone (i.e. keeping the circle small)?
 - What practicals do we learn from this passage about the reconciliation process?
 - When you’ve wronged someone (right side):
 - Why is it important to immediately seek reconciliation and not wait?
 - What does it look like when an apology goes wrong? How can we apologize in a way that is not really an apology?
 - What does healthy repentance and restitution look like? Any specific examples in the group?
 - Discuss - Does this grid help you identify any next steps to take in your current relationships?

Prayer / ministry time: 15 minutes

- Spend some unhurried time ministering to each other in prayer - asking God for help to reconcile.
- Can break back into smaller groups (or guys/girls) to better facilitate ministry time.

God's Way for Pursuing Reconciliation

Let's recap the differences between forgiveness and reconciliation. Forgiveness and reconciliation are not the same thing. Forgiveness is an act of releasing someone from an offense or debt against you and not exercising your 'right' to personally pay them back for what they've done. It is also a fundamental change of heart toward that person from desiring their harm to desiring their good. Reconciliation, on the other hand, is the next step of movement towards one another to restore a broken relationship. Forgiveness is a mandate for followers of Jesus no matter the response of the other person. Reconciliation is a pursuit that takes two people working together to restore what was broken.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to pursue reconciliation. Jesus brought a new kingdom to this world, and the distinctive mark of His kingdom is reconciled relationships (John 13:35). As the world becomes more and more isolated, individualistic, and broken in relationships, our message to the world is the good news of reconciliation with God and with each other (2 Cor 5:18; Eph 2:14-19)! God actually calls us His ambassadors to the world carrying this message of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:20). Reconciling with others is *who we are*.

So we fervently pursue, and hope, and pray for reconciliation in our personal relationships, but because reconciliation takes two people, it is not always possible. This is why Paul instructs us to live at peace with all people "so far as it depends on us" (Rom 12:18 ESV). This is not an excuse to throw up our hands and say "I've done all I can do!", but rather it is an invitation to fulfill our God given role to be peacemakers no matter the outcome.

What does "so far as it depends on us" look like? What does the Bible teach us about the reconciliation process? How can we do it God's way?

The chart on the next page is adapted from Ken Sande's book "The Peacemaker". This chart identifies the steps to take to pursue reconciliation in two different scenarios - when someone has wronged you and when you have wronged someone else. In relationships, conflict is rarely 100% one person's fault, so both sides are applicable to the reconciliation process. We hope this resource is helpful for you to identify the next steps God is calling you to take to live out the peacemaker identity He has given you.

When someone has wronged you

Psalm 69, Matthew 7:1-5, Matthew 18:21-35, Matthew 18:15-20, Matthew 5:24

Glorify God

Ask how can I please and honor God in this situation?

Turn to God like David in the Psalms. Find refuge in Him and turn your heart to praising Him. Ask Him how you can honor Him like Jesus when He was wronged?

Get the log out of your own eye

Ask how can I show Jesus' work in me by taking responsibility for my own contribution to this conflict?

With God's help, identify your own contribution to the conflict. Honestly confess and apologize for it without excuses.

Gently restore

Ask how can I love and serve others by helping them take responsibility for their contribution to this conflict?

Seek the good of the offender and the preservation of the relationship by telling them what they have done to hurt you. Take ownership for your part in the conflict. Communicate your desire for a restored relationship.

Go and be reconciled

Ask how can I demonstrate the forgiveness of God and encourage a reasonable solution to this conflict?

Express your forgiveness for their offense. Work together towards a reasonable solution. With God's help, extend plenty of grace knowing that you would need grace if you were in their shoes, and no one will do this perfectly.

When you have wronged someone

Luke 17:1-4, Matthew 5:21-26, 1 John 1:9, James 5:16, Proverbs 28:13

Confess

Clearly state what you did wrong and the damage it caused without excuse. Don't rush to apology - allow the gravity of the offense to sit and an opportunity for the other person to acknowledge the hurt.

Apologize

Express a sincere apology and regret for your wrongdoing. Don't put a "but" at the end of your apology. Simply apologize with no excuses. Also don't make your apology about the other person's feelings ("I'm sorry you were hurt"), which is not a true apology.

Repent

Repentance means a change of mind and behavior. Express that you don't think the same way anymore and follow that up with changed behavior in the future.

Bring restitution

Restitution means making it right. Do everything in your power to pay back what your wrong took away.

Seek to reconcile

Express your desire for a restored relationship. Ask for forgiveness. Ask how you can be reconciled.

Week 3

Break-Out Discussion

Goal: identify our personal relationships that need forgiveness and reconciliation; minister to each other in prayer for these relationships.

Welcome: 5

- Announcements
- *Break-out*

Discussion: 30 minutes

- Quick personal updates
- Recap forgiveness discussion from previous week
 - Main idea: Jesus' work of restoring us to God paves the way for restoring broken relationships in our lives
- Goal of night - identify relationships that are broken/strained and need healing, and to bring that to God in prayer
- What relational struggles are you currently facing?
 - As people share, ask others if they have any encouragement for that person from the Lord to build each other up
 - *Avoid advice. Avoid co-misery.*
 - Be ready to pray for people in the moment - it's possible not everyone shares, but for those that do it may be very painful.

Prayer / ministry time: 15 minutes

- Listening Prayer: Spend some time in silence as a group asking God to identify anyone you need to reconcile with. This may be someone you have wronged or hurt.
 - Then ask if God brought anything to mind, and encourage folks to pray out for what God put on their hearts
- Ask God for power to forgive and healing for broken relationships
- Invite people to the center of the circle so you can lay hands on them and pray for the relational brokenness they are experiencing.