



Discipling Disciple

Session 5: The Unforgiving Servant

Mt 18: 21-35



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Part 1(looking back: Hospitality/Catching up/Review/)

identity

worship

community

Spend time catching up with everyone's week – consider that eating food together can be a good context of building friendship and trust in the group.

After everyone has shared a bit, ask how everyone found crafting and telling the story.

This is the time for caring for those in your group, hearing about what's going on in their lives, asking questions, listening, and praying.

Part 2 (story)

identity

mission

worship

(Matthew 18: 21-35)

Story Crafting Through the Week

Part of Discipling Disciple stage will involve participants learning how to dive deep into the scriptures and craft the story for themselves. This will involve them learning a devotional story crafting process which they can follow through the week. In the 1st Session, the group leader will explain and model this process with the group so each participant is equipped to take into their week.

Day 1 & 2– Finding the Central Image of the Story

Day 1 - Read the story in the scripture 3 times in 3 different translations. (e.g ESV, NIV, NLT)

Day 2 - Speak out the scripture, and record it on your phone, then listen to the story 3 times.

Meditate on the story and note down what you think is the main point or the main image of the story.

Day 3 – Experiencing the Story

After reading and listening to the story and meditating on the main point or image, the next day will be given to walking through the story slowly, listening to the recorded story and putting yourself in the shoes of Peter/the disciples, contemplating on the emotions and experience of that character through the narrative. For example, in the story of Jesus calling Peter, you will imagine yourself as Peter, who has been fishing all night and caught nothing, hearing Jesus teach from his boat, obey his command to throw his net on the other side of the boat, receiving the huge catch of fish, kneeling at the feet of Jesus.

As you are doing that, you are asking yourself the questions

- i) How is Peter feeling at this moment?
- ii) How would you feel if that was you?

This process should be done prayerfully in conversation and communion with the Holy Spirit asking Him to guide you and to reveal things to your heart and mind. You will want to note down any things that come to light for you.



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Day 4 – Research the Story

At this point, after reading and internalising the story we can begin to ask questions concerning the contextual/literary gaps in our comprehension of the story which we can research with the help of study notes/commentaries etc.

These materials will provide some studies notes on some of the main points where a bit of information relating to (language meaning/ phrasing/ literary context and design patterns/geography/historical context etc.) can serve to really aid one's comprehension of the story as a whole. We have also provided a list of commentaries that have been used in the crafting of these stories and their accompanying notes to go deeper with.

Day 5 – Group Session

Read the Scripture, Act out the story, Re-tell the story, Questions.

The hope is that when the group gathers, through this crafting process each participant has engaged with story at a deep level. It is helpful to complete this process together, so the middle section of the session will include telling the story and then getting the group to act out the story. (This may feel odd for a few, but even if all the group does is physically act out the movements of the story, engaging the whole body really helps internalise the story). After acting out the story, it is helpful then for each person to retell the story before moving in to the questions section.

- i) **Ask each person to read the passage in a different version (E.G ESV, NLT, NIV)**
- i) **Act out the Story** - Talk about the characters in the story and choose them. If you know anything about the characters, talk about the person.
 - a. Determine where the scenes will be acted out and the spacing of the story.
 - b. Act out the story with one person narrating.
 - c. Act out the story at least one more time, with people switching parts. This time, stop at crucial points in the story, and certainly at the main action(s) of the story that illustrate the main point of the story. Each time you stop consider how each of the characters must have felt. Describe the scene to each other a bit more, describing what everyone in the scene is doing.
 - d. If you forget parts of the story, the entire group can work together to remember what happened next, or what was said.
- ii) **Ask the questions**
 - 1. What do you like about this story/What stood out to you?
 - 2. What bothered you about this story?
 - 3. What does this story show you about God?
 - 4. What does this story show you about people?



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Part 3 (application and commission)

identity

worship

mission

Ask the remaining questions:

5. If this story is true, what does this story mean for your life? How will you live your life differently having learned this story? What is God showing you? What does this story show us about what it means to be a follower of Jesus? How will you respond? (it is really important to give time in this section for reflection and response. Don't settle for superficial answers, hopefully as you model honesty and vulnerability this will be imbibed by the group. However, you may want to help people go deeper, by asking some follow on questions. Don't be afraid to do so.)
6. Who are you able to tell this story to?

iii) **Now, Get each person to tell the story they have crafted**

Encourage everyone in the group to think of people in their life whom they could retell the story to; mention that at the next session we will recap the story and ask who remembered to tell the story. Again it is helpful to emphasise the reason for going and telling the story ourselves is that it is the best way for us to remember the story and we are learning these stories to share the gospel with others.

Responding in Prayer and Worship

Make sure time is guarded to pray and worship (at least 20 mins). This time is key for responding to God after a deep dive into his word. This should be led sensitively, being aware of who is in the room and what has come out in each session.

This time can be led in a variety of ways,

- i) Listening to worship music
- ii) Singing
- iii) Sharing the Lord's Supper
- iv) Silence
- v) Each person sharing a psalm or a verse of scripture
- vi) Each person thanking God
- vii) Praying for one another: bringing words of encouragement and prophecy

A Note on Storying

In our discipleship materials, we have chosen to craft the stories of scripture into an oral format to be learnt, internalised and re-told. This process is done carefully and seeks to faithfully represent the heart, meaning and narrative of the biblical text in spoken form. We have done this for the following reasons;



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- 1.) The spoken story format requires those in the group to internalise the scripture to some degree. We believe that scripture tells God's unified story that leads to the person of Jesus. God invites us to encounter and respond to him through the hearing, believing and living out in accordance with the truth of his story and the good news that it tells. The process of learning and retelling the story requires and allows the scripture to 'live within us', to shape and guide us, to convict and challenge, to comfort and encourage us. Storying is not the only way this can happen of course, but we have found it to be an especially helpful and intuitive way of forming our worldview to that of Jesus Christ through the internalising the story that reveals him.
- 2.) Once this story is learnt and internalised, those in the group have it to share with others. This can be especially engaging when sharing with people with who don't know Jesus, and even more so in age of authenticity. By sharing a story that is 'living within you', you are imparting to someone something that has changed and/or encouraged you, and therefore it comes with more weight and significance.

How to lead a group in internalizing and retelling the story

These are a few creative ways that people can delve into the Story. Use discernment as to what would best help your group and what they'd be comfortable with.

1. Retell the story: as a group, each person tells as much as they can remember and passes on to someone else. Or.... split up the group in pairs, get each pair to tell the story to each other
2. Scenes: Ask the group to think of the story in scenes like a movie, ask each person what is scene 1, 2 etc. Try and see if you can get people to visualise each scene, the geography, the movements, which characters are doing what etc. This will help internalise the story.
3. Feeling the emotions of the story: Retell the story in sections, or re-read the story in sections b. For each section, talk about the feelings of each character in that section...
4. Being a character in the story: ask each person which character they are in the story, as well as helping to remember the story, this will also help your group engage personally with the story from God's word.
5. Art: Draw a picture of the key theme or key feeling in the story/passage.
6. Music: Listen to a song related to the key theme of the passage and draw your feelings about it/or about God. (Art and Music are especially helpful mediums for people who may struggle with oral learning, and appreciate creative outlets)
7. Act out the story: Get everyone to act out the story as a group



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Day 4 Study Notes for Session 5 – to be sent out to the group

Why does Peter ask about forgiving someone seven times?

In light of Jesus' earlier teaching in Matt 6: 14-15, the unequivocal call to forgiveness for his followers - in the mind of the disciples, warrants some qualification for practical out-working. Hence Peter's question, how many times shall I forgive my brother? As many as seven times?

In the earlier rabbinic teaching before Jesus (*b. Yoma 86b87a*), forgiving a brother or sister three times is sufficient. For Peter to suggest the number of seven, is above and beyond the conventional expectations of Jewish tradition and as such may be once again another example of Peter hoping to show off his radical commitment to Jesus. The number seven in Jewish thought is synonymous with perfection and completion, (Peter's proposal of sevenfold forgiveness could be a hyperlink contrast back to the sevenfold vengeance of Cain in Gen 4:15). All this makes the following statement from Jesus all the more shocking. Not seven times but seventy seven times! On what basis can Jesus expect this from his disciples? The following parable of Jesus will serve to demonstrate the grounds for our continual forgiveness of others.

How much is ten thousand talents?

In the parable, Jesus sets up the situation where a slave is indebted to his master to the tune of ten thousand talents. In 1st Century Palestine an average days wage for a labourer was 1 denarii, a single talent of silver was conventionally reckoned as 6,000 denarii or half a life time's wages. A talent is a weight representing the largest measurement of money – similarly, ten thousand (in gk. *myria* – from which we get Myriad, ie. 'myriads upon myriads of angels') was the largest numeral for which a greek term exists. Combining the largest amount and largest measurement, has the rhetorical effect similar to the expression "gazillions of pounds". The intention is to say God's forgiveness and grace is beyond any human calculation.

Why can the first slave have the second thrown into prison?

Debtor's prisons were not uncommon in the time of Jesus, and this first slave's appears to have had a higher status and so a degree of authority to carry out this punishment. What horrifies the on-looking slaves is not that this was an illegal or illegitimate action but rather the sheer failure to reciprocate even a miniscule of the generosity with which he himself had received. In contrast to the 'zillions' he owed the master, this servant owed him the equivalent of 3 months wages, not an insignificant sum but nothing in comparison to the previous debt.



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Does the parable of Jesus teach that we can we forfeit our forgiveness if we refuse to forgive others?

This parable of Jesus causes discomfort for us when considering God's response to us if we do not forgive from our heart. The story finishes with the king in his anger handing over the unjust servant to be tortured until he has paid his entire debt.

The punch-line then comes when Jesus says to *his disciples* 'That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brother from your heart.'-Mt18:35.

As has already been mentioned, this statement from Jesus is building on previous teaching in 6:14-15 to say that whilst God's mercy and grace is over the top and totally unmerited – the slave did nothing to earn his forgiveness – nonetheless, he will not forgive those who refuse to forgive. This is a warning from Jesus to those who would call themselves his followers, a warning to highlight that receiving forgiveness is tightly bound with the giving out of forgiveness and woe betide anyone who would presume upon God's forgiveness and as a result withhold compassion and mercy from others. This forgiveness Jesus says must be 'from the heart' – not a mere formulaic statement but a genuine and warm compassion, demonstrating a changed heart.

Jesus teaching both here and in 6:14-15 is absolute and without qualification. This has often caused those of us who are seeking to follow him deep pastoral challenges - what about in the most horrific circumstances of murder or abuse? Does this mean there is no redemption ever for the unforgiving?

The first challenge is to be treated with deep empathy and love and any answer given here may quite easily be read as flippant or glib. Nevertheless, It is true and worth saying here Jesus's commands are not only to be followed in the moderately difficult circumstances but rather in the very fires of turmoil and pain disciples of Christ are called to imitate him and pass on his sacrificial love... even picking up a cross and following him. This is the call of discipleship.

The second challenge goes straight to the heart of our own eternal security – if I don't forgive will I be rejected by God? R.T France in his commentary responds to this concern, he writes 'Is refusal to forgive therefore an unforgivable sin? In Mt 12:31-32 we have been told there is only one unforgivable sin and that is not simply a refusal to forgive, so that to set the present passage against the wider teaching of Jesus' teaching may suggest some qualification of its absolute language; even the unforgiving may not be beyond redemption. But such considerations, appropriate as they may be to the compilation of a systematic theology, must not be allowed to weaken the impact of this sobering parable and of the solemn words in Mt 6:14-15 which it illustrates. Those who will not forgive must not expect to be forgiven; the measure they give will be the measure they get back Mt 7:1-2.



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Feedback from Group Leader

In our vision for discipleship, we have identified 4 key ingredients to healthy and growing disciples. As you are leading your group, for each session, make some notes under each heading for how the group is faring in each of these areas.

identity

worship

community

mission