

FREEDOM

Spirit Group Leader Guide

WEEK SEVEN



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FORGIVENESS

*He is so rich in kindness and grace that He purchased
our freedom with the blood of His Son and forgave our sins.*

EPHESIANS 1:7 NLT

WEEK SEVEN LEADER GUIDE

Overview

Because we live in a fallen world, we face the realities of hurt and offense. Harboring unforgiveness is like drinking poison and expecting another person to die; it does much greater harm to us than the person we refuse to forgive. Offense is the bait that the enemy uses to lure us into bondage, and it causes us to create walls. Walls may keep out the bad stuff, but they also keep out the good. With walls around our hearts, we not only protect ourselves from pain and rejection but from experiencing love and life-giving relationships. We think that it is up to us to protect our hearts, but the truth is, God never meant for this to be our responsibility; it is His.

Reasons we may struggle to forgive:

- We have the wrong idea of forgiveness. Remember, forgiveness is not minimizing the offense or forgetting what happened. Forgiveness doesn't necessarily bring reconciliation. Forgiveness is something that happens in our hearts, giving us freedom. Reconciliation is a two way street and requires repentance, the desire for restitution, and rebuilding of trust from both parties.
- We don't think it's fair to let them off the hook. We reason in our hearts that they don't deserve forgiveness. But God doesn't hand out forgiveness based on merit—and thank goodness, because none of us deserve forgiveness! Since we have been forgiven so very much, we should extend what we have received to others. The forgiven forgive!

- We don't think we can do it. In our own human power, we may not be strong enough to forgive the great wrongs done against us, but we are empowered by the supernatural strength of God. It is important to remember that forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling. It is a choice that we have to make daily.

It is impossible to forgive others for their offenses until we receive forgiveness ourselves.

If we struggle to forgive others, chances are we have not fully grasped what God has done for us.

We have been given total forgiveness for past, present, and future sin. It is not that God forgets our sins, but rather, He chooses to remember our sin no more because He wants to be in relationship with us.

It's often difficult for us to receive God's forgiveness. The enemy loves to remind us of the mistakes we made in the past because guilt keeps us stuck, unable to move forward into the future that God has planned for us. We feel that we have to repent for our past over and over, but these thoughts come solely from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. We don't have to earn forgiveness. It is a free gift we can receive by faith. When our past comes to mind, we can defeat the enemy by knowing and speaking truth from the Word of God. Forgiveness takes courage and strength, but it leads us to pathways of righteousness where we can live free from guilt and shame!

How do we keep our hearts pure and unoffended? We must recognize our own imperfections, focus on the real enemy (the devil, not people), and receive the forgiveness and love of God.

Because it is a daily choice to forgive, remember the steps for walking out forgiveness with those who have offended you: pray for them, bless them, and do good to them.

Discussion Guide

- Application from Week 6: What area did you pray about surrendering this week? Did you pick a Scripture to declare over the area?
- Did you have the wrong idea of forgiveness before reading through the curriculum this week? Are you harboring unforgiveness in any way?
- Have you received God's forgiveness for your past sins? If not, what do you think is holding you back?
- Think about this, in light of all the sin for which you have been forgiven, can you release those who have wronged you? Would you trade your forgiveness from God for the right to hold someone accountable for their offense?
- Are there people in your life who you have not released to the Lord? Do you think you might be trying to get revenge for their offense?

Application

Encourage the group to write down names of any individuals they need to forgive. Challenge them to pray for each person by name every day this week. You may choose to have your group read the "Let Freedom Ring" section out loud during your group meeting.

Prayer Focus

- Pray that your participants truly receive the Lord's forgiveness for themselves so they can freely forgive those who have offended them.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to show your participants who they need to forgive and give them the strength to do so.
- Pray that the Lord will heal every wound in their lives and allow them to live a truly unoffended life.
- If they express that they are constantly reminding themselves of past failures and are bothered by the sin of their past even though they have asked for forgiveness, pray specifically over these areas.