

RADICAL

Love

Forever Changed

Examine Your Heart
Small Group Study

Leader's Guide

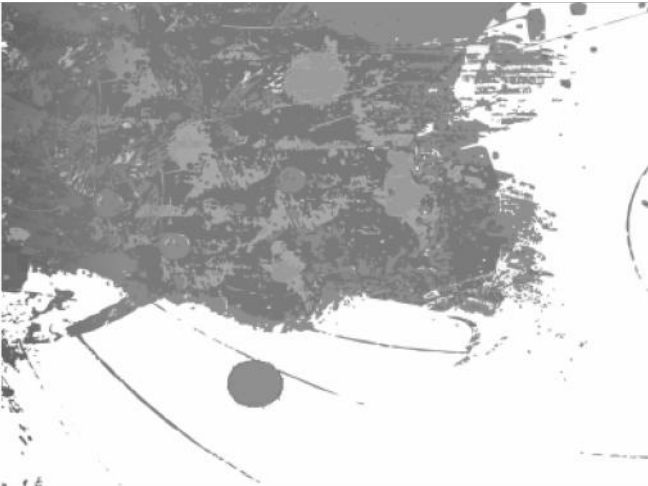
DONNA

LOWE

&

KIMBERLY

PARKER



Unless otherwise indicated, scripture taken from The New American Standard Bible®
Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The
Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®,
NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society, Used by permission
of Zondervan Publishing House. The “NIV” and “New International Version” trademarks are
registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by International Bible Society.

© 2010 by Donna Lowe and Kimberly Parker. All Rights Reserved. This book is protected
by the copyright laws of Canada. Permission to print and photocopy this document
is granted for study purposes only. This document itself may not be resold under any
circumstance without written permission from the authors. Contact donna@forthesakeofone.com
or kim@forthesakeofone.com.

Introduction	page 3
Lesson 1 - Chapters 1 & 2	page 5
Lesson 2 - Chapters 3 & 4	page 10
Lesson 3 - Chapters 5 & 6	page 14
Lesson 4 - Chapters 7 & 8	page 19
Lesson 5 - Chapters 9 & 10	page 24
Lesson 6 - Chapters 11 & 12	page 29
Lesson 7 - Chapters 13 & 14	page 34

Radical Love...Forever Changed Leader's Guide Examine Your Heart

Welcome to the *Radical Love...Forever Changed* Small Group Study. Just as we (Donna and Kim) worked through the revelation of truth about God's radical love together - it is our prayer that each person who makes the decision to love radically will have at least one other Christ-follower for support and encouragement. As such, this guide is written with the intent that two or more people will gather to discuss and work through the content together.

This guide is a supplement, not a replacement, for the book *Radical Love...Forever Changed*. The 14 chapters of the book are divided into this 7-lesson study. Each lesson focuses on two book chapters. Participants should read the two chapters and work through the questions prior to gathering for study.

Lesson Structure:

To begin study time, we suggest the group leader reads the **Opening Thoughts** and the **Spicy Meatball** aloud to the group. The Spicy Meatball is a bold statement that has the potential to generate a multitude of responses - because each person will have a different impulsive reaction.

No one should be made to feel that their gut response to the Spicy Meatball is "wrong" or discounted in any way. The purpose of the Spicy Meatball is not to begin a debate - but for each person to have a realization of how they personally feel when presented with the statement. It is based on Biblical Truth; and the lesson's Scripture study will show, from Scripture, why the Spicy Meatball is to be taken seriously. The Leader should allow enough time for each person to respond to the statement.

The **Scripture Study** is meant to be completed prior to group time, although we all know that generally not everyone completes the at-home portion. The Leader should gauge how much of the Scripture responses need discussion. In this Leader's Guide we have indicated in red the Scriptural answers that we hope participants gain from the Biblical text. These red comments and questions are to assist the Leader in facilitation of the group. When you make copies of the study for your group - **do not use this document** - download the free **Study Guide for Participants** document from the Radical Love Book website. (www.RadicalLoveBook.com)

Following the **Scripture Study**, the Leader should return to the **Spicy Meatball** statement and ask if anyone had any new insight or thoughts after reading through the Scriptures.

The **Life Application** questions encourage the participant to take the truths presented and make them personal. Some people might have difficulty sharing their personal answers and the Leader should be sensitive. We have added some discussion helps in the Life Application questions in this Leader's Guide to help the Leader guide the conversation.

It would be beneficial for participants to spend further time reflecting upon and journaling thoughts on certain questions or ideals. These are marked with this symbol:



Introduction

It is our hope that participants would seek out these questions and spend time in prayer, journaling their thoughts in between group times.

We have included Scripture passages in this Study Guide. All Scripture referenced is from the NASB version unless otherwise indicated. As we wrote this study, we consulted different Bible versions to ensure the accuracy of context and translation.

Many group studies that take place in churches begin with a large gathering that includes worship and then participants break into smaller group studies. Whether or not this is how your group begins study time, we'd like to share with you what has worked in our small group:

We begin our small group time together by playing a worship song through a portable .mp3 device, CD or from a laptop computer. We don't sing, we simply silently listen and journal about what we hear in our hearts as the song plays.

Sometimes we share what we wrote - sometimes not - but it stills our minds and helps bring us in focus and unity. If, as a leader, you are able to do this, or another kind of intimate connection, we recommend it! Also, if prayer is a component of your study, (and we hope it is!) ensure that you leave sufficient time - either at the beginning or at the end - to pray together.

Each lesson concludes with **Closing Thoughts**. We recommend the leader (or a group member) read this aloud. Finish with discussion on the **Examine Your Heart** question. We have indicated this question with this symbol:



If you lead a *Radical Love...Forever Changed* small group study, we would love for you to email us and let us know your name. It would be our privilege to have our prayer team pray for you, by name, as you seek to use your gifts to bring glory to God. Email us at: leaders@radicallovebook.com.

Bless you!

Lesson I - CHAPTERS 1 & 2

Lesson Introduction

Do you ever wonder if God has a plan for your life? Well, He does. Here it is: You are to love God and love the people He has placed in your life - Yes, all of them!

As you might guess, when people hear that we wrote a book, they ask, "What is your book about?" After disclosing the basic premise of *Radical Love* we find with surprising consistency (and much to our good humor) that the typical response is often, "Wow! I know someone who could really benefit from that book."

We all know "someone" who might benefit from a bold confrontation with the truth from God's Word, don't we? Honestly, it is a lot easier to believe this book is a message for someone else rather than to believe that God wants each of us to do our own hard work of the soul.

Frankly, it would grieve our hearts to know that someone walked away thinking only of the many others that should have read this book. Conversely, nothing would please us more than to know that you have recommended *Radical Love...Forever Changed* to a friend because you have found yourself to be divinely changed by truths from God's Word.

As you continue through *Radical Love...Forever Changed*, we are sure you will begin to sense the constant presence of the Holy Spirit. As you discover His voice and learn to obey Him you will be transformed. You might recognize the Holy Spirit's leading as something like an inner tug or a prompt towards action (or inaction). A Scripture may appear to leap off of the page at you. A random comment from a friend might seem to drill right into your heart. Ask Him for confirmation as you listen. He will affirm you. Test what you hear and feel against His Word.

As you read through the book and as you work through the study, pay close attention to "when" you feel the prompting of His Spirit. God will use His Word to speak to you and He will direct you in all ways of wisdom. Loving others with God's perfecting love is only possible if you are connected to Him. He will tell you in each and every circumstance the best way to love the individuals He has entrusted to your care. Dear friend, we have prayed a long while for you. We anticipate great things from God in your life!

Spicy Meatball

God's only call on your life is for you to be obedient to Him.

What is your initial reaction to this statement? (Discuss in your group)

Scripture Study

Read Matthew 22:35-40.

35 One of them, a lawyer, asked Him [Jesus] a question, testing Him, **36** “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

37 And He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ **38** This is the great and foremost commandment. **39** The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ **40** On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

1. What does Jesus say are the two greatest commands?

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind
Love your neighbor as yourself

2. What percentage of God’s Word depends on these two commandments? (verse 40)

All of it.

Read John 14:21. [Jesus is speaking]

21 “He who has my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.”

3. What will happen if you keep his commandments?

You will be loved by the Father
Jesus will love you
Jesus will disclose Himself to you

Read John 15:12-14. [Jesus is speaking]

12 “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. **13** Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. **14** You are My friends if you do what I have command you.”

4. What does a friend of Jesus do?

A friend of Jesus does what Jesus commands.

5. In this passage what does Jesus command?

Love one another as I have loved you

6. How would you display that kind of love, based on this passage? (verse 13)

Lay down your life

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13. Pay close attention to the way in which love is described. (Circle) all of the qualities of love.

1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. **2** If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. **3** And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

4 Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, **5** does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, **6** does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; **7** bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8 Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. **9** For we know in part and we prophesy in part; **10** but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. **11** When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. **12** For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. **13** But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

7. If you do anything without the kind of love described in these verses, what are you? (see verses 2 & 3)

Nothing.

Life Application

Leader; Our main idea for this section is that obedience to your call to love God and others is not primarily dependent upon your outward behaviors. It is the condition of your heart that indicates if you are a friend of God's or not. If your heart is right, the behaviors will follow. The behaviors - in and of themselves - do not mean you are in right standing with God. However, people often rely on the outward behaviors to determine one's level of "Spirituality" or how "Christian" one is. To love radically, you must learn to cease striving to an outward appearance and check the condition of your heart in all matters.

These questions hopefully will guide the participant to any areas where he or she relies upon or judges others based on behaviors and encourage him / her to begin the practice of holding up the mirror to check his / her heart condition in each and every circumstance.

In Matthew 22 we read that the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love others. Throughout this book, we are going to identify at deepening levels how the world has distorted our understanding of the love to which we are called.



8. As it stands right now, do you sense God nudging you more strongly to one or the other of these two commands? Consider journaling your thoughts.

Although both areas of our calling are important - it is possible that someone needs to address their basic relationship with God before he or she can begin to love others. Not everyone who begins this study will have the Holy Spirit. Awareness of God's nudging is something we will encourage throughout the study and throughout the book. These nudgings are terrific journaling opportunities.

9. Do you have an image in your mind of how a good Christian looks and behaves? What are those characteristics?

Often we look to things like "goes to church," "does not drink alcohol" "uses mild language" "shows kindness to everyone" "dresses modestly" "exhibits patience" etc. as the things that make someone a Christian. We even use the phrase "That was a Christian thing to do." - What do we mean when we say that?

10. Do you hold that image in your mind as the goal you strive towards?

Leader ask the group: Do you strive towards behaviors or do you strive towards obedience? What is the difference?

11. Can someone exhibit the behaviors of a Christian without acting in true obedience to Jesus' commands? How?

Yes! If we do anything without Christ's love, it is not done in true obedience. This is a huge concept that should not be glossed over.

Closing Thoughts

As we begin this study of God's radical love, the most important thing to realize is that loving others God's way is not optional for Christians. He commands you to love Him and each other in the same way He loves you. If you choose not to love others, there are some pretty serious consequences.

Without love He will not disclose Himself to you; You are not His friend; You are not loved by the Father; You are nothing. Those are extremely strong words.

As we read in Matthew 22:40, everything in the Word of God is dependent upon the commands to love God and love others.

Lesson One

Through the first two chapters of the *Radical Love...Forever Changed* book, we have sought to first show you that God speaks personally to you - and will continue to do so as you seek Him.

Connect with Him through His Word, pursue relationships with other Christ followers, and ask Him to reveal Himself to you in prayer. These are crucial steps that will help you to get to know His voice.

Secondly, we hope you understand that He has uniquely gifted you to carry out the call on your life to share the good news of His love. You don't have to wonder about your purpose on earth - it is to first be reconciled with Him and then to share that love with others. You are to live out the Great Commission. With LOVE. It is possible to exhibit the behaviors of what one would call a "Christian" without His love in your heart. We pray if this describes you, that you will decide right now that you do not want to live that way any longer.

There will be times when you do not want to love. There will be times when choosing to love Christ's way seems to be the hardest thing that you have ever done. When those times come - ask Him for His strength. YOU may not be able to love always, but HE can. So go to Him in those moments. Ask Him to change your heart on specific matters. As you will learn in Chapters 3 & 4 of the book, His Spirit is the only agent through which your heart change can happen.

With all of this in mind, we want to leave you with one final question to discuss in your group:



How important is it for **you** to gain a true understanding of the love to which God calls you to give?

Lesson 2 - CHAPTERS 3 & 4

Lesson Introduction

Sadly, our churches are filled with people who, for the most part, have been able to manage their outward behaviors without ever experiencing real heart change.

Even if you have been going to church all of your life, it is possible that you quench the Holy Spirit's power to work in your heart - or - the Holy Spirit may be absent from your life altogether.

There is a dreadful misconception that exists in Christian circles. Many believe they are saved from eternal punishment because they prayed a prayer in which they asked Jesus to forgive their sins. Of course that is certainly *part* of the process, but without repentance there is no salvation. Failure to repent is a barricade to The Holy Spirit and there can be NO change in a person's life without it - salvation or otherwise.

Metanoeo is the original Greek word from which our English word *repentance* is derived. It means to have a complete change about sin. Not just a change of mind, but also a change of emotional attachment to sin. This means a change of will. Repentance happens when a person recognizes his or her sin in the way God sees it; disgusting! In light of that knowledge, repentance leads to heartfelt sorrow which culminates in a change of behavior.

As we read in Chapter 4, and will investigate further in this lesson, salvation does happen when there is true repentance; but the decision to repent is not a one-time occurrence. Repentance must happen whenever God reveals your sin to you. It is the starting point for all Godly change. It keeps the communication lines open between you and God.

As you work your way through *Radical Love*, the Holy Spirit will expose the sins of your heart on an ongoing basis. The Holy Spirit is the most credible teacher. He will guide you into all truth and He will be your ever-present Helper so you can overcome sin and get on with fulfilling God's plan in and through your life.

Spicy Meatball

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'"

And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" (Matthew 7:21-23)

Do these verses make you shudder? Why or why not? (Discuss in your group)

Scripture Study

Read 2 Corinthians 7:8-10.

8 “For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it--for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while-- **9** I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us.

10 For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.”

1. Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthian church. How does Paul distinguish the two types of sorrow mentioned in these verses?

Sorrow that produces repentance
Sorrow that produces death

2. What made the Corinthians sorrowful?

Paul's letter

3. What is God's will regarding sorrow?

That it leads to repentance

4. What does repentance lead to?

Salvation

5. Can someone be sorrowful about sin without being saved?

Yes - if there is no repentance

Read Acts 2:37-38

37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"

38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

6. Leading up to verse 37, Peter had disclosed the truth about Jesus to the House of Israel. These were the very people who supported Jesus' crucifixion. When they heard the truth about their sin, how were they affected?

They were pierced to the heart (remember we learned in Chapter 3 of the book that the "heart" is the innermost, core place inside each one of us. Basically, they had an emotional reaction to the truth about Jesus.)

7. At what point did Peter tell them that they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit?

After they repent and are baptized

Notice that simply hearing the gospel message and even being emotionally impacted by it was not enough to grant them the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Life Application

Leader; The main point of this lesson is that you can be sorry for the consequences of a sin without having a heart change about the sin itself. If that is the case, there has been no repentance. It is easy to hate the sin of others, but how do we feel about our own sin? This is what we want participants to explore in this week's lesson.

8. In both of the above Scripture examples Paul and Peter initiated confrontation about the sin of those to whom they were communicating. When you are confronted with sin (either by another person or because the Holy Spirit has prompted you) what is your typical reaction?

Do we get defensive? Do we become ashamed? We must be confronted with a sin before we can repent of it. This is often difficult. Knowledge of our reactions when confronted with our sin will help us identify what we have a hard time repenting.

9. Can you think of a situation in which you are sorry for the consequences of something you do... but when given the opportunity you **want** to do it again?

Overspending, over-indulgence, gossiping, repeated arguments with family members, cheating on taxes, "white" lies, reminding others of their faults and mistakes - what are the things you don't like the outcome of - but still pursue when given the chance?

If you have sorrow about the outcome of something, but want to continue to do it, then you have not repented of the behavior.

This doesn't mean that when we mess up, we lose our salvation. We will indeed continue to deal with sin - but how do we handle it when we realize our sin? Are we heading in the direction of an ever-increasing freedom from it?

10. The Holy Spirit is the agent through which God works in this world. He isn't a "part" of the Christian life... without Him, the Christian has NO life. When the Holy Spirit takes up residence in you, you have received Him in His entirety. This initial immersion of the Spirit baptizes you into God's family. Do you recall the circumstances in your life leading up to the moment of your initial repentance? Up to this point, did you fully understand the critical role that the Holy Spirit has in salvation?

As participants discuss this question, we want them to see that it is often through difficult circumstances that God allows us to see the futility of trying to live our lives while comfortable in our sins. Through our trials we recognize our need for a Savior. We want them to focus on the situations leading up to their initial repentance more than we want them to focus on a specific moment when they may have said "the salvation prayer".

11. In Chapter 3 of the book we examined the before and after difference in the life of Peter once he received the Holy Spirit. Is there a marked difference in you?

What we'd like to draw out is for each individual to recognize if he/she can identify a life change following receipt of the Holy Spirit. Particularly, was there a change in regards to their thoughts towards their sins?

12. Even with the fullness of the Holy Spirit in you, it is possible that you have not given Him complete room to do His work through you. In upcoming chapters, we will work through those things that keep you from living a Spirit-led life. But as it stands right now, can you identify those times that you are being led by the Spirit?



Start to pay attention to the times that you and God are well connected; and more importantly, what leads up to those times. These are wonderful journaling opportunities.

Closing Thoughts

Belief in Jesus Christ as God's only Son, crucified for your sin, is a portion of your salvation. You must decide that His death and resurrection made it possible for you and God to be in right standing again. He took on a human form in order to pay the penalty for your sin.

If you know this, but have no heart change about your sin... if you continue to pursue it and give it top spot in your life... if you do not repent of your sin, there has been no salvation. One cannot serve two masters. Regardless of how long God pursued you before you made the decision to repent, receipt of the Holy Spirit is the beginning of your life as a saved child of God.

The Holy Spirit will bear evidence to others that you belong to God. His love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, self-control, gentleness and faithfulness displayed in you will glorify Him. Your job is to be obedient and walk in the way He has set forth in His word. That means loving others as He loves you. Once you have the Holy Spirit, you are equipped to love in His radical way. Without the Holy Spirit, radical love is not possible. Abide in Him and His Spirit will have full access to work through you.

We want to state again that this is a *process*. You won't get it right every time. Old habits will surface. Unloving words will come forth from your own lips. However, you will notice that in increasing measures you are able to put to practice that which God teaches you. If you desire to allow God to continue to refine you, then ask Him to do it. He will. Ask Him to help you hate your sinful ways. Ask Him to help you respond with His love. Pursue Him and He will disclose Himself more and more to you.

We want to leave you with one final question to discuss in your group if you are comfortable:



Have you had the moment of realization of just how ugly **your** sin is to God?

Lesson 3 - CHAPTERS 5 & 6

Lesson Introduction

Satan has deceived many into thinking that sex, love and intimacy are one and the same. As such, many, including Christians, are gravely misled in their understanding of God's most pure and perfect gift - LOVE.

Most Christians would agree that addiction to pornography is destructive. Pornography kills marriages, and interferes with one's ability to function in daily life. A 1996 Promise Keepers survey revealed that 50% of the men in attendance at one of their events were involved with pornography within one week of attending the event. You might feel a sense of outrage at this kind of report, and rightly so. What could be worse?

We would like to suggest that millions of people live with an emotional addiction like none-other. It is based upon a love ideology that puts one's self at the center, or makes one's self the object of, someone else's love. This is the love depicted in "harmless" chick-flicks and romance novels. As a result, most women, and quite a few men, seek the "whisk you off your feet and carry you away to a perfect life" kind of love. It is as destructive to relationships as pornography.

The expectation for this kind of love is not restricted to marriage. Every aspect of worldly love puts you at the center. This ideology has seeped into every form of relationship, including your relationship with God. How many times have you heard it said, "God wants me to be happy"? The quest for this love is nothing more than self-idolatry! Friend there is no greater tragedy than to believe that what the world has taught you about love, *is true love*.

As we learned in Chapter 3, the Holy Spirit's job is to testify about Jesus and His ministry of reconciliation. Once you have the Holy Spirit in you - you have the power to overcome all distortions and barriers that prevent you from loving God's way.

We hope through this lesson you realize that you **must** begin to look at others the way Christ does. As you process through these questions - know that the intent is not for you to feel self-condemnation. As long as you walk this earth there will be people and scenarios that make it tough to love. Our attempt is to shine light into the dark recesses of your heart so that you can be free from those lies. His love, in you, provides the power. THAT is the truth that God wants you to see.

Spicy Meatball

As God's child, unless you choose to love with Christ's mind, you choose to side with Satan.

What is your initial reaction to this statement? (Discuss in your group)

Scripture Study

If you are going to love with Christ's mind, you must look to Scripture to see what choices Christ made and why.

Read Philippians 2:3-4.

3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; **4** do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

1. Paul wrote this passage to believers in the church. As a believer, how are you to regard others?

As more important than yourself

2. When is it acceptable to put your needs first?

Never

Continue reading verses 5-8.

5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, **6** who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, **7** but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. **8** Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

3. According to these verses, what choices did Christ make?

To release His own rightful status.
To become a servant (or bond-servant)
To take on man's likeness or appearance
To humble Himself
To be obedient - even to the point of death.

Continue reading verses 9-15.

9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, **10** so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11** and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; **13** for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing; **15** so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world...

Scripture Study

4. According to verse 11, why did Christ make these choices?

So every tongue will confess Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

5. What does your obedience to this instruction show?

That you are a child of God

To ask it another way, what would your disobedience to this instruction indicate?

That you are not a child of God.

To emphasize the point that you support Satan's efforts when you do not handle yourself with God's interests in mind - read Matthew 16: 21 - 23.

21 From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.

22 Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You."

23 But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

6. Because Peter's mind was not on God's interests, what does Jesus call him?

A stumbling block to Jesus.

Each time you intentionally decide to do it your way, not God's way, you support Satan's efforts in that moment. When you fix your sights on self-centered pursuits - including your pursuits about love - you do not bear witness to the presence of God in this world.

Life Application

Leader; Our main point in this lesson is for participants to understand the magnitude of our decision to follow Christ. We cannot declare Him with our mouths and still live in pursuit of self-serving, self-centered interests. Each time we hush the Spirit within and try to do it our way, we side with Satan.

7. Your mind, set on God's interests, means you are removed from the center of your pursuits. Have you ever heard (or used) any of these phrases:

"You need to do what you feel is right."

"If it makes you happy, then do it."

“That was the final straw - I’m through with him / her.”

“I’ve got to look out for myself.”

Whose interests are at the center of these kinds of statements? Are you beginning to see the difference between man’s love and God’s love?

There is a distinction between acting in someone else’s best interests and simply giving in to their demands. For example, if your child wanted to eat nothing but candy - obviously that would not be in their best interests; even though allowing it seems easier at the time. Your easiest route out in the moment is not always God’s answer.

How do you know Christ’s mind in a situation? When you are connected to Him through His Spirit, you will have the discernment to have the agape love response. You really do have access to Christ’s mind; do not take that lightly. Each scenario is different - every person is unique - and He alone knows what is required. If you try to make those decisions without connection to Him, you likely will default to your own control mechanisms and self-serving actions.

8. Are there people in your life who you believe are undeserving of your self-sacrifice? Who are they and why do you feel this way about them?

We all have those people in our life who test our patience and test our love more than others. It is these very people that we need to love the most. Nothing is more crushing to Satan than when we show love to someone whom he is pursuing. Why? Because God’s love DOES NOT FAIL.

9. Moving forward, what kinds of situations do you envision would be difficult for you to demonstrate unconditional love?

We’d like group members to think about very specific situations in this question. What are the times when they have the most difficulty showing God’s love to others?



10. What is one small step that you can take with one of those difficult people that would show them Christ-minded love? Spend time envisioning those scenarios that you find tough. Write in your journal how you feel and commit your future responses to God.

A first step might be to pray for that person. Leader, if you are able to pause and have a time of prayer, do it! Ask God to begin to soften hearts towards those people participants find tough to love radically. Have participants call to mind the names and faces of those people whom they need to love better. Invite repentance of hard hearts towards these “tough to love” people.

Closing Thoughts

In Chapter 6 of the book, we explored the “Love Influences” that you may have experienced in your own life. The effects of these influences cause us to give God the “yeah, butts...” when it comes to our love for others.

When family, culture and peers have more influence over your life than God does, you will have a difficult time holding a pure picture of the qualities of His love; especially in difficult situations. You will look for the loophole - and will be ready to think that “this one situation” is the exception to the rule. That is a temptation from Satan, because there are no exceptions.

Christ loved God so much that he made the choice to take on humanity, for your own good, at the expense of His own entitlement. How much more should you be willing to obey God’s commands - even in situations you feel your “rights” are violated?



What are names of the walls that have been built - by you or by others - that prevent you from accepting the truth that His way is best in all situations?

Are you **really** willing to allow Him to blow up those walls for all situations - with no “yeah, butts...”?

If you are comfortable sharing this information with your group or with a trusted friend, we recommend you do so. As we’ve said, calling into the light those things that Satan would rather you keep in darkness is crucial to removing any barriers that keep you from living a Holy Spirit-led life.

Leader: Many people find it a difficult truth that God’s primary interest is not our happiness - it is our holiness. As we are obedient to Him, we will realize just how free we really are from the things of this world. Joy and happiness abound from that freedom. However, many pursue it the other way around. We think if only we were happy, then everything else would fall into place. Our human nature wants our needs met before we’ll believe that God has our best interests in mind. Trusting God is such a big part of this equation - and the next lesson goes deep into trusting Him. Encourage your group members throughout the week if you can.

Lesson 4 - CHAPTERS 7 & 8

Lesson Introduction

We'd like to ask you a question. What is the opposite of trusting God? 9 out of 10 people automatically reply, "doubt." Actually, the opposite of trust in God, is trust in man. Any man. Jeremiah warned us that if we trust in mankind, rather than place our trust in God, we will live as though we are a cursed man (Jeremiah 17:5).

Even as we (Kim and Donna) complete this study guide, we are enduring some really difficult times in each of our own family situations. The temptation is great to resort to our own methods for a quick fix. The problem with our own methods, however, is that our quick fix is usually a worldly solution.

Two things God hates; pride and despair. Pride declares, "I can do it myself, I don't need God." Despair declares, "God is not big enough, or strong enough, or simply does not care enough about me to take care of me and my situation."

When it comes to relationship issues, you simply must trust God. The temptation will be great to have a back-up plan or to listen to how the world would respond in a given situation. No doubt, just as we have, you have had the painful experience that your "fall-back" solutions prove to be neither wise nor profitable. The counter-actions to pride and despair are submission and trust.

In Chapter 7, we learned how prone we are to old sinful habits - resorting to these habits is "relying" on ourselves. We just need to STOP IT! Stop it now. God promises that if we resist temptation, the enemy will flee from us (James 4:7).

Your trust should not be in the hope of a desired outcome. Your trust is in the character and the promises of God - that His way will always provide the best outcome. Do you trust God enough to believe that His way is the best, no matter what it looks like?

Trust in God takes practice. You step out in faith and He will meet you there. As you grow in your confidence, as you trust in God with all your heart, you will feel safe and be carefree. Your entire faith life hinges on your ability to trust God.

Our scripture study will look into the story of a man who declared his trust in God's promises, even though everyone around him did otherwise....

Spicy Meatball

Whenever you try to control the outcome of any situation, you do not trust God.

What is your initial reaction to this statement? (Discuss in your group)

Scripture Study

Today we travel to the Old Testament and read part of the story that precedes the Israelites' period of forty years wandering in the desert.

Read Numbers 13:1-2 (NIV)

1 The LORD said to Moses, **2** "Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders."

1. What was the mission of the men and who sent them?

The Lord sent them, their mission was to spy, or explore the land.

2. What land was it?

Canaan (Leader: this is the promised land, the land which is now the country of Israel)

3. How many men were sent on mission?

One from each tribe (12 total)

We see throughout Scripture that it was common procedure to survey, or assess, the land prior to moving into battle. As we review the outcome of this story it is important to note that the purpose of the assessment was not to determine whether or not they **should** take the land - they were simply to go and report back what was waiting for them **as they went in** to take the land which God had promised.

Let's see what happened...

Read Numbers 13:27-32 (NIV)

27 They gave Moses this account: "We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. **28** But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. **29** The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan."

30 Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it."

31 But the men who had gone up with him said, "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are." **32** And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, "The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size."

4. What was the report regarding the land and the people who lived there?

The land was good, flowing with good things, they brought back good fruit, the people were strong and cities were fortified and large, they would not be able to up against the people.

5. Did all of the men have the same report? Who reported differently?

No, Caleb reported that they should go in and take possession.

Joshua, one of the other spies, also believed with Caleb that the Israelites should go in and take possession of the land. They pleaded with the congregation:

Read Numbers 14:8-11

8 "If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. **9** Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them."

10 But the whole assembly talked about stoning them. Then the glory of the LORD appeared at the Tent of Meeting to all the Israelites. **11** The LORD said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?"

6. According to verse 9, what prevented the Israelites from trusting that they should go into the land?

Rebellion and fear

7. Who was the rebellion against? (verse 11)

God

8. Who did they fear?

People or man

The Israelites as a whole decided not to go in and take the land. They even wanted to stone those who trusted God! This was in direct opposition to what God told them to do. The consequence was great.

Read Numbers 14:22-24. (NIV) [God is speaking, emphasis ours]

22 "Not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times - **23** not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. *No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it.* **24** But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it."

9. What was God's punishment on the people?

None of them got to enter the land

10. Why was Caleb spared the consequence?

He had a different spirit and followed God fully

Life Application

Leader; Our desire for this lesson is for participants to understand that trust in God may at times appear foolishness to man. That doesn't mean we go out looking to make senseless decisions - but when there is a command from God to obey - we must obey it. Our trust is built alongside our obedience. Fear-based and control-based actions will ultimately fail - every time. When fear strikes, we must cling to God's promises. Recall the lessons learned from Peter in Chapter 8 of the book. Encourage participants to take those actions when fear or mistrust strikes.

Because Caleb and Joshua trusted God, they had confidence that obedience to His command was the best option, even though the others told them otherwise. The rest of the Israelites, who let their fears guide their actions, tried to control their circumstance under the guise of self-preservation. With this in mind...



11. What are the areas in your life that you make self-preserving decisions at the expense of obedience to God? Which situations do you try and maintain control over?

Often these scenarios relate to our children, our finances, our spouses. These can be hardest to identify because we will try and justify our actions in the name of love.

12. Do you think that your attempt to maintain control over these areas is driven by fear?

Our fears can drive us to make unwise decisions to maintain control. We may even try and justify sin in the name of love. If participants have a hard time answering - perhaps ask them: What are you afraid of? Then follow up with: What do you do to combat that fear?

Every act of faith is rewarded. Caleb and Joshua were the only two who got to step foot in the Promised Land. The others supported each other in making fear-based decisions and it led to their destruction.

13. When fear comes upon you, you have a decision to make. Will you try and control the circumstances or will you seek God's Word on the matter and obey it, no matter what the external evidence?

The choice you make gives indication what you really believe in your heart. The key is to be fully connected to God - to abide in Him. You are then in position to hear His guidance for your actions and decisions. He will show you His will for the matter.

Closing Thoughts

Did you happen to notice from question 10 of this lesson that Caleb was identified as having a "different spirit" than the others? Like Caleb, you have a different Spirit in you. If you are saved, you have the Holy Spirit.

Lesson Four

Joshua and Caleb placed their trust in the outcome God promised. Do you realize, God has made promises to you? He promises:

1. To supply for every need that you have. (See Philippians 4:19)
2. That His grace is sufficient for you. (See 2 Corinthians 12:9)
3. That His children can always escape temptation. (See 1 Corinthians 10:13 & Jude verse 24)
4. That all things (no matter how they appear to our human minds) will work together for good for those who LOVE Him. (See Romans 8:28)

These are just some of the promises you can cling to when temptation to trust in man surfaces. Resist the temptation to take matters into your own hands. When you trust God, you will know when you are to take action and when to stay put. He promises:

“Many are the woes of the wicked - but the LORD’S unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in Him.” (Psalm 32:10 *NIV*)

When you are surrounded by His love - you can not go wrong. Do we hear an “Amen”?

Here’s a little sumthin’ for ya.... Many Christians today believe that God does not perform miracles any longer. If you have been deceived with this lie, then we’d like to suggest that lack of trust drives you to take matters into your own hands without ever giving Him the chance to do a miraculous work in your presence.

The final question we would like you to discuss openly in your group is:



What steps do you need to take to build your trust in God’s promises?

Lesson 5 - CHAPTERS 9 & 10

Lesson Introduction

We do not fall away from our faith all at once. We drift away slowly! Here's how it might look:

As we begin to drift, we have doubts about God. When we doubt God, our hearts become hardened. When our hearts are hard, we despise and defy God's Word. The result is devastating to a believer. Envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions and constant friction arise between men and/or women who have drifted from truth.

As the church of Corinth grew, they allowed the culture around them to be an influence on the church - rather than the church having influence on the culture. Paul wrote this epistle to a congregation in desperate need of correcting. Paul's rebuke to them: "Grow up! You are acting just like children who have never known how to behave!"

Paul was greatly disturbed when he said, "I can no longer speak to you as spiritual men....For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?" (1 Corinthians 3:1&3)

Paul's words pack a punch that should be felt by anyone ready to give into the temptation to be jealous. Our culture will tell you that everyone else has things and status that you deserve. How do you deal with the temptation to believe it? Do you look for someone to blame for your perceived misfortune?

In Chapter 9 and 10 we identified many of the things that cause us to stumble. Every difficult relational situation is an invitation from God to *examine your own heart*. How do you react when someone hurts you or makes you angry? It is **your** heart's reaction to their behavior that God wants you to see, because, as we discussed in earlier weeks, it is your heart that reveals your spiritual condition.

As you work through this lesson, pay close attention your heart reaction. Identify areas where God needs to work. Celebrate the areas in which you find increased freedom. As the Hebrew writer encouraged, "For this reason, pay close attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it" (Hebrews 2:1).

Spicy Meatball

Harboring feelings of envy and blame can lead you to abandon your faith.

What is your initial reaction to this statement? (Discuss in your group)

Scripture Study

Genesis 4 contains the story of the first murder committed on earth. Two brothers. Cain and Abel. In study of this event, we want to understand the choices Cain had and how he responded. We will see that Cain's circumstance is not unlike the situations we face every day.

Read Genesis 4:3-8 (NIV)

3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. **4** But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, **5** but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

6 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? **7** If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

8 Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

1. In verses 3 and 4 we read that God showed favor on Abel. We are not completely given the reasons as to why Cain's offering was less acceptable - but the end result was that God deemed it so. It left Cain with a feeling of anger. What warning does God give Cain as to his state of mind?

That because he was angry, sin was crouching at the door, waiting for him.

2. What choice did God give Cain (v.7) as it related to Cain's anger?

Cain had the choice to do the right thing -or- not to do the right thing. He had the choice to be master over the sin that was waiting for him.

Note: Because Cain was angry the temptation to let that anger lead to sin was present. The initial anger wasn't the sin - God said he would sin if he did not master his anger. God warned him - and also told him that he had a choice. He could let the anger control him or he could master it.

3. What did Cain do next?

Cain rose up against Abel and killed him.

Read Genesis 4:9-10

9 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?"
"I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

10 The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground."

4. Did God know what Cain had done?

Yes - verse 10 tells us that God knew what happened

5. If God knew, why do you think He asked the question of Cain?

God gave Cain the chance to confess what he did

Read Genesis 4:11-16

11 Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. **12** When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."

13 Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is more than I can bear. **14** Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me."

15 But the LORD said to him, "Not so; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over." Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. **16** So Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

6. In the verses above, circle God's consequences for Cain in verses 11 & 12.

7. Now, circle in a different color how Cain interprets what God said in verse 14.

8. What are the two major differences?

Cain claims that from God's face he will be hidden; Cain also claims that whoever finds him will kill him - God never said that. God even replied, "Not so" after Cain stated this.

9. Who left who in verse 16?

Cain went out from the Lord's presence.

Life Application

Leader; Our main point in this lesson is for participants to realize that envy and blame pull us away from our faith. The only power Satan has over the life of a believer is to tempt him/her into believing that a lie is the truth. The Spirit will warn when we stray close to dangerous envy and blame. Anger usually has a major role in these harmful situations. As anger comes upon us, we have a choice.

All of this began when Cain paid attention to God's favor upon Abel and felt anger over it. We read that God warned him of the impending sin. Then, even after the sin occurred, God gave him opportunity to confess and repent. It started with envy. With that in mind, we'd like you to take a moment and really consider...



10. Who do you envy? Or What do you covet? Please don't gloss over this question. Likely the thing you envy is the thing Satan will tempt you with most. It is different for each of us and a crucial wall to identify so that the Holy Spirit can help you knock it down.

We want participants to dig deep to see where envy has a grip on their hearts. It might be a particular person or success of another in a particular situation. It might be envy of a better lifestyle or envy of others who seem to have it all together.

11. When you feel envy there will always be a warning. What choice do you make?

When the pang of envy surfaces - what are typical reactions? Do we justify our envy? Do we get angry at our own circumstance? Do we begin to blame others for our lack? Whatever we do, the temptation to sin is never closer. We must confess our envy, blame or anger immediately.

This question ties closely with Question 8 asked in Lesson Two as to how we tend to react when confronted with our sin. Leader, you might want to refer back to that question and make the connection.

Closing Thoughts

The point we want to make from Cain and Abel's story isn't that Abel was a "better" servant of God because he gave a better offering. The point is that when God blessed someone else, Cain let his feelings of envy and anger lead him to sin.

It will always be a temptation to compare yourself and your life to others. We live in a media rich society that is filled with images of things you "must have." You see pictures of people who are prettier, skinnier, more successful, smarter and *everyone* drives a better car. Within the church you will hear stories of God using His people in mighty ways - and you may feel envious that you are not a part of it.

Unless you take those feelings to God as they surface, there is great danger that they will create a barrier between you and the Holy Spirit. He is there and waiting to hear from you, just as He was right there waiting to hear from Cain.

Instead of repentance, Cain gave God self-focused whining. *"What, am I my brother's keeper?" "My punishment is to great to bear." "People will kill me."*

Never do we hear Cain say, "I am sorry. I was wrong." Although God's consequence for Cain was hefty - God never said He would leave Cain. Cain assumed that to be the case and left the presence of the Lord.

In reality, there is not a place you can go that would be out of God's presence. But you can sure choose to ignore Him. You can allow your anger, envy and sinful blame block the voice of the Spirit's warning. You can choose mindless entertainment over reading His Word. You can stop going to the house of the Lord to worship. You can pretend your sin isn't your fault. As such, your faith slips away.

As a result, you may feel God has left you. That, too, is a lie. Through all of your attempts to silence Him, blame Him, discredit Him and mistrust Him, He is there and waiting for your repentance.



With all of that in mind, we'd like you to ask God to reveal to you if there is hate anywhere in your heart? It is not too late - what are you going to do about it?

Lesson 6 - CHAPTERS 11 & 12

Lesson Introduction

Failure to repent creates a huge barricade between you and God. Confession is the dynamite that, once detonated, blows up that barrier and clears the pathway for you to return and be reconciled with Him.

All unforgiveness must be confessed before God. A battle rages in the heart of every believer. The double mind of the heart is this; whether to surrender to the temptation and enter into sin, or to press on, to strive for purity.

Sooner or later you must decide which master you will serve, God or Satan. Unforgiveness toward others gives Satan supremacy over your life. To forgive another is to bow before a Holy God. The best news of all is that you can decide which master you will serve. This is the free will of choice God has given you.

Your heart either knows or it doesn't know the magnitude of the cost for your own forgiveness. Your heart can accept, rejoice and respond in gratitude for the freedom that comes with forgiveness, or it can harden, deny and even reject God's forgiveness altogether.

In this lesson we look at the heart as it relates to forgiveness. We will see that how you respond when given the opportunity to forgive indicates the condition of your heart.

Spicy Meatball

We have wrongly assumed our own forgiveness if we do not demonstrate, in increasing measure, our ability to forgive others.

Do you agree with this statement? Are there things that could happen that you probably couldn't forgive? (Discuss in your group)

Scripture Study

Read Matthew 18:21-35

21 Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"

22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. **23** For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. **24** When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. **25** But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made.

26 So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.' **27** And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt.

28 But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' **29** So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' **30** But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed.

31 So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened.

32 Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. **33** Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' **34** And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.

35 My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

Jesus tells this parable in response to a question from Peter as to how many times he should forgive another. As Jesus does, He flips it around to show us that the question is not, "How many times?" The question is, "What if you don't forgive at all?"

1. According to verse 23, what is the parable about?

The kingdom of heaven

2. The king and the slave demonstrate very different responses when they are presented with an opportunity to forgive. In the chart below, list how each responded when asked for forgiveness:

The King	The Slave
Felt compassion	Unwilling
Released the slave	Threw him in prison
Forgave him	

3. According to verse 31, who witnessed the unforgiveness of the slave, what emotion did they feel and what did they do about it?

Fellow slaves were witnesses, they were grieved deeply and they reported what happened to the lord.

4. What was the outcome for the unforgiving slave?

He was handed over to torturers until he should repay all that was owed

5. To demonstrate our own receipt of God's mercy, what does Jesus command us in verse 35?

Forgive our brother - from the heart!

One last Scripture we want to examine is Mark 11:25:

25 "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions."

6. When does Jesus say you must forgive?

Whenever you pray

You can not expect to stand before a Holy God and ask for your own forgiveness if you intentionally hang on to hate in your heart.

Life Application

7. Going back to the question we asked in the Spicy Meatball, after study of this parable, is there an offense that is too great to be forgiven?

Leader: Jesus does not show any loopholes when it comes to forgiveness. Unkind words, intentional hurts, unfaithfulness - nothing is exempt from our forgiveness. Just to note again; forgiveness does not mean “keeping the peace” or denial of our hurts. Forgiveness is a heart condition.

Unkind words about a person or feeling outright anger are indicators that unforgiveness exists in a situation.

8. Do you currently hold something against someone else? What does God want you to do?

This could be a painful realization that individual group members may want to keep private. If the group is close enough, invite members to confess their unforgiveness and pray with them. If they want to keep private, lead a prayer of confession and ask them to silently release any unforgiveness.

9. In chapter 11 of the book, you read a quote, “To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.” Have you experienced an emotional freedom following your forgiveness of another person?

Discuss: How does forgiveness make you feel inside? Is it always a good feeling? Does it take time to feel release or does it happen all at once?

When do you know you are free? When you can look upon someone who has hurt you and feel **compassion**. It is a process - and may require you to continue to ask God to soften your heart towards another person. Press through and confess feelings of unforgiveness when they surface. Most of all, avoid the temptation to re-live the offense in your mind. One day you will realize you no longer want to bring up the past hurt again. Not to yourself, not to someone else and not even to God. Freedom!

The freedom we speak of is not simply a release from the emotional stress of unforgiveness, it is much more than that. It is a freedom from the snare of Satan and the bondage of sin. Forgiving others is indeed an indication of your salvation.

Closing Thoughts

In this Lesson’s Scripture study, we were struck once again by the realization that just when we are ready to look to the sins of others, Jesus turns things around and asks us to reveal the condition of our own heart. Peter’s initial question was, “How many times should I forgive someone else’s sin?” He wanted to determine the point at which someone else disqualifies for receipt of pardon.

The parable that Jesus taught in response shows that the question we should consider is not how often we forgive - but what is our heart condition when someone has an offense against us? Do we understand the mercy that the Father has offered - and then offer the same forgiveness and mercy in return?

Or do we hold others accountable for their debts and mistakes?

It is because of a different heart - the Holy Spirit residing within - that we are indeed able to forgive all offenses - no matter how great or small. If we try and forgive without the Holy Spirit, there will always be a breaking point. There will always be an “unforgivable” offense.

Jesus’ whole point was that once we know the depth of the forgiveness offered to us, we cannot hold others in bondage of their debts to us. Not in the kingdom of heaven. You will not stand before Christ on the day of your death and point the finger at someone else.

The other slaves saw the behavior exhibited by the unforgiving slave. (verse 31) They were grieved and went to the lord about it. When we demonstrate an unforgiving heart, others take notice. Any influence or impact we may have over their lives to give glory to God is lost in the moment they witness our unforgiveness. It goes directly against our call on earth.



The question we’d like to leave you with, and one you may want to spend time reflecting in your journal, is: Have you noticed on an increasing measure that you are able to forgive others even during those times you did not want to forgive in the first place?

Leader; We are in the home stretch. Satan will be nearby, with words of condemnation for participants. Encourage your group that God’s love covers our past sins - that is the whole point! Once we have accepted His forgiveness, we have the power to conquer the evil feelings and behaviors that surface. This is a work of freedom - not a work of condemnation. God sees us as children whom He loves. He blesses us as we seek Him. That is the journey we are on... a journey towards truth and away from lies.

Lesson 7 - CHAPTERS 13 & 14

Lesson Introduction

Friends, we realize that the temptation might be to assume that your role in the kingdom of God is to self-sacrificially love others and receive nothing but misery in return. There is no HOPE in this line of thinking, and will lead to a fruitless death of your soul.

Jesus was criticized, mocked, spat on and beaten, but know this; He was NOT a victim. In all His freedom, Jesus made the "choice" to respond in love - He never demanded others love Him in return; He never thought of Himself as un-loved. Why? Jesus knew He was loved by His Father and that love was enough to keep him going - even to the point of death.

You love because He first loved you. When you love in the way God requires, you clear a space in your heart and He will fill it. Dear friend, of course it is God's desire that everyone would love in this way; unconditionally, seeking the best interests of others at all times. God does not promise, however, that you will be loved in return by those you have been faithful to love. Love is a choice - remember?

You may not receive God's love in return from those you expect it from - but know, God **will** send His love to you through true brothers and sisters in Christ.

Best of all, God's promise is that you are loved by Him! His love will remain when all else falls away.

As you obey the call to love others, there will indeed be difficult times when you must lay down your pride. However, in the middle of your most trying circumstances, you find Jesus. In hindsight, you find the gifts Jesus left behind. Gifts of joy, peace, patience, love and kindness, just to name a few. Living out God's call to love Him and love others guarantees that you will have His love to the fullest.

As you work through this final lesson we pray that you have already begun to experience the power of the Holy Spirit in your life. By His power you will find your heart changed towards others. By His power you will find yourself doing things that benefit others, even when you don't feel like doing them. In this, you glorify God. We cheer you on friend. Nothing compares to the realization of His power at work in your life.

Spicy Meatball

There will be times when what is in the best interest of someone else, the thing the most demonstrates God's love, will not be the thing you want to do.

How does this resonate with you? (Discuss in your group)

Scripture Study

At one point during Paul's second Missionary Journey he traveled through the city of Philippi. While there, he and Silas healed a slave-girl, who was a fortune teller for her masters. As a result, they were beaten and imprisoned. Let's begin our final Scripture study together by reading what happened to Paul and Silas in prison.

Read Acts 16:22-30

22 The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods.

23 When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely;

24 and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

25 But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them;

26 and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened.

27 When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.

28 But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!"

29 And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas,

30 and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

1. Before the earthquake, what were Paul and Silas doing in prison?

Praying, singing hymns of praise to God

2. Were they alone in prison?

No. We read in v. 25 that there were other prisoners there who were listening to them.

3. What happened to the prison house itself when the earthquake happened?

The foundations were shaken, all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened.

4. What was the jailer's initial reaction and why?

He drew his sword to kill himself, supposing the prisoners had escaped

5. The jailer made an assumption that the prisoners had left - was he right?

No. Paul, Silas and all of the prisoners were still there.

6. What was his response when he saw that everyone was still there?

He trembled with fear and fell down before them. He asked "What must I do to be saved?"

When the doors opened and chains fell off, they had the opportunity to escape. No doubt they knew of Peter's miraculous release from his chains of imprisonment that occurred in previous months. (See Acts 12) Yet, in this circumstance Paul and Silas knew they were to stay put.



7. How do you think they knew what they were to do in this situation?

Spend a few moments reflecting on this question. You may want to journal your thoughts, Then, proceed with the lesson.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:14-16 (Keep in mind, Paul penned these words)

14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

15 But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one.

16 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.

8. We'd like to ask you again, How do you think Paul and Silas knew that they were to stay put - even though the outward circumstance would have appeared that they had been given freedom?

The mind of Christ instructed them.

Did participants have different answers before and after reading these verses?

Peter, Paul and Silas were led by the Spirit. Verse 25 of Acts 16 tells us that right before the earthquake they were in prayer and worship. As they abided in Christ, the Spirit told them what to do. It was only because they were connected to God that they had the discernment to do the thing God wanted done in this situation. Even though it would have made more sense to the human mind to flee.

Life Application

9. Have you ever -or- do you now feel imprisoned by some circumstance?

10. God's Word tells us that His agape love is always, ALWAYS in their, and ultimately our, best interest. When circumstance appears to you that fleeing -or- severing a relationship - is in your best interest, how will you know the correct course of action?

Being fully connected with Jesus through the Spirit is the only way we'll have the discernment to know. We must engage in Spiritual Disciplines to remain connected to the vine. We must confess sin immediately to keep communication lines open. We must walk in the ministry of reconciliation; with forgiveness and grace at the forefront of our relationships. Through these, we remain filled with His Spirit, we bear fruit and He discloses Himself to us.

Closing Thoughts

We wrote *Radical Love...Forever Changed* to guide you to a crucial decision point. Will you pick up the cross of Christ and carry it with you every day, in all situations?

We pray that you have realized that His cross has His love and grace at its center. You can decide today that no matter what someone else does or says to you - there is nothing that will remove them from the presence of your love. You can decide to forgive, before you have even been wronged. You can decide that no matter what the outward circumstances, you will make the choice to obey God. You will know His will, because you abide in Him through His Word and through Spiritual Disciplines that keep you filled with His Spirit.

Often, obedience may not be the thing that seems the most natural to you. Every force of this world will tempt you continually to place yourself at the center of your decisions. The world will tell you that you should place expectations on others and that you have the right for those expectations to be met. Envy, manipulation, blame, anger and most of all, PRIDE will taunt you. Will you trust that the Spirit in you is stronger than those temptations? He alone defeats the sin - every time.

The truth is, when you lay down your expectations and choose obedience - only then does God's love prevail. His way will not fail. Ever. Nothing crushes the plans of Satan more than when God's people show His love to those he pursues. Your purpose is not to simply bind the evil in this world - but to overcome it with His love.

The blessing comes from doing it God's way.



The final question we'd like you to discuss in your group is: Have **you** picked up the cross of Christ?

Bless you deeply.

Dear Leader,

We want to hear about your experience with this Study. We want to continue to pray for you. Please contact us at leaders@radicallovebook.com.

Thank you for embarking on this journey with us.

Donna's Blog: www.FortheSakeofTRUTH.ca Kimberly's Blog: www.FortheSakeofJOY.com