



Hope Over Hurt

A BIBLE STUDY WITH
EMILY MILLER

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CULTIVATE REVIVAL BIBLE STUDY SERIES

A Bible study series.
Designed to cultivate revival
and to grow stronger, together.



WEEK 1

BONDAGE OF UNFORGIVENESS

A scenic view of a coastal town at the base of a large, flat-topped mountain under a warm, golden sky. The water is clear and blue, with a small boat visible in the distance.

In Him we have redemption through His blood,
the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.

EPHESIANS 1:7

When I agreed to write on the topic of forgiveness, I expected it to come easily or to just write down the facts and be done with it, but here I am sitting in front of a blank screen feeling wildly under-qualified to write anything about this. While it doesn't feel like I am far enough into this journey to teach on such a topic, perhaps I am just far enough in to tell you some of my story. It's easy to stand on a mountain top and speak glibly of the valley, but I knew that He was calling me to walk through the hallways of my memories and feel the tension again.

Forgiveness has not been an easy journey for me. I spent many years of my life completely entangled in bitterness to the point that it affected every part of my life. And believe me, I felt perfectly justified in that. In my young childhood, I experienced years of sexual abuse that left me feeling very angry and jaded. I felt as though my unforgiveness was the only thing that kept a wall of safety around me. In my mind, forgiveness meant reconciliation, and I purposed in my heart to protect myself above all else. What started to happen as I hardened myself against forgiveness was that it became easy to not forgive the slightest offense. What started as me not forgiving a big thing soon turned into holding senseless little grudges and feeling justified in doing so.

Unforgiveness is
bondage.

Unforgiveness is bondage. There's no easier way to say it. It starts with a sense of power and control, and then quickly brings you to a place of mental torture. When I think of unforgiveness, I often think of Christian in, "Pilgrims Progress," when he is weighed down by the heavy burden on his journey to the Celestial Kingdom. I don't know what it feels like to you, but it very often felt that way to me. I was just trying to get through life while carrying boulders in my pockets.

Having grown up knowing the Bible, I had often heard verses regarding forgiveness being taken out of context and manipulated to the favor of the guilty party. You've probably heard it as well. Someone trying to garner forgiveness by saying something along the lines of, "If you truly are a Christian, you will forgive me for..." fill in the blank you've probably heard it. To see forgiveness manipulated and people taken advantage of under the guise of "forgiveness," is devastating, and I can only imagine how it grieves the heart of God.

It is only through forgiveness from Christ that we can be restored to right standing with the Father.

Please don't misunderstand me. Forgiveness is important and necessary. Forgiveness is a beautiful thing. Forgiveness is emphasized clearly and often in the Bible. Ephesians 1:7 is one of my favorite verses regarding the forgiveness we receive from the Father: "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." It is only through forgiveness from Christ that we can be restored to right standing with the Father. Christ in His great mercy to us has given the gift of repentance, we leave the things that have burdened us and in exchange He offers complete forgiveness.

I have found that the missing piece in many people's journey to forgiveness is unbelief surrounding the forgiveness that Christ is offering. I myself battled for many years to accept

that I didn't have to earn forgiveness from Christ. Somewhere in that, I started to realize that the way I viewed receiving forgiveness from Christ tainted the way that I offered forgiveness to others. I had an expectation that people had to earn my forgiveness. I used this as a defense mechanism, a way to keep from getting hurt, but it stemmed from a false idea of what forgiveness truly was. I also find it very helpful to verbalize some of the lies that I have believed surrounding forgiveness.

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THIS WEEK'S QUESTIONS

If you feel comfortable with your group, here are some questions that can be answered together. Taking time to write down your answers, specifically ones that you are not sharing with your group is a helpful starting point to find forgiveness.

What are some of the lies that you have believed surrounding forgiveness? _____

How is unforgiveness affecting your life? _____

What is holding you back from forgiveness? _____



WEEK 2

CHOOSING FORGIVENESS

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
being justified freely by His grace through the
redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

ROMANS 3:23-24

I remember so vividly one day as a young teenager, sitting on the floor with my eyes tightly shut, as I was being led through a prayer of forgiveness. I remember going through the motions while being riddled with the fear that if I forgave it meant that the hurt I had experienced didn't matter anymore. I muttered the phrases that were expected of me and later went home feeling shattered. I had half believed by speaking the words somehow the gaping holes in my life would be filled and I would feel fine. It certainly didn't happen that way. There was a continual dance happening in my head. Forgive and forget, or remember and be safe. It never sat right with me, this idea that forgiving and forgetting meant acting as though I hadn't ever been hurt, or that wrongs had not been committed.

After the abuse of my childhood came to light, there was intense pressure put on me to forgive and move on. Due to the emphasis put on reconciliation, I had this false idea that unforgiveness was the only thing that would keep me safe. After that little prayer it was expected that the wrongs have been righted and life will go on as it had before. While paging through the book, "Forgiving What You Can't Forget," by Lisa TerKeurst recently, I found the words I wish I had heard on that day. It said, *"The purpose of forgiveness is not always reconciliation, in some cases, keeping the relationship going is simply not an option. But that doesn't mean forgiveness is not an option. And even when reconciliation is possible, there is a lot of relationship work that must be done*

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in the process of coming back together. Forgiveness doesn't mean that trust is immediately restored or that hard relational dynamics are instantly fixed. The point of forgiveness is to keep your heart swept clean, cooperating with God's command to forgive and keeping yourself in a position to be able to receive God's forgiveness. Forgiveness doesn't always fix relationships, but it does help mend the hurting heart."

I want you to know that forgiveness, while it is a single choice, it is also 1 million choices,

 it is a lifestyle. There are things in life that are big and scary. There are things in life that are twisted and dark. Life will inevitably hold some injustice, and I know for some of you there are things that immediately come to mind. If you're anything like me, the idea of forgiving has at times made you feel powerless. That couldn't be further from the truth. So many of us have been taught that forgiveness as a quick fix or simply the way to be on the right side of eternity.

 What if there is so much more to it?

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On the side that could almost sound selfish, forgiveness is so personal. Forgiveness deals with you, and your relationship with the Father. Forgiveness can bring healing physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Forgiveness sets you free. The need to forgive and to be forgiven is recognition of the state of humanity. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," Romans 3:23-24.

I can't tell you when to forgive. I can't tell you what forgiveness will look like in your life. I can't tell you that forgiveness will make you feel better. What I can encourage you to do is to step away from the big picture view for a moment, pick something in your life that you find to be a struggle to forgive and take that to the Father. It could be something that feels

small and nonsensical or something that seems big and overwhelming, but just pick one thing and find a quiet space for a few moments and ask God to speak to you about it.

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THIS WEEK'S QUESTIONS

Were there any immediate areas of unforgiveness that were highlighted to you in your reflection time? _____

What do you feel God spoke to you about what you brought to Him? _____



WEEK 3

LEARNING TO HOPE



O Israel, hope in the Lord;
For with the Lord there is mercy,
And with Him is abundant redemption.

PSALM 130:7

We have talked so much about forgiveness the last two weeks and I'm really excited to begin the conversation surrounding emotional healing. There's no cookie cutter way to go about healing, but I do strongly believe that forgiveness is a solid basis to emotional health. Before we get into it, I do want to reiterate that these things do not look the same for every person. Some parts may be relatable, and others not at all. I will be speaking a little about my journey with depression, suicide, and self harm. Those things don't tend to fit in a nice little box, nor does healing from them.

I think I always knew that my emotions were not as they should have been. I remember being as young as four or five, and feeling so frustrated that the emotions I felt were either too much or too little, but never as they should have been. I would watch other little kids and wonder if they felt as shattered inside as I did. As I grew older, it became my mission to keep everything in. It didn't feel good, but it meant that I had some sense of control over what could hurt me, or so I thought. It was short-lived, and I found myself in a long battle with intense depression, suicidal thoughts, and self harm. I began to question everything I thought I knew down to the very existence of God. I so clearly remember one night sitting on my bed, contemplating suicide because I felt like there was nothing left for me. If you had told me then that eight years later, I

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would be writing about emotional healing I wouldn't have believed you.

When I began to tiptoe around the idea of emotional healing, I was almost convinced that it wouldn't work for me. I thought that I was a lost cause and even if other people could get there, I probably wouldn't be able to. You see, I had made an idol out of my circumstances.

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Being broken was my identity and as much as I hated it, I also hated to let it go. We live in a time where trauma makes people "interesting", and brokenness is trendy. Brokenness, trauma, pain, heartbreak, shame, depression, the list could go on and on, those are very real things and shouldn't be made light of, but healing is an option!

Healing doesn't look the same for all things and the truth is that if you try to create a formula around it, you will probably be disappointed. There are things in my life that I feel that I was healed from in an instant and other things that I still bring before the Lord and ask him for complete restoration in. As cliché as it may sound, life is a journey and healing is a part of that.

When was the last time you thought about hope? Hope is a key element. Psalm 130:7 says, "O Israel, hope in the Lord; For with the Lord there is mercy, And with Him is abundant redemption." This was true then and it's still true today for you and I. Maybe you feel as though hope is beyond your grasp, and you are powerless to change that. Or maybe you have recognized idols surrounding the brokenness in your life.

THIS WEEK'S QUESTIONS

These can be answered with your group or privately, depending on your comfort level, but most importantly, they should be answered honestly between you and God.

Have you created idols surrounding the brokenness in your life? _____

Do you or have you ever felt beyond hope? _____





WEEK 4

EXPERIENCING WHOLENESS

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

GALATIANS 6:2

We made it to the last week, thanks for sticking with me! I wanna jump into finishing out the conversation surrounding emotional healing. If you thought last week was a little bit vague, it was intentionally so. I can't tell you what emotional healing will look like for you. I can tell you parts of my own story, I can tell you that it is available for you, but I can't make that happen for you, and I don't want to give you a false idea of what that may look like in your life.

As scary as it can be, one of the most beautiful things is to walk through the hard things in life within community. Obviously, that's not always an option and if you are in a place where you do not have good community, I am sorry. That is an incredibly difficult place to be in.

If you do have people to walk through things with you, or if this group has become a safe place for you, I would encourage you to learn how to walk through the hard things of life together. As people we are made for community, we are made to need people in our lives. We are made to care and to be cared about. Don't misunderstand me, I am not advocating for everyone to dump any and all of their problems onto others without cau-

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tion or boundaries, but there is something beautiful about being there for each other. All that being said, I'll let you in on a little secret that really isn't a secret at all, and that is that I go to therapy/counseling every once in a while.

A little over a year ago I, "Googled," something along the lines of, "Christian therapist in my area," after going through some family issues that I didn't know how to move on from. I sat in the waiting room, thinking about how ridiculous it was that I was paying someone just to talk to me about my problems and little did I know that it would change my life in a lot of ways. For one of the first times in my life, I felt completely free to talk about things I was dealing with, without worrying that I was taking up too much of someone's time, I was paying her to be there after all. Every once in a while, she would stop my rambling and connect some dots in my thought process before allowing me to continue on.

Most importantly and far beyond any of the tips and advice, is relationship with the Father.

I remember walking out of the first session, thinking of specific things that I was able to let go of simply from being able to talk through them freely. I'm telling you this for perspective. Healing looks wildly different in different times, seasons, and for different people. That's okay. Most importantly and far beyond any of the tips and advice, is relationship with the Father. He is the author of forgiveness and the ultimate Healer, and without Him all of this means nothing. Without His guidance these are just a bunch of silly words.

I've told you about me, but what about you? With all my heart, I hope that you choose to follow hard after Christ. I hope that you hold onto hope and don't let it go even in the darkest of times. I pray that as you journey through healing and forgiveness, whether it feels like smooth sailing or the most tumultuous of oceans that you find your anchor point in Jesus and His promise to not let you go. I'm proud of you for sticking with this and be-

ing willing to answer tough questions and go to difficult places in your life in the pursuit of healing and wholeness.

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THIS WEEK'S QUESTIONS

Why is healing so important?

Is God highlighting any areas of brokenness in your life? *Take a few minutes to sit in silence with this.*

What are some practical steps you will be taking towards healing? *If you feel comfortable, I encourage discussing this together as a group to bring a level of accountability and community.*



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