

“Taking a Look at Our Sin with Jesus” (Growth in Grace I)
(Study 3 of “Spiritual Processing Group: Sonship B” Series)

Opening Question (10-15 Minutes)

1. Is there a time in your life when what you saw or heard about yourself surprised you?
 - For instance, you overheard people talking about you or describe you to someone else?
 - Or you saw emails or text messages about you, and they said...
 - Or you heard your voice on a recording or a picture of you, and you thought...
2. How were you surprised- were you pleasantly surprised or unpleasantly shocked?
 - Do you tend to have an artificially high or artificially low view of yourself?
 - Why do you think that is?

Let’s take a look at a story Jesus told about seeing ourselves honestly- and how that changes the way we understand how God sees and treats us...

Scripture Study (15 Minutes)

Read Matthew 18:21-35

(Depending on time, have one person read it aloud in the ESV and/or in the NLT translation.)

1. Be quiet for 30 seconds. Think or write. Now what are your first impressions?
 - What’s your emotional, gut-reaction?
 - Ask a question you have (or can think of).
 - Volunteer a thought or comment- about a verse or the whole passage.
2. Imagine yourself in the place of Peter in verses 21-22. What in your life would lead you to ask Jesus how many times you need to forgive someone?
 - Is there a relationship or situation that comes up for you?
 - Are you surprised by Jesus’ answer? Why or why not?
3. In verses 23-27 a master forgives an unnamed servant an enormous financial debt. Verse 27 tells us the master had pity. Think about your own life. What does this scene make you feel?
 - Is there a scene in your own life (a debt or generosity) that comes to mind?
4. In verses 28-30 that forgiven servant refuses to forgive another servant a lesser debt. What does this scene make you think about in your own life?
 - Is there something you’re owed or a hurt that this scene that comes to mind?
 - Sit with God’s generosity to you for a few moments. How do you feel about that person?

Scripture Passage (Parable of the Unforgiving Servant)

Matthew, Chapter 18- English Standard Version Translation (ESV): 21 Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” 22 Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. 23 “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. 24 When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 25 And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. 26 So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ 27 And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. 28 But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ 29 So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ 30 He refused and went and put him in prison until he

should pay the debt. 31 When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. 32 Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ 34 And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. 35 So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

Matthew, Chapter 18- New Living Translation (NLT): 21 Then Peter came to him and asked, “Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?” 22 “No, not seven times,” Jesus replied, “but seventy times seven! 23 “Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. 24 In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. 25 He couldn’t pay, so his master ordered that he be sold—along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned- to pay the debt. 26 “But the man fell down before his master and begged him, ‘Please, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.’ 27 Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt. 28 “But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment. 29 “His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it,’ he pleaded. 30 But his creditor wouldn’t wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full. 31 “When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. 32 Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. 33 Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’ 34 Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt. 35 “That’s what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart.”

Group Discussion (20-25 minutes)

Spiritual Exercise: “Taking a Look at Our Sin with Christ”

Before we practice how to look at ourselves more honestly, let me read a quote. This quote is from a 19th Century Scottish theologian (Robert Murray McCheyne). It helps correct for our ability to get caught up in what’s wrong (the bad news)- at the expense of God’s love for us, even there (the good news). *“For every one look at your sins, take ten looks at Christ.”* [Read 2x]

1. **Reflect:** Has anyone ever asked a family member, good friend, or spouse something like the following: *“If there was something you could change about me, what would it be?”* [Read 2x]

- If you have, what was that experience like? What did you learn about yourself?
- If have not, what do you think that person would say about you?
- (If you’re having trouble with answering this question- or even if you think you can guess; take some time to ask someone you love this question this week...)

2. **Read:** Can I get a volunteer to read the following quote from Brennan Manning?

“Humility, recovering alcoholics like to say, is stark raving honesty... We cannot receive what the crucified Rabbi has to give unless we admit our plight and stretch out our hands until our arms ache... Through his passion and death Jesus carried away the essential sickness of the human

heart...He has robbed loneliness of its fatal power by traveling Himself to the far reaches of loneliness. He has understood our ignorance, weakness, and foolishness and granted pardon to us all. He has made his pierced heart a safe place for every defeated cynic, hopeless sinner, and self-loathing derelict across the bands of time...

Listening to the faith heartbeat of the dying Rabbi is a powerful stimulant to the recovery of passion. It is a sound like no other. The Crucified says, 'Confess your sin so that I may reveal Myself to you as lover, teacher, and friend, that fear may depart and your heart can stir once again with passion.' His word is addressed both to those filled with a sense of self-importance and to those crushed with a sense of self-worthlessness. Both are preoccupied with themselves... The release from chronic egocentricity starts with letting Christ love them [read: you] where they [read: you] are...

Heart to heart. The Rabbi implores, 'Don't you understand that [Christian] discipleship is not about being right or being perfect or being efficient?...Wise men and women have long held that happiness lies in being yourself without inhibitions. Let the Great Rabbi hold you silently against His heart. In learning who He is, you will find out who you are: Abba's child in Christ our Lord.'
(Brennan Manning, a recovering alcoholic and pastor)

- Is there a section or sentence you'd like to hear again? [Ask the reader to re-read that]
- What strikes you about this quote? (It could be a thought, a question, or a comment.)
- What feels hard to believe about what Brennan Manning is saying?
- What about your life would actually change if you believed this...
 - about Jesus?
 - about yourself?

3. Respond: Let's respond to these two views- of ourselves and of God- with reading a centuries-old prayer together. Can I get another volunteer to read aloud this prayer for us?

"Lord, high and holy, meek and lowly, Thou hast brought me to the valley of vision, where I live in the depths but see Thee in the heights; hemmed in by mountains of sin I behold Thy glory. Let me learn by paradox that the way down is the way up, that to be low is to be high, that the broken heart is the healed heart, that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit, that the repenting soul is the victorious soul, that to have nothing is to possess all, that to bear the cross is to wear the crown, that to give is to receive, that the valley is the place of vision. Lord, in the daytime stars can be seen from deepest wells, and the deeper the wells the brighter Thy stars shine; let me find Thy light in my darkness, Thy life in my death, Thy joy in my sorrow, Thy grace in my sin, Thy riches in my poverty, Thy glory in my valley." ("Valley of Vision," A Traditional Puritan Prayer)

Group Prayer (15 Minutes)

Ideas for Communal and Personal Prayer.

- Share for yourself, and pray for the person sitting at **12 o'clock** from you

1. Here is a reflection questions to ask yourself, and- if time permits- share about:

What's one thing you're processing about how God meets you- as you are, not as you should be?

- (Is there a related question or comment that is sticking with you?)
- (For instance, is there something you're feeling or thinking about the spiritual exercise?)
- Is there a praise, a confession, a word of thanks, or a request you'd like to make about what you're processing?

2. Is there something else going on that what can we pray about for you?