

FORGIVENESS

Following Jesus into Radical Loving— Participant's Guide

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Forgiveness: Following Jesus into Radical Loving—Participant's Guide

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Participant's Guide

Introduction

1. On page x, the author quotes theologian Reinhold Niebuhr on the subject of forgiveness: "Forgiveness is the final form of love." What do you think Niebuhr means here? Have you ever had a personal experience of forgiveness that would validate his claim?
2. Huston points to Jesus' declaration in Matt. 6:11-15 (pg. xiv) as crucial for our understanding of the central role forgiveness plays in the Christian life. What is your understanding of that statement? Does it appear that forgiveness is ever optional for a Christian?

Chapter One: The Problem of Evil

1. On page 9, the author says, "The radical Christian belief is that evil is only overcome when it is transformed into good." What does this sentence mean to you? In what way can evil ever be "transformed?" Have you ever witnessed such a transformation yourself?
2. What do you think the author is referring to when she uses the phrase, "the problem of evil"? Have you ever struggled with the questions she raises? How did you resolve them?
3. On page 20, Huston quotes Matt: 25:31-45, then adds, "With these words Jesus calls us to something more than simply resisting sin." What is the "something more" to which he calls us, according to your understanding? In what ways have you tried to live out this call in your own life?

Chapter Two: The Problem of Justice

1. Many people are afraid that forgiving those who do horrific things violates justice. How do you feel about this issue? Are there acts that seem unforgivable to you for this very reason? What is the author's response? (See in particular the section entitled "the two kingdoms").
2. According to Huston, one of our greatest modern attributes is respect for individual human beings. Yet on page 40-42, she seems to pit the concept of self-esteem against Christ's call to be holy. What do you think she is getting at here? In your own life, how has focusing on self-esteem sometimes made it difficult, if not impossible, to forgive?

Chapter Three: The Evil I Do Not Wish to Do

1. What does C.S. Lewis mean by the moral “law of nature,” according to the author (pg. 62)? In what ways do you recognize yourself and your own sin experience in Lewis’s assessment of human nature?
2. How does our failure to keep this law of nature lead to what Huston calls the “self-deceiving lie” (pg. 74)? What part do you think shame has played in your own life? What story have you developed over the years that explains why you are the way you are?

Chapter Four: Telling the Difference between a Real Hurt and a Wounded Ego

1. Jesus says, “Stop judging that you may not be judged” (Matt: 7:1-5). According to the author, what impedes our ability to judge others fairly? (see pages 82-83). Can you point to a time in your own life when you wrongly judged another person? What do you think prevented you from seeing clearly in this case?
2. What does Huston mean by the phrase “purity of heart”? (pg. 83) Have you ever met someone who seemed genuinely pure of heart? What were his or her distinguishing characteristics?

Chapter Five: Disciplines as Preparation for Becoming a Loving Person

1. On page 115, the author refers to the 4th century writer, Evagrius Ponticus, and his recommended method for changing habitual behavior, which is referred to as the “antidote of opposition.” What do you think this means? Have you ever applied this antidote to one of your own habits? What was the result?
2. Huston talks about “watching the thoughts” on page 120. What is your understanding of this spiritual discipline? Have you ever consciously watched your own thoughts? How did this change your behavior, if at all?

Chapter Six: False Forgiveness

1. On page 143, the author discusses the “aesthete,” or “emotional junkie,” who is more interested in how he or she feels about a given situation than about getting at the truth of the matter. How does this kind of sentimental approach to life get in the way of real forgiveness, according to Huston? Have you ever been the recipient of this kind of false forgiveness yourself?
2. What is a “cosmic lover,” as described by the author (pg.147)? Why do you think the cosmic lover’s philosophy has become so attractive in our era? What is the flaw in this position when it comes to real forgiveness, according to Huston?

Chapter Seven: Parents

1. On page 153, Huston asserts that almost everyone holds some kind of grudge toward his or her parents, regardless of childhood circumstances. What is her

- explanation for this situation? What is your own experience regarding the parent/child relationship?
2. The author cites psychiatrist Barry Grosskopf on page 159, who points to the Fourth Commandment as key to forgiving our parents, regardless of what they've done to us. What do you think he means? Have you ever tried to honor your mother and father in the way he is talking about? What was the result?

Chapter Eight: Marriage Partners

1. Jesus says about marriage, "Because of the hardness of your heart, Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so" (Matt. 19:8-9) (pg. 184). What do you think the phrase "hardness of heart" means, and what impact does a hardened heart have on a spousal relationship? Have you ever experienced such a phenomenon in your own marriage? What did you do about it?
2. What are the five steps involved in forgiving a spouse, according to Huston on pages 187-191? Have you known any couples on the brink of divorce who have managed to save their marriage? How did they do it?

Chapter Nine: Community

1. What are some of the temptations peculiar to belonging to a community, according to the author on pages 194-205? As a community member, have you ever experienced these particular problems? How did you try to resolve the situation?
2. Huston employs the phrase "living in imitation of Christ" on page 225. What does this mean to you? How, in particular, have you tried to imitate Christ in your own relationships?

Chapter Ten: When We Are at Fault

1. On page 240, the author talks about how difficult it was for her to seek out and receive forgiveness from her sister. Have you ever experienced a similar situation? Why do you think it is so hard for us to accept being forgiven by another?
2. Jesus tells us to seek out our wounded brother and attempt reconciliation, whether or not we believe ourselves to be at fault. Why, according to the author on page 251, does he take this position? Isn't accepting blame for something we haven't done simply a false form of humility? How does Huston handle this question?

Chapter Eleven: From Wounded to Healed

1. The author refers to Gerald May's definition of addiction on page 259. Based on this summation of what addiction is and how it gets a hold on us, how do you see addiction playing a role in your own life? What are some of the ways you have tried to grapple with it? What has been the spiritual result?

2. On page 268 Huston says, “At the heart of our inability to claim God’s liberating forgiveness for ourselves often lies one of two mistaken notions about the extent of our own capabilities.” What are these mistaken notions? Which one is your own biggest temptation when you think about your sin history?
3. What do you think Jesus means when he says, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9)?

Conclusion

1. What do you see as the main point of this book? What in particular will you carry away with you now that this study is over?
2. How will this new insight change the way you approach forgiveness?