

Contents

(The Forgiven)

1. God and Forgiveness (March 29–April 4)	4
2. Forgiveness in the Old Testament (April 5-11)	11
3. Forgiveness and Repentance (April 12-18)	18
4. How Jesus Forgave (April 19-25)	25
5. Forgiveness and Guilt (April 26–May 2)	32
6. Forgiveness and the Church (May 3-9)	39
7. For the Love of God (May 10-16)	47
8. Loyalties (May 17-23)	54
9. Reverence (May 24-30)	61
10. Why Forgive? (May 31–June 6)	68
11. Out of the Heart (June 7-13)	75
12. Unselfish Service (June 14-20)	83
13. Living the Life of Faith (June 21-27)	90

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Overview

Prisoner and Enemy

The prisoner was taken to jail for the same reason his family had been murdered. It was because of race! The prisoner was called into a hospital room where an enemy soldier lay dying from a war wound. Wrapped in dirty bandages, the soldier painfully made this plea: "I was in a top army group. A land mine killed thirty of our men. In revenge,¹ we rounded up three hundred of your men, women, and children and put them in a building. Then we poured gasoline on the building and set it on fire. We shot people who tried to escape. I remember a mother, a father, and a small boy. The parents covered the child's eyes and ran outside. All of them were screaming. I shot them dead. I cannot forget the sight and sound of that family and their screams. And now, as I am dying, I ask for forgiveness from someone of your race. Without your forgiveness I cannot die in peace. Please, please, forgive me!"

The prisoner stared at the enemy soldier who was breathing hard. His bandaged head had two wet spots from his tears. The prisoner said nothing. The only sounds were the prisoner's feet walking toward the door and the cries of the enemy soldier.

What would you, or what should you, have done? As Christians, we know that God has forgiven our sins. We believe that at the Cross, Jesus accepted the sins of the enemy soldier, including his killing of the men, women, and children. So are we not required to forgive? Yes. God commands, even requires, that we forgive. But does He mean we should forgive even the enemy soldier's terrible action? If He does require it, is it a forgiveness that comes only because He requires it?

"Forgiveness belongs to the injured person," wrote poet John Dryden. So was it the prisoner's duty to forgive what had been done to other people? What made the prisoner the "substitute"² for people who could not forgive the enemy soldier because he had killed them?

No matter what the answer is, forgiveness does not come easy. If it is hard to ask us to forgive an unkind³ word, an insult, or a curse, how much did it ask of God to forgive our lusts, our murders, our cruelty, our hatred, our crimes, and even our mass murders?

The Cross makes the difference. Jesus died on the cross by accepting the sins of the world. If His death does not make us see what forgiveness costs, nothing will. Jesus was willing to pay the full price for the world's sin. If His willingness to pay the price does not help us see how important forgiveness is to this universe, what will?

This quarter's Bible Study Guide is based on the work of Dr. Geoffrey Garne. This study examines the difficult question that faces us all every day: What does it mean to be both a prisoner and an enemy soldier? We need to learn about both receiving and giving forgiveness.

¹revenge—getting even.

²substitute—someone who takes another person's place; Jesus is our Substitute, because He died for our sins.

³unkind—not kind.

Introduction Sandwiched

Forgiveness is a simple word. But how much power or healing can come from forgiveness! How many lives would be so much better if people forgave more often!

Forgiveness influences people who forgive as well as people who are forgiven. Forgiveness spreads in all directions, reaching out and comforting people who stand on the sidelines and see what forgiveness does to both people who receive forgiveness and who give forgiveness.

Perhaps this whole quarter's Bible Study Guide should be titled "Sandwiched," because as Christians, we are sandwiched in by forgiveness—the forgiveness we have received from Jesus, and the forgiveness we give to other people. The blessings that come with forgiveness are many: (1) the blessings we have received from God, (2) the blessings we give to other people because of what we have received from God, and (3) the blessings we get back when we give to other people. We will study forgiveness as object (receiver) and forgiveness as subject (giver). We are the object of God's forgiveness. Because of God's forgiveness, we become the subject, giving forgiveness to people who need forgiveness as much as we do.

First we will look at what it means to have God forgive us. No matter what we have done, no matter how ugly our record, our Creator God forgives, justifies,¹ pardons,² and cleanses us by the blood of Jesus.

Second, we will look at what happens in the lives of people whom God forgives. What does God's forgiveness of us encourage us to do for other people?

Forgiveness comes with a heavy price tag. But as we will see over the next few months, no one can afford to be without forgiveness.

¹justifies—when God forgives a person and makes that person righteous (holy) by cleansing him or her from sin.

²pardons—forgives; to set free from punishment.