

Crosswalk Communities Discussion Guides

December 17th

Icebreaker Questions (Pick at the least one question, but use as many as your group feels comfortable)

1. What is your favorite Christmas movie? Why?

Bible Study Questions

1. Pastor Michael said that bitterness is the result of unresolved wounds. What have you observed? What often makes people bitter?
2. Read Matthew 18:23-35
 - Put yourself in the servant's shoes as he awaited the king's judgment. What emotions was he feeling? How can you resonate with his experience?
 - How would you describe the servant's emotions following the king's verdict?
 - Why was his demanding of payment from the other servant so offensive to the king?
3. How does forgiveness open the door for healing?
4. What difference does it make knowing that God has forgiven us of sin...knowing that doing so cost him the life of his son?
5. Why is it so offensive to God for forgiven people to refuse to forgive others?
6. What has been your experience with forgiveness? Does it come easily or is it difficult?
 - Sometimes we lay those offenses at the cross only to pick them up again later. How is forgiveness and ongoing process?
7. Some people experience bitterness toward God.
 - Have you ever experienced that?
 - Why is bitterness toward God rooted in a wrong perspective about the God/human relationship?
 - What would you say to someone who is bitter toward God?

December 17th: The Grinch Within: Bitterness

In the story of the Grinch, we don't get a backstory. However in the more recent movies, we are told about him being ridiculed or ignored by others. Those wounds over time made him bitter.

- I. Bitterness is the natural result of an unresolved wound from another:** This can be the result of one offense or ongoing offenses that rob us of something. Sometimes that offense can be the result of one not living up to our expectations. For some, bitterness stems from a perceived loss from God. The good news though is that God provides a way for healing.
- II. Healing is the natural result of forgiveness:** In Matthew 18:21-35, Jesus tells a story about a man who was forgiven a great debt but refused to offer forgiveness to others. The command is that we are to forgive. Forgiveness rejects bitterness and opens the door for healing.
- III. Forgiveness is a continual cancelling of debts:** We can be confused about forgiveness. It does not mean that trust or intimacy are restored. It doesn't mean that justice is ignore. God promises to take care of that. It also doesn't mean that the offense is forgotten. But as illustrated in Jesus' story (18:27), it is simply a cancelling of the debt. For many, this isn't just a once act, but an ongoing act of forgiving and not constantly picking up the offense.
- IV. Forgiveness is possible because we are recipients of God's forgiveness:** When the offense is deep, forgiveness is difficult if not impossible. But deeper reflection teaches us that God has already forgiven us of a deeper offense. We assaulted him and deserve eternal judgment. He sent his son into this world and watched as his son died in agony on the cross so that we could be forgiven. That knowledge enables us to forgive. Furthermore, we have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit to help
Note: For those who are dealing with bitterness toward God, a perspective change is needed. The root of that bitterness is anger that God did not do what "I" wanted him to do. It is to position ourselves in a place above God, dictating what he does. It denies God's lordship and love for his creation. A way to move past this bitterness is to reflect on God's goodness and repent of our arrogance.

Conclusion

In the Grinch, he robs the community of all of their Christmas possessions. Yet, they still gather to sing, essentially forgiving the

Grinch for his offense. That act warms his heart and responds by forgiving.

There are many in the church who have received God's forgiveness but are still holding onto bitterness toward someone. That bitterness controls us and robs us of community and joy. God desires freedom. What more, for us to withhold forgiveness is to cheapen God's sacrifice for us. That answer is to do what God says and to forgive.