

ILF LEADERSHIP DEVOTIONAL

- **Lesson 4: Forgiveness and Reconciliation**
- **Scripture:** Matthew 18:21–35, Colossians 3:12–14
- **Key Theme:** True unity isn't possible without forgiveness.

Hello brothers and sisters in Christ! My name is Amy, and I'm so happy to connect with you here. I first learned about Impact a Life when Cyrus, Britan, and Pastor Zack shared powerful stories of God's work in Sierra Leone with the Mission Church. Last summer, when Cyrus invited me to join the team, I was excited to say yes. It's a joy to help share the unfolding story of God's incredible movement in Sierra Leone and India. Today, I'm honored to dive into God's word with you and reflect together on what it means to pursue unity in Christ.

Let's take a moment to remember what we have learned about unity so far in this series.

1. We must have unity to move forward. Trust God and "cross the river" together!
2. Unity takes humility. Consider others above yourself.
3. To stay unified, we must remember who the true enemy is – the spiritual forces of evil.

Now let's reflect on a tool we must use to move forward, stay humble, and fight the enemy together: forgiveness. The enemy would have us hold on to anger, bitterness, pride and hurt when someone does us wrong, but holding onto resentment like this tears a group apart. Without forgiveness, there is blame and guilt. If blame and guilt are barriers to relationship, then true unity is not possible without forgiveness.

Forgiveness is so important that God commands all Christ followers to forgive and specifically to forgive as He forgave us. We read about this command in Colossians 3:12-14 where it says, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."

Where does forgiveness begin? You might think that forgiveness begins after an offence has occurred, but Colossians 3:12 proves otherwise. It says, “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” An important word in this verse that we should pay attention to is “clothe”. Here, “clothe” is an action, and more specifically it is a command for us to follow. Clothing ourselves with these virtues and binding them together in love (vv.14), is where forgiveness begins. Just as we don’t leave our homes without first putting on proper clothing, we should not go to interact with others without first putting on these characteristics of Christ. Only then will we be prepared to work in unity and forgive as needed to maintain unity.

What does forgiveness look like? In general, to forgive means to choose to give up your angry feelings about a mistake or an offense. The first part of Colossians 3:13 calls believers to, “Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone.” A grievance is a complaint, a quarrel, or a disagreement. The fact is, as sinful humans, we will make mistakes, disappoint or even outright hurt others at some point. Yes, even brothers and sisters in Christ who long to work together to share the gospel far and wide will grieve each other in some way at some point. When this happens, everyone involved has a critical choice. As the offender, will you ask for forgiveness? As the offended, will you forgive? If you are clothed in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience and love, the choice will be clear. These attributes make it possible to offer forgiveness, but they also make it possible to ask for forgiveness. When everyone involved chooses forgiveness, reconciliation is possible, and unity can be restored.

In the family of God, we have the ultimate example of forgiveness to follow. The second part of Colossians 3:13 says to, “Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” Each and every one of us have been personally forgiven for every sin we have ever or will ever commit because of Jesus.

Matthew 18:21-35 tells about a time the apostle Peter asked Jesus about forgiveness. He said, “How many times should I forgive someone—seven times?” Jesus replied, “Not seven, but seventy-seven times.” Jesus then told a parable about a king who forgave a servant’s enormous debt after the man begged for mercy. But that same servant refused to

forgive a fellow servant who owed him a small amount, throwing him into prison. When the king heard this, he was furious: “You wicked servant. I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?” He punished the unforgiving servant. Jesus concluded, “This is how my heavenly Father will treat you unless you forgive others from your heart.”

We are servants and God is the good master. God has forgiven us for every sin so completely that, like the master, He cancelled any debt we owed and set us free. What used to require regular animal sacrifice, an ongoing debt and repayment plan, God covered once and for all with the life of His son, Jesus. Even more incredibly, this all happened before we could even ask for forgiveness! Remember Romans 5:8 – “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” What will we do with this beautiful freedom? Tragically, the servant in Jesus’ parable used his freedom to oppress his fellow servant. He was not clothed in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience and love, and he suffered the consequences. May we learn from his mistake, not selfishly hoarding our freedom in Christ but freely offering it to others as it was freely given to us.

“Seventy-seven times” may seem like an exhausting or overwhelming amount of forgiveness, but each time we take part in forgiveness we cultivate unity. Each time we take part in forgiveness we proclaim the gospel to ourselves and each other. Each time we take part in forgiveness, we’re not just ready to do good work for the kingdom, we’re already doing it by showing people what God’s perfect kind of love looks like.

Take Action:

- Ask God for help putting on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience and love each day.
- Ask God to show you anyone you need to forgive—then take the first step. Initiate a conversation. If a conversation is not possible, simply release it in prayer.
- Ask God to show you anyone you need to seek forgiveness from—then take the first step. Initiate a conversation or ask God for the opportunity to ask for forgiveness.