

SMALL GROUP LEADER NOTES

The Prison of Unforgiveness

Pastor Chad Gilligan - October 12, 2025

Main Passage: Matthew 18:21–35

1. The Freedom of Forgiveness

- We can have forgiveness from our sins: *1 John 1:9*
- We can have forgiveness with our King: *Romans 5:6–10*
- Jesus' parable shows the heart of God - He cancels the unpayable debt and releases us completely.

Discussion Questions:

- How does understanding the size of our own “debt” change the way we view others' offenses?
- Why do you think it can be difficult to accept God's forgiveness as complete and final?
- What would it look like for you to live more freely in God's forgiveness this week?

Follow-Up Prompt:

Consider one area where you've been living as though you still owe a debt God has already canceled. What would it mean to walk in the freedom He's already given?

2. The Burden of Bitterness

- Unforgiveness grows into bitterness when we hold onto offense.
- Forgiveness and trust are not the same thing: *Matthew 10:16*
- You can go from bitter to better when you take the focus off the “I.”
- Be ready for reconciliation when it comes (“Be there for the bounce” — *Luke 15:17–20*).

Discussion Questions:

- What does “the burden of bitterness” look like in real life?
- How have you seen bitterness affect your relationships or your spiritual life?
- What's the difference between forgiving someone and trusting them again?
- Who do you need to “be there for the bounce” with — someone you may need to welcome back when the time is right?

- **Follow-Up Prompt:**

Bitterness grows in the dark. Take time this week to bring a hidden hurt into the light through prayer, journaling, or a trusted conversation.

3. The Prison of Unforgiveness

- Unforgiveness is a prison in your present: *Mark 11:25; 1 John 4:20*
- Unforgiveness is a prison for your future: *Matthew 6:14–15; 18:35*
- When we refuse to forgive, we choose to live bound by what someone else did.

Discussion Questions:

- Why does Jesus connect our willingness to forgive others with our own forgiveness from God?
- How does holding on to unforgiveness keep us trapped in the past?
- What's one practical step you can take toward releasing someone who has hurt you?

Follow-Up Prompt:

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you any area where unforgiveness has been keeping you in a “prison.” What would it look like to hand that key over to Jesus?

Reflection and Prayer - Moving Forward

Take a few quiet moments to reflect on these questions:

- Who do I need to forgive - or forgive again - so I can move forward freely?
- What has Jesus already forgiven me of that reminds me to extend grace to others?

Prayer:

“Lord, thank You for the freedom You’ve given me through forgiveness. Help me release every person and every wound into Your hands. I trust You with justice and healing. Teach me to walk in Your freedom and to reflect Your grace in every relationship. Amen.”