

Leader's Guide

Strengthening the Family

Even When It's Difficult

Pastor Philip Leichty

July 19, 2026

Conversation Goal

This week's goal is to help group members honestly examine their hearts, recognize where unforgiveness may still be affecting their relationship with God and others, and respond to the Holy Spirit by taking a practical step toward forgiveness.

Synopsis

1 John 3:10 and 4:20-21 remind us that our love for God is inseparable from our love for others. Scripture teaches that forgiveness is not pretending the hurt didn't happen, nor does it always lead to reconciliation. Rather, forgiveness is a Spirit-empowered decision to release the debt to God, trusting Him with justice while freeing our hearts from bitterness. As we experience Christ's forgiveness, we are invited to extend that same grace, even when the process is difficult or ongoing.

Discussion Question 1

Jesus said our love for others reveals the authenticity of our love for God (1 John 4:20-21).

Teaching Point

Our relationship with God is never merely vertical. Throughout Scripture, God connects our love for Him with how we treat the people around us. While we all struggle in relationships, the Holy Spirit continually invites us to grow in love, grace, and forgiveness because these reflect the character of Christ.

Discussion Question

What do you think John means when he says, "Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar"? Why do you think God connects our relationship with Him so closely to our relationships with others?

Follow-Up Prompts

- Why do you think loving difficult people can be so challenging?
- Have you ever realized that an unresolved relationship was affecting your spiritual life?
- How does remembering God's love for you change the way you view someone who has hurt you?
- What attitudes make forgiveness more difficult?
- What practices help keep our hearts soft toward others?

Additional Scripture

- Matthew 22:37-40
 - John 13:34-35
 - Romans 12:9-18
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Discussion Question 2

Philip reminded us that forgiveness is a decision; not a feeling, and often a process rather than a single moment.

Teaching Point

Forgiveness doesn't excuse wrongdoing or erase the pain. It is choosing, in obedience to Christ, to release the debt into God's hands. Sometimes that decision is made once; other times it is renewed repeatedly as God continues His healing work in our hearts.

Discussion Question

How does understanding forgiveness as a decision rather than a feeling change the way you think about forgiving someone? Which misconception about forgiveness do you think people struggle with most?

Follow-Up Prompts

- Why do you think we often wait until we "feel ready" to forgive?
- Have you ever experienced forgiveness becoming easier over time?
- What fears sometimes keep people from forgiving?
- How does trusting God with justice make forgiveness possible?

Additional Scripture

- Ephesians 4:31-32

- Colossians 3:12-14
 - Romans 12:19
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Discussion Question 3

Philip shared vulnerable stories about bitterness, healing, and learning to forgive over time.

Teaching Point

Unforgiveness often grows quietly beneath the surface. Left unattended, it can produce bitterness, resentment, anxiety, or emotional exhaustion. The Holy Spirit lovingly brings these hidden places into the light not to condemn us, but to begin the work of healing.

Discussion Question

Without sharing anything you're uncomfortable sharing, where do you think bitterness or unresolved hurt most often takes root in people's lives? How can we recognize when our hearts may need healing?

Follow-Up Prompts

- Why is it sometimes easier to ignore pain than to deal with it?
- How has God used difficult relationships to shape your faith?
- What role do trusted Christian friends play in our healing?
- What encouragement would you give someone who says, "I want to forgive, but I'm struggling"?

Additional Scripture

- Hebrews 12:14-15
 - Psalm 139:23-24
 - James 5:16
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Discussion Question 4

Forgiveness begins with one step of obedience.

Teaching Point

The Holy Spirit rarely asks us to fix everything overnight. More often, He invites us to take one faithful next step. That step may be praying for someone, releasing the offense to God, writing a letter we'll never send, asking for forgiveness ourselves, or seeking wise counsel. Obedience opens the door for healing.

Discussion Question

What is one practical step the Holy Spirit may be inviting you to take this week toward forgiveness and healing?

Follow-Up Prompts

- What makes that next step feel difficult?
- What would trusting God with the outcome look like?
- Is there someone you need to begin praying for differently?
- Is there a conversation God may be preparing you to have or perhaps one He isn't asking you to have yet?
- How can this group pray for and encourage one another this week?

Additional Scripture

- Matthew 6:14-15
- Romans 12:18
- Philippians 4:6-7