

Forgive to Heal

Scripture used: Luke 23:40-43 (NLT)

OVERVIEW

Big Idea: Pastor Hurmon used a story from his youth to illustrate how we can experience a major regret throughout life because of one past act that triggered pain, shame, and guilt. The Easter celebration is the ultimate reminder that because God's forgiveness is generously and freely offered to us, we need to forgive ourselves, and forgive others, in order to heal. Jesus welcomes our doubt and cynicism. He wants us to "lean in." Our journey should follow the principles in HEAL outlined below.

KEY POINTS

- 1) **Point #1** Honest assessment. Just like the convict on the cross next to Jesus, we need to assume appropriate responsibility. The convict recognized that he deserved to die because he had sinned and had committed crimes; as an insurrectionist, he likely had taken the lives of others. Often, we seek to bury the painful parts of our lives, and to avoid them or cope with them through denial, medicating them in various ways, acting out, etc. The process of forgiveness is not a process of minimizing. It is a process that honestly and squarely weighs what we have done and whom we have affected. It is also important to only assume **appropriate** responsibility; in instances where we have been abused or violated by others, we may have shame attached to events, but we need to know that it is not our fault.
- 2) **Point #2** Equip my heart for forgiveness. A heart prepared for forgiveness is one that is able to see the big picture. We are not static beings, either good or bad. We are works in progress, and God continues to shape us so that our hearts grow to be more like the heart of Jesus. Recognizing that God doesn't expect us to be perfect allows us to see the ways that God is present and active in our lives, and forgiving ourselves becomes possible because it is a part of God's work to shape us.
- 3) **Point #3** Ask for and accept what you don't deserve. Easter is a gift lavished on us that we can't fully understand. Grace is not always correlating to our value. Pastor Hurmon used the example of Vanessa Russell who was in management at Cisco Systems and launched the Love Never Fails ministry for the restoration, education and protection of the victims of domestic human trafficking in our community. You don't need to understand the gift you're offered, but you should accept it.
- 4) **Point #4** Let it go, but hold on to the lesson. We want to end up at a place where we can honestly look back on our lives, and even where we have regret, we can have regret with peace. Regret with peace means that we aren't constantly beating ourselves up over what we've done, but we've been able to let go of shame and guilt, while still holding onto the lessons from our past so that we can live differently going forward.

DISCUSSION

- 1) **HEAR** - Did this message bring to mind ways that you still struggle with forgiving yourself? Are there ways you can take a next step of not minimizing or burying this struggle, but find a safe and trusted way to engage it openly and honestly? This may take the form of writing about it (journaling), but it may also take the form of a step of faith to share about it with a trusted friend, someone you are confident will respond with grace and understanding.
- 2) **UNDERSTAND** - Why do you think it is so challenging to accept forgiveness from God and forgive ourselves? How are God's forgiveness and self-forgiveness related? Consider the account of Jesus' crucifixion and the forgiveness of the thief next to him shared in Luke 23:32-43. Do you believe that we are all like one thief or the other? Do you believe that God genuinely responds to our sin and brokenness with grace and forgiveness?
- 3) **DO** - Make a commitment to try to recognize when we are feeling emotions of shame and guilt; these emotions are the signs that we have not accepted forgiveness from God and we have not forgiven ourselves. When we feel these emotions, go through the steps of repentance. Honestly acknowledge what we've done (confession) and ask God for forgiveness. Consider memorizing 1 John 1:9, which assures us that God forgives us. Reflect on lessons we've learned from our past actions; this will also help us move forward with forgiving ourselves. Find a safe person or community to share about what God is doing in your life, because sharing with another person often seals the work of God's forgiveness.