

hidden joy in a dark corner

BY WENDY BLIGHT

Week Four

Bible Study Companion Leader: Stacy J. Lowe



Hey there! I'm excited to be back with you on the Bible Study Companion this week!

I have a question to kick us off today:

On a scale of 1-10, how important is obedience to God? _____

I know, I know ... seems like a no-brainer, right? But, if your answer were based solely on how you actually live, would that number go down? Perhaps significantly?

You're not alone!

Obedience may come easy in the small stuff, but it can be hard when what we're *supposed* to do goes against what we *want* to do, or feel is necessary or fair.

God has taught me, though, there is only ONE standard of truth we should live by, and it's His. Regardless of my opinion of what's right or wrong, my opinion will *never* trump His truth. Neither will yours.

Foundations

Read Matthew 7:24-27.

What two foundations does Jesus teach about?

_____ and _____

What happened to the house built on sand? _____

What happened to the house built on rock? _____

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Jesus taught that if we want to build our lives on something that will last, a proper foundation is essential! That foundation is the Word of God Himself — our Bible — and is the first place to start when we need guidance.

Forgiveness

Chapter 6 of *Hidden Joy* begins with this verse:

“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” ~ Colossians 3:13

There is no qualifier here. God doesn’t say to forgive if the other person apologizes. He doesn’t say to forgive if the other person acts better. God says we are to forgive PERIOD.

As Wendy says, though,

“Forgiveness does not come naturally.”

No, it doesn’t!

With that in mind, let’s spend some time today looking deeper into forgiveness through the lens of Scripture — what it is, what it is NOT, and what to do when we struggle to forgive.

Roots of Unforgiveness

I overheard a conversation recently where a woman refused to forgive a wrong from years ago, but claimed the unforgiveness didn’t affect her in any way. A few minutes later, she expressed continued bitterness and anger toward this person who had wronged her. Clearly, it was affecting her more than she let on or realized.

Anger is often both the root and byproduct of unforgiveness. We feel a debt is owed to us, and holding on to our anger gives us a sense of superiority over the other person.

Do you feel that way about someone? If you’re comfortable, write that person’s name, or their initials, on the line below. Remember, this is just between you and God.

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Now read Psalm 4:4, then copy it in the space provided.

Take particular note of the first part of this verse. The NLT translation says it like this:

“Don’t sin by letting anger control you.”

This tells me anger in and of itself does not always equal sin. It’s what we *do* with that anger that’s the problem.

Paul quotes this verse in Ephesians 4:26, then carries it a step further.

Read Ephesians 4:26-27 in the NIV translation. What reason does Paul give for controlling our anger?

Merriam-Webster defines “foothold” as *“a position usable as a base for further advance.”*

In other words, when we allow anger to fester in our hearts, we are giving Satan that foothold. A prime opportunity not just to come against us, but to lodge himself firmly in our lives. This is what Paul warns against.

Look up the following Scriptures, then fill in the chart below with what each passage teaches us about anger.

Psalm 37:8	
Ecclesiastes 7:9	
Matthew 5:22	

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Did you notice what these verses have in common? The consequences of festering anger fall on US. Nowhere does it say the object of our anger will suffer. Nowhere does it say something will change in the other person's heart because we refuse to let it go.

Anger produces a lot of things, none of which are good, but there's also something it *won't* lead to. Read James 1:19-20. What does God desire that anger *won't* produce?

These Scriptures teach us that when we remain angry and refuse to forgive, we're hurting OURSELVES. ***It's not about the other person.*** Forgiveness is about US. God commands it for OUR benefit.

In fact, what does Proverbs 19:11 say happens when we LET GO of our anger and choose to overlook an offense?

What about the person we've been holding a grudge against? Read Romans 12:19, then copy it down below.

What good news Paul gives us here! When we release our anger, God takes control of the offense. He takes the burden off our shoulders and places it on His. The One who is the ultimate Judge will deal with the offense, and the person, as *He* sees fit.

It's Not a One-Time Thing.

Head knowledge of the importance of forgiveness is one thing. HEART knowledge and real-life application are something different.

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When's the last time you reminded yourself to take your next breath? My guess is never. There are some things we do that come naturally without thinking.

Forgiveness (unfortunately) is not one of those things. Forgiveness requires intentionality. It's an ACTIVE and REPEATED choice on our part.

In Matthew 18:22 (NLT), Jesus taught we are to forgive "*seventy times seven*" times.

A few times forgiving someone, you could possibly keep track of. But 490? No way. You would quickly lose count, and that's just the point Jesus was making. There's *no limit* to forgiveness.

****I want to pause for a quick clarification. Choosing to forgive someone does NOT mean putting yourself back in the same position you were in. There are some situations where, for your own safety or well-being, keeping your distance is necessary. You can fully forgive without allowing that person a place back in your life.****

Struggling to Let Go

Several years ago, I knew I needed to forgive someone for a pretty serious offense. Even though I knew there would be no apology, I chose to forgive. From that day forward, I didn't think about the offense or the person who had committed it. I genuinely thought I had forgiven and moved on until I encountered this person in a check out line.

I felt the world closing in around me. My heart began pounding, and my palms began to sweat. I started gasping for breath, praying she wouldn't notice me. I realized while I may have chosen to forgive, I'd done nothing about it since. I had some work to do.

Going back to Scripture, God's Word not only commands us to forgive our enemies. Jesus also instructs us how to interact with those we might label an enemy.

Read Matthew 5:43-48. What two things does Jesus tell us to do for our enemies and those who persecute us?

_____ and _____

Y'all. That's not an easy task! But, God hasn't left us to do this on our own. He's laid a solid foundation for forgiveness. He speaks of forgiveness often, and we need to take it seriously.

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For me, the one I had forgiven was no longer part of my life, so showing love to her in person wasn't an option, but I could still love her by praying.

Can I be honest? I didn't want to pray. My first time praying for this person went something like this...

"God, You said we are to pray for our enemies, so that's what I'm doing: I'm praying for (name). Amen."

That's all I had in me. It may not have been much, but it was something.

Do you find it easy to pray for your enemies? Why or why not?

Read Romans 8:26-27. How do Paul's words make you feel? What comfort do they bring you?

Knowing the Holy Spirit would take my obedience and my pitiful words and shape them into something beautiful and meaningful meant everything to me!

I then decided to go one step further. I wrote this person's name on my bathroom mirror. Every time I walked into the room and saw that name, I was reminded of my choice to forgive, and I would pray yet again.

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The feeling of forgiveness took time. But, eventually, the feeling caught up with my decision. It's not easy to hold a grudge against someone you daily bring to the feet of Jesus.

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Seventy times Seven

Before we end, let's return to Matthew's words in Matthew 18:22, "*seventy times seven.*" What does this kind of forgiveness require? To me, there is only one word for it: Grace.

We've spent our time today learning how to forgive others. But there's another forgiveness we should address. The forgiveness from which all other forgiveness flows. It's the ultimate gift of forgiveness offered to us *all* through Jesus Christ.

God's standard is holiness — perfection — and there isn't, never has been, and never will be one who fully lives up to that standard, EXCEPT for Jesus.

Romans 6:23 (NIV) says, "*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

Because Adam and Eve rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden, sin entered our world. That sin separated them from God. Because Adam was the first man, his sin has been downloaded into every generation of people since Adam and Eve, including you and me. In God's economy, that sin deserves death and eternal separation from Him.

Thankfully, God didn't want to be separated from His children. So He sent His perfect, sinless Son to live the life we never could and die the death we rightfully deserve. Jesus then did something none of us could *ever* do. He conquered death. God resurrected His Son, Jesus, into new life.

You're probably familiar with John 3:16, but let's read it in The Message, to see it with fresh eyes:

"This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again. Anyone who trusts in him is acquitted; anyone who refuses to trust him has long since been under the death sentence without knowing it. And why? Because of that person's failure to believe in the one-of-a-kind Son of God when introduced to him." ~ John 3:16-18

John writes ANYONE can have "a whole and lasting life." I'M an anyone. YOU'RE an anyone. That name you wrote above? ALSO an anyone. (Yep, God loves them too!)

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God's offer is for anyone. We need only accept the trade — His holiness for our sin. It's the best deal you'll ever make! If you've never made that trade, and you're ready to do so now, will you pray with me?

Lord, I confess to You that I am a sinner. As much as I need to forgive others, even more so I desperately need forgiveness from You. Thank You for loving me so much that You would send Your Son Jesus to this earth to live the life I never could, die the death I rightfully deserve, then conquer death itself. I'm ready now to accept Him as my Savior. Please come into my heart, forgive me of my sins, and help me to follow You from this day forward. In Jesus' name, Amen.

If you prayed that prayer, we'd love to know about it! Send us an email at obsblogsupport@proverbs31.org so we can pray for you and provide you with resources to help get you started on this new journey in Christ.

Thank you for being here today and walking through this with me!

Rooting for you all,
Stacy