

THE GENTLE
ART OF
discipling
WOMEN

NURTURING AUTHENTIC FAITH
IN OURSELVES AND OTHERS

DANA YEAKLEY

Praise for *The Gentle Art of Discipling Women*

If you've ever felt intimidated when a young woman asks if you will disciple her, read this book! In *The Gentle Art of Discipling Women*, Dana Yeakley has included everything you need to know when you say yes to the exciting opportunity of investing in the life of someone who wants to grow in her faith. You will learn how to be a disciple and how to take specific action steps to make disciples. This is a must-have resource!

CAROL KENT

Speaker and author of *Becoming a Woman of Influence*

Dana Yeakley's passion for discipleship is both inspiring and infectious. In her book *The Gentle Art of Discipling Women*, Dana provides a guide that removes the mystery from discipleship. Grounded in Scripture and supported by personal stories, this book will make you feel both encouraged and empowered to live out the command for every believer to "go and make disciples."

JENNI CATRON

Church leader and author of *The 4 Dimensions of Extraordinary Leadership*

Through the pages of this book, experienced discipler Dana Yeakley comes alongside those of us who want to disciple women but aren't sure how to start, whom to approach, what to do, or how to keep things on track to show us the way. This book is a great resource for any woman who wants a front row seat to see the Word of God bring change to the life of another woman.

NANCY GUTHRIE

Bible teacher and author of the *Seeing Jesus in the Old Testament* Bible study series

In a culture where our identity is often focused on what we do, Dana places equal emphasis on being a mature disciple before we do anything for God. With a solid foundation of faith and security in our identity in Christ, we can confidently engage others with proper motivation and intentionally collaborate with God in the gentle art of discipling.

KIMBERLY MATTHISEN

Alongside Women and National Leadership Team, Navigators of Canada

Dana's book is full of important, life-giving lessons on both being a disciple and leading others in purposeful discipleship relationships. A great tool for every woman who takes Jesus' call to "go and make disciples" seriously.

JESSIE MINASSIAN

Resident "big sis" at LifeLoveandGod.com and author of *Unashamed*



THE GENTLE

art of discipling women



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The Gentle Art of Discipling Women: Nurturing Authentic Faith in Ourselves and Others

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Contents



Introduction XI

PART ONE: *Be His Disciple* 1

CHAPTER ONE: *We Are Forgiven* 5

CHAPTER TWO: *We Are Safe* 19

CHAPTER THREE: *We Have Access* 33

CHAPTER FOUR: *We Are Becoming* 49

PART TWO: *Make a Disciple* 69

CHAPTER FIVE: *How Do We Create a
Life-Giving Atmosphere?* 77

CHAPTER SIX: *Whom Do We Help?* 101

CHAPTER SEVEN: *What Do We Share?* 119

CHAPTER EIGHT: *How Does Discipling One-on-One
Actually Work?* 149

Leader's Guide 173

Notes 179

Introduction



DESIGNED FOR DISCIPLESHIP

Emily fidgeted with her coffee cup. Marcia was running late. They'd gotten to know each other a little at church. Emily, though honored, had been taken aback when Marcia, a new Christian, had asked Emily to disciple her. She had stammered out a yes without thinking and now was wondering what exactly she'd gotten herself into. Emily was a Christian—had been following Jesus for years—and of course she knew she was *supposed* to be discipling people. Something within her longed to help Marcia grow. But now, in the midst of this busy coffee shop, her coffee going cold and her mind going blank, she felt utterly inadequate. Marcia was looking for her to do something, but Emily had no idea where to start.

Have you ever felt this way? Maybe you haven't thought of it in terms of the word *discipleship*, but perhaps someone has asked you to help her grow, or simply has looked to you for guidance in her relationship with Christ—and you feel ill-equipped to do whatever this “discipling” thing is supposed to be.

What do you think when you hear the word *discipleship*? A lot of us might look at Jesus' command in Matthew 28 to “go and make disciples of all nations,” and we nod our heads. But when we get down to it, the actual “going and making disciples” part can feel intimidating, insurmountable, or simply confusing.

Even though we want to—and in fact are designed—to disciple others, we let our confusion and lack of information hold us hostage. Later in this book we will get to Jesus' definition of *discipleship*—our most important guide for discipling—but to get started, let's consider the dictionary definition Daniel Webster gives us: “Someone who accepts and helps to spread the teachings of a famous person.”¹ Webster nails it! Indeed, discipleship means accepting and helping to spread the words of Jesus. Could it really be that simple?

Yes, discipling another woman is a doable task. Throughout this book, I want to walk alongside you, encouraging you to find your God-given ability to disciple another woman in your life. I'll be with you in spirit as you uncover the assurance and freedom God offers each of His daughters who want to follow Him in obedience into this gentle art of discipling women.

WHY “GENTLE”?

The LORD and King is coming with power.
He rules with a powerful arm.
He has set his people free.
He is bringing them back as his reward.
He has won the battle over their enemies.
He takes care of his flock like a shepherd.
He gathers the lambs in his arms.
He carries them close to his heart.
He gently leads those that have little ones.

ISAIAH 40:10-11

Isaiah 40:10 shows us a bold and compelling description of our almighty God—and in the very next verse, this same God is described as a protective shepherd who gently gathers lambs in His arms. If we wish to disciple other women, we need that powerful ruler supernaturally surrounding us and filling us—but we can also be thankful knowing that He attends us and those we help as a gentle shepherd. We can gently disciple others with His omnipotent pastoral care and support.

As our gentle shepherd, Jesus “gently leads those that have little ones” (v. 11). When I read this, I picture a young mother holding her newborn. There is never a more vulnerable time for mother or baby than the first days or weeks of the little one’s life! I remember the vulnerability I felt as I raised my

three children, and more recently I have watched the empathetic care of my daughters for their children. As women, we have been created with that sensitivity and vulnerability whether we have had children or not.

Biologically, there are hormones every woman needs: estrogen, oxytocin, and progesterone. Sometimes I refer to these hormones as “drugs” that we have been placed on so that we can do what we are created to do! We have all experienced the side effects of these “drugs” when we experience PMS, but these hormones also give us wonderful capabilities. We are able to sense what people—whether our friends, husbands, or children—need. We can quickly tell how someone else feels. Sometimes it seems as though we have eyes in the back of our heads!

This nurturing quality we possess within our feminine design is our greatest resource as we respond to Christ’s call to make disciples. Disciplers are nourishers. They are sensitive. They are relationally aware. They give attention to the spiritual dietary needs of those they help. They place themselves in a position of vulnerability for the sake of those they help. And because Jesus gently cares for us and leads us, we are compelled to gently disciple others.

I am thankful for the gentleness that Jesus has continued to show me throughout my life as I have walked with Him. And how important it is that we offer gentleness as we disciple! This gentleness does not mean that we are indifferent to the damaging life choices or attitudes of those around us. Nor does it mean that we endorse the pervasive victim mentalities

present in our culture today that paralyze a woman's growth. But in gentleness, we should show deliberate voluntary kindness and forbearance as we conduct ourselves as disciplers.

WHY AN "ART"?

Like art, discipling requires a certain level of skill development. The application of those skills, along with creative acumen, brings discipling to a level of artistry. As artists, we envision the beautiful results of what is being crafted, plan for the results, and contribute to their end. We are fully present with the emerging work of beauty in front of us, even as we work with the finished product constantly in mind. Being flexible and creative as we use the skills we have developed is essential as we trust God for His desired outcome in a woman's life.

As we intentionally develop our skills, we grow in our ability to disciple with confident thoroughness. Relying upon God's Spirit helps us cultivate an awareness of the needs of those we help. And while we are "at work" in a person's life, the ultimate Artist, the Creator of the universe, is accomplishing the true work! God is far more in tune and active with those we are discipling than we could ever hope to be.

LORD, you have seen what is in my heart.

You know all about me.

You know when I sit down and when I get up.

You know what I'm thinking even though
you are far away.

You know when I go out to work
and when I come back home.
You know exactly how I live.
LORD, even before I speak a word,
you know all about it.

You are all around me, behind me and in front of me.
You hold me safe in your hand.
I'm amazed at how well you know me.
It's more than I can understand.

PSALM 139:1-6

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Today, if we want to grow in Christ, women have so many options! The Sunday morning worship service, Sunday school for adults, Tuesday or Wednesday morning or evening Bible study, the Christmas evangelistic brunch, perhaps a fall or spring retreat, conferences . . . the list goes on.

In my twenties and thirties, I was always involved in women's groups at church. I loved the camaraderie these communities provided as I began raising kids, hunkering down in the marriage relationship, and figuring out what it meant to be a godly woman. The friends I made during these years were priceless and necessary.

But during those years I was especially helped in my growth through a one-on-one discipleship relationship with a woman ten years older than me. She helped me in my

personal walk with God, in my understanding of the Word, and in my conviction that I needed to help others know Christ and make Him known. This one-on-one discipleship attention influenced my life choices and helped me make sense of all the other input I was receiving from the pulpit, conference speakers, and Christian friends in Bible study and other groups I attended.

The Gentle Art of Discipling Women was written to help women who want to disciple another woman one-on-one. Remember Emily at the beginning of this chapter? If you're like Emily, desiring to disciple someone but unsure where to begin, I would recommend that you go through this book on your own, asking yourself, "Am I grounded in Christ?" and "How do I disciple someone else?" This book will equip the mature Christian who wants to disciple another—but it will also be of help to the woman who wishes to be discipled! If you're like Marcia, desiring to be discipled, you could pick up this book and ask a trusted and respected fellow believer, "Could we read this book together? Can you help me grow as we do so?"

This book can also be used with a small group. Perhaps you have several friends who are full of life and would be great at discipling others. Take a risk and invite them to study this book together. There is a short leader's guide in the back of this book that will give you guidance and confidence to guide others along this journey with you. Walking together through both sections of this book will give all of you a chance to talk about your strengths and weaknesses as His

disciple and to encourage one another as you step out to disciple others. Understanding that we are all in this together is important as we think through the possibilities of discipling! Be encouraged by Psalm 68:11: “The Lord announces the word, and the women who proclaim it are a mighty throng” (NIV). Come join the mighty throng and take up the challenge of discipling others!

Do you remember our simple dictionary definition of *discipleship*? Discipleship means accepting and helping to spread the words of Jesus. Both pieces are critical as we step into discipling another woman. So this book is divided into two parts: “Be His Disciple” and “Make a Disciple.”

Part 1 is vital: *being* one who authentically follows Christ must always precede stepping out and building into someone else’s life. So, in this first section, we will forthrightly consider our own foundation—what we as Jesus’ disciples need for our own spiritual health as we walk with Him. These things are our birthright as His daughters!

Take your time to work through the stories, Scripture, and questions in this section. Studying Scripture is a crucial part of both your individual walk with Christ and your journey alongside someone else. Throughout this book, we will dive into Scripture to help us understand key truths about our position in Christ as a disciple and how we are to disciple others. Use a journal to reflect on the questions about Scripture and record your thoughts. The questions are designed to be worked through as you go through each chapter, and you may wish to take a week to go through each

chapter to adequately dig into the questions. This part of the book is intended to help you personally, and it can also serve as a powerful study tool with which you can disciple another woman in her understanding of who she is in Christ. I pray that God uses it mightily in your own faith so you may be confident as you set out to disciple others.

Part 2 calls us to boldly consider and step into the broad scope of what it means to be a disciplemaker. We will look at Jesus as our master disciplemaker. We will consider advice on making disciples as we look at the Word as our backdrop. As we work through the Scripture, questions, and challenges together, you will feel empowered and encouraged, understanding that God has given you all you need to disciple others!

God's heart is that we would join Him in the lofty mission of bringing others to Himself and disciplining them so that they might go and do the same. As we consider joining Christ's commission upon our lives, let us humbly lean upon Him because He promises to be with us and gently lead us. Step with me into the magnificent challenge of impacting our world through investing in another person!²



❖ PART ONE ❖

Be His Disciple

I DON'T CARE who tries to convince us that there are simple formulas for a happy life—life is not easy. If someone says that knowing Christ means painless living, then they are passing on an enormous lie. But do you know what Jesus does promise us? “I have come so they may have life. I want them to have it in the fullest possible way” (John 10:10).

The word Jesus used for *life* in this verse is translated from the Greek word *zoe*:

Zoe is distinguished from *bios* (*Strong's*, 979) which refers to physical life or livelihood. Having *bios* allows us to be physically alive, that is to exist. *Zoe* (*Strong's*, 2222) is the nobler word of the two, expressing all of the highest and best which Christ is and which He gives to the saints. *Zoe* is the highest blessedness of the creature.³

We all possess *bios*, but some of us may not be experiencing or living out of the wealth of *zoe*, the life that Christ gives us. Jesus' purpose in coming to earth was not only to die for our sins but to open the way to a life that is full and meaningful. As we examine our foundation of faith in this section, consider: Are we living abundantly, in living color, as Jesus intends—or are we just existing as in a dull black-and-white photo? Are we truly living, or just existing?

FOUNDATION

In these first four chapters, we will spend time digging into four foundational realities of our faith:

- *We Are Forgiven*
- *We Are Safe*
- *We Have Access*
- *We Are Becoming*

These realities are for every follower of Christ, and incredibly important for those of us who want to take up the gentle art of discipling women. As we consider discipling, we need to be assured of our place as His disciple so we pass on that which we know to be true. These four realities flow from the truth of the Word of God and center on the promises we have in Christ. Living in these realities cultivates an authentic faith that will underscore every part of our lives—and will undergird us as we gently offer help and growth to those we disciple.

We Are Forgiven: Knowing that we are forgiven is crucial to a genuine faith, because without knowing the eternal and daily reality of God's forgiveness, we tend to live out a self-serving vacuous existence even as we call ourselves "Christian." Our lives will not center on Christ and joyful obedience to His Word but will merely give Him a compartment or two, allowing us to pretend we're following Christ. When we truly embrace and hinge all that we do on the sacrificial forgiveness of God, then we begin to acknowledge daily how spiritually destitute we are apart from Him. Having this reality firmly established in our hearts will launch us into an ability to care and lead another as we disciple them.

We Are Safe: Do you know that you are safe in Christ? Only when we embrace this reality can we walk with Him day by day free from anxiety. Our media-driven world can create fear and panic; it is vital to understand that though we are vulnerable, we are shielded in Christ. As we comprehend this, we can live out of His protection. And from there we bring our strength and conviction to the discipling table. Genuine faith rests upon our consciousness that we are safe because of the trustworthiness of our God, who not only created us but has arranged for us an eternal home.

We Have Access: Most of us live inside stressful, active, overwhelming schedules, under the burden of a myriad of

expectations. Cultivating intimacy with Christ is imperative. In the protection of our daily connection to Him, we can not only survive but thrive above the cacophony that surrounds us. As we set out to disciple other women, this reality will extend blessing into the lives of those we help.

We Are Becoming: The truth that “we are becoming” impacts how we perceive every circumstance of our lives. Christ makes no mistakes. We are the work in progress of a loving God, and He intends to complete His work in us. The abundant life that Jesus promises involves His personal and loving invasion into our spirits as He matures our character to wholly reflect Himself. As we come alongside another woman, we will have empathy and understanding for her life circumstances and relationships—because we are also in the process of becoming.

The pursuit of a genuine faith requires that we, with vulnerability and honesty, open ourselves to Christ, anticipating growth that takes us out of our comfort zone. And as we engage in this study with other women, we have the opportunity to encourage and challenge one another on the journey.

We Are Forgiven

Christ [the Messiah Himself] died for sins once for all, the Righteous for the unrighteous (the Just for the unjust, the Innocent for the guilty), that He might bring us to God. ❖ 1 PETER 3:18, AMP

Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” The other guests began to talk about this among themselves. They said, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” ❖ LUKE 7:48-49

*Forgive us our sins, as we also forgive everyone who sins against us.
❖ LUKE 11:4*

HAVE YOU EVER DEALT with an addiction? I’m not just talking about the big ones we automatically think of—drugs or alcohol or food, for example—but something, anything, that had such a grip on your life that it colored everything else you did.

I did. In my late twenties and early thirties, I was completely and unabashedly codependent. Unknowingly, I began to rely upon my group of girlfriends to give me my sense of identity. I needed to hear their compliments. I looked forward to and leaned upon their laughter and approval of my

ideas, choices, and opinions. Whenever I left an outing or coffee time with them, I felt satisfied. Life was good! It was a satisfying unseen addiction.

And during this time in my life, I was avidly discipling women.

You know, what this book is about.

In the midst of my busy schedule—leading group studies, meeting with women one-on-one, prepping to move overseas as a missionary, raising three children under six years of age, and just really enjoying life—God gently ran interference on my heart. His goal? To intervene in my addiction.

My awareness of this addiction began to bubble up in me when I realized I was finding an unhealthy sense of satisfaction in the fact that a certain really “cool” woman had asked me to disciple her. Meeting with her fed my sense of personal worth. Our discipling relationship was a badge I pompously wore for others to see. As I began to realize the pleasure I was drawing from this “discipling relationship,” I was dismayed.

God showed me that this particular situation was but the pinnacle of a great iceberg of codependency. Relying on my cozy group of friends or someone I was discipling for my sense of importance, value, or identity was clearly sin. Not only was this codependency crowding out Jesus as my “first love,” but it was becoming an idol that I depended on to give me “life.” The full weight of this tendency tormented me deep within my spirit. My heart crumpled as I confessed to Jesus that my identity needs were being met through the very thing He had asked me to do: disciple women.

And, as He always does, He offered me forgiveness with open arms (see 1 John 1:9).

Forgiveness is sometimes difficult for us to understand. Sure, we all know at some level or another that when we come to Christ we are forgiven for all our sin—past, present, and future. But as we live life, we still sin.

And this is the beauty of the gospel: when we first believe in Christ we repent and He makes all things new. But just as exciting is this: that as we continue to sin, Jesus is faithful and just to forgive us our sin! Over and over and over. Choosing to sin, even though we know Christ, and humbly seeking forgiveness are intrinsic aspects of our lifelong trek with Him. So we must continue to walk with Him and let Him transform us completely, continually confessing our sin and receiving His forgiveness. And because He continues to forgive us, we are humbled and glad to forgive others.

As I have developed in my understanding of forgiveness, I have experienced a spiritually tangible God-presence accompanied by His peace. And my love for Him deepens the more I recognize the value and truth of His forgiveness for my sin. Let's explore together this powerful first foundational reality that we are women whom Jesus loves and has forgiven.

AMONG THE FORGIVEN

The Bible is full of stories of people who experienced the power of forgiveness firsthand, but I particularly love the story of the prostitute in Luke 7. As we engage with her life,

let's stand beside her, befriend her, and seek to understand her deepest emotions and actions.

As a prostitute, she was socially and culturally condemned for her transgressions. No one could fathom what might have led her into her life of sin. No one in her world cared to understand the shame that she carried with her through a pit of immoral disgrace.

She had sinned. She knew it. And yet she innocently but determinedly moved toward Jesus. She even risked stepping into Simon the Pharisee's judgmental gaze. Without one word she approached, worshiped, and engaged with Jesus. She sought Christ, trusting His forgiveness.

The men in Luke 7 who attended the dinner and observed our forgiven friend found it difficult to wrap their minds around the forgiveness Jesus offered her. Perhaps it was because they knew about her sins, conspicuous and reprehensible. Perhaps she made them feel uncomfortable and a bit nervous as they watched from their pious seats.

Some of my friends have experienced sexual brokenness in one way or another over the course of their lives. It is agonizing to hear of the hurt and shame others inflicted upon them and the resulting poor choices they made as they tried to deal with the pain. Perhaps they have asked, "Could a body broken and blood spilled two thousand years ago restore my own damaged life?"⁴

One such young woman, Janie, grew up making harmful choices because of the sexual wrongdoing committed against

her as a child. Hear her heart as she vividly describes the morning when she acknowledged Christ's forgiveness:

One morning, my friend picked me up for church. I was reluctant to go with her, knowing where I'd been the night before, getting my fill of pleasure and numbing my pain. Nonetheless, I went and listened to what the pastor said. By the end of the service, I was sobbing like someone who had just lost a loved one.

What is wrong with me? Why am I unraveling? Before I could think another thought, my feet started moving. *Something* compelled me to walk up to the front of that church. I knelt down with that man and admitted my desperate need to be rescued from my sin-ravaged life. I wish I could describe what happened to my soul at that moment without sounding overly dramatic, but something deeply touched me and changed me on the inside.

For the first time in my life I felt worthy to be loved. I knew I didn't deserve it and I couldn't have earned it, nor could I have made it happen through any effort of my own. The heavy burden I was carrying was being carried by someone else. Someone who took the very stabs to His own soul that I should have received. Someone who bled physical drops of blood to pay the price I owed.

Unfathomable. An indescribable, mysterious transformation was taking place inside of me.⁵

Janie is a modern-day Luke 7 woman! As she moved from her sin-ravaged existence into the loving arms of Jesus, she experienced a kind of spiritual culture shock. Like the woman of Luke 7, my friend came to the awareness that Christ loved her—and because of His love she felt worthy to be loved. Realizing that we matter to Jesus leads us to grasp what C. S. Lewis points out: “He died not for men, but for each man. If each man had been the only man made, He would have done no less.”⁶ We are uniquely loved and will be uniquely cared for!

Janie and the woman of Luke 7 remind us that our ultimate source of forgiveness is Jesus Christ. Let’s look back at Him as He connects with our miscreant girlfriend in Luke 7. Bravely she encountered the living Jesus and worshiped Him, using perfume that she would have formerly used to allure prospective clients. She physically interacted with Jesus as she worshiped Him without a word. Her actions, though passionate, were not seductive. She was forgiven and free.

Like this forgiven friend in Luke 7, when we fully embrace the forgiveness of Christ, we receive the agape love of God. His agape love is deep and constant, extended personally toward those who are entirely unworthy. God’s love, when truly embraced, produces and fosters a reverential love toward Him and a practical love toward others. And,

ultimately, this love fosters a desire to help others to seek Him. It is this agape love for us that moved God to send His Son, Jesus.

The woman of Luke 7 is every woman. In fact, she is every person! She is you and she is me. She understood that she was forgiven for all of her immoral ways. She saw Jesus for who he was, the Redeeming God. And He received the prostitute's worship and thanksgiving, endorsing the truth of her forgiveness and promising her peace. Because she knew forgiveness for her abundant sin, she wanted to respond to Christ by showing how much she loved Him for forgiving her. She was done with her past way of living.

Of course, Jesus used this woman's life to teach Simon the Pharisee and all who gathered at his table. Where the woman had seen Jesus for who He truly was, Simon the Pharisee saw Jesus as a pathetic slave. He did not welcome Him as an honored guest even though it was required by culture. But what a momentous dinner for those men! Would Simon begin to see Jesus accurately? Would he be able to see Jesus as the forgiving agent that He is? And would Simon ever come to a place in his life where he could offer grace and forgiveness to others?



GO DEEPER

To help us really wrestle with this concept of forgiveness, let's take a closer look at Luke 7. Read verses 36-50 in your favorite translation, then answer the questions in your journal.

Verses 36-37

1. Who was present at this dinner?
2. Why do you think Jesus came to eat dinner with Simon the Pharisee and his friends?
3. The woman brought a flask of perfumed ointment. How did this reflect her purpose in coming to see Jesus?
4. Do you ever plan how you might serve or worship Jesus in a special way that reflects your heart of gratitude?

Verse 38

5. What was her demeanor? Why do you think she acted this way?
6. List all the nonverbal interactions she had with Jesus. How did her actions reflect her past?
7. Through her actions the woman brought honor to Jesus. What insight into the woman's heart does this give you?

Verse 39

8. How did Simon the Pharisee view this woman? What conclusion did Simon make about Jesus because of his view of the woman?

Verses 40-43

9. What was Jesus replying to in these verses? How did He reply?
10. What lesson was Jesus teaching through this parable? How did Simon respond?
11. Jesus spoke to Simon's intellect, not to his emotions. Why do you think He did this?

Verses 44-47

12. Hospitality was highly valued in this culture. Hosts were to bow down to

their guests as they greeted them, kiss them on the cheek, wash their feet, offer them tea, and make them feel incredibly welcome and appreciated. Simon the Pharisee ignored this respectful behavior toward Jesus. What conclusions do you draw about Simon because of this?

13. What is the lesson Jesus is teaching all of us through this woman's life?
14. Why do you think this woman loved much? Do you identify with her deep sense of love for Christ?
15. What was this woman's love rooted in?
16. Read John 14:21. What do you see in this verse about loving Jesus?

Verse 48

17. Jesus had already said that her sins were forgiven. Why do you think He repeated this truth to her?

Verse 49

18. What was it that the guests at the table began to question about forgiveness?
19. Why do you think Jesus wanted these men to know that He forgives sins?

Verse 50

20. What saved this woman?
21. Why do you think Jesus told her to "go in peace"? Do you think peace is a benefit of experiencing forgiveness? Why or why not?

THE REALITY OF FORGIVENESS

We are forgiven! Easy to breeze past this foundational reality, isn't it? But without a transformative realization of what Jesus has truly done for us, we may feel hindered as we step forward in making disciples. We can't be effective disciple-makers if we choose to live under a dark undefined label that

says we are *unforgiven* when in truth Jesus calls us *forgiven and free!* This is an opportune time for you to settle from the heart those things that weigh you down or hold you back from a spiritual fresh start.

As we pursue this essential and foundational reality of forgiveness, we must also contemplate our willingness to forgive others (see Luke 11:4). Because of what Christ has done for us we can compassionately move toward those who have hurt us deeply, slandered us, lied about us, talked behind our backs, wounded us deeply through physically abusive acts, or passed over us for compensation or honor. C. S. Lewis reminds us, “To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.”⁷

Forgiving those who have deeply hurt us definitely takes work. We cannot simply flippantly say, “It’s okay.” My friend Terri, who had forgiven the uncle who abused her at age six, told me that “twenty years later, after I had forgiven my uncle the first time, God brought this topic up again. This time, God spoke to me about forgiving not only my uncle’s actions but also the effects those actions had on my life.” Her life was smeared with the ripple effects of his selfish actions, and she needed to forgive him for those ripples to find healing and freedom.

It can be painful to forgive, but we must ask ourselves, *Do I want to forgive as I have been forgiven?* On one occasion many years ago, I was unable to attend a meeting of a woman’s leadership council of which I was a member.

Many in the group took advantage of my absence to slander me. The woman I sent to the meeting in my stead later informed me of the verbal butchery that had taken place. I was stunned. It was as if someone had plunged a dagger into my gut.

After a few weeks, when the dust had settled in my emotional framework, I went to the council director and asked her about what my friend had reported. I made a point of sharing how it made me feel. She agreed that she was wrong to allow this attack to occur, taking responsibility and asking for my forgiveness. I forgave her, but I still felt the sting of the hurt.

After this conversation, I realized how emotionally arduous it was to forgive. Even though I genuinely meant what I said when I forgave her, I still felt shamed, sliced and diced emotionally. Forgiving the collective group took me some time as I had to process the sin against me. Finally, God did bring me to a sincere place of forgiving these women. Forgiveness, in effect, means that we hurt twice—once during the actual offense, and again whenever the hurt arises during the forgiveness process. Like Terri, I learned that to experience true freedom I must forgive not only the actions of those who hurt me but the effects of their actions.

It took me some time, my friend. But who am I, really? I am a forgiven sinner like them. I make mistakes. Jesus taught me to forgive others as I have been forgiven, but I am still growing in this! How about you? How are you doing with forgiving others? If we want to truly experience

His forgiveness and step into a redemptive lifestyle, we must forgive.



BEFORE WE GO ON

In this chapter we have looked at three sides of forgiveness:

1. Sin separates all humans from God. We all need forgiveness. And we are forgiven for all of our sin through Christ's death on the cross.
2. Even though we are forgiven, we continue to live life and we continue to sin. Christ calls us to approach Him with our sin on a daily basis, sincerely confessing our sin and receiving His cleansing forgiveness.
3. We can expect that others will sin against us. And as women who know forgiveness for our personal sin, we have the opportunity and need to forgive others who have sinned against us!

Out of these truths, pray over and journal about these three questions:

1. Do you know for sure and are you truly able to celebrate the forgiveness for all your sin that Jesus covered by His death on the cross? Are you assured that you have eternal life? (See 1 John 5:11-13.)
2. Are you living out a redemptive lifestyle, daily confessing your sin and receiving the cleansing forgiveness of Christ? (See 1 John 1:9.)
3. Is there someone who has wounded you or sinned against you whom you need to forgive? (See Luke 11:4.)

Take some time with the Lord and pray over each of these aspects of forgiveness, asking Him to show you what He wants to concentrate on with you. Begin journaling as Jesus uncovers where in these three aspects of forgiveness you might move forward.

Finally, like our courageous girlfriend in Luke 7, let us triumphantly be sent on our way as we live forward in His magnificent provision of forgiveness, hearing Jesus gently say to each of us, “Go in peace” (Luke 7:50).

Father, this foundational reality of receiving Your forgiveness and forgiving others who wound us is our joyful reality—yet it can be so painful. To know we are forgiven brings us to such a high point in our lives. We praise You that as we experience Your forgiveness on a daily basis, You send us into life with Your peace and steadfast love. We are humbled to realize that as we have been forgiven, so shall we compassionately offer forgiveness to those who sin against us. Help us, Lord, to live a redemptive lifestyle, quick to continue in Your forgiveness as well as to forgive others. Amen.



DISCIPLEMAKER CHALLENGE

- Do you experience a deep assurance of Christ’s forgiveness in your heart and life?
- How do you live out being forgiven and forgiving others in your life today?
- As you step in to discipling another woman, how do you think it might affect her growth if she has not embraced the all-encompassing forgiveness of her sin through Christ?

