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Offer Forgiveness

John 21

“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”

But he replied, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.”

Jesus answered, “I tell you Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.” (Luke 22:31-34)

Peter and Jesus saw the future differently. As we might expect, Peter's view of the future (and of himself) was a little shortsighted. Satan did sift Peter as wheat—and Peter flunked the test. After denying his Lord three times almost as soon as Jesus was captured, Peter disappeared from the scene. Scripture does not show him at the crucifixion. There is a brief, mysterious note in Luke 24:34 that Jesus appeared to Peter, probably on Easter Sunday morning, but we don't get to see that meeting. What we do see is an amazing account of Jesus and Peter's interaction—dealing with the problem of forgiveness.

GROUP DISCUSSION. Why is forgiveness difficult to give and to receive?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. Bring to mind a fractured relationship from

your own experience. What do you need to forgive? What do need to be forgiven of?

Peter had abandoned his Lord at the time of Jesus' greatest need. Peter had seen Jesus once since then—perhaps even been forgiven—but what would their new relationship be? What role (if any) would Peter have in God's continued work? *Read John 21:1-14.*

1. Close your eyes and imagine that you are present at this event. What sights, sounds and smells surround you?

2. Try to put yourself in Peter's sandals. What are some of your thoughts and feelings?

3. In what ways did Jesus show that he wanted to continue a relationship with his disciples?

4. What would be hard about any continued relationship with Jesus at this point?

5. Jesus created an atmosphere that made it easy for his disciples to be with him. Consider one of your own difficult relationships. If you

wanted to, what could you do to create a welcoming setting that might lead toward forgiveness?

6. *Read John 21:15-25.* What do you think was painful to Peter in his post-breakfast conversation with Jesus?

7. Although Jesus did not mention the word *forgiveness*, what all do you see that suggests Jesus has forgiven Peter?

8. What does the conversation with Jesus reveal about Peter's future responsibilities?

9. What do you personally find reassuring about Peter's conversation with Jesus?

10. What do verses 20-25 reveal about the perspective of John, the writer of this book?

11. Why is it important to learn to give and receive forgiveness?

12. Peter was one of Jesus' closest disciples. Why is it particularly hard to forgive people who are close to you?

13. Bring to mind one person with whom you need to extend or receive forgiveness. What is a step you could take in that direction?

Focus on the forgiveness that God has given you, the forgiving work of Jesus on your behalf. Pray, thanking God for all this brings to mind.

Now or Later

Do you suspect that you have offended someone, that perhaps you need to be forgiven? Prayerfully study Matthew 5:23-24. Then make the effort described in that passage.

Has someone hurt you to the point that you are having trouble forgiving them? Prayerfully study Matthew 18:15-22. Focus on the goal stated in verses 21-22. Then go back to the earlier part of the passage and consider what steps are appropriate for this particular relationship, steps that could lead you toward that goal.

Do you need to forgive a person no longer available to you, perhaps separated by distance or death? Notice that forgiveness does not minimize the hurt. (Jesus gave Peter the opportunity to declare his love—just as many times as he had declared his denial.) Write a letter, journal entry or prayer that could lead you to forgive that person. Then ask God's help in bringing that about.