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- I love figures, and I've calculated that the average Christadelphian who does the Daily Readings reads about 40,000 Bible Verses a y
- Like it often happens, classes like this begin with one of those verses that you read one evening during the readings...
- This time, it was Ephesians 4:32

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- We'll start at Verse 30 for Context
- Ephesians 4:30-32
 - 30) And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.
 - 31) Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.
 - 32) Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, **forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.**
- Now, I can't say that I understand what it means to "*grieve the Holy Spirit*", but I am quite sure that is something that I don't want to ever do
- And the thing that seems to grieve the Holy Spirit the most is not forgiving each other
- This thought made me think, and made me come to quite an uncomfortable position...
- Basically, I have learned that I am not a very forgiving kind of person
- I want to change that
- This class is part of my continuing journey to change who I am

- Forgiveness is hard for me, so I'm assuming it might be hard for some of you as well
- I'm assuming that like me it doesn't come very natural
- I'm assuming that like me you could use a little help, Learning to Forgive
- Psychologists and Sociologists describe three basic types of Forgiveness:
 - 1) Detached Forgiveness - A reduction in negative feelings, but no real reconciliation
 - 2) Limited Forgiveness - A reduction in negative feelings and a partial restoration of the relationship
 - 3) Total Forgiveness - Total cessation of negative feelings and a full restoration of the relationship back to it's previous state
- That is the kind of Forgiveness that we want to achieve in our relationships with each other
- A total cessation of negative feelings
- A full restoration of the relationship back to it's previous state
- Not an annoying feeling of uneasiness every time their name is mentioned, or they enter the room
- We want to learn how to achieve Total Forgiveness
- In order to do so, one of the first things that we want to make sure we understand as we begin a study of Forgiveness is Forgiveness is a clear commandment

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- Colossians 3:12-13
 - 12) Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,

- 13) bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, **so you also must forgive.**

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- Matthew 6:11-12

- 11) Give us this day our daily bread,
- 12) and forgive us our debts, **as we also have forgiven our debtors.**

- It isn't just something nice to do
- It isn't just something to make you feel better
- It's a Commandment from God
- It simply isn't our position to avenge ourselves
- We're very familiar with all the verses in the Old Testament that say vengeance is the Lord's

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- Look what Paul told the Romans:

- Romans 12:17-19

- 17) Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.
- 18) If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.
- 19) Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, **"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."**

- This is going to be a key concept for us to understand as we learn about Forgiveness: God will avenge all wrongs
- It's often so hard to "let it go" because you don't want the person to "get away with it" and you feel an honest yearning inside your heart for Justice
- Justice is the Lord's – He will avenge

- Let's begin our journey on this topic of Revenge:
- Have you ever known people who are tied up in their own knots of bitterness?
- Revenge doesn't always look like some scene from a Mafia movie... It is often simply a bitter, angry person who inside has thoughts of revenge.
- Consider the concept of "Would other people describe you as being bitter?"
- Most of us have experienced times in our lives when we are pushed beyond our limits to forgive
- Sometimes you are just unable to draw yourself up to that level
- Sure, you might pretend it
- You might even try to convince yourself of it
- But, when it really comes down to it, you truly haven't forgiven them, and you are still bitter about what happened
- Total Forgiveness does not come until you have completely released the person from your anger and bitterness
- Until you completely release them, you will never be released from what they did to you
- Oftentimes, one of the first steps to beginning this journey of Forgiveness, is having a friend point out to you that you really are harboring anger over an old hurt
- This is hard to have happen to you, and brings to mind the words from Proverbs:

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- Proverbs 27:6
 - 6) **Faithful are the wounds of a friend**; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

- If you truly are fortunate enough to have a good friend, they might tell you this someday
- If you do find it within you to forgive, you may come to understand peace
- There is a certain type of peace that the Bible talks about
- A peace that comes into your heart when you forgive others and are right with God
- When was the last time you felt genuine, all-encompassing peace?
- What we need to come to see is that bitterness doesn't damage anyone but yourself
- When we are bitter, we delude ourselves into thinking that those who have hurt us are more likely to be punished as long as we are set on revenge
- To see our enemies punished is the goal of all revenge and bitterness
- We are afraid to let go of those feelings, because we don't want them to "get away with it"
- We can convince ourselves that it is up to US to keep the offense alive - For justice' sake
- But, remember what we read Paul telling the Romans?

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- Romans 12:19

19) Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

- It simply isn't our job
- Our ONLY job is to "let them off the hook"

- We are to proceed forward with the clear and full understanding that we are not going to have anything to do with whether or not “what THEY did” will ever see the light of righteousness
- We have to move forward with the full assurance that GOD will set things right
- Instead of spending our time thinking about how they are going to fall, we need to forget about them all together
- To begin this journey to true forgiveness and the genuine, all-encompassing peace that comes with it, you have to commit to forgive those who hurt you... EVERY DAY!
- You have to let them utterly off the hook with no repercussions or conditions at all

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- You have to **Resign Yourself to 3 Things:**

1) They **won't get caught** or found out

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2) **Nobody will ever know** what they did

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3) They will prosper and be blessed **as if they had done no wrong**

- Once you begin to allow yourself to start thinking this way - To actually believe the verse that says that "*Vengeance is the Lords*" - Then you can start to be free
- When you find yourself actually HOPING that they won't get found out - HOPING that no one will ever know what they did - HOPING that they will be blessed as if they had done no wrong - THEN you will have achieved TOTAL FORGIVENESS
- THEN you will feel the peace that comes from living that way
- Today we are going to talk about forgiving when you don't want to...

- The real test of forgiveness
- We aren't taught Forgiveness in school
- Instead we are more familiar with concepts like, "*Distance yourself from them*" or "*Teach them a lesson*"
- We probably didn't learn Real Forgiveness at home either... or even at Sunday School
- Let's start out by all agreeing that forgiving those who have severely hurt us is difficult
- Forgiving an unfaithful husband or an abusive parent may seem impossible
- Forgiving what was done to your son or your daughter may seem impossible
- There are all kinds of offenses that we find hard to forgive:
 - Being betrayed
 - Having someone angry at you
 - Someone acting careless or forgetful towards you
 - Being cheated
 - Being overlooked
 - Offenses involving money
 - Offenses involving your children
- Each one will respond with a different person in a different way
- I would think that it would be very hard to forgive someone who wants to - and then actually succeeds at - killing you
- And yet the example we have is, "*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do*"
- The motivation to forgive often has a "selfish" explanation as well...
- Consider the verse we read earlier in the Lord's prayer:

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- Matthew 6:12

12) ... forgive us our debts, **as we also have forgiven our debtors.**

- Christ also said,

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- Matthew 7:1

1) **Judge not, that you be not judged.**

- A possible selfish motive for not judging others is to not be judged
- Likewise, forgiving others will work towards your forgiveness
- But, more important than that is the affect that forgiveness will have on your life
- That peace that we talked about carries the idea of releasing your thoughts from everything that you carry when you carry a grudge
- Living a life of un-forgiveness can stultify your life and rob you of opportunity
- Let's look again at the verses that we read in Colossians 3

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- Colossians 3:12-13

12) Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,

13) bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, **so you also must forgive.**

- Forgive as the Lord forgave you
- How has the Lord forgiven you?
- Unequivocally and unconditionally

- Your sins will never be held against you, and no one will ever know what you did
- That needs to be our goal in how we deal with forgiving our Brother's sins against us

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- Psalm 103:11-12

- 11) For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
- 12) **as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.**

- Sometimes we can't control ourselves, and we just have to unload our burden on someone
- If you do, make sure that you only do it to one person, and make sure that that person is not the kind of person who is going to tell others
- Make sure it's someone who can help you, and not hurt the other person...
- What we will come to understand in our classes is that Forgiveness is a **choice**
- Forgiveness is NOT something that comes naturally
- Forgiveness is something that we **choose** to do, and have to continue to choose to do every day
- We'll discuss this in depth of the next several days, but I'd like to introduce you to these steps along the path to Forgiveness

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- There are **7 Steps** to **Forgiveness**

1) Make the deliberate and irrevocable choice **not to tell anyone what they did**

- As we've said before, you may need to tell someone for therapeutic reasons, but make sure that it is only to one person, and that one person agrees not to tell anyone else
- This is one of the hardest parts!
- When our motive is to hurt someone by telling on them than that is sin
- If we don't want to hurt them, then we will keep it to ourselves

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2) Be pleasant to them if you are around them

- Put them at ease
- Don't make them anxious or nervous to be around you
- Think about the demeanor of Joseph when he was around his Brethren

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3) Say something to free them from Guilt

- Guilt is painful
- We can easily punish people by sending them on a "*guilt trip*"
- Remember that God doesn't want you to feel guilty over the sins He has forgiven you, so you should follow the same example for those who you forgive
- "*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*"
- How do you want to be treated when you hurt someone?

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4) Let them feel good about themselves

- Yes, you heard me right...

- This person who has hurt you so badly, deserves the opportunity to feel good
- Not only does this mean never reminding them of their wrong and your hurt, but it also means helping them through any guilt that they might have
- If you have truly forgiven them, you should behave as though you don't even think that they did anything wrong!
- This is hard for all of us, but it must be done...
- Say whatever you can (as long as it's TRUE!) to give that person a sense of dignity

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5) Protect them from their greatest fear

- If you are aware of some deep, dark secret and fear that they have, they will probably know that you know
- If they can tell by your graciousness that their secret will never be revealed, they will be relieved
- If you know that they know that you know... Then tell them that you will never reveal it!
- If you don't know whether or not they know that you know... Keep your mouth shut!

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6) Keep forgiving - FOREVER

- There is no such thing as "*Forgiving and Forgetting*"
- You are going to be continually reminded by things they say and do about what they did to you
- Your job is to forgive them for that today, tomorrow, this year and next year...
- Forgiveness is a lifelong commitment

- The temptation of bitterness will emerge
- Make a commitment to forgive and remind yourself of that commitment every day

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7) Pray for them

- Probably the most important step
- If you can get yourself to the stage where you are honestly and sincerely praying for the betterment of those who have offended you, then you have forgiven them
- Not a perfunctory prayer, "*And please remember James*", but truly praying that God will forgive them, that they will feel the love of God's forgiveness, that they will forgive themselves, and that God will bless them so that they can move on from this
- This is something that you do quietly in your own closet
- You don't tell people, "*Guess what I did? I actually prayed for my unfaithful spouse to be blessed.*"
- Only God witnesses what you say... And whether or not you mean it
- I have found that this is the hardest part of the process
- To honestly and truly pray for the betterment of someone who has hurt you
- There are some really helpful stages to consider when we talk about praying for those who have hurt us

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- Let's look at the **5 Stages in Praying for Your Enemies**

1) DUTY - The first level is strictly based on obedience - You pray for them that hurt you because you feel that you have to

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2) DEBT - You reach the second level when you are so conscious of what you have been forgiven that you cannot help but pray for those who have hurt you - You don't want God to NOT forgive you, so you forgive others

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3) DESIRE - You begin to pray for your enemies because it is what you really want

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4) DELIGHT - This is a step further - It is when you love doing it! You get joy from praying for and blessing your enemies

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5) DURABILITY - This means that you took on as a lifelong commitment becomes a lifestyle. The thought of turning back is out of the question. It has become a habit, and it no longer seems extraordinary.

- All of this is done in secret, behind closed doors
- You aren't allowed to be praised by people who say, *"Oh, isn't it lovely that you would pray for your enemy like that!"*
- Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you
- One of the consequences of praying for those who have hurt you is that you just **MIGHT** turn your **Enemy** into your **Friend!**

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- 2nd Corinthians 5:18-19

- 18) All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;
- 19) that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the **message of reconciliation.**

- God did just that to us!
- He changed us from being His Enemies to being His Friends
- He reconciled our relationship!
- You might just win your enemy over and reconcile your relationship by loving them and praying for them

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- Tomorrow we'll try to define exactly what Forgiveness is, and what it isn't

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- Wednesday we'll answer the question, "How do I know when I've really forgiven someone?"

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- Thursday's Class is all about Judging... Or rather, Not Judging...

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- Friday we'll wrap it up with some helpful suggestions on How To Forgive