  
**Online Book Club: Making Sense of Forgiveness by Brad Hambrick**

**Session 1**

Set text: Chapters 1-5 Definitions and misunderstandings

Discussion questions:

* What have we learned about how to understand someone’s pain from chapter 1?
* Given the material in chapter 3 (and your own experience) how would you define forgiveness when speaking with a friend? (ie using a relaxed, chatty language that’s clear and helpful).
* To what extent do you / your church family buy in to any of the misconceptions in chapter 2?
* When are we likely to use the language of forgiveness when it’s not appropriate? (Chapter 4)

Practical:

Tom is angry. A co-worker has undermined him in a meeting – he passed off Tom’s ideas and papers as his own. Their boss doesn’t seem to think it’s a big deal and has just told Tom to get on with his work. When he got home, he discovered his wife was in a foul mood. She snapped at him for no good reason rather than listening to his pain. And his son (who struggles with school) got a low mark in a test. He “knows” he needs to forgive all 4 of them but he doesn’t know where to start.

* + What would you want to ask Tom?
  + What might you want to help him understand?
  + What traps would you want to avoid?

**Session 2**

Set text: Chapters 6-8 Embracing God’s forgiveness

Discussion questions:

* What’s hard about forgiveness?
* Why is it important to remember God’s capacity to forgive is limitless but not unconditional? And that God does not forget? How countercultural are these things in our churches?
* What do you think about the goal of forgiveness being to see others differently? (p36-37)?
* To what extent do we need to forgive ourselves? Why do we often feel we need to do this?

Practical

Think of someone who has hurt you. What is your aim for forgiving them? How does a right understanding of God’s forgiveness help you? How might you phrase that in a mini-testimony?

**Session 3**

Set text: Chapters 9-15 Wisely extending forgiveness

Discussion questions:

* What is beautiful about forgiveness? And what is ugly about unforgiveness?
* What is helpful / unhelpful about using the categories of wisdom and folly when considering forgiveness?
* It is folly to trust someone who tries to manipulate through mock repentance. How easy is it to spot such behaviour? What’s tricky about addressing it? What might help?
* What struck you about the gradual growth of trust set out in chapter 13?

Practical

Andrea’s husband has been using pornography. She caught him watching a few weeks ago and since then he’s told her the extent of his use. He said sorry. He does mean it. He’s put accountability software on his computer and confided in a close friend at church. He genuinely wants to change. And he wants Andrea to trust him – to treat him as if it’s an issue in the past.

* How would you help both Andrea and Tom to see that trust needs to grow slowly?
* What would it mean for Andrea to gradually move to a place where she can “remember well” (chapter 15)?

**Session 4**

Set text: Chapters 16-18 Embracing forgiveness from others

Discussion questions:

* What’s hard about receiving forgiveness?
* Why do we often continue to feel shame even after the guilt has gone?
* How can we process that shame? And help others to process it too? What biblical imagery or metaphor might be particularly helpful?
* What’s going on in our heart when we don’t want God to forgive those who have hurt us?

Practical:

Think of a time when you have hurt others. How can you move towards a place of knowing you are truly clean? How can you walk alongside a friend who is experiencing a similar struggle? Think biblically, practically and see if you can identify clear staging posts in the journey.

**Session 5**

Set texts: Chapters 19-23 Moving toward closure

Discussion questions:

* What does emotional freedom after forgiveness look like? What’s exciting and hard about it?
* In what ways does this freeing forgiveness promote spiritual maturity? Why does forgiveness also make a pretty rubbish test of maturity?
* Why is remembering the wrath of God so important when walking alongside those who have been hurt? How can we help people remember this wisely and well?
* When is it tempting to cover up the sins of others? To protect those we love rather than the vulnerable? What motivates this?

Practical:

David is an elder in a church. It has come to your attention that he repeatedly reduces the children’s worker to tears. He’s known for being forceful – that's “just how he’s wired” - and regularly offends people. The children’s worker is on the verge of resigning. She comes to you for advice. She feels utterly ground down by David’s undermining and unfair criticism – and unrealistic expectations of what she can achieve in her part-time hours. She wants to go. But should she say anything before she does? After all, he’s an elder – he's the major donor who keeps the church afloat – and he’s widely respected as a great preacher and effective evangelist. David's wife is also one of your closest friends – and you know his wife is finding life really hard right now.

* What would you say?
* What would it mean to protect the vulnerable in this situation?
* How would you help her navigate forgiveness?

**Session 6**

Set texts: Chapters 24-27 Avoiding ministry mishaps

Discussion questions:

* What are some of the opportunities and pitfalls of teaching the parable of the unforgiving servant? How might you use that parable in a pastoral situation?
* How can we tell stories wisely in counselling settings (either testimony – biblical narrative – or stories we’ve heard)? Tease out some principles to remember.
* What examples of religious scrupulosity have you come across? How can we understand this, biblically? What helps someone grow?

Practical:

Share a slice of life. Help each other see how the story of Joseph speaks into your story.