



# ONCE UPON A TIME

**fairy tales and falls**

## Week 3 Group Guide | Message by Shawn Johnson

### Start

To get things started, let's go around the circle and answer this question:

**Speaking of fairy tales, if you have ever gone to Disney World or Disneyland, what was your all-time favorite ride or thing to see? If you have never been there but have gone to a theme park, what was your favorite ride? Defend your answer.**

### Share

Welcome to our new series called "Once Upon a Time - Fairytales and Falls."

Fairy Tales ... when we hear those words, there can be very differing reactions. For some, there is excitement, hopefulness and wonder. We think about the stories of struggle, overcoming great odds, finding our true potential, and seeing justice prevail. It's when the good guys win and the bad guys lose. Fairy tales speak to a much deeper part of the heart, where we understand that there is this epic struggle going on in life and it's something we can all relate to. For some of us, our motto is "being optimistic isn't always being happy. It's about taking what the world throws at you and saying 'I'm not going to let this get me down.'"

For others, when we hear 'Fairy Tales,' we have a very different reaction. Our initial thought is that fairy tales are dumb. Instead of hope, we feel despair or even anger. The stories of redemption just make us feel worse about our lives and remind us just how far we are from any type of fairy tale ending. Deep down, we know there is no happy ending. To compensate, we become masters of sarcasm and are card-carrying pessimists. For those of us who view them this way, our motto is "if everything seems to be going well, you have obviously overlooked something."

Throughout this series, we are going to look at relationships and how all of them are intertwined and connected to a greater story. We are going to talk about adversity, how we get back up when we fall, unconditional love, and finding real redemption. The good news is that this greater story is not a made-up fairy tale, but a true story with a real fairy tale ending.

Pastor Shawn made clear this last weekend what we all know to be true: "Nobody wants to talk about forgiveness." There are so many other things we like to talk about in a series about relationships, but forgiveness is usually not one of them. Why? Because we have all been hurt by someone. When we think of forgiving them, it feels insurmountable. How can I forgive *them* for something that deeply affected my life?

For some of us, we don't want to talk about the despair of not being forgiven by someone else. There is something we said or did that we wish we could take back or do over, but we can't and we feel the loss. It's the stuff of country songs. No, really! Keith Urban describes it in his new song "Break On Me" when he writes, "There'll be times when someone you know becomes someone you knew, but you would do anything to change it." Sounds like many of the Psalms we read when David talked about broken relationships.

Forgiveness isn't letting the person off the hook. People are still accountable for their actions, but we are commanded by God to get rid of all bitterness and actively forgive each other. And for some of us, that is a process of repeatedly making it an act of will to forgive. Why? Because we have been forgiven by God. We need it and the people we forgive need it too.

**Let's read: Ephesians 4:31,32**

**Growing up in the family you did, what did you learn about forgiveness; good or bad?**

**When we don't forgive and instead hold on to bitterness or resentment, how does that generally affect us. How does that personally affect you?**

**What makes it hard for you to forgive?**

**According to Scripture, why should we forgive?**

## Grow

Forgiveness is not easy and it is not natural, but with God's strength, it is the exact thing we most long for. Why? Because it sets us free. It doesn't let the other person off the hook or say that what they did was okay. It is about setting yourself free from whatever it was that hurt you. Not forgiving punishes the person who chooses not to forgive.

In *Traveling Mercies*, Anne Lamott wrote, "**Not forgiving is like drinking rat poison and then waiting for the rat to die.**"

God is serious about forgiveness and He is serious about your freedom. Jesus made the implications clear in a story he once told about forgiveness after Peter asked him how many times we are supposed to forgive.

**Let's read: Matthew 18:21-35**

In the *New American Commentary of Matthew*, Blomberg talks about the immense contrast and what seems to be a harsh punishment:

But just as the sums owed sharply contrasted with each other, so also the first servant's response proves entirely opposite to the king's generosity (vv. 30–31). "He refused" is literally *he was not willing*, showing that the servant made a conscious choice to harden his heart. Needless to say, the other servants are outraged and report the matter to the king.

**18:32–34** The two original characters reappear on stage for scene three. Furious that his lavish mercy was so spurned, the king vents his rage. He orders the servant to be imprisoned and tortured "until he should pay back all he owed." Since the man has no way of earning this kind of money in jail, the king's orders guarantee a life sentence.

It almost seems the punishment for not forgiving seems harsh. However, in contrast to the \$100,000 debt that was completely forgiven, how could this man not extend mercy to the person who owed a few dollars? How could he be so angry and harsh with the man pleading with him? Jesus wants us to see the seriousness of not forgiving others. Notice that while in jail, there is no way he can pay the whole thing back.

Jesus is showing us that ONLY God can release us and pay the debt, otherwise no matter how hard we try, we will not be able to come up with enough and it will be a life sentence of torture to live with anger and bitterness.

**In the beginning of the story Jesus told, the man owed an enormous amount of money. How did he act before the master?**

**What was the master's response to him?**

**Can you relate to one of the characters of this story? If so, which one and how?**

## Move

In this week's message, Shawn ended with how bitterness not only affects the person not willing to forgive, but it ends up affecting all the relationships around us. Shawn used the example of marriage and how according to Genesis 2:24, those of us who are married are "one flesh." So when one of you – the husband or the wife – is in bondage to bitterness, it affects both of you. The guilt, anger, bitterness, resentment, and pain only build up and become a toxic environment for a marriage that God intended to be fruitful. This applies to all our relationships: our friendships, dating relationships, at work, and at home.

On stage, Shawn had a couple stand together and handed the husband visual hurts to hold onto in the form of basketballs ... one after another stacked up until he couldn't hold anything else. How true is that for our own lives? When we are holding onto so much anger and hurt, we have little to no room to take hold of God's plans for us, our spouse, kids or friendships. Remember the verse we started talking about...

*Ephesians 4:31,32*

*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

**If you have experienced the freedom of choosing to forgive – not saying what happened was ok – but choosing to forgive; how has that changed you or your life today?**

**If you could identify one specific hurt that you are holding onto that most affects your life, what would it be?**

**In the next week, is there a conversation you need to have with someone and if so, how can the group or a friend best support you with that?**

## Pray

As a group, spend some time praying for each other, especially for the situations that people might be facing today. If you are in a co-ed group, we suggest breaking up into guys' and ladies' groups to pray more openly.

## To Go

*Psalms 56:8,9*

*You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book. My enemies will retreat when I call to you for help. This I know: God is on my side!*