

Offering Forgiveness

Matthew 18:15-35

As we continue our study on Life's Values, we have come to the segment where we are going to talk about Offering Forgiveness.

The fact of life is you are going to be hurt in life. Many times intentionally by things people *say* about you, by things people *do* to you, even by things that people *think* about you. When we talk about forgiveness some of you instantly call to mind certain heartaches and hurts and problems. The memories are still fresh because many of you have been hurt very deeply. You still wince when you think of those memories.

Tonight the outline is very simple. We are going to look at, "Why in the world should I ever forgive anybody who hurts me?" Why should I do that? And then we are going to look at how.

Why should I forgive anybody who hurts me? Jesus told a story one time. It is called the parable of the unforgiving servant. It is found in Matthew 18. In that story, Jesus gives three illustrations, three reasons why we ought to forgive. He says you need to learn to forgive other people when they hurt you...

1. Because God has forgiven me. I have been forgiven so I need to learn how to forgive others. The Bible says in Ephesians 4:32, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." When I remember how much God has forgiven me, it causes me to want to be a little bit more forgiving to other people.

On the other hand, if I do not feel forgiven, I am going to have a tough time forgiving you. If you are one of those people who have a hard time forgiving others, you have a hard time letting go of hurt,

you have a hard time of forgiving a grudge, the possibility is that you yourself do not really feel forgiven. **If I don't feel forgiven, I don't want you to feel forgiven.** **If I do not feel grace, I am certainly not going to be very gracious to you.** If I do not feel set free from the things I have done wrong, I certainly do not want you feeling good about the things that you have done wrong to me.

If I realize that every moment of my day I am living in the light of God's love and grace and He has wiped the slate clean on me because of Jesus Christ and all the things I deserve to be paid back for, I am not going to be paid back for because God has wiped the slate clean. He has wiped it out. **He has forgiven me.** When I remember that, it makes me want to be a little bit more forgiving.

You will never have to forgive anybody more than God has already forgiven you. **He will always forgive you more than you forgive anybody else.** **That is the first reason.**

2. Because resentment does not work. Actually it is very self destructive. **It is counterproductive.** **It always hurts you more than anybody else.** If anybody had the right to be resentful it was a guy in the Bible named Job. **He was really a godly man and God was first in his life.** **He had everything he wanted.** And one day he lost it all. **Enemy nations came in and killed all his livestock.** **All of his children were killed.** He lost everything he had. **He got a terrible disease.** **He was living in poverty with incurable pain.** The only thing he was left with was a nagging wife. **Then his friends came along and said, "Job, it is your fault."**

If anybody had the right to be resentful it was this guy. But three times in the book of Job we are told that resentment does not work. **Job 5:2 says, "To worry yourself to death with resentment would be a foolish, senseless thing to do."** **Ecclesiastes 7:9 says, "It is foolish to hold a grudge."**

3. Because forgiveness is something I need to, I need forgiveness in the future. This thing of forgiveness is a two way street. You cannot expect everybody to forgive you if you are unwilling to forgive other people. **Forgiveness is a two-way street.** Jesus says it like this in Matthew 6, "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

He is saying we cannot receive what we are unwilling to give. That is the way it works. Forgiveness is a two-way street.

There are a lot of *faulty concepts* about forgiveness out there about forgiveness. There are a lot of *myths*, a lot of *misconceptions*.

1. Forgiveness is not minimizing the seriousness of the offense. Forgiveness is not saying, "It is no big deal!" It was a big deal. You did get hurt. No, that is not forgiveness, not at all.

There is a difference between *forgiveness* and *acceptance*. You are going to be hurt in life a lot of times unintentionally. But forgiveness is reserved for the intentional hurts. **There is a difference between being *wounded* and being *wronged*.** *Wronged* is intentional. *Wounds* often come *accidental*.

When you minimize a wrong, you cheapen forgiveness. It does not mean saying, "It was no big deal," because it was a big deal.

2. Forgiveness is not the instant restoration of trust. A lot of people misunderstand this. Forgiveness is *instant*. **Forgiveness is what you do.** You are not obligated to continue in a painful situation.

Another important point. Only the *victim* has the right to *forgive*. You do not have the right to forgive people for hurts that they did to someone else and I do not either. **God does.** But I do not and you do

not. For instance, if your family had been robbed, I do not have the right to go to that robber and say, "You are forgiven" because he did not hurt me. Only the people who have been harmed only the victims, only the offended have the right to forgive. We can forgive the deed, but only the victim can forgive the person.

3. Forgiveness is not resuming the relationship without any changes. A lot of people worry about this too. They think, "If I forgive somebody, then I have to accept them back just the way they are and let them continue to hurt me." No, you do not. Forgiveness is not the same as a reunion of a relationship. Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation.

You can forgive without the one who hurt you ever knowing about it. Why? Because forgiveness is what you do, not what they do. Your forgiveness is not to be based on their response, whether they ask for it or not, whether they accept it or not, whether they acknowledge it or not. You forgive, because God has forgiven you, resentment does not work, and you need forgiveness yourself.

Four things are needed in your life in order to experience the freedom of forgiveness.

1. Recognize we are all imperfect. When we hate somebody, we tend to lose our perspective about them. When we are filled with resentment and bitterness and hurt, we tend to dehumanize the offender. We demonize them. We forget the fact is, we are all imperfect. We are all capable of hurting others.

2. Relinquish my right to get even. This is the heart of forgiveness. This is what forgiveness is all about. The Bible says in Romans 12:19, "Never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God, for he has said that he will repay those who deserve it."

You may be thinking, "Man, that is so unfair!" You are right. It is. But who ever said life is fair? God never said life is fair. This is not

heaven. **This is not a place of perfection. This is a place where people sin, where people make mistakes. I do, you do and everybody else does. Life is not fair. There is not always justice in the world. There are a lot of injustices. But, God says one day He is going to settle the score.**

How often do I have to release my resentmentdo? How often do I have to release my right to get even with the person who has hurt me? As often as the hurt memory comes back. Forgiveness is not a one shot deal. It is a repeated act of saying, "I give up my right to get even."

Jesus put it this way when "Peter asked, 'Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?' (Peter thinks he's being real generous here!) 'No,' Jesus replied, 'seventy times seven!'" **In other words an infinite number. Every time you remember that hurt you must forgive them again and again until you know that you have released it.**

3. Respond to the evil with good. Jesus said this in Luke 6, "Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you." There is no way you can do that verse on your own power. Humanly speaking, you do not have enough love and forgiveness and joy in your life from the human standpoint to continually forgive everybody who has hurt you. It takes God's power. The only way you can do that is if you get Jesus Christ in your life and He fills you with His love and His peace and His forgiveness because human love runs out. **Why? Because you are filled with *hate*. You are filled with *bitterness*. You are filled with *resentment*. And your *flesh* does not give in easily! You need God's help.**

4. I refocus on God's plan for my life. I stop focusing on the offense. I stop focusing on the hurt. I stop focusing on the person who has offended me. Instead I begin to refocus on God's purpose for my life which is greater than any problem or any pain that I am experiencing.

Job, who had every reason to be offended and every reason to have resentment gives us the three steps for refocusing your life in Job 11. He says, "Put your heart right, reach out to God then face the world again, firm and courageous. Then all your troubles will fade from your memory, like floods that are past and remembered no more." Notice he says three things to do:

1. **Put your heart right.** Release and forgive the person who's hurt you. "I do not feel like it" - Do it anyway. God says to do it and you are only making yourself miserable holding onto the hurt.

2. **Reach out to God.** That means to ask Christ into your life because you do not have enough power and love and forgiveness on your own to do good to those who hurt you. Say, "Jesus Christ, I am reaching out to You and I want a relationship with You. Fill me daily with Your love." **Ladies and gentlemen, you must allow God to love through you, and forgive through you.** It is spiritual as well as emotional.

3. **Face the world again.** You do not withdraw into a shell. You do not built up walls. You do not say, "I am never again going to let any man hurt me!" "I am never going to open myself up to any relationship. No way!" **That is dumb.** You are cutting yourself off from love. Your heart will shrivel and die if you do that. You do not say, "I am a victim and I am going to cave in and close and not let anybody touch me. I am going to be a porcupine and no more opening up and no more intimacy and no more vulnerability." **No.** You face the world again. You keep your focus on the Master!!