

## FORGIVENESS

### YOU ASKED FOR IT (PART 6)

Forgiveness is another one of those big issues that we all deal with. The reason that we have to deal with forgiveness is the fact that people invade our territories and sin against us. It's hard enough to live with one sinner-yourself. When you add other sinners to the problems that you are already creating for yourself, it really gets hard. The German philosopher Schopenhauer compared the human race to a bunch of porcupines huddling together on a cold winter's night. He said, "The colder it gets outside, the more we huddle together for warmth; but the closer we get to one another, the more we hurt one another with our sharp quills. And in the lonely night of earth's winter, eventually we begin to drift apart and wander out on our own and freeze to death in our loneliness."

At Fellowship Bible Church, we believe our mission is to be used by God to draw people into authentic Christian relationships. That is very difficult for a bunch of porcupines. But we believe that we cannot only survive the winter, we believe we can thrive by huddling together.

So what do we do about our quills?

What do we do when people offend us?

What do we do about those people who irritate us by what they say or do?

**Every time someone does something to upset us, we have three options:**

- 1) We can become angry and bitter against them.** That accomplishes nothing.
- 2) We can struggle to hold back our anger.** That will emotionally exhaust us.
- 3) We can pray for God and forgive them.**

That is the right thing to do, but it is not commonly done. We're more likely to try to nurse our wounds and to punish the one who has hurt us. People say they "*bury the hatchet*." But, they almost always keep a "*map*" that carefully marks the spot where it's buried so they can dig it up when they need it.

## THE DANGER OF FAILURE TO FORGIVE

### 1. WE LOSE OUR TESTIMONY

Most people know that Christians are supposed to forgive. The Bible is full of instruction about the importance of forgiving those who have wronged us. In the Lord's Prayer Jesus taught us to pray, "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." (Matthew 6:12) Or as one four year old boy rephrased it: "And forgive us our trash baskets as we forgive those who put trash in our baskets."

*Colossians 3:13: "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."*

You are never more like Jesus than when you forgive one another. Somebody once said: "We are like beasts when we kill. We are like men when we judge. We are like God when we forgive."

*1 Corinthians 13:5, "love keeps no record of wrongs." (The Message) says it this way, "Love doesn't keep score of the sins of others."*

Love doesn't keep score because love has a bad memory. When we fail to forgive, we lose our testimony.

## **2. RELATIONSHIPS GO FROM BAD TO WORSE**

One of the worst things that you can do for any relationship is to hold a grudge against the other person. People who were once friends can become enemies. People who are married can develop an adversarial relationship with their partner. If you want to poison a relationship, it's really easy. Just don't forgive.

## **3. WE PUT OURSELVES IN EMOTIONAL BONDAGE**

*Matthew 18:21, "Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"*

The Old Testament Law taught that if somebody offended you that you were obligated to forgive them 3 times. Three strikes and you're out! So Peter doubled what the Law required and added one to it! I'm sure Peter anticipated Jesus to pat him on the back for being so spiritual.

Jesus replied in vs 22, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." That is 490 times! In other words, there is no limit to forgiveness. Just keep on forgiving.

Beginning in verse 23, Jesus tells a parable to illustrate His point.

*Matthew 18:23-31, "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. "But*

*when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.*

The same person who had experienced forgiveness for a debt he could not pay refused to show forgiveness toward this man who owed him about \$12.00. "How could anybody be so ungrateful?" We are so much like that. All Mighty God has forgiven us of a debt we could never pay and then we turn around and refuse to forgive all those little offenses that come our way! Because you are a forgiven person, you are obligated to the King to be a forgiving person!

*Matthew 18:32-34, "When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."*

God is warning us that a failure to forgive will put us in our own self-made emotional prison. When you choose not to forgive, you are the one who suffers. People who refuse to forgive turn into bitter, angry, joy-less people. They become emotional hostages to their own hate. "They don't hold a grudge as much as the grudge holds them."

A long time ago, a newly married girl named Li-li couldn't get along with her mother-in-law who lived with the newly weds. Their personalities and habits clashed, and they never stopped arguing and fighting. According to tradition, Li-li had to bow to her mother-in-law and obey her every wish. Finally, Li-li could not stand her mother-in-law's bad temper and dictatorship any longer. Li-li went to see a family friend, Mr. Huang, who sold herbs, told him the situation and asked for some poison to slip into her mother-in-law's meals. Mr. Huang then gave her a package of herbs and told Li-li, "To eliminate suspicion, I have given you a number of herbs to slowly build up poison in her body. Every other day prepare some pork or chicken and put a little of these herbs in her serving. Also, act very friendly towards her so that nobody suspects you when she dies. Don't argue with her, obey her every wish, and treat her like a queen." Li-li began serving the specially prepared food to her mother-in-law. She controlled her temper, obeyed her mother-in-law, and treated her like her own mother. For the next six months, Li-li was almost never upset or had an argument with her kinder and friendlier mother-in-law. They were like mother and daughter. In horror, Li-li came to Mr. Huang and pleaded tearfully, "Mr. Huang, please help me to keep the poison from killing my mother-in-law! She's changed into such a nice woman, and I love her like my own mother. I do not want her to die." Mr. Huang comforted her, "Li-li, I never gave you any poison. I gave you vitamins to improve her health. The only poison you had was in your mind and your attitude."

## **4. OUR FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD IS HINDERED**

When we fail to forgive, we erect a barrier between ourselves. God's forgiveness of our sins hinges on our forgiving others.

*Matthew 6:14-15, "Jesus said, "...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."*

When John Wesley was travelling by ship to America, he heard an unusual noise in the cabin of General Oglethorpe and, the governor of Georgia. It turned out that the governor's servant had stolen some of the governor's favorite things. The governor had his servant tied hand and foot. He then told Wesley, "I never forgive." Wesley replied, "In that case, sir, I hope you never sin!"

## **STEPS TO FORGIVENESS**

### **1. UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF FORGIVENESS**

One of the reasons forgiveness is hard is that we don't understand what you're really is. What exactly is forgiveness?

#### **a) Forgiveness IS NOT FORGETTING**

Almost all of us have experienced the problem of forgiving someone the best way we know how and then discovering that angry thoughts still fill our minds. Forgiveness is not a feeling or a mood. Forgiveness does not mean we somehow wipe out of our mind the record of what happened. Forgiveness means we choose not to dwell on those things. It also means we choose not to hold a grudge against someone who has wronged us.

Corrie Ten Boom tells of some Christian friends who wronged her. For many days, she was bitter and angry until she forgave them. But in the night she would wake up thinking about what they had done and get angry all over again. It seemed the memory would not go away.

Help came from a pastor to whom she confessed her frustration after two sleepless weeks. He told her, "Corrie, up in the church tower is a bell which is rung by pulling on a rope. When the rope is pulled, the bell sounds out ding-dong, ding-dong. What happens if the rope is not pulled again? Slowly the sound fades away. Forgiveness is like that. When we forgive someone, we take our hand off the rope. But if we've been tugging at our

grievances for a long time, we shouldn't be surprised if the old angry thoughts keep coming for awhile. They're just the ding-dongs of the old bell slowing down."

So it's not surprising if after forgiveness, for a while the memories keep coming back. If you refuse to dwell on them, slowly they will fade away. Why? When you forgive, you let go of the rope and the force is gone out of your anger.

## **b) Forgiveness is not CONDONING or DISMISSING**

Forgiveness doesn't mean saying, "What you did was bad, but it doesn't really matter."

If something doesn't matter, then forgiveness isn't needed in the first place. Forgiveness acknowledges the act as being wrong and forgives it anyway. Forgiveness is built around the root word, "give" which should tell us that it is something that is undeserved -- like a gift.

### **WING CLIPS Karla Faye Tucker - The Brother of Deborah (3:37)**

Ron Thornton, who recently accepted the Lord, learns to overcome his hate and bitterness and forgive Karla Tucker, the murderer of his sister. **Themes:** Forgiveness, Anger, Bitterness, Confrontation, Hatred, Reconciliation

## **c) FORGIVENESS IS A CHOICE**

Forgiveness means "to dismiss, to give up something, to send away, to release something." This word was used to describe Peter and Andrew leaving their nets after Jesus called them to be His disciples in Matthew 4:20, "Then they immediately left their nets and followed Him." They didn't forget their nets or their boat. They just chose to leave them behind! To forgive means to forsake or leave behind an offense just as Peter and Andrew left their nets to follow Jesus! Forgiveness is a choice!

This word was also used to describe the death of Jesus in Matthew 27:50, "And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up His Spirit." To forgive means to release an offense just as Jesus released His Spirit.

Forgiveness is not something that you necessarily feel like doing. It is a command that needs to be obeyed. Harry Emmerson Fosdick said that when he was a boy he overheard a conversation between his dad and his mother at the breakfast table. He heard his dad say, "Tell Harry he can mow the grass today if he feels like it." Then as his father left he heard him say, "Tell Harry he'd better feel like it." Forgiveness is not a matter of whether you feel like it or not. It's a matter of acting on a command from our Heavenly Father.

Forgiving is a commitment to not let feelings of resentment come between us and those who have wronged us. The simplest definition I've heard is from Archibald Hart who says, "Forgiveness is surrendering my right to hurt you for hurting me."

## **2. GIVE UP TRYING TO FORCE PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND HOW MUCH THEY HURT US.**

There is something within us that makes us want the person who has hurt us to know how bad he has done. You may consider forgiving them if they would in knowledge how badly they hurt you. The truth is they don't know, and they won't know. Some of you are thinking, "That's not true. They understood exactly what they were doing. They understood exactly what they were saying."

Listen to the words of Jesus on the cross: "father, forgive them because they do not know what they're doing. The word "what" is the key to understanding. The roman soldiers knew they were killing a man named Jesus, a religious leader, but they did not really understand who he was. They did not know that he was the son of god. And so it is with people who hurt you. They understood what they were saying when they said those hurtful words, but do they really understand how it affected you emotionally? Nobody can get inside of your head and understand all the damage that they're doing. They only see the surface. If you are going to forgive, you're going to have to give up the thought of someone understanding how bad they really hurt you because they're not going to. Your pain and your sorrows are yours alone. Only God can understand what you're going through.

## **3. DON'T WAIT FOR REPENTANCE**

People often think, "how can I forgive this person when they are not even sorry. Forgiveness is not reconciliation. Reconciliation takes two people, and that is the ideal, but it doesn't always work out that way. Some people don't care that they have hurt you, but you can still forgive them. That's your choice, and no one can keep you from doing it.

Think about the example of Jesus on the cross. Death by crucifixion was the most horrible thing imaginable. When Jesus asked the father to forgive them for what they were doing, we have no indication that anyone involved in this horrible torture was sorry for what they were doing. Not one single one of his accusers or torturers said, "Hey, I'm really sorry for putting you through all this. I know you're an innocent man." Jesus' forgiveness wasn't dependant on the remorse of those who mistreated Him. The kind of forgiveness that God has called us to show to others who wrong us, does not depend on the person who wronged us, being sorry for what they did.

## **4. DO SOMETHING GOOD FOR THE PERSON WHO HAS OFFENDED YOU**

Nikita Krushchev, the late premier of the Soviet Union, once told a gathering of American reporters. "We communists have many things in common with the teachings of Jesus Christ." He paused and then continued, "My sole difference with Christ is that when someone hits me on the right cheek, I hit him on the left so hard that his head falls off."

That is very different from what the bible tells us to do. Romans 12 begins with those well-known words which tell us to not be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. In other words, we're to respond differently than people who do not know Christ. One of the ways that we are to act differently than the world is seen in the way that we respond to word those who hurt us.

*Romans 12:21, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."*

*Mathew 5:43-44, "“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.”*

For the follower of Jesus, it is not enough to just not try to get someone back for what they've done to you. We are told to do good for them. How we respond is determined by who we are, not by who our enemy is.

What would happen if you made it a habit to continually do good to two someone who is offending you? In most cases, the heart of that person would begin to soften. There is something about doing good things for people that is able to diffuse the most angry people over a period of time.

You truly know that you have forgiven someone when you have moved beyond the hurt or the wrong that was done to you and you respond by seeking to do good to that person.

## **5. ASK GOD FOR HELP**

It is really not hard for me to stand up here today and say these things, but I know without a shadow of a doubt that I cannot do these things apart from the power of god. Apart from god's power, the things I'm saying are simply lofty ideals. They only become a reality when the Holy Spirit controls your life and does the supernatural through it. That's why the most important thing you can do when you have been wronged is to draw near to God.