

FORGIVING OTHERS

Why It's Way More Important Than Most People Think It Is

Matthew 18:23-35

THE STORY BEFORE THE STORY:

Matthew 18:15-17 and 21-22

Whatever forgiveness means –
it doesn't mean *letting everything go*.

THE SAD STORY OF AN UNGRATEFUL SLOB:

Matthew 18:23-35/ James 2:13/ Luke 17:3-4/ Luke 6:37

FORGIVING: A Practical and Realistic Look At What God Expects From Us

- ❶ Forgiving starts with a look *in the mirror*.
Matthew 18:32-35/ Ephesians 4:32 & Colossians 3:13/ Matthew 6:9-15/ Matthew 7:2

- ❷ Forgiving is never *easy*.
Luke 23:33-34

- ❸ Forgiving doesn't mean . . .
Compare Jeremiah 31:34 & Genesis 8:1/ Proverbs 14:15/ 2 Samuel 12:13-14
 - ✓ *Pretending it never happened.*
 - ✓ *Trusting again.*
 - ✓ *Removing all consequences.*

- ❹ Forgiving simply means . . .
1 Peter 2:21-23 & Romans 12:17-21/ 2 Timothy 4:14/ Ephesians 4:30-32/ Jeremiah 18:1-8
 - ✓ *Refusing to seek revenge.*
 - ✓ *Refusing to be consumed by the past.*
 - ✓ *Giving others what God gave me.*

Growth Group Homework

For the week of November 12, 2006

QUICK REVIEW: Looking back over your sermon notes from *Forgiving Others*, which particular point or passage of Scripture most challenged, confused or caught your attention in this weekend's sermon?

MY STORY

1. Forgiveness tends to be more of a journey than an event. Sometimes we don't want to be on that journey. What are some of the reasons we give for holding on to a grudge or not forgiving?

2. Often we think of forgiveness in the context of letting go after we've been greatly wronged. But we also face issues of forgiveness in our daily life. What are some of the small things that happen to us in which we also need to ask for or offer forgiveness?

DIGGING DEEPER

1. Larry mentioned in his sermon that forgiveness means refusing to seek our own revenge. But doing that can be difficult because it can feel like the other person is getting away with it. In 1 Samuel 24:1-13, we see an example of David not seeking revenge even though he had been wronged by Saul.

1 Samuel 24:1-13

After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, "David is in the Desert of En Gedi." [2] So Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Crag of the Wild Goats.

[3] He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave. [4] The men said, "This is the day the Lord spoke of when he said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.'" Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe.

[5] Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. [6] He said to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the Lord." [7] With these words David rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.

[8] Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul, "My lord the king!" When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. [9] He said to Saul, "Why do you listen when men say, 'David is bent on harming you'?" [10] This day you have seen with your own eyes how the Lord delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, 'I will not lift my hand against my master, because he is the Lord's anointed.' [11] See, my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. Now understand and recognize that I am not guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life. [12] May the Lord judge between you and me. And may the Lord

avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you. [13] As the old saying goes, 'From evildoers come evil deeds,' so my hand will not touch you. [NIV]

How and why do you think David was able to not seek justice for himself?

What is the most challenging aspect for you in not seeking justice or revenge?

How can this passage (along with Romans 12:14-21) help motivate us to forgive instead of seeking revenge?

Romans 12:14-21

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. [15] Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. [16] Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

[17] Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. [18] If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

[19] Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. [20] On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

[21] Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. [NIV]

2. One aspect of maintaining a healthy relationship is learning to quickly ask for forgiveness when we've wronged someone. In Genesis 32 & 33, we see the reconciliation of Jacob and Esau, brothers who had been estranged for years because Jacob had stolen Esau's inheritance. After reading Genesis 32:6-11 & 33:1-12 answer the following questions:

Genesis 32:6-11

When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, "We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him."

[7] In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well. [8] He thought, "If Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape."

[9] Then Jacob prayed, "O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O Lord, who said to me, 'Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,' [10] I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups. [11] Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. [NIV]

Genesis 33:1-12

Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men; so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two maidservants. [2] He put the maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear. [3] He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother.

[4] But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept. [5] Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. "Who are these with you?" he asked.

Jacob answered, "They are the children God has graciously given your servant."

[6] Then the maidservants and their children approached and bowed down. [7] Next, Leah and her children came and bowed down. Last of all came Joseph and Rachel, and they too bowed down.

[8] Esau asked, "What do you mean by all these droves I met?"

"To find favor in your eyes, my lord," he said.

[9] But Esau said, "I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself."

[10] "No, please!" said Jacob. "If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me. For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favorably. [11] Please accept the present that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me and I have all I need." And because Jacob insisted, Esau accepted it.

[12] Then Esau said, "Let us be on our way; I'll accompany you." [NIV]

What principles of asking for forgiveness or pursuing reconciliation do you see in this story?

What emotions do you think Jacob experienced in this process? How about Esau?

Asking forgiveness can be difficult. Why do you think it's often so hard to ask for forgiveness?

3. One person who learned to forgive in an extremely tough situation was Christian author and speaker Corrie Ten Boom. Here is her story:

Corrie and her sister Betsie were confined in a Nazi concentration camp during World War II because they were caught concealing Jews. Corrie survived 10 months of inhuman and humiliating treatment at the hands of the Nazi guards but her sister died because of the brutal conditions. After the end of the war, Corrie traveled the world telling the story of God's faithfulness during her imprisonment.

After one of her messages, a man approached her who she immediately recognized as one of the more brutal guards at the concentration camp. He identified himself as a former guard and then told her he had become a Christian since that time. He went on to share how he had experienced God's forgiveness for all the cruel things he had done there.

Now he was standing in front of her, his hand extended, asking for her forgiveness as well.

If you were Corrie Ten Boom, how do you think you would be feeling or what would you be thinking at that moment?

Turn your homework over to read the rest of the story (as told by Corrie in her book "The Hiding Place")

The Rest of the Story

"And I stood there – I whose sins had every day to be forgiven – and could not [forgive him]. Betsie had died in that place – could he erase her slow, terrible death simply by asking?"

I had to do it – I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us. I knew it not only as a commandment of God, but as a daily experience. Since the end of the war I had had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality. Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were also able to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and as horrible as that.

And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion – I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. ‘Jesus, help me!’ I prayed silently. ‘I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.’

And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. As I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

‘I forgive you, brother!’ I cried. ‘With all my heart.’

For a long moment we grasped each other’s hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God’s love so intensely as I did then.”

What stands out to you about this story?

How do you think it was possible for Corrie to forgive the guard?

What do you think took place in Corrie’s life prior to this encounter that allowed her to forgive the guard at that moment?

TAKING IT HOME

1. Are there any past hurts or injustices that continue to trip you up or bog you down? If so, how does the sermon speak to that situation?

2. As you review the three statements Larry gave to help us understand what forgiving means, which one is the most challenging for you to follow (and why)?