

An Unforgiving Spirit Steals our Joy
Matthew 18:21-35 (cf. Luke 17:1-5; Heb. 12:15)

Memory verse: Matt. 18:35

Ephesians 4:32 “And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you.”

Introduction

This morning, I want to consider another joy robber as we conclude the series of messages on our Church’s theme 2016 next Sunday. **An unforgiving or bitter spirit will steal the joy of our salvation** – read Heb.12:15.

All of us have been hurt by the actions or words of another. Perhaps your mother criticized your parenting skills, your teacher called you stupid (ST article 8 May on a dyslexic who became engineer & doctorate), your colleague sabotaged a project or your partner had an affair. These wounds can leave you with lasting feelings of anger, bitterness or even vengeance.

But if you don't practice forgiveness, you might be the one who pays most dearly. By embracing forgiveness, you can embrace peace, hope, gratitude and joy. Consider how forgiveness can lead you down the path of physical, emotional and spiritual well-being.

I. The Pattern of Forgiveness

Peter’s Question

Peter couldn’t stand it any longer, “*How many times do I have to forgive my brother if he sins against me? Seven times?*” He was being generous because the Jewish standard was three times.

Most of us would consider ourselves super-forbearing if we forgave somebody seven times in a day.

Jesus’ response shocked Peter and the rest of the disciples: “*Not seven times, Peter, but seventy times seven.*” The disciples were shocked! No limits to forgiveness? That takes faith—*Lord, increase our faith.* No, you don’t need more faith—what you need is **obedience**.

A. Jesus’ Answer

In order to help the disciples get the proper perspective, Jesus tells a parable about forgiveness in Matthew 18. What is the point of the parable?

The point is that God has forgiven us so much that no offense against us can ever begin to compare with the magnitude of our offense against God. We have been forgiven much; therefore we can and should forgive others.

Illus: Soldier to chaplain who shared that salvation is free—But Sir, there is no such thing as a free lunch. That’s right. God’s forgiveness is not a “free lunch.” The punishment for our sin debt had to be paid in full; and Jesus, the Lamb of God paid that debt for us by shedding His blood on the Cross.

Question: How do you know if someone has truly received God’s grace of salvation?

The evidence of a forgiven believer is the possession of a forgiving spirit. In Matthew 6: 12 Jesus taught his disciples to pray: *“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”*

Jesus said the same thing again at the end of our parable in Matthew 18: 34-35: *“So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if you from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.”*

We are able to forgive others because God has graciously forgiven us. A person who adamantly and unrelentingly refuses to forgive his brother has no biblical basis for considering himself a Christian - see 1 John 3:14-15

II. The Practice of Forgiveness

A. Granting Forgiveness to Others

Let us now define forgiveness and consider how we are to forgive others.

1) What is forgiveness?

Generally, **forgiveness is a decision to let go of resentment and thoughts of revenge.** The act that hurt or offended you might always remain a part of your life, but forgiveness can lessen its grip on you and help you focus on other, more positive parts of your life.

- Forgiveness is not **pretending** you are not hurt.
- Forgiveness doesn't mean that you **deny** the other person's responsibility for hurting you, and it doesn't minimize or **justify** the wrong. **You can forgive the person without excusing the act.**

The Bible never tells us to “feel forgiving” or “forgive if you feel like it.” **Forgiveness is a command to our will,** not an option or a suggestion—*“forgiving each other, even as God in Christ has forgiven you”(Eph.4:32).* Beloved, forgiveness brings a kind of peace that helps you go on with life. Some commentators see forgiveness in two aspects:

2) Two Aspects of Forgiveness

(a) Vertical Forgiveness – establishing a forgiving spirit before God

When we forgive someone as **Mark 11: 25-26** commands, we are releasing him from his “debt” to us *before God*. Here Jesus is teaching about **establishing a forgiving spirit before God**. (e.g. Joseph—toward his brothers. Did Joseph forgive them after they asked him or before?)

(b) Horizontal Forgiveness – granting forgiveness to those who hurt us
This second aspect is **the actual granting of forgiveness** – “*If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him*” (Luke 17:3). (i.e. comes to you and beg your forgiveness)

Notice that in **Luke 17:4**, Jesus did not condition forgiveness on our perception of the other person’s sincerity. If someone came to you seven times in a day saying, “I did wrong,” you would seriously question the sincerity of his repentance.

However, we don’t have the option of withholding forgiveness from anyone asking for it. Our response to his continued failure should be a willingness to get involved in his life to help him overcome sin.

Summary: Forgiveness is choosing to remove the record of others’ debt to us and to restore our relationship with them as far as the consequences of their sin will allow.

3) Implications concerning Forgiveness

a) Why is it so easy to hold a grudge?

When you're hurt by someone you love and trust, you become angry, sad or confused. If you dwell on hurtful events or situations, grudges filled with resentment, and hostility can take root; and you might find yourself swallowed up by your own bitterness or sense of injustice.

b) What are the effects of holding a grudge?

Studies have shown that if you're unforgiving, you might:

- Bring anger and bitterness into every relationship and new experience
- Become so wrapped up in the wrong that you can't enjoy the present
- Become depressed or anxious
- Feel that your life lacks meaning or purpose, or that you're at odds with your spiritual beliefs
- Lose valuable and enriching connectedness with others

Conversely, letting go of grudges and bitterness can make way for happiness, health and peace.

c) What are the benefits of forgiving someone?

Forgiveness can lead to:

- Healthier relationships
- Greater spiritual and psychological well-being
- Less anxiety, stress and hostility
- Lower blood pressure
- Fewer symptoms of depression
- Stronger immune system
- Improved heart health
- Higher self-esteem

d) How do I reach a state of forgiveness?

To begin, you might:

- Consider the value of forgiveness and its importance in your life
- Reflect on the facts of the situation, how you've reacted, and how this has affected your life, health and well-being
- Forgiveness can be challenging, especially if the person who's hurt you doesn't admit wrong.
- **By God's grace choose to forgive the person who's offended you.**
- Be aware that forgiveness is a process and even small hurts may need to be revisited and forgiven over and over again.
- **Forgiveness is a commitment to obey God.** As you let go of grudges, you'll no longer define your life by how you've been hurt.

4) FAQs:

a) Does forgiveness guarantee reconciliation?

If the hurtful event involved someone whose relationship you otherwise value, forgiveness can lead to reconciliation. However, this isn't always the case. Reconciliation might be impossible if the offender has died or is unwilling to communicate with you. In other cases, reconciliation might not be appropriate. Still, **forgiveness is possible — even if reconciliation isn't.**

Please do not misunderstand. Forgiving someone doesn't mean you have to put up with the person's nonsense or unreasonable behaviour.

b) What if I have to interact with the person who hurt me but I don't want to?

If you haven't reached a state of forgiveness, being near the person who hurt you might prompt you to be tense and stressful. To handle these situations:

- Remember that you can choose to attend or avoid specific functions and gatherings. If you choose to attend, don't be surprised by a certain amount of awkwardness and perhaps even more intense feelings.
- Do your best to keep an open heart and mind. You might find that the experience helps you to move forward with forgiveness.

c) What if the person I'm forgiving doesn't change?

Getting another person to change his or her actions, behavior or words isn't the point of forgiveness. **Think of forgiveness more about how it can change your life** — by bringing you peace, happiness, and emotional and spiritual healing. Forgiveness can take away the power the other person continues to wield in your life. Forgiving others is being Christ-like.

d) What about things like abuse, or rape, or immorality? Does forgiveness mean that it's all over and we are to go on as if it never happened?

- Granting forgiveness restores the channel for fellowship between the parties; it does not exempt the offender from the consequences of his sin.
E.g.: Suppose someone runs a red light and wrecks your car. He is very sorry and comes asking sincerely for your forgiveness. Granting him forgiveness doesn't mean he doesn't have to pay for the damage that he caused. The Bible clearly teaches that **what a man sows he will reap** (Gal.6: 7).
- The sad truth is that some offenses so damage relationships that they can never be the same. On the other hand, it is certainly possible that the relationship could become stronger than ever.

B. Seeking Forgiveness from Others

What if I'm the one who needs forgiveness?

The fact of the matter is that we are not always the innocent party. We are sometimes guilty of sinning against our brother. In Matthew 5: 23-24, God places the responsibility for reconciliation upon whoever remembers that his brother has something against him.

The first step is to

1) Seek God's forgiveness.

Psalm 32: 5 says, *"I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."* We have to get our relationship with God restored first as all sin is ultimately sinning against God.

2) Ask forgiveness from the offended party.

The second step is to seek forgiveness from the person we offended.

Specifically ask for forgiveness — without making excuses. Our pride struggles and fights against admitting that we are wrong and need forgiveness. Some inadequate methods of seeking forgiveness are saying “*I’m sorry,*” or “*I apologize.*” Those are statements of how we feel and is not an admission of guilt or a request for forgiveness. Both of these statements usually elicit a response like “That’s O.K.” or “Forget it.” Sin swept under the carpet makes it difficult to be comfortable sitting down with one another.

So how should we seek forgiveness?

The proper components of seeking forgiveness are: 1) an ***admission*** of our guilt and responsibility for our sin, and 2) a ***request*** for the offended person’s forgiveness—something along the lines of “***God has shown me that I was wrong when I did ____ . Will you forgive me?***”

3) Accept corrective measures.

Granting someone forgiveness does not exempt a person from the consequences of his sin. We must be willing to accept whatever limitations resulting from our sin. Forgiveness does not put all relational Humpty-Dumpty’s back together again. It takes time to earn trust and rebuild the relationship.

Conclusion

When someone you care about hurts you, you can hold on to anger, resentment and thoughts of revenge — or embrace forgiveness and move forward.

If God has forgiven you so much, then it is only reasonable for you to forgive those who sin against you.

Challenge

- 1) Are you extending to others the same kind of forgiveness God has extended to you? By God’s grace, release the debt of others today!
- 2) Have you sought forgiveness from those you have sinned against?

Pastoral Prayer: request all to kneel and pray.