

Hearts Fit for the Journey

Refusing to Keep Score

Learning to Forgive – Mt.6:9-15

I. Introduction

A. The Blessing of Forgiveness

- 1. One of the greatest promises that God has given us is the promise of forgiveness when we err**
- 2. In what we refer to as the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray that God will “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Mt.6:12)**
- 3. No matter how ugly or how great our sin debt, our trespasses, our shortcomings may be: God is willing to forgive us**
- 4. IF—you see there is a catch to receiving the forgiveness of God for our own sins—we must be willing to forgive those who have sinned against us**
- 5. Have You?**
 - a. Have you forgiven, really forgiven, those who have sinned against you?**
 - b. The Lord’s Prayer is not just a prayer to be mouthed, it is a prayer to be lived**
 - c. Are you living the Lord’s Prayer in relation to forgiving others**
 - d. The unwillingness to forgive others as we have been forgiven is another of those cancerous traits that many of us carry around in our hearts and it is killing some of us**

- e. **The lack of forgiveness destroys churches, it tears a part relationships and it makes life so much more less enjoyable to live**
- f. **“A young boy, being asked what forgiveness is gave the following answer: It is the fragrance that flowers breathe when they are trampled upon” (Trampled Fragrance, *Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations*, 1765, 456-57)**

B. Forgiveness

- 1. In our lesson today we are going to be discussing, you guessed it, forgiveness**
- 2. Refusing to keep score is one of those great qualities in the heart of a child of God that enables them to enjoy life and maintain relationships when others do not**
- 3. If you want God’s forgiveness, if you want to enjoy life; you must stop keeping score and start practicing real forgiveness**
- 4. Other than worry, it is my belief that unwillingness to forgive is perhaps the greatest hindrance to our ability to really enjoy life as God would have us to**
- 5. So, with that in mind I want to spend the next couple of weeks considering this most important subject**

II. Why Do We Find Forgiveness So Difficult?

A. Because it is undeserved

- 1. “Forgiveness is not a merit badge deserved by the worthy. It is a free gift for the forgiven” (Casselmann)**
- 2. We must ever keep in mind the fact that God did not forgive us because we deserved it; He forgave us because He loved us and we must do the same for others**
- 3. The word forgiveness literally means to cancel a debt, to absolve, to cover, to remember no more**
- 4. “When the Moravian missionaries first went to work with the Eskimos, they could not find a word in their language for forgiveness, so they had to compound one. The word was a**

formidable looking assembly of letters, but one with a beautiful connotation for those who understood it. It meant not-being-able-to-think-about-it-anymore” (Inability to Think, *7,700 Illustrations*, 1764, 458)

5. That is what forgiveness is—forgiveness is as it never happened—not because the forgiven deserve such, but rather because our Lord calls us to give such

B. Because it is undeserved

1. Again, forgiveness is a free gift for the forgiven
2. Let’s say that you owed a \$10,000 debt on your Visa card and the company writes you a letter telling you that the debt is forgiven, you no longer owe it (not that any credit card company would ever do such a thing but work with me)
3. If they were to do such a thing; does that mean that you earned it?
4. No, it was a free gift and that is what forgiveness is; from God to us and from us to others
5. You cant say the word forgive without saying give and that is because forgiveness is something you give to another
6. It is a gift, unmerited, unearned and undeserved and I believe this is one of the reasons it is so difficult for us

C. Because it is unnatural

1. In the book, *What’s So Amazing about Grace*, Phillip Yancey states that the law of nature demonstrates no forgiveness
2. When the lion eats an antelope, the rest of the antelope don’t hang around and say no problem your forgiven—that is not how it works in nature—it is not how it works in our human nature
3. Yancey further states that it is a dog-eat-dog world in which we live, not a dog-forgive-dog world
4. Yancey also points out that all of our major institutions—financial, political, athletic, business—work on this same unrelenting principle

- a. Banks do not say, “you still owe 3 car payments, but don’t worry about them”
 - b. The umpire never says, “You were really out, but I am going to call you safe”
 - c. The politician does not say, “you really lost the election, but I think I will let you serve anyway”
 - d. The world we live in just does not work that way and it has had an effect on the way to many practice forgiveness
5. The world says get even, don’t forgive—our world teaches us to live by the eye for an eye principle and as Gandhi said, “An eye for an eye end up making the whole world blind”
 6. Too many Christians have been guilty of allowing the world to mold us into living by this principle and this is not God’s way for us to live
 7. Forgiveness may not be natural, it is spiritual and as Christians we are to be led by the Spirit and not the flesh
 8. As the old saying goes, “To err is human, to forgive divine” and that is right, forgiveness is a divine mandate
 9. It is necessary to our own forgiveness and critical to our enjoyment of the journey

D. Forgiveness is not easy

1. In fact it can be quite hard
2. Why should we bother?
3. Why make the effort to be forgiving?

III. Why is Forgiveness So Necessary?

A. It is crucial to our mental and physical health

1. The most common Greek word in the NT for forgiveness means to release, to send away, to free
2. And we need to realize that when we do forgive, the one forgiven is not the only one set free, we are too

3. **Consider some verses which verify the destructive nature of holding anger in our hearts**
 - a. **Job.5:2—know any one that has ruined their health because of bitterness and refusing to forgive?**
 - b. **Job 18:4**
 - c. **No wonder Paul said, “Be angry and do not sin, do not let the sun go down on your wrath” (Eph.4:26)**
 - d. **Forget it, let it go, send it away and release it**
 - e. **Jesus said turn the other cheek, go the second mile**
 - f. **Jesus knew how destructive anger in the heart could be—it will destroy our mental and physical health**
4. **Many of you are familiar with Amos and Andy**
 - a. **In one of their old routines, Amos was wearing a bottle around his neck and Andy asked him what it was**
 - b. **He said it was a bottle of nitroglycerine**
 - c. **Andy asked him why he was carrying a bottle of explosives around his neck**
 - d. **He said, “well, the next time that guy hits me, I will blow his fist off”**
 - e. **Amos, like so many of us, that getting even usually hurts us the most**
5. **We are never going to enjoy the journey if we don’t learn to stop keeping score and stop trying to always settle it**
6. **It doesn’t work and it will only make you feel worse**

B. It is crucial to our spiritual health

1. **How so? (Mt.6:14-15)**
2. **The greatest cost of getting even or harboring ill will is that we can’t be forgiven ourselves**
3. **Jesus is not teaching that our forgiveness of others merits or earns God’s forgiveness of us, just that our lack of forgiveness hinders God’s forgiveness of us**

4. The point is simple

- a. God requires of those He has forgiven far greater debts to pass on that forgiveness to others**
- b. It is not optional and it is not a suggestion**
- c. It is a requirement**
- d. “It may be infinitely less evil to murder a man than to refuse to forgive him. The former may be an act of a moment of passion: that latter is the heart’s choice. It is spiritual murder to hate, and to brood over the feeling that excludes.”**
- e. “God holds the unforgiving man with His hand, but turns His face away from him.”**
- f. “No man who will not forgive his neighbor can believe that God is willing, even wanting to forgive him. If God were to forgive a man who hated his brother, would it not mean to that man that he may go on hating. While God may take into account the reasons for our anger with another, He does not excuse us for our unwillingness to forgive.”**

5. Jesus wants us to treat others that way God has treated us

6. This principles is clearly taught also in The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant—Mt.18:21-35

7. God says, you do for others what I have done for you and if you don’t, I will cease doing it for you

C. It is crucial to our work as Christians

- 1. Mt.6:10**
- 2. Here some questions to consider**
 - a. Is there any hate in heaven?**
 - b. Any bitterness and resentment**
 - c. Any schemes to get even**
 - d. Any lack of unity or discord**
 - e. The answer to all is NO**

3. **If these things do not exist in heaven; why do they exist here”**
4. **We don’t practice forgiveness as we should**
5. **Rom.12:17-19**
6. **The Hebrew writer exhorts us to “Pursue peace with all men” (Heb.12:14) and nothing makes this more possible than forgiving those who trespass against us and nothing makes it more impossible than refusing to do so**
7. **Jesus says that the world will know we are His disciples by or love for one another and nothing calls into question the reality of our discipleship more than holding a grudge and refusing to forgive**
8. **We can’t have it both ways**
 - a. **We can’t be a disciple of the Lord**
 - b. **And refuse to forgive as He has**
 - c. **In One of His last statements from the cross Jesus said, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do” (Lk.23:34)**
 - d. **If Jesus could forgive those who put Him on the cross—those He came to save by the way—why can’t we forgive those who are guilty of far lesser offences against us**
 - e. **A willingness to forgive is crucial to showing the world that the will of the Lord and His kingdom have come into our lives**
 - f. **Has it come into yours?**

D. It is crucial to maintaining our relationships

1. **Forgiveness is necessary because relationships are worth it**
2. **The lack of forgiveness**
 - a. **Tears marriages a part**
 - b. **Robs us of a close relationship with our children**
 - c. **Destroys friendships**

- d. Tears churches a part
 - e. Keeps us from enjoying life
3. The following is a true story told by a preacher
- a. One Sunday during the invitation song a young woman came forward with tears in here eyes
 - b. She wanted to confess to marital infidelity
 - c. As the preacher read here statement of confession there was movement in the audience
 - d. An individual came forward and placed a hand lovingly on her shoulder, comforting her, embracing her, loving her
 - e. It was her husband
4. That's forgiveness—do we have that type of forgiveness in our hearts
5. People may reject that kind of forgiveness, but God loves it
6. Brethren our relationships are worth it
- a. Our marriages are worth it
 - b. Our friendships are worth it
 - c. Our church fellowship is worth it
 - d. Are we willing to forgive as God has forgiven us

IV. Some Important Principles Concerning Forgiveness

A. Forgiveness is a personal choice

1. On Monday, Dec.1, 1997, a group of about 12 students were praying as they did every morning in the hallway of Heath High School in Paducah, Ky.
2. As the prayer ended there were sounds of gunshots
3. A 14 yr. old student had opened fire on the group, calmly shooting one at a time

4. When it was all over, 3 of the students were dead and 5 more were seriously injured
5. One of the students, 15 yr. old Melissa Jenkins, suffered spinal cord injuries that would leave her a paraplegic for the rest of her life
6. Instead of expressing anger and hatred, emotions that most of us would naturally understand, she instead from her hospital bed said, “Tell him I forgive him”
7. How can one hurt so much by the anger and hatred of another forgive so easily?
 - a. It is because she chose to—it is that simple and that hard
 - b. Forgiveness is a personal choice that takes place inside of the one doing the forgiving
 - c. And unlike reconciliation; forgiveness only takes one; that’s me
8. “But I don’t feel like forgiving them”
 - a. Ever said or heard someone say that?
 - b. Forgiveness is not a feeling, it is an act of the will
 - c. It is a determined act on our part to do what God asks us to do instead of harboring resentment or seeking revenge
9. Always remember that forgiveness is a gift and we are the ones who will be blessed by it as much as the one forgiven

B. Does forgiveness demand that we forget?

1. Yes and No
 - a. There is obviously no way to purge our memories of an offence and the deeper the hurt, the more difficult to keep it from coming to our minds
 - b. When it comes to forgiveness we must be like our computer’s hard drive
 - i. *When we erase a document, its address is erased but the document is really still there*

ii. The computer just does not see it any more

iii. That is the way forgiveness is to be

- 2. Forgiveness means that we do not base our future relationships on past forgiven behavior**
- 3. It is though the offence, although we are still conscience of it, is simply not there any more**
- 4. It means that we remove that offence out of the picture of any future relationship with that person**
- 5. Do we truly forget it, probably not, but we do not act upon that hurt, the wrong, that offence any more**

C. How often must we be willing to forgive?

- 1. While such is not always the case, this parable is made easier for us to understand by the fact that it was spoken in response to a question from one of Jesus' disciples**
- 2. To answer that question let us consider Jesus' teaching in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant—Mt.18:21-22**
- 3. Peter's Question—Mt.18:21**
 - a. Isn't it just like Peter to ask a question and suggest the answer at the same time and isn't it just like a follower of Jesus' in general to want to know "how much" do I have to do**
 - b. He wanted to know how often he was required to forgive a brother who had sinned against him and it is quite likely that he felt he was being generous when he responded "up to seven times"**
 - c. The Rabbis of the time taught that at most a man was required to forgive his brother 3 times, but no more than that**
 - d. But Peter said I will double that and add one to boot, surely this level of forgiveness would be acceptable to the Lord**
 - e. However, the Lord had a surprise for Peter and for all His disciples**
- 4. Jesus Response—Mt.18:22**
 - a. There is little doubt that the answer of Jesus shocked Peter**

- b. He said “I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven”
- c. It would be unwise to attempt to take Jesus response here too literally, as though we could count up to 490 times and then we would be free of our obligation to forgive another
- d. What Jesus is doing is I believed expressed well by the following statement from the Believers Bible, “Jesus is confronting Peter with the truth that the spirit of forgiveness really knows no boundaries”
- e. In other words there are no limitations to the forgiveness that we are to show unto others, as they seek our forgiveness—Lk.17:3-4
- f. To further reinforce this point with Peter and all future Disciples Jesus then told the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

5. Sounds to hard

- a. There are many when confronted with such teaching that believe it to be simply too difficult or too hard to always be forgiving of those who seek our forgiveness
- b. The fact of the matter is that it is hard to forgive others: when we don’t have an understanding of our motivation for doing so
- c. We shall consider such motivation momentarily
- d. But true forgiveness keeps no score cards
- e. Our forgiveness of others should be as boundless as the mercy of God toward us

V. How Do We Learn to Forgive Like God Expects?

A. Again we can learn some principles that will motivate us to be forgiving from this same parable

B. Realization of our indebtedness to God

1. It is easy to read this parable and miss, because of spiritual blindness, the application to self
2. It is easy to say how evil the servant in this parable acted, refusing to forgive after being forgiven of so much
3. What we must realize is that this parable represents the plight of all mankind before they come to God
4. We are that servant, God is the King; and because of our sins we owe Him a debt that we could never repay, as Paul says, “The wages of sin is death” (Rom.6:23), and that is what each of us deserve, that is what our sins have bought us
5. And even though we may start to think at times, just like the servant, that if given enough time we could repay God the debt we owe him, it is an impossibility—Eph.2:11-12
6. Without Christ we were all like this servant, without hope

C. Realization that in spite of our indebtedness, God forgave us anyway

1. Because of His grace, mercy, love, and compassion God forgives those who seek His forgiveness, even though we did not and could not earn that forgiveness
 - a. “He paid a debt He did not owe, I owed a debt I could not pay, I needed someone to take my sins away.
 - b. And now I sing a brand new song, Amazing Grace
 - c. Christ Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay”
 - d. “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men” (Tit.2:11)
2. Even though, because of our sins, we owe God a debt that we could never repay, God has forgiven us that debt
3. What a blessed people we are, as the Psalmist said “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity” (Ps.32:1-2)

D. Realization that because God has forgiven us, we must extend that same forgiveness to others

1. **Here is the question: how much do we appreciate what God has done for us?**
2. **The forgiven servant in this parable obviously did not think to much about the great debt he was forgiven, because he was unwilling to forgive a fellow servant of an, in comparison, inconsequential debt**
3. **Our willingness to forgive is a direct reflection of our appreciation of the great debt we have been forgiven of by God, because in the end what others owe us is far less than what we owed God**
4. **Lk.7:41-43**
5. **“To whom much is given, much will be required” (Lk.12:48)**
6. **God has given us much and in return he expects much from us, as it relates to this topic, God expects us to be willing to forgive those who sin against us, because He has forgiven us of our sins against Him**
7. **“Prompted by gratitude the forgiven sinner must always yearn to forgive whoever trespasses against him”**
8. **“If we do not forgive others, God will not forgive us”**

E. Some additional principles that will help us become more forgiving

1. **We must have a change of heart**
 - a. **Trying to forgive without changing our own heart first will lead to problems**
 - b. **Problems with ourselves and problems with those we are seeking to forgive**
 - c. **Forgiveness must not be hypocritical—it must be genuine, it must be true and it must come from pure motives**
 - d. **We must forgive from the heart—Mt.18:35**
 - i. *Insincere forgiveness is no better than no forgiveness at all*

- ii. When we forgive it must come from the heart, it must come from our understanding of and appreciation for what God has done for us*
- iii. We must forgive because we desire to, and because we realize that part of the reason for forgiving another is that we might help them*
- iv. This requires some work on our own hearts first*

2. **We must get out of the getting even business**
 - a. **Revenge is never a Christian motive**
 - b. **Rom.12:19**
 - c. **Punishment for sin—any sin—is not our business**
 - d. **It is not our right to get even with those who have wronged us, I don't care what our society says, it is not our right**
 - e. **Punishing sin is God's business so let's leave it to Him**
 - f. **Getting even does not do anyone any good so leave it alone**

VI. Conclusion

A. Yancey

1. **“Forgiveness breaks the cycle. Forgiveness does not settle all questions of blame and justice and fairness: To the contrary it often evades these questions entirely. However, it does allow spiritual renewal within and allows relationships to start over. In this way, we differ from all animals. It is not just our capacity to think which makes us different, it is rather our capacity to repent and forgive. Only humans can perform these most unnatural acts. And by doing so only we can develop and maintain relationships with God and our brother which transcends the relentless law of nature”**
2. **Would you like to live a good life? Would you like to begin enjoying the journey more?**
3. **Then start practicing forgiveness the way God practices forgiveness**
4. **A great load will be lifted in your life and the journey will be richer, fuller and far more enjoyable**

B. Perhaps it is time

1. **Time to let go of some old hurt or offence**
2. **Time to let go of some new hurt or offence**

- 3. Time to repair a relationship**
- 4. Time to forgive**
- 5. If you have someone to forgive, perhaps today is the day to do so**

C. Perhaps you need God's forgiveness today—it is available