

[Family/Community Matter: As many of you are aware, late last week there was a double homicide here in our community of Cameron Park. A single mom, MARRISA, and her son Josiah were the victims of this horrible tragedy. The ripple effects of this are wide and sobering. Our church has been reaching out to the family and supporting them as best we can. We also extended our support to the faculty and staff of Blue Oak School where Josiah attended.

Please be in prayer for everyone involved in this horrific tragedy—first responders, law enforcement, teachers, extended family...and of course the family, including the one surviving sibling. We will be hosting a public service for MARRISA and her son Josiah on September 6 at 11am, here in the auditorium.]

Introduction:

Several years ago I was on an airplane flying back to Sacramento...I was reading a book by Dan Allender called *Bold Love*. A 20-something woman was sitting next to me and towards the end of the flight she asked me about the book I was reading. "So, what's bold love?"

I explained that Allender is a Christian Psychologist who works a great deal with sexual abuse victims. And he helps them work through their debilitating trauma and come to a place of freedom and forgiveness of their abuser.

At that point, her whole posture and tone changed. She began to get tense and quietly rant about how ridiculous and unthinkable forgiving an

abuser would be. And the more I tried to help her understand what Allender was and was not saying, she got more and more angry. So, I finally just got quiet, and I listened. She clearly believed forgiveness was inappropriate and unrealistic in the face of abusive.

I suspect some of you have endured gut wrenching, life shattering wounds from someone or many “someones”—someone who has hurt you deeply, physically, mentally/emotionally. I am sure all of us have been offended by someone, which has caused a break in a relationship with a friend, spouse, kids, parents, coworker, or boss. So, the question isn’t, “Have we ever been wounded or offended?” The question is, “How are we to respond when that happens?”

[Transition] – Our text today gives us some coaching on this question. And it gives us a good occasion to talk about what it means for us to forgive.

Now, you may have just cringed inside! If you’ve been deeply wounded, there was probably a part of you that just cringed, recoiled or puckered when said that last word, “forgive.”

You may understand logically, or theologically that we are called to forgive, there may be very little genuine willingness or ability to do so. Maybe you feel like that woman on the plane. “Forgiveness is inappropriate or unrealistic in the face of deep wounds.”

Forgiveness can seem offensive, impossible, and one of the quickest ways to compound the unfairness of being wronged.¹ I want to tell you right now...if that’s what you’re feeling, that’s okay. I hope you won’t stay there forever, but it’s okay to admit where you are today. Our text today

¹ Terkeurst, Lysa. *Forgiving What You Can’t Forget*. p. 4.

gives us an occasion to talk about what real forgiveness means, and what the path through real life forgiveness actually looks like.

The forgiveness God calls us to is not something you can muster up in your strength. It is not an act of your determination. Forgiveness is actually God's work in you—as you allow God's grace for you to heal your wounded heart, you enable his grace to flow freely through you. And this is the path to true freedom in your spirit. The path to seeing beauty again. The path to being released from feeling the heavies. And the path to regaining the possibility of trust and closeness again, if the circumstances are appropriate.

In short, forgiveness is the path from hurt to healing! So, I'll hope you'll stick with me through this message so that we can clear up some misconceptions about forgiveness and learn to genuinely pursue forgiveness of others.

[Transition] - Today we pick up exactly where we left off last week. Last week Phil led us through Paul's response to that *group* of critics from within the Corinthian church, reminding us we're called to be consistent and dependable. In our verses for today, he coaches them about what needs to happen now for *one individual* in the church who had been previously called out for his toxic, destructive lifestyle and the grief that brought into the church body. His basic message to them is, "It's time to forgive." Let's look at what Paul writes: Read v.5-8

Apparently, this guy's behavior grieved Paul, and to varying degrees, the whole church. Now we don't know who Paul is referring to here. Some speculate that this is the man Paul calls out for incest back in 1

Corinthians chapter 5. But that's only our best guess. Remember, we're reading someone else's mail. ☺

It seems the church responded to this offense by disciplining the offender. We don't know exactly what the punishment was in this case, but many suggest that the church probably informed him he was no longer welcome in their gathering because his unrepentant behavior was poisoning the whole body. If this is referring to the man who was practicing incest from 1 Cor 5, that text tells us this person was put out of fellowship with the church.

Even though a lot about what happened in this situation is unclear to us, what's important to Paul in our text today is what needs to happen now that this person has repented.

Paul advises them to stop the discipline. Why? Because the punishment has been effective and doesn't need to continue. The man has owned his offense, repented, and is experiencing remorse to the point that Paul is concerned about him falling into excessive sorrow.²

The Purpose of Discipline is to help bring one to Repentance (vv. 5-6).

Here's an important lesson for us: When we carry out discipline within our household, our workplace, or in our churches...we need to discipline with a purpose of bringing one to repentance. It's not to judge them, shame them, or write them off as losers forever.

At Paul's directive, it sounds like the church confronted the man, and when he refused to change, they removed him from fellowship with them.

² (Garland 1999, pg 126)

And it worked. The guy had a change of heart. And he's repented. Now, Paul calls the church to end the punishment and instead, offer forgiveness to him.

[Transition] – Now, Paul's comments in the next few verses teach us some reasons why forgiveness is so important. Look at verses 7-11.

Reasons why forgiveness is so important:

"In the NT there are two main words for forgiveness. One means, 'To send away', to loose, to free)."³ The other means, "To deal graciously with, show favor upon." That is the word used here. Paul is telling the church is to show favor on this guy, and to comfort him. Basically, he's coaching them to treat him as if the crime/offense was never committed.

One author put it concisely,

"True forgiveness neither excuses the sin nor ignores what happened. It means that you still relate to that person in spite of what happened but also in light of what happened. Forgiveness, however, does not require that the church reinstate the person into a position of authority again but does require his reinstatement into their fellowship."⁴

[Transition] – Now, here's why Paul calls them to forgive. First, because forgiveness heals.

³ Morris, L. L. (1996). Forgiveness. In (D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman, Eds.) *New Bible dictionary*. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

⁴ (Garland 1999, pg 127)

Forgiveness heals (v.7-8)

He doesn't want this guy to become overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Offering forgiveness to him will help heal his sorrowful heart.

In this way, forgiveness has a kind of healing power. When you repent and are forgiven by someone there's a number of positive impacts it has on you, not the least of which is, "Emotional relief." Qualitative research shows forgiveness lifts the burden of guilt or shame, reduces anxiety and emotional stress, allowing you to feel more at peace with greater mental and emotional well-being.⁵

Paul knew that forgiveness would aid in healing the emotional state of this person. The church held this guy accountable, confronted him, and he responded positively.

[**Transition**] – That's the first reason forgiveness is so important. It promotes healing. Second, we are to forgive because Christ commands us to forgive.

Christ commands us to forgive (v.9)

In verse 9 Paul alludes to challenging them to be obedient everything. In this case, he challenged them to confront this guy in his former letter. They did and now he is challenging them again...this time to forgive him. Both the discipline and the forgiveness are to be practiced, not because Paul calls for it...but because Christ calls for it.

Jesus said, "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."- Luke 17:3-4

⁵ Summary of Grok AI findings.

And his letter to the Colossians Paul reinforces this saying, "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." Colossians 3:13

Again...if that caused you to cringe inside...stay with me to the end of this message.

[Transition] -So, here's what we've said, so far. Forgiveness is important because, 1) It promotes healing, 2) It's Christ's command to us, and 3rd) Forgiveness helps mend relationships.

In verse 10 Paul says, *"Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake."*

Forgiveness helps mend relationships (v.10)

Forgiveness impacts everyone involved in the offense. It helps mend relationships between all parties.

One scholar wrote, "Paul's concern is always for the whole group and not just for himself or even the offender. The forgiveness mends the differences between Paul and the individual, the individual and the church, and even between Paul and the church."⁶ Mending broken relationships, and preserving unity is absolutely crucial and forgiveness aids in this.

[Transition] - Finally, the fourth reason forgiveness is so important: Forgiveness defeats the enemy. Read verse 11.

Forgiveness defeats the enemy (v. 11)

⁶ (Garland 1999, pg 131)

The word "outwit" in verse 11 means, "To gain advantage" or it could also mean, "to rob." In the context of church discipline, Paul's point is if you continue to refuse fellowship to the one who has repented it is counterproductive. If you refuse to restore the repentant person the door is open for the enemy to take advantage and breed discouragement, resentment and disunity. In this way Satan will rob the community of a valuable member of their group.⁷



Like a Bison that gets separated from the herd and gets picked off by predators. If a contrite, repentant person is not accepted back into the church body, they are left out and vulnerable to Satan's attacks.

[Transition] – So, these are 4 key reasons why forgiveness is so important. Now, obviously Paul is addressing a situation within a church body. But the implications of forgiveness apply to each of us in our personal relationships as well.

⁷ (Garland 1999, pg 131)

Now I'm guessing there are a few of you who have been listening very closely to all this talk about forgiveness and you're feeling a little uneasy. I'm guessing there are some of you who are sitting there privately cataloging your unique circumstances which justify your unwillingness to forgive, find freedom, and move forward.

I get it. But stick with me for a few more minutes. Forgiveness may feel like one of the most maddening things Jesus asks of you. But, with Jesus in you, forgiveness is possible even though it won't always feel possible.

Application:

Let's talk for a moment about what forgiveness is not!

- Forgiveness does not diminish what you've been through, nor does it make light of the anguish you've cried a million tears over.
- Forgiveness does not justify abuse or abandonment or affairs that are all wrong no matter how it's flipped or framed by others.
- Forgiveness does not disregard how powerful feelings are and how powerless you can feel when you get flooded by pain, triggered by memories, ignored by those who were supposed to love you, or brushed aside by those who should have cared for you.
- Forgiveness doesn't demand that you excuse the cruelest, most horrific offenses committed against you or those you love.
- Forgiveness does not demand that all relationships work out with all people -sometimes that neither possible or safe.

- And just so you know, “Forgive and forget”, is not actually in the Bible. God is able to forget our sin when we confess it. But people are not called to forgive and forget.

As I shared in my opening comments, the forgiveness God calls us to practice is not something you can muster up in your strength. It is not an act of your determination. It doesn't rise or fall on your efforts, your mustered up grit, your conjured maturity, or your feelings that seem real one moment and fake the next.

Here's an important key to forgiveness. It's cooperation. Cooperation with God's work in you. God knows we can't do it on our own. But it is a choice we have to make! A choice to heal regardless of what the offender does. A choice to trust God, that he will heal you and help you move forward.

Again, forgiveness is God's work in you—as you allow God's grace for you to heal your wounded heart, you enable his grace to flow freely through you.

And this is the path to true freedom in your spirit. The path to seeing beauty again. The path to being released from feeling the heavies. And the path to regaining the possibility of trust and closeness again, if the circumstances are appropriate.

Lysa Terkeurst (Turk-hurst), in her book “Forgiving what you can't forget”, suggests a helpful practice. (I highly recommend this book to you). Here's a practice she suggests in her book.

As feelings and memories related to the offense come up, choose to verbalize or write them down one by one and your willingness to forgive

them. For example: I forgive Joe for keeping secrets. Or I forgive Josephine for betraying my trust. In this way you are naming or putting words to all the pieces and parts—the facts of what happened.

Then after each item, say to yourself out loud or write it down, “whatever my feelings don’t yet allow for, the blood of Jesus will surely cover.”⁸ So, to use our example: I forgive Joe for keeping secrets. And whatever my feelings don’t yet allow for, the blood of Jesus will surely cover. I forgive Josephine for betraying my trust, and whatever my feelings don’t yet allow for, the blood of Jesus will surely cover.

Lysa argues, this practice may seem shallow or contrived, but it’s important because, “Each offense needs a marked moment of consciously releasing the unforgiveness that threatens to hold us hostage and holds us back from moving forward.”

Now, please hear me; this doesn’t mean these will all be erased from your memory, but it will work to begin to free you from carrying all that heavy weight making forgiveness seem even more confusing and impossible.

Please remember; forgiveness is both a decision and a process. You make the decision to forgive the facts of what happened. But, then you will need to walk through the process of forgiveness for the impact those facts had on you.

Every trauma has an initial effect, and a long-term impact. If someone collides with you in your car and you break your leg, your leg can heal from the injury or surgery, but you may walk with a limp for a long while as it fully heals.

⁸ Terkeurst, Lysa. *Forgiving What You Can’t Forget*. Pp. 43-44

The decision to forgive doesn't fix all the damaged emotions. It doesn't automatically remove the anger, frustration, doubt, damaged trust, or fear. Healing of those emotions can take some time.

As you consider being willing to forgive, I want to make sure you are clear. Forgiveness doesn't mean excusing sin. It doesn't mean ignoring boundaries. Sometimes forgiveness means full restoration and reconciliation. But sometimes that's not wise given the other's growth progress and whether they are safe or not.

Forgiveness doesn't require you to open yourself again to someone's threatening or unsafe relational style or patterns. As I've stated, forgiveness is a process that matures and is more fully realized over time, as trust is rebuilt, and new healthy patterns of relating are established and proven.

But in every situation, forgiveness means releasing the debt to God. It means entrusting the situation to God's wisdom and justice, his healing and his grace.

In the privacy of your own heart and in your own words, I want to give you some space you to spend a few moments talking with God openly about forgiveness. You might use this time to pray for yourself, or you might need to pray for a friend.

Maybe you want to forgive someone, but you're stuck and not able to fully forgive and move on past the offense and all its tentacles. You've tried but you just can't move past it.

Maybe you're in the process of forgiveness and want to fully realize the freedom forgiveness brings.

Maybe you're just not sure. Maybe you're just not willing to forgive yet. There's too much pain, too many tears, too much anger. I want to invite you to be honest with God about all that.

I know you probably have a number of reasons you can't forgive—fear of repeated offense, the offense has never been validated, holding a grudge gives me a sense of control, forgiveness feels like it trivializes what happened to me, and it lets the offender off the hook.

If you don't feel willing this morning, are you willing to ask God to do a work in you to make you willing to be willing?

Are you willing to whisper along with me; *today is the day it stops*.
Whisper it with me...*Today is my day to stop the grim, hopeless pursuit of expecting the other person to make this right so that I can receive the glorious hope-filled possibilities of forgiving and being free and moving forward.*

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