

“OVERCOMING EVIL WITH GOOD”

1 Samuel 24:1-7

5/1/2022 – Christ Community Church, Daytona Beach

“Forgive and forget.”

“To err is human, to forgive divine.”

“There is no revenge so complete as forgiveness.”

“Forgiveness is a virtue of the brave.”

Maybe you’ve heard one of those quotes about forgiveness. It’s easy to talk about forgiveness; it’s quite another to actually forgive someone who hurt you.

This story from the life of David is very personal for me.

There’s a situation in my life right now in which I’m finding it hard to forgive. I don’t want to forgive; I want to punish.

What about you? Is there someone who has hurt you and you’re finding it hard to move past it, to let it go?

You have basically **three options** when you’ve been wounded by another person:

1. Try to forget about it and hope it goes away.
2. Take it out on somebody: the person who hurt you, your spouse, your dog, your kids, yourself.
3. Or, you can **forgive** the person.

Only that 3rd option works. **But it’s hard to do, isn’t it?**

Before we dive into this text, let me start off with a pastoral observation:

Forgiving someone is not simple. I can’t offer you an easy three-step formula or technique for forgiveness. Every situation is different. I find that when people hear sermons on

forgiveness, they want 5 steps or a simple strategy that “works” every time. They want to “plug and play.” But there is no such thing.

Forgiveness can be messy at times. It’s not a magic wand that makes pain suddenly disappear. **You have to work at it.** It’s often a **process**. And sometimes there are other things that need to be done besides forgiveness in order to reach the goal of reconciliation.

For example, you may need to confront the one who hurt you... many times.

- You may need to get counseling.
- You may need to get church leaders involved.
- You may need to establish boundaries to protect yourself.
- In extreme cases, like abuse for example, you may need to take legal action against the offender.

Sometimes a cheap version of “forgiveness” can be an escape from steps we need to take in order to be truly reconciled with our fellow man.

Forgiveness is not simple. However, it is our calling.

So I want to start off with **two big ideas from this text**, and after that I’ll give you some practical guidance on how to forgive. So let’s dive into...

I. **Big idea #1: Forgiveness looks so foolish that most people refuse to do it.**

This is in **vv1-4** of our text.

As you may know, **David's problems with King Saul** began several chapters before this when David killed Goliath. King Saul became insanely jealous of David and tried to kill him several times. And when we come to **chap 24**, David is a fugitive. He's on the run, trying to stay away from jealous King Saul.

- And he's terribly outnumbered. David has about 600 men, while Saul has 3,000. That's a **5-to-1 advantage** for King Saul.
- David and his men are hiding out in the Desert of En Gedi – an area on the western coast of the Dead Sea. It's filled with springs, and steep, rocky crags and caves.

V3 tells us that something very fortuitous happened. David and some of his men were in this one particular cave, way back in the back, when Saul came into that very cave to use the rest room. They didn't have Porta-Potties back then, you know.

- When you gotta go, you gotta go.
- (*Heb*: "cover his feet," i.e., take a nap)
- So here comes Saul into the cave where David is hiding.
- And David's men conclude that God in his Providence brought Saul into that cave, so that David can take him out!
- I mean, Saul is vulnerable, right? So they whisper to David (**v4**), "Here is the day of which the Lord said to you, 'Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand.' C'mon, David, he's all yours. He's got it coming, David. Kill him!"

Makes sense, right? **Because to forgive Saul, to let him off the hook, would be foolish.**

- The man's no good, David. He's already tried to kill you several times. Saul is a disobedient, narcissistic king. God had rejected him. You've been anointed the next king of Israel. It's your time.
- So take him out!

But David doesn't do it. He spares Saul.

And we say, "David, what are you thinking?"

Illus.: I'm reminded of the time in **Matt 18** – **Peter** asks Jesus, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

- "I tell you, not seven, but 77 times."
- Isn't there a little voice inside your head saying, "But that's nuts! If I keep on forgiving this person, she's going to take advantage of me. If I let this person get off scot free, he's never going to learn his lesson."
- But that's the thing about forgiveness. **There's a foolishness to it.** That's why most people in the world never try it.
- That's Big Idea #1.

II. Big idea #2 – Forgiveness is so freeing that you are the fool if you don't do it.

Let me read what happens next (**vv8-15**).

I hope you feel **David's freedom** in this passage.

- For one thing, **his conscience is clear** – he doesn't have Saul's blood on his hands; he didn't kill the Lord's anointed.

- But also, he's literally **free** (at least for a while) – in **v22** it says "Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold."
- Now, if you know the rest of the story in **1 Sam** you know that Saul's remorse is short-lived. But for the time being, David can relax. He can come out of hiding.
- By giving Saul the gift of forgiveness, David doesn't have to live with a condemning conscience. He did the right thing. He is at rest, at peace with himself and others.

Quote: Albert Haase (Catholic priest) – "It takes a lot of energy to keep a wound open, to keep a grudge alive. The longer I allow a wound to fester, the more bitterness, anger and self-pity poison my blood and eat at my heart."

Illus.: Not long ago, my wife and I spent the weekend with some of our grandkids in Jacksonville.

- Lincoln (age 9) and Ransom (5) share a bedroom.
- Lincoln loves Legos.
- Ransom messed up one of Lincoln's Lego creations.
- Ransom just went out of the room, but Lincoln collapsed in a pile of tears and anger. And he wouldn't let it go. It just spiraled out of control. For hours! So not only was his Lego spaceship broken, but he was bitter toward his brother on top of that.
- **That's the curse of unforgiveness.** Someone hurts you, and you get mad and bitter and angry about it. And as long as you hold on to it, it just hurts you. So now your pain has multiplied. You're hurt from the offense, and on top of that bitterness is eating away at you. Meanwhile the offender walks away. He's recovering, while you're in a pile!

How do you get free of bitterness? You **forgive**.

OK, those are the two big ideas. Forgiveness may look **foolish** but it's **freeing**. But now we need to answer the question, **How?** How do you forgive that person who has hurt you?

Let me show you **4 things** from this passage:

1. **In order to forgive someone who wounded you, first you must take a deep inward look.**

- Notice **v5**: "David's heart struck him." Another translation says, "David was conscience-stricken." He felt guilty. *Why?*
- Because he cut off a corner of Saul's robe.
- He dared to challenge the dignity of the office of the king of Israel.
- And he'd come that close to taking Saul's life and thereby touching the Lord's anointed.

David looked into his own heart and recognized **the seeds of sin**. And he felt deep, deep conviction. You see, David cared more about his own character and integrity than he did about the unjust treatment he was getting from King Saul.

What we see in David here is **genuine humility**.

Notice what he says about himself in **v14** – "After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! A flea!"

If you are having trouble with forgiveness, do you know why? It might be because you don't know your own heart. You haven't looked inside at your own culpability like David did.

- Well, guess what – **you & I are just like David: we're fleas.** We're quite capable of doing the same thing people have done to us, and worse. In fact, some of us have done things that are worse.

Jesus said (Matt 7), “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own?” In other words, for every one look at someone else's sin, we should take 10 looks at our own sin.

- I love this about David. He wasn't perfect. He had flaws. But he was humble. He had a sensitive conscience about his own sin. He wasn't afraid to look at the plank in his own eye.

2. In order to forgive, (take an inward look) Acknowledge the pain you have experienced.

- **V11b** – “...there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you hunt my life to take it.”
- Sometimes we short-circuit the forgiveness process by saying something like, “Oh, that's OK. It's no big deal.” Or we release people from the seriousness of what they've done by saying, “That's just the way he is. She always does things like that. It's OK. I'm just being too sensitive.”
- No, it is a big deal. You're not just being too sensitive. In order to forgive someone, you have to first agree that you've been hurt, tell God that you've been hurt, and if possible tell the offender that you've been hurt.

Now this is hard. Many times we'd rather keep the pain inside and push it down than bring it up and feel it all over again. We'd rather paste on a smile or say some nice Christian cliché than speak truth and cry and make someone else feel bad.

But **recovery begins with honesty.** David says, “I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down, Saul.”

3. In order to forgive, (inward look, acknowledge the pain) cancel the debt. Let the one who hurt you go free.

What I mean is, you eventually have to come to the place where you say, “I forgive you. I will not hold this over you. I am setting you free from my sentence of judgment and condemnation.”

- **V7** – “David persuaded his men and did not permit them to attack Saul. And Saul rose up, left the cave, and went on his way.”

Quote: “Forgiveness is me giving up my right to hurt you for hurting me.”

Listen: Saul was a very bad man! He had tried on several occasions to kill David. He had been hunting him down like a criminal. He'd been spreading bad reports and false rumors about David. And back in **chap 22**, Saul was responsible for the death of perhaps hundreds of people in the town of **Nob**, all because of his hatred of David.

But David makes a decision. He refuses to repay evil with evil. He overcomes evil with good. He lets Saul off the hook.

- He calls Saul his lord (**v8**), his father (**v11**), the Lord's anointed (**v10**).

- In **v8** he bows before Saul and pays homage to the king. Some commentators say that David lay face down on the ground, as a show of respect and humility.
- He says in **v13**, “My hand shall not be against you.”
- He let him go.

Now, when you forgive someone, what happens to the pain? Does it just (poof) disappear, like magic? No. **When you forgive, you absorb in yourself the pain of the offense.**

- In **Matt 18** Jesus tells the story about a man who owed a king 10,000 talents (= millions of dollars). But he wasn't able to pay, and he came to the king, fell on his knees, and said, “Be patient with me, O king, and I'll pay it back.” The king took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.
- So the man didn't owe the king anything anymore. But what did it cost the king to do that? Millions of dollars! The king was willing to pay the debt himself so the man didn't have to.
- Forgiveness is canceling the debt owed by the person who hurt you. The hurt doesn't just go away. You shed your own blood, you absorb the pain into yourself instead of exacting it upon the offender.
- And you may have to **keep cancelling the debt** again and again. In other words, the heartache and loss you've experienced may come back into your consciousness again and again... for weeks, months, or even years. And when that happens, you absorb the pain again. You forgive “seventy-seven times.”
- Every time you want to treat that person like a voodoo doll, and stick a pin in him, you refuse to do it – you pay the debt yourself.

- Every time you want to say something negative about that person into a conversation, you keep your mouth shut – you swallow it, and pay the debt yourself.
- Every time you want to hope that something bad happens to her, you pray a little prayer of blessing for her instead – and you pay the debt yourself.
- You shed your own blood, instead of taking theirs. “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness,” the Bible says.
- Forgiveness is the shedding of your own blood instead of requiring the blood of the other person.

4. **But I can hear someone out there saying, “But what about justice? If I just cancel the debt, will I ever get vindicated? Will the wrongdoer ever get his due?” The short answer to that is “Yes.” So what do you do? You trust God's justice. That's the fourth thing necessary for forgiveness.**

Notice what David says in **v12** – “May the Lord judge between you and me. May the Lord avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you.”

Listen to me, **God cares about justice**. I think of those of you who have been severely wounded—by a parent, for example, or a spouse...by the person who abused you or raped you or abandoned you or divorced you.

There is coming a day when God will make all wrongs right. There is coming a day when, as it says in **2 Thess 1:6**, “God will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled.”

I think it was Tim Keller who said, “But if you try to get justice before forgiving someone, you’re not going for justice, you’re going for vengeance.”

- If you trust in God, and wait upon his timing, he will see to it that you are vindicated and the one who hurt you punished.

And don’t be surprised if you find that the person you’ve set free is you.

Unless, of course, the person who hurt you repents and trusts in Jesus.

You see, Jesus Christ did something that can cancel anyone’s debt, no matter how large. He absorbed in himself the sins and crimes of every single person who turns from sin and trusts in him.

Jesus did something **so foolish** that the angels were amazed. He overcame evil with good. He left heaven, became a man, lived the perfect life we were required to live, and died the death we deserved to die.

- He shed his blood instead of requiring it of us.
- From the cross he said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.”
- And he says to every single person who repents and believes the gospel, “Go free. You are no longer condemned. You are no longer guilty. Your debts are fully paid.”

You owed an infinite debt to God because of your sin, yet it’s been cancelled through the blood of Christ.

Now go, cancel other people’s debts. Forgive as God forgave you. Overcome evil with good.