

## **The Power of Forgiveness**

**Lester Zimmerman**

This morning I want to talk about something that is central to our Christian faith. I am referring to the willingness to forgive others.

Over the years, I have discovered that the willingness to forgive can bring people through the deepest kinds of pain and transform their lives into something beautiful, propelling them into their destiny.

I have also seen the unwillingness to forgive shrivel up a person's soul, physically destroy their health and produces all kinds of spiritual bondage.

- **Forgiveness is the power to heal wounds and right wrongs.**
- **It is the power to overcome offenses.**
- **It is the power to show grace and mercy.**
- **It is the power to restore relationships.**
- **It is the power to heal memories and walk in new freedom.**

Of all the spiritual traits, the one that is the most important and probably the hardest is the ability to forgive.

If you want to live a joy-filled life, a spirit-filled life, and a life that makes a difference it is important to walk in forgiveness toward others.

**The reality is** that people will do things either intentionally or unintentionally that hurt and offend us. .... **The reality is also** that each one of us will do things either intentionally or unintentionally that hurt and offend others.

**Offenses are inevitable.** Jesus said offenses are part of life. (Luke 17:1)

Some people are unable to function properly in their calling because of the wounds and hurts that offenses have caused in their lives.

If we do not deal with our offenses, it will produce the sin of bitterness, anger, and resentment in us. It slowly destroys us and alienates us from God.

**Forgiveness is powerful because** it can set us totally free from the bondage of the offense. **There is no greater power in the universe than forgiveness as was demonstrated through Christ's forgiveness offered to us.**

**Christ's forgiveness becomes the standard by which we live our lives and how we forgive others.**

Look up passages.....

**Ephesians 4:32** Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

**Colossians 3:13** Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

**Mark 11:25** And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

God requires us to forgive but we all know forgiveness is not easy. Let's look at some reasons we struggle to forgive at times.

### **1. We struggle to forgive because it doesn't feel like justice.**

In the natural we want revenge. We want to even the score at least a little bit. We want the person to pay for the pain they caused us. We want a feeling of justice being served.

When I forgive, I pay the price. I am the one suffering from their actions and they go free. **In one sense forgiveness is an injustice.**

That's exactly what Jesus experienced for us. He paid the price. He took the punishment and pain of our sin and let us go free. **That was an injustice against him. He did no wrong. We were the offender and he forgave what we did against him.** That is how we are to forgive.

Something someone said has helped me with this sense of injustice. **When I forgive someone, I take them off of my hook and put them on God's hook.** Instead of me being their judge I forgive and turn them over to the supreme judge. They are not off his hook.

Unless they get right with God, God will mete out justice on their lives for what they did.

**Romans 12:19** Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

God is a God of justice. **That is what the cross was all about.** Justice was meted out for my sin and your sin on the cross so we could be forgiven. Justice was served upon Jesus so we could go free.

**If a person does not repent** then justice will be meted out on them in due time. But if you take revenge or hold them in unforgiveness in your heart there is no room for God's justice.

**The Bible also teaches the principle of restitution.** There is a place for a person to make restitution for crimes they have committed. Forgiveness does not negate the need for restitution.

**God has also set up the laws of the land for the punishment of evil doers.** This is all part of his justice. God will see that justice is done.

*Not long ago a young man broke into our church and stole from us. We have forgiven him and hope someday he becomes part of our Petra family. But the justice system says he must serve time in jail for breaking the law. We are keeping in communication with him.*

**On an interpersonal level, God asks us to forgive those who sin against us so our heart does not become defiled with bitterness and resentment.**

- Forgiveness is as much for us as the offender.

**Lewis Smedes -To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.**

**And sometimes the hardest person to forgive is ourselves** – for the stupid things we did and the pain our actions caused others. But if Jesus has forgiven us we also need to forgive ourselves. It has been paid for. Stop punishing yourself.

## **2. We struggle to forgive because we still feel the pain.**

It is important that we **don't force people into forgiveness.** God wants it to come from our heart. Sometimes the shock and trauma needs to be processed so the heart can forgive.

The problem is the pain will not go away until we forgive. **You don't heal in order to forgive. You forgive in order to heal.**

Forgiveness is God's way of stopping the cycle of abuse. Neil Anderson writes: **"Some say, 'But they hurt me!' and I respond: "They're still hurting you! Forgiveness is how you stop the pain!"**

Forgiveness allows God to touch your emotional core and begin the healing process.

**Forgiveness does not mean we tolerate ongoing abuse or sin against us.** We need to stop or remove a person from abusive situations.

**It's helpful to understand that forgiveness is both a decision and a process.** I need to choose to forgive. I need to say it and declare it. Sometimes over and over again as I work through the memories and pain.

- Forgiveness begins with our will. Not with our feelings.

**Sometimes forgiveness has layers to it.** You forgive on one level and then another memory or feeling surfaces and you forgive again on a deeper level.

*I have someone in my life who has wounded me very deeply. I have forgiven him but find I need to keep forgiving. When I see him sometimes old feelings and memories resurface. But I have found much freedom. I am not bound by bitterness and resentment. I can now pray for God to bless him.*

**Another step in our forgiveness and healing is to ask God to bless the person.** Praying for and blessing those who sin against you is Jesus way of helping us find healing.

**Luke 6:28** bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

**Lewis B. Smedes - "You will know that forgiveness has begun when you recall those who hurt you and feel the power to wish them well."**

### **3. We struggle to forgive when the other person doesn't take responsibility for their actions.**

It is much easier to forgive when the other person confesses their sin against us but that doesn't happen very often. Sometimes our own perceptions are skewed and we think they did something on purpose and that wasn't their intention at all.

Jesus does say there is a place for confrontation in forgiveness. **Luke 17:3-4**

**So watch yourselves. “If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them.”**

Jesus is saying you can confront someone who is mistreating you. If they refuse to repent and keep mistreating you, you don't have to be a doormat for their abuse.

**There are two purposes to forgiveness in the scriptures.**

- **Forgiveness is to set our hearts free even if the other person is unrepentant and doesn't ask for forgiveness.**
- **Forgiveness is also to set the other person free from their guilt if they come and ask for forgiveness.**

Jesus also says that if we know we have hurt and offended others **we need to take responsibility and go and ask them to forgive us.** We need to make restitution as needed.

**4. We struggle to forgive because we can't trust the other person.**

The misconception is that if we forgive we need to let the other person back into our life even if they haven't proven they have truly changed.

We should be open to seeing the relationship restored but **forgiveness and reconciliation with the person are two totally different things.**

If you have repeatedly stolen from me or lied to me I can forgive you from my heart but that doesn't mean I need to immediately trust you and give you my car keys.

**Joseph forgave his brothers but he didn't immediately trust them.** He tested them for a while before he fully restored his relationship with them. (Gen 42-45)

**Forgiveness is given but trust is earned.** Sadly, some relationships will never be the same.

**- Clarissa Pinkola Estes, post trauma specialist - How does one know if she has forgiven? You tend to feel sorrow over the circumstance instead of rage, you tend to feel sorry for the person rather than angry with him. You tend to have nothing left to say about it all.**

## **Conclusion:**

I would like to close with a story of forgiveness from Corrie Ten Boom who suffered in a Nazi consecration camp at the hands of the S.S. prison guards. Her sister Betsie died in the camp from their abuse. After her release she would travel to different churches to share her story. She writes:

“It was a church service in Munich that I saw him, the former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbruck. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there -- the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsie's pain-blanching face.

He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. "How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein," he said. "To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!"

His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to the people in Bloemendaal the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side.

Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him.

I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness.

As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.

And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself.”

**Lead congregation in a closing forgiveness prayer:**

### **Forgiveness Prayer:**

Lord, give me your strength and your love to forgive. Because you have forgiven me of my offense against you I now forgive this person who has offended and hurt me.

*(Say their name and what they did)*

Lord, I give up my desire for revenge and my desire to hear them confess. Instead, I release them into your hands.

I ask you to heal my pain, my memories and my heart. I choose to keep forgiving each time the pain surfaces. I choose to stop talking negatively about the person and instead I ask you to bless them. Meet the needs in their life and bring them to wholeness.



## Discussion Questions:

March 30<sup>th</sup> 2017

## *The Power of Forgiveness*

Message by Pastor Lester Zimmerman

### WORSHIP:

- Take some time to begin your group with worship. The goal of worship is always to glorify God and seek His presence. One creative way to worship would be to select a couple of Psalms that declare God's praises and have different people read them out loud.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Most Christians would agree that Jesus teaches us to forgive. Yet so many Christians continue to hold onto unforgiveness. Why do you think there is such a disconnect between what we believe and what we practice in this area?
  2. On Sunday Lester talked about forgiveness. He had some truly wise and valuable statements. Go around the room and have different people read the following quotes:
    - We struggle to forgive because it doesn't feel like justice.
    - There is no greater power in the universe than forgiveness as was demonstrated through Christ's forgiveness offered to us.
    - The Bible also teaches the principle of restitution. There is a place for a person to make restitution for crimes they have committed.
    - The problem is the pain will not go away until we forgive. You don't heal in order to forgive. You forgive in order to heal.
    - Forgiveness does not mean we tolerate ongoing abuse or sin against us.
    - We often struggle to forgive when the other person doesn't take responsibility for their actions.
    - You can rebuke someone who is mistreating you. If they refuse to repent and keep mistreating you, you don't have to be a doormat for their abuse.
    - If you have repeatedly stolen from me or lied to me I can forgive you from my heart but that doesn't mean I need to immediately trust you and give you the keys to my car.
- Which of these statements resonate with you right now? Why?
  - Which one are you trying to grow in or do you need more time to unpack?
  - In which of these areas have you seen people stumble over forgiveness? How has that offense impacted their relationships with other people and with God?



### 3. Read Genesis 45:1-15

- Notice that the relational wound between Joseph and his brothers was expressed through emotions. Where in the scripture do we see the clues of those emotions being expressed, or unexpressed?
- Notice in verse 5 that Joseph identified anger among the brothers; anger at themselves for what they did to Joseph. What role does self-forgiveness sometimes play in the healing process?
- Can you find any indication of Joseph's mentality or a tool that he used to help him forgive his brothers? How can you implement that into your life?
- Notice, Joseph didn't just forgive his brothers, but he was setting them up for blessing. As you think back on the people you have had to forgive in your life, how hard was it to move from forgiveness to blessing?
- Notice that the brothers were aware that they had wronged Joseph because they were afraid to face him. Jesus teaches that if we know we have hurt and offended others we need to take responsibility and go and ask them to forgive us. We need to make restitution as needed. Why do you think that is so hard to do?

### 4. Read Matthew 18:15-22

- Notice that the issue of forgiveness among God's people is also attached to the issue of sin among God's people. When someone wrongs another person, what are Jesus' instructions for handling it?
- How proactive should we be with one another in calling out our weaknesses and areas of sin?
- What should be our heart motivation when we call others out? Is there a tactful way to call others out?
- What should be our heart motivation when we receive a rebuke from someone? What often is our first response when people confront us? Why?

## PERSONAL REFLECTION:

Take 5-10 minutes for personal reflection.

- Is there someone you need to forgive?
- Why is that so hard? Am I ready to choose forgiveness before I feel like forgiving?
- Am I open to asking someone (in this group even) to help me walk through that process?
- Is there someone I need to repent to and ask for their forgiveness?
- What is stopping me from doing that?

- Am I open to asking someone to help me walk through the process of repentance and restitution?