

Unoffendable 3 – Forgiveness
CCC – October 8, 2023

Unoffendable Intro – Next Week Brant Hansen and then ACTS – Reach One More

What if, a group of thousands of Jesus followers just decided to be unoffendable? Seriously, what would it look like? Not apathy, but responding to hostility with kindness. Giving grace to people who don't deserve it. Loving people who are lovable and people who are not so lovable. Being gentle in a harsh and condemning world. What if that was us?

I have been thinking about this for months and trying to practice for weeks. I am more offendable than I thought. Because bumps and bruises and downright offenses happen all the time in life. Together, though, we are striving to become unoffendable.

Unoffendable Triangle:

In order for us to get to unoffendable, there are a couple of key things we need to master. Last week we talked about being slow to anger and not sinning in our anger. Lots of positive feedback so far about this... glad it has been helpful to so many. This week, we are going to focus on forgiveness. Because if you can be slow to anger and skilled at forgiveness, being unoffendable is a natural byproduct. So if you are watching our overall series, Alex started with the Unoffendable intro, a message on anger, one on forgiveness, then Brant Hansen, the author will be back to finish this off. Be sure to be here and bring a friend!

So, on the topic of forgiveness, I am going to start with some of the unreasonable commands in the Bible around forgiveness and spend the rest of the message unpacking the how-tos and impossible situations.

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

So, here is why this one is hard. The LORD forgive unconditionally. He forgave a lot. He replaces condemnation and hurt with his love and grace. He did it at great expense to himself. And he says "you all... do the same thing." Jesus' massive sacrifice on the cross for us as a grand act of forgiveness that dwarfs our ideas.

Matthew 6

¹⁴ For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

There is a symbiotic relationship between being forgiven and being a forgiver. If you authentically trust in Jesus, become like Jesus and are filled with the Spirit of Jesus, you will be a forgiver. This verse is not meant to be a formula for salvation verse, but it does reveal the importance of forgiveness and it's integration into your salvation process. Lets just say it is a very big deal. And this is why I love to teach about it every year or so. Because life still hurts and forgiveness is still real.

God forgave you, in part, to make you a forgiver. Why? Three key reasons – for you, for others and FORMATION... see what I did there?

For you – effects of bitterness will rot your soul. You need to forgive for your own flourishing.

For others – the opportunity to be forgiven is powerful. Reconciled relationships are meaningful. When you forgive someone, you are a living picture of the gospel to them. They need it.

Formation – you become more like Jesus when you learn to forgive. The bigger the forgiveness, the more you are like Jesus. And the more beautiful the inner-you becomes.

Hurts happen in life. That is just part of the equation of being in a sin stained world. And they happen in different volumes. There are minor annoyances, like the person who jumped ahead of you at the grocery store with their cart of 150 items when I was standing with three. Or the refs that make EVERY call for the opposite team, leading to yet another loss. And it hasn't been that long, I have only been holding on since the 1984 Miami Nebraska game!

Then there is the big stuff. A betrayal of a friend. The infidelity of a spouse. The abuse of an uncle every time you come to visit. Words that sting so deep that you cannot forget them.

Before I go further, I want to stop. I am going to ask you to open your heart to the Spirit of God and ask him to bring an episode in your life to mind. It may be something you have forgiven or something you need to forgive. But consider a time where you were wounded, insulted, betrayed or otherwise hurt and ask the Holy Spirit to give you the right one for this day.

Silence

Got it? I want this course to be a little bit like a lab... not just a lecture... so track with your real world situation while we go through the rest of the message. Forgiveness is NOT first.

So, what is forgiveness? Forgiveness is not

- Forgiveness is not telling the other person "That's OK." It is not excusing or condoning behavior. When I had little kids – YOU say you're sorry, YOU say "that's OK", you stop

hitting your sister, you stop tattling and go out and play. Unoffendable. Imitate kids. Not good.

- Forgiveness is not giving permission for the other person to repeat offend.
- Forgiveness does not mean forgetting. In fact, have you heard the phrase forgive and forget? That's a stupid phrase. Some people think it comes from the Bible. It does not.
- Always quick or easy. Sometimes it takes repeat initiative.

And how do we sort through ways that are both Biblical and healthy to forgive when harm has been done? I have four "R"s that help to sort through the fog – and a frequency with which you should use them.

Revenge – Never

Revenge is a bad thing for humans to put into play. In cultures where vengeance is the norm, it was always the case that people would regularly over execute. You killed my dog? I am taking your cow. You took my cow? I am taking your daughter. I am killing your son. I am going to war with your tribe. I am pulling a bunch of tribes to beat up your tribe. See the problem? Humans always over-exact revenge.

Eye for Eye principle

The other problem is that people always have imperfect information. And we tend to give ourselves more credit than we deserve and assume the worst about our enemies. So, just to be honest, we are not that good at revenge.

Romans 11:19

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,"^[a] says the Lord.

God has perfect knowledge. He has perfect wisdom. He has perfect intent. He has perfect justice. If a wrong really was done, God knows how to make it right and exact justice in the mean time. WE can trust him.

This is super important – because everyone can observe that there is not always justice in this world. Sometimes, the innocent are sentenced to long prison sentences. Sometimes the slimiest thieves or most power hungry dictators are rewarded with luxurious lifestyles and tons of allies. We know that this world is filled with injustice – but we can trust in God for the eternal justice in his perfectly moral economy.

In fact, Jesus makes this even harder. Because his command is not just to let God exact revenge, he tells us that WE should “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” What? Love our enemies? Love them? Pray for them? Yup. Jesus says to pray for the people who oppose you. Why? It is the only way to break the revenge cycle in this world. If we consistently hate the people opposed to us, then the upward spiral of revenge and destruction will continue unabated.

Somebody has to step up and love in the midst of hate for the cycle to stop. And Jesus calls his followers to be those people.

Release – Always

There is one part of forgiveness that is 100% in your control. That is releasing your bitterness against the other person. I am going to repeat some things that I have said in the past because I think it is worth reviewing this every year or so.

When somebody wounds you – in a small way or a deep way – it hurts when the wound hits. If you become bitter about it, dwell on it, hang on to it, think about it... then it wounds you over and over again. By embracing bitterness, you are actually giving that person the power to hurt you 10X of the original pain. If you form your identity around their harsh words. If you let sexual abuse wreck your future sex life. If you allow a betrayal to keep you from loving freely, then the abuser wins over and over and over again.

BUT if you release the bitterness through forgiveness, you take the power and control back. You, in essence, say “I am not going to pay for this repeatedly.” I am going to be free. Weird misconception: holding on to a grudge never hurts the abuser. It only hurts you.

And the physiological effects of hanging on to grudges are devastating and similar to those for anger. Anxiety, depression, a suppressed immune system... and some research even is pointing to cancer.

Now, this idea of release is twofold. It is both the release of the bitterness and it is a release of hatred toward the person. When your view becomes transformed to ‘empathy, compassion or understanding’ toward the person who hurt you, then you know you are making real progress. This is where “Love your enemies” comes into play.

Two weeks ago, a man gave his testimony to our staff. Came from a family where his father was angry and abused him. I was struck when he described his Dad “My Dad was a Vietnam veteran with PTSD who was doing the best he could with the tools he had and young kids at home. His anger was explosive and we were always walking on eggshells.” This guy could have

hated his Dad and spun things to make him seem horrible. But I just noted that HE recognized that his dad had wartime PTSD, no counseling, and a lot of home stress. He didn't excuse the anger, but he had empathy for his Dad's life. That is next stage Release.

Reconcile – Usually

Interestingly, you can accomplish "Release with absolutely no interaction with the offender. Can you forgive someone you haven't seen in years? Yes. Can you forgive someone who is dead? Yes. Can you forgive someone who you don't ever want to see again? Yes.

And while 'release' is an always, Reconcile is a usually. Sometimes, it is not plausible or advisable to be in a relationship with the one who hurt you. They might be dead or disinterested. That would be difficult to reconcile. Or, they might be somebody who has been so cruel in the past that it is just unwise to see them again. Or, perhaps, you know if you call them that they will self justify and re open old wounds.

Your job is to make peace with people when it is up to you. Romans 12:18 ¹⁸ **if it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.** Most of the time, you can apologize for a wrong, have a short conversation and walk away friends. This is probably 90% or more. But I don't want to oversimplify because some wrongs are so egregious that reconciliation is not advisable.

If you can, you must do this before you enter into the worship experience. God says your horizontal relationships are SO important that he wants you to make them right before coming to a worship moment. Kind of like a Dad saying – hey go make it right with your brother before we go out and play frisbee.

Matthew 5:23-24 **"So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.**

Sometimes for reconciliation to happen, there needs to be an apology. A person needs to admit their wrong to be let back into the relationships. But can I be honest? I have seen a LOT of bad apologies. But a GOOD apology can be a world of difference.

The other day, I was in an auto accident. Totally my fault. I was at the driving range and the parking lot jostles at a certain point and I parked there. When I was leaving, I was a bit harried because a pen just exploded in my hand. Nonetheless, I looked where I was going, checked all my mirrors, put it in reverse and at about 5 mph, I hit the car next to me. The guy heard it from

the practice range, threw down his club, gave the universal sign for what where you thinking? And stormed over.

I was just wrong. And busted. His car was a short sports car and mine is a tall SUV, so I just couldn't see it out my windows, plus it was in my blind spot. So, as he stormed over, I just said "I am so sorry. It is totally my fault. You have a beautiful car and I just hit your door." It was amazing to watch his demeanor change. He looked at me with one eye "you got insurance." "Yes," I said. "I can call it in first thing in the morning." We exchanged names and information and by the end, I thought – I could really be friends with this guy. Well, if I didn't just smash his car.

With a solid apology, and the willingness to make amends, it is amazing how well you can repair relationships.

Reinstate – Sometimes

Our last bucket is reinstate. And this is one you can do sometimes, but sometimes it is just not wise. Here are some examples:

- If an accountant has a history of stealing money from the firm, it is not wise to reinstate them to their accounting role
- If a person has a long record of abusing children, then you do not need to allow them to do sleepovers in your home. Or have access to kids at all.
- If somebody has mismanaged a customer at work, it may be wise to assign that customer to a different staff member
- You are not required to reinstate people – even if you release them. In fact you can release without reconciling or reinstating or reconcile without reinstating.
- But much of the time, they will still be your coworker, your wife, your kid, your brother. And reinstating them in relationship with you can be a very rich way of living a long healthy existence.

Forgiveness is hard. But possible. Let me review a few 'good news' pieces about forgiveness.

- 1) God has the revenge part under control. So you can take the pressure off of yourself to have to do any kind of revenge. We don't have to make like Liam Neeson and Clint Eastwood and dare the bad guys to cross us again. WE can trust him to know what is best and .o it!
- 2) You have an incredible model – Jesus forgave you a ton more! His forgiveness of you gives you some perspective and the ability to forgive others. Jesus has been wounded worse than you. His kids are killing each other, raping each other, dropping bombs on

each other, betraying each other, hating each other. And Jesus said “I’ll take it all on me. All at once.” In fact, 2 Corinthians says that he who KNEW no sin BECAME sin for us so that in him, we might become the righteousness of God.” Do you see all of these principles at work? Loving enemies, forgiving, reconciling... all wrapped into the greatest moment in history on a cross by the side of a road just outside of Jerusalem, 2000 years ago.

- 3) When you forgive others, you know what it is like to be Jesus. If you don’t, you won’t know what that is like. As Christians, we say we want to be Christ-like. Forgiveness is Christ-likeness at its pinnacle. It is absorbing the pain that others inflicted on you not once, but twice. It is welling up in so much love that you do not demand repayment or restitution or revenge. But instead, you set the other person free from demands of justice and set yourself free from the bonds of bitterness. Friends, can’t you see that this is what a God of love does by nature? He loves beyond love and forgives all who will accept his forgiveness. And then, he gives you the power to forgive.

Prayer – for the power to forgive and the need for forgiveness.