

FORGIVENESS

Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. –Matthew 6:12

Do you want God to forgive you the way you forgive other people?

But if you forgive not men of their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. -Matthew 6:15

God sent His only Son to be scourged, to be beaten, to be tortured, to be executed for our forgiveness. And if that's what Jesus did for us...if that's what God did for us, and we are created in His image, why should He expect any less from us?

Matthew 5:44 says: "But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you."

The message is: everybody says you can forgive your friends, but I say, forgive your enemies! I want to suggest to you that maybe it might be easier to forgive your enemies than it is to forgive your friends.

How many of you have a BFF? And I'm not just talking about your regular, oh she's my best friend, we go get our nails done together. Yeah, he's my bro and we hang out. I'm talking about somebody that you love more than members of your own family? How many of you have somebody like that? Somebody that you would die for? If that person, that you love like that, betrays you or hurts you, can you forgive them? I'm going to suggest to you that it's easier for you to forgive your enemy than for you to forgive that person. Why? Because you have invested so much of your heart in that person. When your enemy hurts you, you don't care. I mean seriously, you expect your enemy to hurt you, right? You don't expect that person to hurt you.

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Understanding forgiveness was a struggle for me until one day, the message of David and Bathsheba sunk in. You see, I had a BFF like that who hurt me, seriously! And I was struggling with this issue of forgiveness, and I'm saying, God you told me to forgive, and I want too, but how? It hurts so bad. But look at what happened.

Look at what God says about David and Bathsheba. He says: "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord." David said in Psalm 51:4: "Against Thee and Thee only have I sinned and done evil in Thy sight." How can that be? When David was with Bathsheba, he hurt so many people. I mean think about that story. Look at what happened to David's family after his transgression with Bathsheba. He hurt so many people. And yet David said, "I have sinned against the Lord, and against Thee only God, have I done evil in Thy sight." You see, this is the key to understanding forgiveness. When someone hurts you, or betrays you, it is God that they've truly hurt and sinned against. See, that's why forgiveness should be easier for us. Once we understand that although yes, we are hurting, but it's God who has been offended. It is God against whom this person has sinned, not you. All you have to do is get over the physical pain. There's a spiritual thing going on here. The real offense is against God.

And here's the thing, **it's up to God to decide the consequences for these actions, not you!** It is up to God to determine the punishment for that person, not you. You see, our God is a jealous God. And there are certain things God claims to be His own.

Romans 12:19: *"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath, for it is written vengeance is mine, I will repay sayeth the Lord."*

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Much of our hang up with forgiveness is that we are hurting so bad, we want that person that hurt us to hurt too.

You love that person, but they hurt you, you want them to hurt too. It's only right, isn't it? It's only fair. They hurt you, they should hurt some too. Think about that when you get into an argument with somebody, and it degrades to that point of ridiculousness. You know you've been there. And you just start shouting at each other. Not thinking about what the real problem is anymore ...And I can't stand how you brush your teeth in the morning. Well, your feet stink. Right? You know what that is? That's "I want you to hurt the way I'm hurting now." It's **vengeance**. God says that's not your job, that's My job.

In understanding forgiveness, we have to understand, number one, that it's God that's been offended, and number two, only God can determine the consequences for the wrongs done to Him. We must know that the true assault is against God, and that He will take care of the punishment in His due time.

We need to understand on a personal level that **forgiveness is for the forgiver, not for the person who's hurt you. Forgiveness helps you! Not that other person.**

That's why this is so important to God. **You must forgive for your own spiritual protection.**

Because, you see, refusing to forgive, always leads to bitterness, and bitterness is the most toxic thing to your spirit.

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Bitterness

Bitterness is hidden, that's why they call it the root of bitterness. You know when you look at a tree, can you see the roots? Do you know that if a tree is free to grow in its natural environment, you know, it's not pruned or that sort of thing, what you see in the top, is the same as what you see at the bottom. The roots of a tree will be just as wide as the branches are on the top and just as deep as the height of the tree. The root of bitterness will get into your heart and run deep, so deep, and you don't even see it, and you don't even notice that your whole life is now being organized based on bitterness.

You have friends, you know people that are bitter, they don't even see it themselves do they? I mean, it affects their whole lives, they're so negative, they even have this physical appearance on their faces, it's because they can't see the root that's taken over their heart, and when the root of bitterness takes over your heart, it squeezes the Holy Spirit.

Forgiveness is essential for your spiritual well-being because bitterness destroys you.

Take these examples to heart, people who could righteously be in a situation to not forgive:

- Stephen, stoned to death, and before He dies, he kneels down and cries with a loud voice, Lord lay not this sin on their charge! The man is being executed by stoning. How many of you want to go there? And his chiefest concern is God forgive them! Forgive them!?!?!?
- Jesus, when He was about to be betrayed by Judas, He kissed Judas, and sent Him on His way. And as He hung on the cross, He said, Father forgive them, they know not what they do. We are created in this image, and when we take on the name of Christian, when we have God in our lives, and in our hearts, there is no room for bitterness, so there is only room for forgiveness. This is the image that we take. That's why it's so important. Forgiveness is so essential to your spiritual well-being that God talks about it over, and over, and over again in the Bible.

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Peter asks this question; “Then Peter came to Him and said Lord how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive Him? Till seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I say unto thee, not until seven times but until seventy times seven.” Anybody want to do that math? 490! I'm talking not about your enemy assailing you. I am talking about that best friend, that you love, that you would die for, 490 times every day. You must forgive.

How is it that Jesus could make such an “unreasonable” statement? Does that seem unreasonable? You want your best friend to stab you in the heart 490 times? And then you will look them in their eye and say, I forgive you. That seems unreasonable doesn't it? Can I say to you that God doesn't make any demands of us that He does not believe that we can do *through Him*? And He knew that when we refused to forgive, and the bitterness sets in, we are lost to His service.

You are of no use to God if you are eaten up by bitterness because there is no room for love in your heart, and if you can't love, then you can't work for Him. Your vessel is so full of something that shouldn't be there that you can't be full of the Holy Spirit to do things for God. I think that some of the confusion that we have about forgiveness is, number one, understanding that it's not for the person who's wronged you, it's for yourself.

He says, *“Looking diligently lest any man fall of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness spring up, trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.”* When that bitterness gets in your heart, you are defiled. How can you be of service to the Lord and be defiled at the same time? How many of you think that's possible? You see, God loves you! Jesus died for your forgiveness. And He wants you to be His child, not just simply for a free pass to heaven. Jesus did not hang on the cross so we could have hell insurance, but so we could experience the fullness of the joy of the Lord. And we can only do that with forgiveness.

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Reconciliation

Another problem that we have with forgiveness is the confusion of forgiveness and reconciliation. They are not the same thing. Matthew 18: “Moreover, if thy brother should trespass against thee and tell his faults between thee and him alone.”

When your BFF hurts you, go to them and say, you hurt me! That's not just for them, it is for you. And that's what God says you're supposed to do anyway. You're not supposed to go to your other friends, he hurt me, she hurt me, and I can't believe she did that. You go to *that* person. If he hears you, then you've gained a brother, but if not, now take one or two with you and say, hey, I tried to discuss this with you, I want you to know how serious this is. Because you see, I have forgiven you, but I want us to be reconciled as well.

You see, just because you have forgiven somebody, doesn't mean that the fellowship is returned. There's more to this. Reconciliation and forgiveness are not the same thing. The returning of the fellowship depends on what somebody else is going to do too. “The mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established, and if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church, and if he neglects to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.”

In this process of reconciliation, you are working to reestablish someone into fellowship, and if they refuse, that's on them now. We must realize sometimes we must part ways. Remember we are not supposed to be unequally yoked, and if someone cannot repent of what they did, you have to let them go. But you see, their repentance is not a condition upon your forgiveness. Your forgiveness comes whether they repent or not. The thing that is restored through repentance is fellowship. You can forgive someone and never be reconciled because reconciliation requires the offender to humble himself and repent of the offense, and he's not humbling himself to you, he's not humbling himself before God. Jesus died for the forgiveness of our sins. The whole world's sins, but only those who confess, repent, and accept that forgiveness, receive the reconciliation with God and eternal life.

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You see, that's why this message of forgiveness is important, and the follow up with fellowship is important because this is the example that God gives us. I have forgiven you. Now you must not just simply accept my forgiveness, but you must repent. Do you know what that means, repent? It means to turn around and walk away from. It's not just forgive me of my sins today so I can go sin again tomorrow. It's forgive me of my sins, and I will now turn away from that behavior. I will move unto righteousness. See, that's the example of reconciliation. How do you get reconciled with someone that's hurt you. You must first forgive. Then you must confront them in the wrong that they've done to you. Love them enough to give them the opportunity to repent, to confess and repent, what a great gift that is. Can you imagine?

Let me flip this around. Anybody here ever hurt somebody they loved, I mean deeply hurt somebody they loved? How long do you carry that guilt? How heavy is it when you look at that person, and you think, man I love them so much, how could I have ever done that? You see, if you love that friend enough to give them the opportunity to confess, to give them that opportunity to repent, you are helping them walk in righteousness and receive personal spiritual release. So much love is involved in all of this, and love overcomes all. We must remember that it's easier to forgive when you know that the real offense is to God. That confession that happens between you and your friend is a confession before God. And then you can be healed, everybody is healed in that kind of situation.

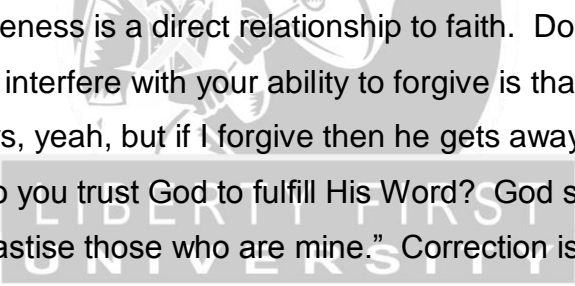
You see, I think sometimes we wander through life wondering what we are supposed to do, and we forget that God wrote the instruction manual for life. There is not any situation that you will ever go through that God has not given you the instruction on how to deal with it. The Bible says that God has given you no temptation, that He has not provided you a way out. There's your way out. In the Holy Word of God. Don't run to Facebook when you get hurt. Hello....Don't run to Instagram, don't run to Tweeting when you get hurt, run to the Holy Word of God because that's the only place you're going to find deliverance. He has provided you a way out, a way out of bitterness, and a way into restoring that fellowship.

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It is easier to forgive when you remember that the offense is against God. Now, notice that I said, it is easier, not easy. There's a difference. I'm not telling you that this is something that is simple, that it's easy, so just go ahead and do it. Forgiveness can be painful.

If you have a tree and it's growing and it's twelve feet tall, can you reach around the trunk and yank it up? No, it's going to take a lot of work, isn't it? A lot of effort, a lot of pain of the straining of the muscles. But it's a lot easier to do that if you prepare around it. You know, you dig around the roots of the trees, you loosen up that soil. You've got the right tools to cut through that root. It's not going to be easy, but it's easier. And that's why we need to be soaked in the Word of God. Because forgiveness is also a matter of faith.

Faith



Do you trust God?! Forgiveness is a direct relationship to faith. Do you trust God?! Because the thing that will interfere with your ability to forgive is that still, aching, hurting thing in your heart that says, yeah, but if I forgive then he gets away with everything and will never be punished. Do you trust God to fulfill His Word? God said, "Vengeance is mine." God said, "I will chastise those who are mine." Correction is the job of the Lord, not your job! Can you know the heart of your brother or sister? Only God knows their heart. You start wielding a sword, you're going to start cutting off ears instead of correcting hearts. God is the only one that is in the heart business, not you.

We must pray, "increase our faith God, so that we can trust and wait on you!" Because even though you've forgiven, maybe the reconciliation has not come, maybe the repentance has not come, that doesn't give you carte blanche to say, "well I forgave, but he didn't confess, and I forgave, but she didn't come back to me and ask for my forgiveness, so I can just be hateful." What is the sharpest sword you wield to hurt someone? Your tongue!! Just because you think you're super spiritual, you got into

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forgiveness and now they haven't gone back to you does not mean you can start wagging because then your forgiveness is not real.

I want to close with a little story. Because I had that BFF who hurt me, and I had this lesson already. God prepared my heart for that hurt. And the whole time I am hurting, I'm thinking, God, I know it's all about you. God, I realize that although I'm hurting, the offense is against you, but God help me because I can't get over this hurt. That hurt that's in your stomach, and God how do I do this, God please!! And God just said, pray!!! Just pray! He didn't say lash out, and hurt the person that hurt you. He didn't say, make them feel punished for their bad behavior. He said, just pray. Can I tell you, for three years, for three years, I prayed for that reconciliation with my friend. Three years, feeling like I had forgiven, yet reliving that pain over and over again, three years. It was everything that I could do to wait on God, to do what He had to do in the heart of my friend. Probably the hardest thing I have ever done in my entire life, and then one day, one day, my friend came to me, and confessed and repented!!! Now, here's the thing, I could have kept poking at that wound. I could have been getting my vengeance, and feeling better for just a few seconds. Because that's what vengeance does, it makes you feel better that moment that you're stabbing. But then afterwards the pain comes back because it's not the relief because that's not how God wants this to work. I could have been doing that, and I may have never seen that reconciliation.

But when my friend came back to me, I saw what God had done in her heart. I could physically see the changes that God had made because He did it, not me. And that helped me understand that that change was permanent, right? Because somebody can come to you and ask for forgiveness, but what they're really saying is, I'm sorry I got caught. And you let them back in, and then they keep hurting, and keep hurting because the change is not real because you didn't wait on the Lord. I got to see that. And I'll just confess to you, I am no spiritual giant because I started weeping, and I said, God! Thank you so much for this restoration! Thank you so much for this reconciliation. Thank you so much that I am able to see that it's you, and I can trust that this repentance is permanent because you have delivered us back into our fellowship.

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You have no idea what God is doing in the background. You have no idea what is going on in the heart of your friend and the things that God is having to do, and the demons that He is having to wrestle. Because God does not just want to restore your friend in your fellowship, He wants to restore your friend in fellowship with Him because it's all about Him. That's why you must wait on forgiveness. He knows the way that I tick. He knows that He is trying me, and if you just have the patience and the faith, you will come out shining gold!! See, that gold is the prosperity that we should be seeking. The wood, hay, and stubble that burns away here on earth, but that's the gold that we will cast before Jesus' feet. He will promise to never leave us nor forsake us, we just have to remember, He's in charge, and He has given us victory through forgiveness, because when you forgive someone, it is a matter of your heart, it is essential to your spiritual well-being, and you are the victor!!

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