

# Forgiveness

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, Fred Stone called me about 3 o'clock yesterday afternoon and said, Can you preach for me tomorrow? But before he said a word, he's something like this, Can you preach for me tomorrow?

And my response was, Fred, you sound awful. And running a fever, thought he had the flu, not feeling good, so we need to pray for him, and as has already been mentioned, we need to pray for Lisa.

Fred and I are alike in a lot of ways, and Lisa and Ann have compared notes, and we're not very good patients, I know, so pray for Lisa. Pray for Fred that he'll get better as well.

A few weeks ago, when he was going through Colossians, as he was going through Colossians 3, Fred preached about forgiveness. And so I want to speak about forgiveness today, not in any way to try to compete with what he's already said, because I agree with everything he said.

It was a good sermon. What I want to do is just take one facet of forgiveness and share it with you. So if you have your Bibles, if you'll turn to Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 32.

[ 1 : 1 3 ] One verse. While you're turning, Colossians chapter 3 and verses 12 and 13 says, So as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving each other.

Whoever has a complaint against anyone, just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Then in Ephesians 4 and verse 32. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Forgiveness is good for our souls. Forgiveness is healthy. Forgiveness is Christian. Forgiveness is right.

Forgiveness is a gift from God that transforms us or should to the point that we become like our Savior in that we forgive when we've been wronged.

Now that's hard to do. It's tough to do. I remember many years ago now when I was a pastor at Roebuck Baptist in Spartanburg, I preached a sermon about forgiveness.

[ 2 : 3 3 ] And I was younger then and knew more then, of course, than I know now. But I really preached it. And I preached it hard. And the next morning on Monday, I go into a barber shop that a woman had disguised as a beauty parlor.

But her ministry to me was, I'll cut your hair for free. Now, please, it was many years ago when I had some hair. So I go in there and I'm sitting in the chair.

She's cutting my hair. And the guy comes in and he was at church Sunday. He said, preacher, I heard that sermon about forgiveness. I said, yeah. He said, man, I don't know. He said, that's hard. I said, yeah. He said, that forgiveness, he said, I don't know. He said, there's some people that's done things so wrong and so bad to me. I don't think I can ever forgive them. And so I said, yeah, you can.

Not knowing any better, I said, sure you can. Looking back on it, I think it was the right thing to do because you can because Jesus Christ will never ask us to do anything that he will not empower us to do.

[ 3 : 3 6 ] So if forgiveness is God's will and it is, you and I should be people of forgiveness. We should be discerning. We should be intelligent. We should be wise.

But we should be people of forgiveness. And forgiveness is not about how we feel. It's about what we do. It's not feeling something as much as it is being committed to something.

So when we forgive somebody, we cancel the debt. We don't hold it against them. It's not something that we carry any longer in our hearts, the hurt.

Dr. David Benner, who was a clinical Christian psychologist, said this, the single most important concept in biblical Christianity, wow, the single most important concept in biblical Christianity is forgiveness.

It is a freeing, empowering, refreshing, healing, and joyful experience, which is capable of transforming all of life.

[ 4 : 49 ] To forgive is to show love. To forgive is to actually receive love. The Bible says we're to love one another, to love our mates, to love our enemies.

And it's not so much that we're going to have these effervescent feelings, but that we are going to be committed to do what is the right thing. On Monday, December the 1st, 1997, in Paducah, Kentucky, and the reason I go back that far and remember that is because when I was working on my second master's degree, then there was a guy in the class who was from Paducah, Kentucky, and I had never heard of the place before, but then sometime later, this happened, and I was remembering that, and I recall my friendship with him.

About a dozen students, you remember, gathered to pray before school had started. It was outside the administration building at Heath High School. Classes were getting ready to start, and the prayer meeting was about to end when shots rang out, and a 22-year-old freshman with an automatic .22 pistol came in, and he began firing into the prayer meeting.

He killed three. He seriously wounded five. One of the girls that was wounded, her name was Melissa Jenkins. She was 15 years old, and she had been shot.

She was taken to a nearby hospital, and they did surgery on her, but the results were that she would be a paraplegic for the rest of her life.

[ 6 : 24 ] So as the days went by, and she was able to talk, she said to people who had visited her, tell the shooter, I forgive him.

Now that rocked the media. They didn't know how to handle that because the secular media does not know how to handle spiritual stuff. They were shocked by that. They couldn't believe it.

Forgiveness is hard. Forgiveness is not natural. Forgiveness is supernatural because forgiveness is the work of God to us and through us and in the lives of other people.

Just a few years ago, you remember the Emanuel Nine at Mother Emanuel AME Church when Dylan Roof, a white supremacist, comes in to a small prayer meeting on a Wednesday night and pulls out a weapon and kills, murders nine people.

And once again, the media was absolutely stunned when that church rallied around and then you had families of the victims saying, we forgive him. That's not natural.

[ 7 : 39 ] The world doesn't expect that. The media doesn't expect that. Some Christians don't even expect that. But that's what God expects from us. To forgive.

But I would remind you that over 2,000 years before the Emanuel Nine or before Melissa Jenkins or before all these other terrible shootings, Jesus Christ dying on the cross, dehydrated in great pain, bearing the sin of the world.

And just before he died, do you remember what Jesus said? Father, forgive them. For they don't know what they're doing. And we have a tendency to separate who Jesus was and who we are and we shouldn't because the Bible says he is in us in the person of his spirit.

And if he is in us, then we should be growing more and more to be like him. And Jesus Christ was about forgiveness. Forgiveness is mentioned 260 times in the Bible.

A few years ago, I went out to Dallas, Texas. And I have had a license as a counselor for a number of years. But some of you know this.

[ 9 : 00 ] If you're in any kind of profession that you have to have a license or certification, then you have to go through continuing education. You have to get these CEUs. So they're having this Christian counseling conference and had these national speakers.

And then you know how those things go. You have a plenary speaker and then you have tracks. And you have all these different courses or tracks you can get on. And I noticed that Dr. Richard Walters, his track was forgiveness.

So I decided to take his lectures during the week and I bought his book, which was about forgiveness. And I'll never forget when he stood up the first day of his seminar, he said this.

He's in Boulder, Colorado. Christian psychologist. Private practice. He said, over 90% of all the people I see in my practice have an issue.

And the issue is forgiveness. They either need to receive it or they need to give it. No wonder then Benner would say it's the single most important concept in biblical Christianity.

[10:10] Forgiveness. Dr. Walter said, when we don't forgive, there's three things that happen. There's broken relationships. And a person has a tendency to become kind of paranoid, cynical, suspicious of almost everyone.

And then the second thing is broken fellowship with God. And he says, you cannot have joy. You can't be a witness. You cannot really walk with God if you don't receive forgiveness, if you don't give forgiveness.

And then the third thing is broken health. And he says, unforgiving people have a tendency to have more physical difficulties than others. Well, that was the introduction.

So I want to share two things with you this morning. And you know it's going to be short, right Brian? Because it's only two things. The first is the foundation. He says, forgiving each other just as God in Christ has also forgiven you.

The foundation. So why do we even need that verse in the Bible? He says, forgiving each other. And he's talking about Christians, people that are born again, forgiving each other.

[11:27] Then the reason it's there and the reason it's for Christians is because we need it, because we fail, because we sin, and because we hurt others, and we are hurt by others.

It's a real temptation to say, if you are perfect, would you stand up and testify about what life is like, like that?

But I won't do it because you never know in a service when some deranged person may come in thinking they're actually perfect. We're not. We sin.

We fail. We stumble. But we're to be forgiving. And we're to receive forgiveness. So the problem we have is the problem of sin.

And guess what? Sin doesn't go away. It's always been in the world. It always will be in the world. And the root of sin is pride. And pride is the reason we don't forgive.

[12:26] We don't think we need to forgive. We think we're too good to forgive. We're too hurt to forgive. We know too much to forgive. Pride gets even.

Pride destroys. Proverbs 16 and verse 18 says, Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before stumbling. And Hebrews 12 and verse 1 says, Laying aside every encumbrance and the sin. Note the article. The sin which so easily entangles us. A lot of Christians have been bothered by that. They think it's this sin or this sin, this thing I do or this thing I do.

But what the writer is talking about is the sin is unbelief. Theologically it's unbelief. You flip it over and the other side of the coin is psychologically. It's pride.

And they're one and the same. The sin that so easily entangles us from pride, from unbelief, comes this unwillingness to forgive.

[13:27] And if we're unwilling to forgive when we know we need to forgive, then what happens inside of us is a sort of bitterness and stillness spiritually begins to set up.

John MacArthur said, Refusing to forgive is a horrible sin. Now forgiveness and reconciliation are not the same thing. You can forgive somebody and you may never be able to be reconciled with that person, but you can never be reconciled with someone if you're not forgiving of that person. The problem is sin. But the power is Jesus Christ.

There's never been a shortage of power with Christ. I'm in the process of writing a book about angels and it's fascinating about angels.

And I had one to appear in my life although I've never seen an angel. But Christ is so much more powerful than angels and all the angels exist to serve and honor and glorify Jesus Christ.

[14:32] The power is in Christ. When His Spirit is in us, it's His power that works in us. Forgiven people know how to forgive.

Forgiven people should be forgiving people. Oh, but there's, you know, that bothering story in Matthew 18. 23 through 27.

The man had a debt of 10,000 talents. Huge debt. The largest talent was the largest denomination of money in the Roman Empire in circulation.

One talent was equal to 6,000 denarii and a denarius was a day's wage for an everyday laborer or a soldier. 6,000 denarii would equal about 17 years of wages and a debt of 10,000 talents would take 10,000 men about 17 years to pay off.

It would take at least 100 men a lifetime to pay it off. The debt was insurmountable. It was impossible to pay off. It was something like 12 to 14 million dollars. And that's the debt this man has accumulated.

[15:43] The Bible doesn't say how he accumulated it, but he accumulated it and he couldn't pay it. So he goes to the people he's indebted to and he asks for mercy and then they say, your debt's been forgiven.

It's canceled. You don't owe anything. And then he leaves that relieved, wouldn't you? He's rejoicing and he runs into his friend on the street who owes him \$20.

And he says, give me my money. I don't have, if you don't give me my money, I'm going to have you thrown in jail. And he had him thrown in jail. And then Jesus makes the point that this man did not know forgiveness because if he knew forgiveness of this insurmountable debt like we had with sin and was not willing to forgive a man \$20, he did not know the power or the principle or the reality of forgiveness.

Ephesians 1, 7 says, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace.

God never overlooks sin for God's sin is serious and sin ought to be serious for us. And God paid the price for sin. When the price for sin is paid, our condition, our condition has been changed.

[17:07] God looks at us not as sinners then but he looks at us as redeemed but we commit sins. And that's where we go to a verse like 1 John 1, 9.

If conditional. If we confess our sins. He's faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us of all unrighteousness. It is a condition based on the confessing and the confess.

Mike, I know you're a Greek scholar. The confess is a compound word in Greek. Homo, legio.

Homo meaning same. Legio meaning word. Speak the same word. Say the same thing. In other words, agree with God.

When we confess our sin to God, we are agreeing with God that what we've done is wrong. Instead of playing games, instead of hiding, instead of not owning up to it, we confess it with God.

Pain, hurt, that lingers in our heart will fester spiritually. and if we don't confess that, it will lead to this heart, this spirit, this practice of unforgiveness.

[18:14] The last thing, the second thing is the explanation. He says, forgiving each other. Now, what do we do when we forgive somebody? Well, somebody, say somebody comes to us and they say, you know what, I did this, will you forgive me?

We say, yeah, I forgive you. Now, one thing with the problem with that is that most of us in this country, Christians, when somebody says, will you forgive me and we don't want to talk about it, we don't have to deal with the hurt, we say, oh yeah, yeah, I forgive you because we don't think about it.

We haven't forgiven them, we just say, I don't want to talk about it. Forgiveness is a process.

Forgiveness takes time. It doesn't just, to forgive someone, you have to feel what has happened and you have to release any claim on that.

You have to be willing to cancel the debt even though somebody has done you wrong. Remember the model prayer in Matthew 6 and verse 12.

Jesus said, forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors or our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Our condition has changed but our practice as sinners continues.

[19:29] when we forgive we release and we don't take it back. Now you can forgive someone and never be able to walk in fellowship with that person again depending on the person's life not yours.

Let me give you an example. I'm like Fred, I'm a dog man, I don't particularly like cats. So, if I'm walking down the street and there's this fenced in front yard and I go by the sidewalk and there's a little dog on the inside and he's jumping up and down, he's wagging his tail which is a sign to say I love you, I love you, I love you.

And I open the gate and I go and I say, hey little buddy, how you doing? He goes, he writes my finger off. And I'm bleeding profusely and so I wrap it up and I run down to the doctor and he stitches it up and he says, look, we can't save your finger, you're gonna be without a finger.

And I recover and get back on my daily walk and I go by that same house and that same dog and the dog's barking and wagging his tail again and I said, I'm not messing with you. Now I've forgiven the dog, I didn't kill the dog.

I've forgiven the dog but I'm not gonna get in there with the dog, have fellowship with it because the nature of the dog has not changed. There's some people you'll meet in life because of the way, the trajectory they're on, where they live, what their life is like, they may do something to hurt you and you may forgive them but you may not be able to be reconciled with them or to have fellowship with them.

[ 21 : 04 ] But when you forgive, a commitment is made and that commitment is maintained. How can we tell if we need to forgive somebody?

Have you ever wondered that? Dr. Walters in his book and I've used this for years in counseling with people would give them a list of things and this was on the list.

But he said, there's six things that you can ask and he used this as a checklist in his practice in counseling with people. Six things to see if you need to forgive someone.

Let me give them to you real quickly. Number one is, do I often think about the hurt? Do I often think about the hurt and have strong feelings of anger?

Now there's a difference in being hurt and being unforgiving. If you're hurt, you can be forgiving. You can be hurt and be unforgiving but there's a difference in the two.

[ 22 : 00 ] Second, do I imagine or desire injury or hurt coming to the person who hurt me? Revenge is the opposite of forgiveness. Many years ago when I was pastor at Roebuck Baptist in Spartanburg doing counseling, there was a couple that joined our church.

It was a blended family. They both had lost their mates and so they come together as this blended family and blended, they had eight children. So it was a struggle from the very beginning and they just kind of got married before anybody knew it.

Bam! And there they were. And so they came to me for counseling. I counseled with them for a few weeks and then one day she comes in alone and she is absolutely hysterical.

What happened? He's gone. What do you mean he's gone? While I was at work, he had a U-Haul come, loaded up all his furniture, took his kids and they've gone to Florida.

I said, oh my. And she was, I mean, she was hot. She was livid. And so we began to talk and I'm thinking, well, how can we work through this now? I didn't want to say, well, how do you feel about him?

[ 23 : 12 ] Because I had an idea how she felt about him. As we began to talk, forgiveness was a little early in the conversation.

I was just trying to get her to a place that she didn't want to kill him. And I said, well, after a couple of times, I said, well, how are you feeling about things now?

She said, well, you know what? I don't want him to die. And I thought, well, that's a success. She said, I just want him to have an accident or get a disease and just linger for a long time in pain.

That's not forgiveness. That's not forgiveness. Do I imagine hurt or injury coming to this person?

The third thing, do I go out of my way to avoid the person? They have hurt me. Do I go out of my way to avoid them? The fourth thing is, do I have physical symptoms like irritability when we think of that person or that wrong?

[ 24 : 19 ] Does it change the way I behave? Number five, do I directly or indirectly attack the other person? Am I very aggressive or am I passive aggressive?

And then number six, am I critical of myself, self-demanding and self-condemning? In other words, if I am angry and I'm not going to express it to this person because I'm going to avoid them and I'm not confessing it to God, then that means I'm suppressing it and if I'm suppressing that anger that comes from that hurt, that means I'm probably depressed and my countenance, my inside, my soul changes.

Anybody, you need to forgive. The best time to forgive somebody is when you can. I want to close with this story that happened in my life.

I grew up in the little town of Iva, South Carolina. Has anybody ever heard of it? Okay. I don't know if you'd want to go there today but there was a lady that grew that was in my church and she was kind of the, she was Miss Missions to everybody in the whole area, every church.

Her name was Reva Wansley. She was a school teacher. She had been a widow for as long as I knew her as a little boy growing up. She had two jobs. She'd be a substitute teacher and then she would also work for the Anderson Independent and she covered Northeast Georgia and she had a column in there called Roving with Reva and she'd tell about all these little things that were happening and dinners and all this stuff and coming and going and vacation and get togethers and

stuff in Northeast Georgia but she was a member of the church I grew up in and she smelled good. [ 26 : 28 ] I mean she smelled real good. I mean she smelled strong and you knew Miss Reva was coming before she got there and she wore makeup and she had beautiful, beautiful gray hair but she put her makeup on and she always had these red circles that she put on her cheeks and she was something else but boy was she mighty, mighty in prayer and missions.

She loved missions so much she wanted to help missionaries so much that instead of spending money and getting new shoes she would cut out of cardboard the size of her shoe and put it in her shoe so she could wear it longer so she could give more to missions.

You talk about Lottie Moon Christmas offering this is a woman that inspired many, many people to give. Well I came along and after she had retired from just about everything I was working at the Anderson Independent for a couple of years I went to University of South Carolina I continued to be a writer for them in the sports department and then I announced that I was God had called me into ministry and I was shifting gears and I was going to study for the ministry then.

Well I got a letter from her it means a lot to me so I'm going to share it with you I hope it means something to you she said my dear Rudy congratulations I'm so proud of you I'm expecting great things of you and I'm sure I won't be disappointed you're doing well as a sports writer I read and enjoy all you write and she gave me a list of several verses and then said these along with others have meant so much to me in my life and work they are so very comforting when the going gets tough don't let anything discourage you in life discouragements will come but don't let them get you down I'm so proud of the interest you are taking in the Lord's work keep it up may God bless you and use you in a marvelous way now and always I love you dearly and she signed it Mrs. Wansley in 1978 there was a fire in her house she was 81 at the time she had a retarded son who was 57 and somehow he had turned a kerosene heater over it had spilled out and the house had caught fire and she was unable to move and it burned 60% of her body badly she was in intensive care and they didn't hold out much hope during that time she had a daughter who was estranged from her mother she wouldn't speak to her mother she wouldn't visit her mother she would not even go see her mother on her death bed when she was in all that pain in the hospital just before she died she said this tell her her daughter tell her

I'm going to die soon I know it but tell her I have forgiven her now what I want to say to you is that's the way forgiveness works when you got it in your heart you want to let that person know whatever way possible I forgive you and it is liberating it is powerful it is compelling it may be the single most important concept in the Christian life Jesus forgave his message to us is as I have forgiven you go and forgive has anybody hurt you anybody done you wrong anybody just done something that's not right big or small and you're holding that in your heart you won't let go of it the most freeing releasing powerful thing that you can do if that's the case is to forgive that person now sometimes this happens you hold there for so long that person dies and you're still holding that hurt in your heart what can you do then you still can forgive you still can release you can't make the circuit complete but you can let go of the hurt you can see the person differently you can cancel the debt anybody you need to forgive if there is would you think about praying about it and maybe even this week as God gives you direction to do it would you just do it you say do I need to talk to that person maybe maybe not most cases yes because you want to make that circuit complete but if they won't hear you they shut the door in your face they hang up on your phone call send them a note send them an email send them a text and let them know that you forgive them not in a condescending way not in a judgmental way but in a genuinely caring way like

[ 31 : 52 ] Jesus does anybody that you need to forgive let's pray together father we thank you for the power and the forgiveness that you empower through us we thank you for the forgiveness that you give us that is so magnificent so deep so eternal we'll never get over it help us if we hold on to hurts to get over ourselves so that we can experience a life that reflects obedience to you and finds freedom and not bondage from following you there's anyone here that really needs to forgive someone I pray that you would give them the grace and the strength and the courage to do it in Jesus name amen