

FORGIVENESS

Fireproof Your Marriage: Sermon Five
Matthew 18:21-35

Adam was walking outside of the Garden of Eden with Cane and Abel when the boys were young. Cane and Abel looked into the garden and viewed waterfalls, lovely birds, lush forests and fruit trees loaded with fruit. Then they looked at where they were living. It was dry, dusty, full of weeds and sickly-looking trees. "Daddy? Why don't we live in there instead of out here?" Adam said, "Well sons. Eve and I use to live in there, but your mother ate us out of house and home."

As we enter into week 5 of *Fireproofing our Marriages*, I want to talk to you about one of the most critical skills in marriage. It is the skill of forgiveness. Great marriages are built on a foundation of unconditional love and forgiveness.

The truth about forgiven is... it isn't easy. We never have to forgive someone for something that doesn't matter. The only time we have to forgive someone is when we're upset and hurting because of what someone else has done to us.

We've been following Caleb and Catherine Holt through the challenges in their marriage. Caleb has received Christ as his Savior. With the help and encouragement of his father and his friend Michael, Caleb has committed himself to learning to love Catherine unconditionally. On this particular day, Catherine has stayed home from work because she is not feeling well. In this clip we are going to see one of the best apologies you will ever see as Caleb asks Catherine for her forgiveness.

 [\(Play Session 5 from *Fireproof Your Marriage DVD*\)](#)

Now, having been asked, Catherine is faced with a decision: will she forgive Caleb or not?

As we think about forgiveness this morning I'm going to ask you to do something: I ask you to suspend judgment until we work all the way through the sermon this morning. I say this because I know forgiveness is a very involved subject. And from preaching on forgiveness in the past I know that many of us start thinking about our own experiences or the experiences of others and we start thinking "What about this situation or does forgiveness mean that she has to stay in that abusive relationship?" So I know that forgiveness is a very involved subject. There are some truths in the first half of the sermon that need to be clarified in the second half of the sermon. So, please hear me out all the way to the end as we work through the issue of forgiveness.

Please turn with me to Matthew 18:21-35. The Apostle Peter asks Jesus about forgiveness and Jesus responds with a parable; the parable of the unforgiving servant.

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.

As I thought about Peter's question, it occurred to me that Peter was in the process of a major paradigm shift in his thinking. The reason I say this is because at this time in history the Jewish rabbis were teaching that one could forgive a brother up to three

times, but after the fourth offense there was no forgiveness. That's what Peter had been taught all his life by his spiritual teachers: forgive up to three times, but no more. Now obviously Peter was rethinking his belief about forgiveness and it appears that Jesus had had some kind of influence on Peter because Peter is going beyond rabbinic teaching by suggesting that the standard is forgiving up to seven times.

I wonder what you believe about forgiveness. I wonder who taught you about forgiveness and what they taught you.

Some people are taught never to forgive because forgiveness is weakness. Other people never forgive because they believe that forgiveness means you have to just keep taking the abuse from the other person. Others don't feel like they can forgive because they've been taught that to forgive means you forget what was done to you and they can't forget so they conclude they can't forgive.

Whatever you've been taught; whatever you believe, are you willing to let Jesus re-teach you about forgiveness? Are you willing, like Peter, to undergo a major paradigm shift in your thinking about forgiveness?

Peter suggested forgiving one's brother up to seven times was the standard of forgiveness. How did Jesus respond?

YOU DON'T KEEP COUNT – YOU JUST KEEP FORGIVING.

Jesus is calling us to forgive our brother, our spouse, every time they sin against us.

Now this might be quite a shock to you and go against everything you've been taught about relationships, but this is what Jesus is saying. And this is what it means to live by faith in Jesus Christ – to take Him at His word and do it His way - trusting Him that this is the way of the abundant life which He came to give us. There are many things related to forgiveness that we will need to think through, but the core of Jesus' teaching is that we are to forgive and to continue to forgive without keeping count.

The parable gives the reason we are to forgive without counting.

“Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.

In order to fully appreciate what Jesus is saying we need to understand that a talent in the New Testament is a measure of money. One talent of gold was the equivalent of fifteen year's wages for an average worker. What that means is that the king's servant owed the king 10,000 talents, that is, he owed the king 150,000 years worth of wages. The point Jesus is making is that the servant owed the king an amount he could never repay and on the flip side, the king willingly forgave the servant an inconceivably large debt.

I want to take a moment and reflect on what Jesus is saying here about Peter and about all of us. Every human being is that servant. Every human being, you, me, everyone who has ever lived is that servant. Our sin debt against God is on the scale of that

servant's debt to the king. It is inconceivably huge. The Apostle Paul cuts to the core of our offense:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men... ..because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Romans 1:18, 25

Most of us really don't get it. We really don't understand how egregious our sin against God really is. This is the point Jesus is driving home about the servant.

Cathy and I had an interesting conversation with a man we met at the Ramona Fair. As we shared the gospel with him, he made this statement, "I'm basically a good person and if God doesn't accept me the way I am He can kiss my butt!"

Christians can lose sight after awhile of the magnitude of our offense against God of which we have been forgiven in Christ. We must never forget that we are that servant.

The reason I am driving home this point is that Jesus' entire teaching on forgiveness hangs on this point. If we don't accept the fact that we are that servant we won't accept what Jesus is telling us about forgiveness.

The parable continues as Jesus moves to His second major point about forgiveness:

But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.

A denarius was a single day's wage for a soldier or laborer. So the debt owed to the forgiven servant was about 100 days worth of pay. The forgiven servant, who had been forgiven 150,000 years of wages refused to forgive his fellow servant 100 days of wages.

I think we all get where Jesus is going with this. But drill down with me a little further. Jesus is saying that compared to our offense against God, every kind of offense committed against us is small. Did you hear what I just said? Compared to our offense against God which He has forgiven us in Christ, every kind of offense committed against us is small – even the worst kind of offense we can think of – murder, rape, slavery.

Please don't misunderstand me: Jesus is not saying that these things are trivial or any less horrible and evil than what they are. But in comparison to our offense against God it is 100 days of wages versus 150,000 years of wages. That which we are called upon to forgive others pales in comparison to what God has forgiven us in Christ Jesus.

I admit that I am trying to wrap my mind and heart around this just like you are. And I readily confess that some of you have been sinned against in far more serious and hurtful ways than I have. But even that being the case, the principle Jesus is teaching here about forgiveness applies to all us and every kind of offense that may be committed against us.

The action of the unforgiving servant is shown to be clearly wicked because of the debt he had been forgiven by the king. It all comes together in the conclusion of the parable:

When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master

summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

Matthew 18:21-35

Here is the main idea of this parable:

GOD IS GREATLY DISPLEASED IF, HAVING BEEN FORGIVEN BY HIM, WE REFUSE TO FORGIVE OTHERS.

So in our marriages what are we to do when our spouse isn't very kind or thoughtful? Forgive them. What are we to do when our spouse continues in the parasites that are controlling their life? Forgive them. What are we to do if our spouse commits adultery? Forgive them.

Now you might be having a really hard time with this. And some of the push back might be because we're not clear on what forgiveness really is. So let's tackle some of these things.

First,

FORGIVING IS RELEASING TO GOD OUR DESIRE TO MAKE THE OTHER PERSON "PAY" FOR WHAT THEY HAVE DONE.

The New Testament was originally written in Greek. Aphiemi is the Greek word frequently used in the New Testament for forgiveness. The main idea of aphiemi is to *release*. So when we forgive, we are releasing any intent on our part to punish the person who has hurt us.

Our ability to do this is greatly aided by God's promise to us in Romans 12:19

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

Romans 12:19

We can release our desire to exact payment from the person who has hurt us knowing that God has promised to deal with it. Ultimately, justice will prevail.

Second,

FORGIVING IS A DECISION OF YOUR WILL IN OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WORD.

If you wait until you feel like forgiving, you'll never get there. Being hurt is an emotional event, and emotions don't heal by themselves. They heal with the help of your will. First, make a decision to forgive. Later, your feelings will follow.

FORGIVING IS NOT FORGETTING.

When someone hurts you deeply, your brain records it. It's there, you can't forget it. Our tendency is to play and replay the memory of the event and to feel over and over all the emotions that event provoked. Forgiving is not forgetting in the sense that when we forget we do not have the expectation that we must erase the memory from our mind

like we wipe information off a cassette tape with a magnet. After we forgive we must commit ourselves to process the memory and feelings in a way that is consistent with forgiving. That means that when the memory comes up we choose not to allow it to remain in our mind: we do not let the DVD run, but we choose to think on something else or we pray to God to help us shut the DVD off and we pray for the person we have forgiven or we meditate on Scripture. Whatever we do, we do not let the DVD run unchallenged in our minds. We have forgiven and we are not going to replay the event. We are not victims of our memories and our feelings. I know this is a challenge, but in Christ we can take our thoughts captive.

Forgiving is not forgetting, but it is a commitment to take those thoughts captive and subject them to the fact that we have forgiven that other person and we will not dwell on what we have forgiven.

FORGIVING DOESN'T MEAN TRUSTING.

One pastor explains it this way:

“When someone comes to me and says, “My husband has a drug problem, but he wants to reconcile with me. He wants me to forgive him. Or a husband says, “My wife has an alcohol problem but she wants me to forgive her and get back together.”

To both of them, I say, “That’s good. “You should forgive him or her.”

Often they’ll say, “But he’s done this so many times, I can’t trust him.”

To which I’ll say, “That’s good too, you shouldn’t trust him.”

So the logical question is, “Well, how can I forgive without granting trust?”

To which I say, “You just do it.” When you forgive, you release to God your desire to make the other person pay for what they have done to you. But if your husband has had a history of drug abuse, or your wife is an alcoholic, you don’t leave him alone with a large sum of money and trust that he’ll do the right thing with it and you don’t expect that if she’s out late at night without a good reason that she’s playing racquetball with her friends.”

Here’s an important distinction:

- **Forgiveness must be granted, it can’t be earned.**
- **Trust can’t be granted. It must be earned.**

When someone establishes a pattern of untrustworthy behavior, you can’t trust them. It wouldn’t make sense. So, when a repeat offender wants to be forgiven, you grant forgiveness. And if they want to restore the relationship, then you set up a system by which they can prove that they really have changed.

If a formerly-alcoholic wife is going to be out later than she expected, her husband will assume that she’s out drinking—it’s only natural that he would think that. So the rule is, “I won’t be anywhere you don’t know for anymore than 15 minutes for the next 2-3 years, so I can earn back your trust. If I’m not where I said I would be when I said I would be there, I will call, with a verifiable reason for being late, because I want you to be able to trust me, and I know you can’t unless I prove myself trustworthy.”

Does this make sense? This is very important. Forgiveness must be granted. No one can earn it. While trust must be earned.

FORGIVING RELEASES US FROM BITTERNESS AND ITS BAGGAGE.

Satan wants to get a foothold in our lives. When we harbor anger and unforgiveness toward our spouse we give Satan territory to come in and exploit that weak spot. When we forgive we protect ourselves from Satan's attacks against our marriage.

When we refuse to forgive our spouse we suffer as much if not more, than they do. When we refuse to forgive someone, they own us. We can't sleep in the same bed with our spouse or if we do it's awkward because we're six inches apart, but we're not talking to each other. Our blood pressure goes up every time we think about our spouse and what they did to hurt us. The reason we don't want to forgive is because we want to hurt the other person, when the reality is, we hurt ourselves far more by our refusal to forgive.

SEEKING FORGIVENESS IS AS IMPORTANT A SKILL AS GRANTING FORGIVENESS.

This is something I have learned over the years: whereas the world tells us that admitting our wrong and asking forgiveness will cause us to look weak and lose the respect of others, in fact, it does just the opposite. Seeking forgiveness when we have been wrong is so healing and so crucial to maintaining trust. Learn to seek forgiveness is every bit as much as learning to grant forgiveness in your marriage.

CONCLUSION

As we watched this morning, Caleb humbled himself and asked Catherine for forgiveness. In his confession, Caleb confessed that for seven years he had trampled on Catherine with his words and actions and that he had loved other things when he should have loved her.

Seven years is a long time to be trampled and unloved. Yet here he is asking forgiveness.

What should Catherine do?

What would you do?

LOVE DARE CHALLENGE

Meditate on Matthew 18:21-35 and review your notes. Humble yourself and ask forgiveness for those things you have done that hurt your spouse. Forgive your spouse for those things they have done to hurt you. Forgive as God has forgiven you in Christ.