

Peacefakers, Peacebreakers, and Peacemakers

Pt. 6, Forgive as God Forgave You

*For those willing to share, what are some ways you have employed these peacemaking concepts into your day-to-day relationships?

Introduction

A High Standard

Christians are the most forgiven people in the world. Think about the gospel – God has forgiven the entirety of his people’s sins by laying them on Christ. Therefore, we should be the most forgiving people in the world.

However, we know that forgiving others genuinely and completely is very difficult. Too often, we say, “I forgive you; I just can’t be close to you again.”

*How would you feel if you confessed a sin to God and he replied, “I forgive you, but I can’t be close to you again...” ?

God gives us an incredibly high standard and example to imitate when we have the opportunity to forgive someone, but fortunately, he gives us the grace and guidance we need to imitate him.

You cannot do it alone

Forgiving someone in your own strength, especially when they’ve hurt you deeply, is impossible.

You can try not thinking about what they did, stuff your feelings, or put on a false smile when you see them. This lingering unforgiveness will poison your thoughts and words and can keep trust and relationship from being rebuilt.

There is only one way to overcome these barriers: to admit that you desperately need God to change your heart. Often, I have prayed: *“God, I can’t forgive in my own strength. In fact, I do not want to forgive, at least until he suffers for what he did to me. But your Word says that unforgiveness builds a wall between you and me. You gave your Son in order to forgive me. Please help me forgive and love others the way you forgave and love me.”*

Relying on God in this way is the key step in beginning to forgive. God is delighted to answer this call for help. As we receive and depend on his grace to us, we can breathe out the grace of forgiveness to others.

*For those who are willing, describe a situation where you asked God to help you forgive in his strength and not your own.

Group Discussion

1. What Forgiveness is Not

To understand what forgiveness is, we must first look at what it is not.

Forgiveness is not a feeling: It is an act of the will. Forgiveness involves deciding to call on God to change your heart. Then you decide not to think or talk about what someone has done to hurt you.

Forgiveness is making these decisions regardless of your feelings.

Forgiveness is not forgetting: Forgetting is a *passive* processes in which a matter fades from memory as time passes. Forgiving is an *active* process involving a conscious choice.

When God says he “remembers your sins no more” (Isa. 43:25), he doesn’t say that he *cannot* remember them, as if he has forgotten. He promises that he *will not* remember them. He chooses not to mention, recount, or think about your sin again.

Although this requires much effort for us, it’s helpful to recognize that when we resolve to stop dwelling on an offense, painful memories usually begin to fade.

Forgiveness is not excusing: Excusing says, “That’s okay” and implies “What you did wasn’t really wrong.” Forgiveness is the opposite of excusing. The fact that forgiveness is needed and granted indicates that was someone did was wrong.

Forgiveness says, “We both know that what you did was wrong and without excuse. But since God has forgiven me, I forgive you.”

Because forgiveness deals honestly with sin, it brings a freedom that no amount of excusing could provide.

***Which of these three is most surprising to you? Why?**

2. What Forgiveness is

Illustration: I heard a story about a woman once complaining to her pastor, saying, “Whenever my husband and I get into a fight, he gets historical.” The pastor replied, “You mean hysterical.” “No, historical. He keeps a mental record of everything I’ve done wrong. When he’s mad, I get a history lesson.”

***In what ways do you resonate with this?**

Although many people bring up others’ past wrongs, this pattern destroys relationships and deprives them of the peace and freedom of genuine forgiveness.

To understand what the bible means by “forgiveness” it’s necessary to see how the word is used in scripture. In the bible, there are six words that are used to describe the act of forgiveness.¹

a. Old Testament (Hebrew)

- i. **חָנַן** (hanan) – “to show mercy, favor, or be gracious toward someone”. It can have the nuance of “to forgive”
- ii. **כָּסָה** (kasa) – This word is predominantly used with the literal sense of “to cover.” In other contexts, it can mean “conceal, hide” and even “forgive”.
- iii. **נָסָה** (nasa) – “To lift, raise high, bear, carry.” When God is the subject of *nasa*, it can mean “to carry away sin” (i.e., to forgive)

b. New Testament (Greek)

- i. **ἀφίημι** (aphiemi, 143x) – Depending on its context, this word means “to forgive, leave, or abandon.” It’s primarily found in the gospels, but it’s used 45x elsewhere in the NT to forgive sins, debts, or trespasses.

¹ These word studies come from William Mounce, *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of New and Old Testament Words*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 266-267.

- ii. **χαρίζομαι** (charizomai, 23x) – Usually means “to give graciously” but can also mean “to forgive” based on the context.
- iii. **ἄφεσις** (aphesis) – The word is used a bunch in the LXX for “release” and “forgiveness”. In the NT, it’s almost exclusively used for “forgiveness” (only 2x is it “released from captivity”). To be forgiven is to be released from the debt, guilt, or condemnation, etc.

As the biblical witness and usage shows, forgiveness can be costly. Whenever someone sins, he or she creates a debt that must be paid. Most of this debt is owed to God, but relationally, we incur debts to each other, as well.

Usually, when someone sins against us and owes part of his debt to us, we *extract a payment* by withholding forgiveness, being cold and aloof, lashing back, gossiping, or seeking revenge. We often desire to punish that person in order to *extract the payment*.

The problem is that in the long run, *extracting payments* like these costs you and destroys relationships.

“Unforgiveness is the poison we drink, hoping others will die.” (Ken Sande)

- *When was a time you extracted a payment like this from a person who sinned against you?
- *What were the short-term consequences? What were the long-term consequences?

Rather than *extracting payments* on debts, we have the choice to *make payments* toward the debt that people owe us and thereby release others from the deserved penalties. Sometimes this is easy, other times it’s incredibly challenging.

Agree or Disagree: Most people don’t truly understand why they were offended in the first place.

I think, in general, people have a hard time processing their emotions and they either try to control the situation anxiously, or they withdraw quietly (or loudly) without examining their heart and their hurt.

Look at the Feelings Wheel:

Think about a recent situation where you were offended, angered, or sinned against.

Replay that situation in your mind.

*Did you anxiously respond and seek to control the situation, or did you withdraw quietly or loudly?

In order to truly forgive someone, it’s important to actually identify why and how their actions hurt you. If you don’t identify this, you will end up continuously trimming leaves, wondering why they keep growing back. You will never uproot the actual weed. ***How have you experienced this before?**

Once you’ve identified the hurt, then you can move toward forgiveness. It always begins with God’s forgiveness of you. You have sinned against, and you have incurred a debt to him that you will never repay. Rather than extracting the payment from you, he released you from it by sending his Son to pay the price... his wrath.

The Four Promises of Forgiveness (“Good thought, Hurt you not, Gossip never, Friends forever.”)

- 1) I will not dwell on this incident
- 2) I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you
- 3) I will not talk to others about this incident

4) I will not let this incident stand between us or hinder our personal relationship

***For you, which of these promises is the most challenging to make and keep?**

Many people have never experienced this kind of forgiveness before, yet we all long for it. When they hear the words, “I forgive you”, they continue struggling with feelings of guilt and estrangement.

As Christians who have been forgiven more than we can comprehend, we have an opportunity to glorify God and share the good news of what Jesus has done for us through his death, resurrection, ascension, and return. He is the model of our love. Through us, he is loving and extending forgiveness to others.

When you forgive someone, extend forgiveness using the language of the Four Promises.

3. Can You Ever Mention the Sin Again?

These four promises are essential and helpful, but avoid using them in a rigid and mechanical fashion. Particularly, avoid using the commitment “to not bring this up again and use it against you” to prevent you from dealing realistically with recurring sin patterns.

E.g., You forgave someone who confessed to you about losing their temper and saying harsh words to you. Now, he did it again. Although you’re willing to forgive him again, for his sake, you may help him see that he is caught in an ongoing pattern of sin, which calls for biblical counsel.

You bring it up for their benefit, not to use it against them. Only do this if you have a very compelling reason and good motive for doing so – not just to bolster your case against them.

4. Forgiveness and Consequences

***If you’ve truly forgiven someone, should you release the wrongdoer from all the consequences of his or her sin?**

God may allow certain consequences to remain to teach others not to sin again. (*E.g., Israelites and wilderness or David and Bathsheba*)

Once you’ve actually identified the hurt and you extend forgiveness, use wisdom to determine the best way to proceed. For the treasurer who stole money from the church, it’s probably wise that they are required to pay it back. For the teenage driver who damaged something because of careless driving, it may help them be a safer driver in the future if they have to repay.

The point is that our actions do have consequences. We have to examine our own hearts to determine if we’re encouraging the consequences for their good or if we’re *extracting a payment* for their debt to us via punishment.

Conclude with Prayer Requests for members’ struggling to forgive. End in prayer.