



## TIME OF GRACE®

# Forgiveness Is Offensive: You Must Forgive EVERY Day

## Study Notes

### Summary

Where do you start the journey called forgiveness? In a world where so many people are hurting in so many ways, where so many relationships have been ruined by selfish choices, where do you even begin? What could possibly give you the power to forgive those who have hurt you the most?

- Four post-sin paths:
  1. \_\_\_\_\_
    - **Jeremiah 31:34:** Declares the LORD. . . . “I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”
  2. \_\_\_\_\_
    - **1 Peter 3:9:** Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult.
    - **Romans 12:17:** Do not repay anyone evil for evil.
    - **Matthew 5:43,44:** <sup>43</sup>You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” <sup>44</sup>But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.
  3. \_\_\_\_\_
    - **Hebrews 12:15:** See to it that . . . no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.
  4. \_\_\_\_\_ = The \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ to let the \_\_\_\_\_ alone.
    - **1 Peter 3:9:** Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.
    - **Romans 12:14:** Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.
    - **Matthew 5:44:** But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.
- **1 Peter 2:23,24:** <sup>23</sup>When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. <sup>24</sup>“He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross.

- **Romans 4:7,8:** <sup>7</sup> Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. <sup>8</sup> Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them.
- **Matthew 26:28:** This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

### *Points to Ponder*

1. What “stones” have hurt you the most in your life? Looking back, which of the four paths did you choose to take? Which path are you taking today?
2. Meditate on 1 Peter 2:21-25 and list three things that make Jesus worthy of our worship.
3. **Challenge:** Share this message with a loved one who is struggling with bitterness or vengeance. Make sure to fill that conversation with God’s unconditional love.

### *Homework for Next Week*

Read Matthew 18:15-35

Time of Grace Ministry

**Forgiveness is Offensive: You Must Forgive EVERY Day**

Jeremiah 31:34, 1 Corinthians 13, 1 Peter 3:9, Romans 12:17, Matthew 5:44, Hebrews 12:15, 1

Peter 2:23, Psalm 32:1, Matthew 26:28

March 7, 2021

***Pastor Mike Novotny***

Some sin is so small it's annoying and it bothers you but you forget about it an hour later. And then some sin – if it hits you, God forbid if it hits you – it's not a glancing blow; it can break you and you wound you and scar you and change you.

If you haven't met him yet, Pastor Jim is the guy on our pastoral team who is kind of known for having a really big, compassionate, empathetic heart. On those personality StrengthFinder kind of tests, I'm pretty good at being a learner but the gift of empathy is dead last. And on Jim's StrengthFinder it's about the opposite. So when I knew that I was going to be speaking to you about forgiveness, the first thing I did with my learner-brain was to pull up a Bible search engine to type in the word "forgive" and to figure out how many times, cover to cover in the entire Bible, the words "forgive," "forgiveness," "forgave," or "forgiven," come up. One hundred twenty-eight, by the way, if you're curious. But Pastor Jim didn't immediately jump to a computer to search for the passages. His mind immediately started thinking about the people. He started thinking about you. And he wrote me an email to remind me that whenever you bring up the topic of forgiveness, whenever you broach that subject in church, whenever there's a paragraph or a whole sermon or an entire sermon series, you start to knock on a door and behind that door are some of the hardest things that people have ever been through. The topic of forgiveness is not like self-control or kindness or a little bit more love. The word itself implies that something bad has happened, something very bad, something that hurt you very deeply.

And that's why when I thought about Pastor Jim's email, I decided to bring this stone. Because I thought that forgiveness is what happens - or at least what God wants to happen - when you've been hit with one of these. You know, it's when you used to be neighbors and your neighbor would wave at you from the mailbox and then something happened where he picked up a stone and he threw it and it hit you and the relationship changed. Or maybe you used to be coworkers or business associates and you'd join your hands in a handshake but then the associate let go of your hand and picked up a stone and threw it. Or maybe it was with someone that you actually held hands with and took your vows with, tears in your eyes, to love, to respect, for better, for worse, no matter what but then someone that said they loved you, they let go and they grabbed one of these and especially from so close, that sin hurt.

You know, some people say that sin is just sin and Christians say that sometimes all sin is the same but I don't think that's entirely true. Some sin really hurts; some sin is so small it's annoying and it bothers you but you forget about it an hour later. And then some sin, if it hits you - God forbid if it hits you - it's not a glancing blow; it can break you and wound you and scar you and change you.

I want to teach you the four things that you can do when a stone gets thrown. Whether it's small, whether it's big, when that hits and falls at your feet and that sin is right there, today I want to talk to you about the four reactions you could have and the one that God hopes that you choose. So grab a pen if you have one in your hand cause we're going to start with the first option when you get sinned against and here it is: You could try to forget.

You've heard that before, haven't you? You're supposed to forgive and forget. Good Christian people, they forgive and forget. It sounds like a nice Pinterest post, doesn't it? Some nice flowers growing out of the corners or something. It sounds good but here's my question - is that what the Bible says? Forgive and forget? The answer is kind of. The closest passage that talks about forgiving and forgetting is actually not something that God commands you to do; it's a promise that God has made to you. This might be my favorite passage in the entire Old Testament. Jeremiah 31 says, "Here's what the Lord declares: I will forgive their wickedness and I will remember their sins no more."

So should you do the same thing? The Bible's answer is kind of – 1 Corinthians 13, that famous love chapter, says that love is patient, love is kind, it's not easily angered and love keeps no record of wrongs. So to the people who've thrown stones at us, should we treat them like they deserve to be treated? The Bible's answer is no. Should we carry along this list of grudges and hurts and hang-ups in our hearts to get them back with? The Bible's answer is no. But does that mean that if you still can remember the things that have been done to you that you haven't truly forgiven? Now the answer to that question would be no. In fact, I would contend this: Do you know the person who really, really, really wants you to try to forgive and forget? The devil. Because if you think deep in your soul that to forgive someone means you have to forget that it happened, guess who's going to win? When you get thumped by a terrible sin and you're bruised and you're scarred, time might heal that wound but the scar still remains and the stone sits at your feet and how do you just forget that? The devil would love for you to believe this guilt-inducing lie that if you haven't forgotten it, you haven't forgiven it, so you must not be a forgiving person, which means maybe that you're not even a Christian. So forgive and forget? The answer's no, God doesn't demand that, he doesn't command that. Don't treat people like they deserve to be treated but you could still remember and still forgive. So don't go down that path, which means you're ready to explore a second path.

Here's something else you could do after you've been sinned against. You could get back. Good 'ol karma. A few of my soccer teammates are in church today and they could tell you that when someone fouls us and we foul them back, we don't feel good about it. The other team doesn't say, "Well, thank you. Now we're good." No, you know what happens - back and forth and back and forth and back and forth until there's grudges and divisions and animosity and rivalries. When we choose to take justice into our hands instead of leaving it to God, it never works out. And so as natural and as instinctual as it might be, God doesn't want us to touch that stone because he knows what's about to happen. And that's exactly what Peter and Paul and Jesus teach us in the Bible. Let me show you a few passages. Peter said really clearly, "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult." Don't do it. You're going to want to match up exactly what they did for you, eye for eye and tooth for tooth, don't do it. Paul agreed with him in Romans 12. He said, "Do not repay anyone, even the person who threw the biggest stone, anyone, do not repay them evil for evil." And Jesus in that famous line, "You've heard that it was said love your

neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." He started it! It doesn't work for teachers with their students, it doesn't work for parents with their children, and it doesn't work for God with us. So you don't have to forget but don't try to get them back.

And the third path that God would not like you to take is this: Do not get bitter. Getting back at someone and getting bitter are very, very closely related but they're not exactly the same. If someone throws this stone at me and it hurts and it drops there at my feet, payback is when I grab it and I throw it back. Bitterness is when I grab it and I hold onto it. You know, it just wouldn't feel right, maybe I know it's going to be drama if I really give you what you deserve, but it's just something I can't let go of. You know that you're bitter when your hands aren't open to pray for someone who hurt you. When your hands aren't free to extend a reconciliation, to forgive with a handshake, to raise open hands in a blessing. When just the thought of that person doesn't bring anything good but just this deep bitterness, it's because you're holding onto something and you won't let it go. Another clue this has happened to you is when you hope that their life is hard even if you don't cause it. You know, she files for divorce and now on Facebook you see that she's dating again and what do you want to happen to that relationship? Someone's talking trash on the court or on the field, what do you want to happen to them by the end of the year? If someone hurts you at school, you're not going to throw the stone back but you hope they get a little bit of what they gave to you. You hope that they hurt in the way that you hurt. It just wouldn't be right if God would bless a person like that.

But friends, I want to warn you. Holding onto sin for another day will just make it harder to let go tomorrow. About 25 years ago, I got my first job. My dad had a real estate company; he built this big condo complex in Green Bay. Eighteen-hole golf course around it and my job was to cut the grass. There's a lot of grass, alright? Day after day after day and then it would keep growing after I cut it so day after day after day, when I would have to do the weed whacking or the string trimming, it wasn't like that little 10-minute zip around your yard. It would be a 12-hour job. So I put on my little safety glasses, I'd fill up that little tank, I'd wrap around enough string and do you know what I would do for eight hours a day? I'd grab the handle - brrrrr, brrrrr - lunch time. Brrrr. And at the end of the day, do you know what would happen? From grabbing onto that handle, it was hard to let it go.

Exactly like bitterness. When we refuse to give up memory to God, we hold onto it. And the longer we hold onto it, the harder it is to let go of it. And God sees what happens, that when our hands aren't open, it's not just the person who threw the stone that hurts us, it's that we become incapable of joining hands with anyone. Our hands aren't free, our heart isn't clean enough to pray and to bless, to offer grace and mercy. Maybe it's why in the book of Hebrews 12 we find these words. God says, "See to it that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many." A bitter root. And every day, that root gets stronger and it produces toxic fruit that will ruin your relationships and ruin your life. So our heavenly Father in love says you don't have to forget it, but I don't want you to touch that stone. Don't grab it to pay them back, don't grab it just to hold onto it, stew about it, tell the story again to anyone who will listen. No, there's another path you can follow and it's the path you might guess - called forgiveness.

Now forgive is a complicated word that's often misunderstood so let me just give you my simplest definition. To me, the word forgive simply means this: The daily choice to let the stone alone. And I carefully crafted every word in that sentence. I called forgiveness a daily choice. It's not a feeling, it's not something, you know, that one day the light switch goes on and you suddenly feel great about it. No, it's a choice that you make not once but every single day.

Peter said, "Do not repay anyone evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing because to this you were called that you may inherit a blessing." Paul says, "Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse." Jesus in his sermon about turning the other cheek said, "I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

So friends, here's my big question for you: Are you willing to forgive today? Are you willing to let that stone alone? That person from your past that you've been thinking about for the past 20 minutes, will you make the choice today and then tomorrow, not just to act like it's okay, not to not have boundaries, not to immediately trust them again; that's not true. But not to pay them back? Not to get bitter but to leave it to God?

I have to tell you the rest of what Pastor Jim told me to tell you. The email that he sent to me had a big paragraph, "Mike, don't forget the kind of trauma that people have been through, the hurts that they carry with them." But that was only this much of an email that was this long. Do you know what this part was about? It was about Jesus. And Jim reminded me that forgiveness for us is one of the hardest things we have to do. Giving money to the poor? Okay. Forgiving dad or your ex or your boss or the system or whoever? That's hard. And so, Jim pleaded with me, he begged me, he said, "Mike give them the gospel and then give them more of the gospel and give them a whole bunch more of the gospel." So are you ready to get the gospel? I hope so cause I'm not talking at you and I'm not suggesting and I'm not teaching. What I'm about to say, I will preach at you with all the authority of Jesus. It comes from heaven itself. It's not my opinion, my words. God brought you here to this place so I could tell you exactly what God says and here's what God says: He forgives you. Every single day, because of the blood of Jesus, every one of those stones that you have thrown at God, it sits at the foot of the cross and Jesus Christ himself makes the daily choice not to touch it, not to look at it, not to hover his hand above it. No, his forgiveness for you is so great and that's what Peter and Paul and Jesus taught me.

Check out Peter's words. It says, "When Jesus suffered, he made no threats." Jesus never said, "You wait until I get off of this cross! I'm God and you're going to," - no, instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross. He took it for us. So that God wouldn't have to threaten us, so you wouldn't have to be afraid. He even forgives us for our difficulties in forgiving them. He bore our sins - plural. Paul agreed, quoting King David from the Old Testament, he said, "Blessed, happy are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them." How good is that? How blessed are we when every transgression is forgiven? He lets it alone and not just that, when your sin is covered up, there's not this pile of stones for God to stare at. It's covered up by the blood of Jesus. And if that wasn't good enough, he says, "Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never," never, never, ever, ever, ever, "count against you." There will not be a day when you have a conversation with God when he counts it against you.

It's gone; as far as the east is from the west. And if the devil's whispering in your ear right now, "No, not that thing," you tell him to go to hell because the King of Heaven has said - he has sworn by his own blood - that he will never count it against you.

The night before he died on the cross, Jesus spoke these words: "This is my blood of the covenant and it's poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." So friends, be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ, God forgave you because it will be so beautiful when you do.

That's what I learned from Brandt. Some of you heard the tragic story from back in 2018 when a 26-year-old accountant named Botham Jean was sitting in his own apartment watching football and eating ice cream but then his door opened and in walked a cop named Amber Geiger. Somehow, Amber had thought that the apartment was her own and when she saw this 26-year-old guy sitting on her couch, she reached for her gun - she was a police officer - but he hadn't broken into her apartment; she was breaking into his. Thinking she was in danger, she drew the gun, pointed, fired and murdered an innocent man. And in the process, she threw a boulder at every heart of Botham's family and friends.

Just over a year later, Amber received a 10-year prison sentence for the crime but what caught the nation's attention wasn't just the sentence; it was Botham's brother, Brandt. You need to watch this video after church today. He stood on the witness stand and here's what he said. He said, "I hope you go to God with all of your guilt. I forgive you. And I know if you go to God and ask him, he'll forgive you. I love you just like anyone else. I personally want the best for you. I love you as a person." And he begged this ashamed woman to reach out to Jesus. And then Brandt did the supernatural. He turned to the judge of the case and he asked, "Can I give her a hug, please? Please?" And when the judge said yes, he leapt out of the witness stand, he'd meet Amber right in the middle of the courtroom and she collapses in his arms. And for a minute, a full minute, they embrace. And when you watch that video and the beauty of forgiveness wells your eyes up in tears, I want you to notice something: Brandt's hands wrapped around her, wide open because on that day, Brandt chose to let the stone alone. I pray that you can, too, just like Jesus does every single day for you.

Let's pray.

Dear Father,

How blessed are we? Our backs might hurt, our jobs might be complicated, we might be broke, lonely, sad but you're the God who will never count our sins against us. Every time we cross the line and we knew better, never will you count it against us. Every time in ignorance we broke one of your rules, never will you count it against us. For every one of us who trusts in Jesus, it's gone and our forgiveness is complete. How can that be, God? We don't know but you promised it and you are incapable of lying. So we pray, since you love us that much, we pray for your help. You say that the fruit of the spirit is love and it's peace and it's patience and it's kindness and it's gentleness and we want that so desperately so, please, send your Holy Spirit.

God, at times in my life, I find it hard to forgive and I've barely been sinned against. So for everyone here who's been deeply wounded, for everyone here who had an ex or a mother or a father or a relative or a best friend who hurt them deeply, send your Holy Spirit that they could let it go, today and tomorrow, and for all the days to come. Give us the strength and the power that we need. We might not feel capable but, God, you are. And I pray for miracles today, God. For people who are enemies, I pray that this message would be one step towards reconciliation. I pray that you could replace bitterness with trust, enmity with affection. Shock us, God, with what you can do in our hearts and in our relationships when Jesus is the daily choice we make.

I thank you so much, God, that 128 times you brought up the subject. It can be difficult to hear but you bring it up for our good. So we ask for your help today and we pray with boldness and with confidence because we know that you haven't turned your face away. You're looking right at us, the children that you have forgiven every single sin. So we pray this with courage and with joy and we ask it all in Jesus' name and all God's people who agreed, they said, "Amen."