



TIME OF GRACE®

Freedom in Forgiveness: When Forgiving Feels Impossible

Study Notes

Summary

How do you forgive someone who sins against you? While Christians may agree that they should forgive, finding the power to forgive day after day can feel impossible. This message unpacks Jesus' teaching on forgiveness, proving that the most important thing to do is to begin with the forgiveness you have first received from heaven.

- **Luke 11:4:** Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.
- **Matthew 18:23,24:** ²³ Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him.
- **Matthew 18:27:** The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.
- The Big Idea: God let your (_____)
_____ alone!
- "Are you not amazed that, poor and needy as you are, the Lord thinks of you? But let not [your sin] discourage you. For if God casts out none that come to him, why should you fear? Our sins are many, but his mercies are more."—John Newton

Points to Ponder

1. Which emotionally bothers you more: The sin(s) that others have committed against you? Or the sin(s) that you have committed against God? Be honest. Then explain your answer.
2. Study Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13. What connections do you see between these passages and today's message?

3. **Challenge:** Pray the Lord's Prayer each day this week. Pause after each line that mentions forgiveness in order to confess your sins personally to the Father and to release the sins personally committed against you.

Homework for Next Week

Read 1 Peter 3:8-12.

Time of Grace Ministry
Freedom in Forgiveness: When Forgiving Feels Impossible
Luke 11:4; Matthew 13:23,24; Matthew 13:27
June 12, 2022

Pastor Mike Novotny

When forgiveness isn't just a concept in church, when it is not something on a piece of paper, a fill in the blank in the church bulletin - when it is a choice that you actually have to make when the hurt is real and the emotions are high, forgiveness is one of the hardest things in the world to do.

I was thinking about that in my own life. I have been spared so far, 40 years in, of some of the major traumatic wounds that many people have been through. My mom and my dad were good to me. I have never gone through a break-up. I married my first girlfriend, never been divorced. I have never been abused verbally, physically, sexually. I have had a pretty pampered life from God. And yet, even these little stones, the kind of small sins that would never make the headlines, I have found that even the small things can be kind of hard to forgive.

I remember a few years ago, there was this woman from my church, and she and I just did not see eye to eye. And she kind of felt hurt by some of my decisions as a pastor, so she wrote some things to me that were not very Christian or loving, that I can still remember today. And I did not throw the stone back at her, but I was a little bit bitter and less than the most loving person towards her, and it just festered for a long time, until I finally said, "You know, we have got to sit down face-to-face. We have got to figure this out if we are both going to call ourselves Christians." And I can remember that conversation. I am sitting here, she is sitting there, and in the middle of it, I said, "You know, we have just got to do something different. This is not love. This is not what Jesus wants in his church." And I still remember today what she did. She said this. "I know." And I could relate to her reaction so perfectly. Like, as a Christian, I know. I know, "Love your enemies." It is right there in the book. "Turn the other cheek," everyone has heard it. "Do not forgive once or twice, but seventy, times seven, times..." - like, on paper it is so easy, but I so related to that woman. I know what to do. I know forgiveness up here, but in practice, forgiveness is so hard. Loving good people is so hard. Loving people who hurt you, it sometimes feels impossible.

And as I think about all of you here today, those of you sitting in front of me at church, those of you watching online, those of you sitting at home - those of you who have not been through like, this little stuff, but big stuff, scarring stuff, it is so hard to forgive, isn't it? You can be an every-Sunday Christian, read the Bible cover-to-cover, but actually letting the stone alone, day after day, after what happened, it can be one of the hardest and holiest things God ever calls you to do, which is why I am so glad that you are here today.

If you would read the Bible cover-to-cover, you would find out that in 128 separate verses, the word "forgive" comes up, and today, I want to share with you what I think are the most important verses of them all. I want to share with you a prayer that Jesus taught us to pray, and then a story that Jesus told to his friends, and in those two things you will find the fuel for forgiveness and the healing that your heart needs when it is hard to forgive.

But I want to warn you right up front - what I am about to share with you just might be the most offensive thing that Jesus ever said. And so, my heart craves and needs, but when I say it, some of you are going to wish I did not. But I am still going to say it because Jesus said it and he loves us. So, if you are ready to dive into the deep end of the pool of forgiveness, let me start by telling you about the prayer that Jesus taught. How many of you here today, a show of hands, have ever heard of "The Lord's Prayer?" Kind of a famous prayer, we pray it week after week in church. If you grew up Catholic, it is called the "Our Father." There are so many lines of "The Lord's Prayer" that Jesus taught his friends that connect with the concept of forgiveness.

You know, Jesus said, "Our Father in heaven, your will be done," and God's will is not that you be bitter, or vengeful, or try to forgive and forget, but that you love people. "Lead us not into temptation," he said - the temptation to get angry about that stone, pick it up, throw it back, hurt someone because they hurt you. God, help us not to do that. But if you know the prayer, right in the middle of it are actually these two specific lines about the concept of forgiveness. It is almost as if Jesus spends more time on this than on anything else. And here is what Jesus said in Luke 11. He said, "We also forgive everyone who sins against us." Not just, "Father, we forgive people," but Jesus, who knew exactly what would happen in your life, the Jesus who knew the name of the person who would hurt you the most, as the son of God, he could already divinely see what was coming in your future, how hard it would be, how many tears you would shed, he dropped the word, "everyone," in his famous prayer. Like, the person who threw the little stone, or this stone, or the worst stone in your past, he wanted you to pray, day after day, week after week, year after year, "God, we forgive everyone, no exceptions. It might hurt so badly, but God, we are not going to pick and choose. Like you, we are just going to forgive." And I think that is why Jesus did not start his line of forgiveness there. Anyone know what comes right before this line? I will show you.

First, Father, forgive us our sins. It is almost as if Jesus is saying, "Father, before I think about him, or her, or them, or what they did, or what she said, or what the system did not do for me - God, let us talk about us. I am asking you, Father, to forgive me for my sins. God, I have thrown a lot of stones. Please do not pick them up. Do not be bitter when you think about me. According to your unlimited compassion, and your crazy love, and your bottomless grace, Father, treat me like I do not deserve to be treated. Listen to me. Love me. Smile when you think about me. Forgive me of my sins." And it is like Jesus knows, like before we get to the hard emotional ground of thinking about that person who did that thing, before you look out at them, he wants you to look up at him. Because he knows that is the only fuel that will work to allow the human heart to really forgive everyone.

That is what I learned from a Broadway musical. If you ever want to see me come this close to ugly crying, buy me really, really good seats to see the Broadway musical, "Les Misérables."

Ever heard of it before? Based off a famous French novel by Victor Hugo. The story, in part, is about this convict named Jean Valjean, who has been deeply hurt by the legal system of his day. He steals a loaf of bread. They throw him in prison and make him a slave for years, and when he gets out, he is clutching on to that sin and he cannot let it go. He is homeless, no one will give him work because of his legal record, and he is so bitter he is about to explode, until - until this hospitable priest opens the doors of a church to Jean Valjean. He invites him inside. He serves him a meal. He gives him a place to stay, free of charge. He loves him, even though he owes nothing to him.

But maybe you have heard that sometimes hurt people hurt people. And Valjean cannot let go of the stone and in fact, he throws it at the priest. He steals some silver from the church cabinets and he runs off into the night, sinning against the very man who had just helped him. But the police catch him. They catch Jean Valjean, silver candlesticks in his hands. They drag him back to the church and they are waiting for the priest just to say the word, and they can throw him back in prison. And do you know what the priest says? "Officers, no. That was my gift to him."

And when we realize that Jesus is just like that priest, he was so good to us and still we sinned against him, and yet, he is still so good to us. Even the times we knew better and we have taken from him, he says, "No, no, no, I withdraw your soul from punishment, from prison, from hell, and I give it to God. I bless you in ways that you do not deserve. I will not treat you as your sins deserve to be treated. Instead, I will love, and give, and listen, and be there for you." And when that thought sinks deep into your heart that God - God would do that for a person like me, then I am ready to look at him and to forgive. Then I am ready to glance at the biggest stones of my past and let it alone. How could I throw that at him if God did not throw the stone at me? That was Jesus' simple, beautiful teaching.

But that teaching actually hangs on a massive question, and I will ask you the question directly. How many stones have you thrown at God? Like, when you look at a cross in a church, how many of your stones are piled up at the base of it? When you think about those people and their character, and you as a person and your character, what do you think? In Luke 7, Jesus said that, "The one who thinks they have been forgiven very little will love little. But the one who knows that they have been forgiven much - well, they will love much." And that is why Jesus did not just teach us to pray some prayer, he also told the story. I think in the gospels, it is the most offensive story he ever tells.

Which is why, before I get to that story, I want to tell you the G-rated version of the story that Jesus almost told. It goes like this. Once upon a time, there was a man who owed his king one hundred silver coins, but he could not pay. The king wanted to settle the account. The man did not have the money. He begged for the king's mercy, "Give me more time," and the king looked at the man and his debt, he smiled and said, "I forgive you, all one hundred silver coins. I cancel the debt right now. You do not owe me. Go in peace," and the man did. He left the palace of the king, ecstatic. He was completely debt-free, absolutely forgiven, and he was so happy, until...until he ran into one of his neighbors that also owed him one hundred silver coins. And he said to the neighbor, "Where is my money?" The neighbor did not have it. He said, "Just give me more time, I will pay you," but the man would not wait. He demanded payment in the moment.

He had the man thrown into debtors' prison and would not let him out until he paid back every single coin. And when the king heard that story, that this man could not forgive the exact same amount that he had just been forgiven that very day - well, the king, he was royally ticked. The end.

Now, that was the story that Jesus almost told. Do any of you long-time Bible experts in the room know what was wrong about my story? Let me show you what the story actually said, Matthew 18. "Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with the servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him." See, Jesus knows we get so infatuated with these stones that we forget something. We focus on every edge, every detail of what they did to us that we lose sight of how often we have done the exact same thing to God. So, let me help you visualize it today. Katie, could you help me visualize this with our friends? And now, Jonathan, could you help me visualize this? And Nate, in the back, could you help me? And Jordan, could you help me? And Leticia, could you help me? And Chad, could you help me?

We need to remember that there is not just one or two stones. There is not just a sin back a few years ago that we have committed against God. That whatever we think that someone has done to us, there is not one, or ten, or a hundred - there are countless stones that God sees when he looks at us, day after day, after day, after day. And we cannot hold on so tightly to the things that have been done to us that we forget, day after day, what is happening.

And Alex, if you could help me, we cannot forget one more thing. We cannot forget that, to God, there is no small stone. Every sin is not small and annoying to him. In fact, this is not even the right size. To God, every sin should look like this. And friends, we cannot forget that. If you turn your back on every sin you have committed and just think about what your ex did, what your dad did, what your boyfriend did, what your boss did, it is the craziest hypocrisy in the world. And the craziest part is that every sin you have ever committed is against God - God. He is so...he is God. He is holy, and good, and he is been so kind to you every day of your life, and yet, every time - every time you worry, every time you lash out, every time you want to get your way, every time you forget his rules, you throw a stone at God. And you cannot forget that.

Excuse your past and your sin, and that person who sinned against you will be the villain, and you will feel so superior and you will spend your days judging them, and wanting consequences, and pointing your finger at them because of the consequences, but you do not want God to do that to you. So, friends, you cannot, we cannot - and Jesus tells a story that is offensive. And honestly, I would not tell it unless Jesus did. As I look out at some of you, I know - I know what has happened. Some of us have wept together. Some of you have sent me late night e-mails. What you have been through is not small.

But the other day, I was having a conversation with a woman from our church who has been hurt very deeply, and you know what she said? She said, "Pastor Mike, it is the same Jesus. The Jesus who taught this story, it is the same Jesus - the one who we believe is good, and compassionate, and forgiving, and kind. This is not someone who took the pen alongside Jesus' teaching. This is

what Jesus taught because he knows we need it." We will never know what it means, "God, forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us," until we remember what God did.

But once that truth hits your heart, there is something I do not want you to miss. It is back in Matthew 18. Let me show you one little verse. "The servant's master, the king, took pity on him, canceled the debt, and let him go." When you think of God, when you think of this, you need to know the truth of the gospel, that God, the king of kings, the holy one of heaven, he cancels the whole thing! He is not the God of second chances, he is the God who leaves seven billion stones alone. He is the God for whom your past, your addiction, your drinking, your problem with anger, it is not too much for him. No, you might sin a lot, but this king has so much compassion, unlimited compassion, and so much mercy, and so much love, that there is nothing you have done, nothing you could ever do, that this king of love is not willing to forgive. I love the story. At first it offends me and I say, "God, I am not that bad," but then, I read it again and say, "God, you are so good. Ten thousand bags of gold, seven billion sins that you forgive, just like that," and this is what Jesus did.

In fact, I did the math. According to Jesus, it would be almost impossible for you, if you tried, to out-sin the mercy of God. Let me say the math. If you take seven billion and you divide it by the average life span in America, about 79 years, you come up with 88,607,594 sins a year, which is 242,760 sins a day, which equates to 10,115 sins an hour, or 168 sins per minute, or about 3 sins every second. Do you think you could sin three sins a second? Go for it. You could not do it, which is Jesus' amazing way of saying, "If you think you are bad, if you feel like the worst - if you look back and just like, every second, things were going wrong morally for you, if someone hurt you and you were so bitter or so vengeful, and you get to the end and you say, "God, I know." Jesus says, "Let me tell you a story about a king and a man with a massive debt, and he just had compassion and he forgave the whole thing."

Friends, this is what Jesus did for us. 2,000 years ago. There was rocky hill outside of Jerusalem called Calvary, and there the cross of Jesus was planted, and I am not sure what it looked like, but I do not think the Romans let Jesus hold onto anything. His hands, nailed to that cross, were open - because it was God's beautiful way of teaching us this. I would love for you to write down this big idea for today, that God let your seven billion stones alone - every sin, all of the shame, all of the guilt. It is gone because of Jesus.

And that is why we love the song. You know, there is a song we sing here at our church that we adore. It is called, "His Mercy is More." And if you have sung it, I wonder if you have ever noticed the lyrics. I love what it says, that God is, "Omniscient and all-knowing, but he counts not the sum" of our sin. In the opening of the song, "What love could remember, no wrongs we had done." How could God, who knows everything, how could this happen? And he would treat us like it does not even exist, not a single stone. How could he smile upon you and be great? What kind of love, what kind of God is this? And I love the line, "We stood beneath a debt we could never afford." God, how could I pay you back? When I was hurting so bad and I lashed out, and it was hard for me to forgive - sometimes I did not even want to - you just...you forgive me still. You are so good to me, God, like a flood of love. Who are you? Who am I? But you did.

You know, that amazing song was written back in 2016 by two contemporary Christian artists, but they got their inspiration from a notorious sinner from the 1700's. Way back then, there was a man named John Newton, who was the captain of a slave ship. You might know that God opened his eyes to see the wretched things that he had done, how many stones had he thrown at black African families.

And when he realized what a wretched sinner he was, there was only one place he could go - not to his own goodness, not to pay God back, but just to cling to Jesus and say, "Forgive me," and he did. John Newton became a pastor and he spoke to people just like you, people who wondered, "Is God still listening? Would God forgive me after all of my struggles to forgive?" And I want to show you what John Newton said to his church. He said, "Are you not amazed that poor and needy as you are, the Lord thinks of you?" God - God is thinking of you right now! "But let not your sin discourage you, for if God casts out none that come to him," not even you, "why should you fear? Our sins are many, but his mercies are more."

Your sins might be so many, but God's mercy, it is always more. Let us pray.

God, none of us want to be humbled. It is so much easier to think that we are the good people and they are the bad people. But God, sometimes it takes us being sinned against to realize how bad sin is, ours included. I am so grateful, God, that you are not the kind of God who makes us make it up to you, there is not a good work that we have to do to make up for every stone. Instead, there is just a king who smiles and he says, "It is finished."

And Father, forgive them. They did not know. They did not know. Lord, when we walk out of here today, there are going to be some deep hurts for us to deal with, and the devil loves working in the hearts of hurt people. So, lead us not into that temptation, deliver us not from that evil.

Heavenly Father, let your will be done and let us forgive everyone - everyone, just as you have first forgiven us. I thank you, God, for your bottomless love, and I thank you for mercy that is truly amazing. I thank you, God, for being you. We are going to need your help this week, so help us. You said you would, and we know that you hear us. We thank you for all of these things in the name of Jesus, our Savior. In his name we pray, Amen.