

## **THE HIGH COST OF UNFORGIVENESS**

### **Healing Life's Hurts**

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When I first began preparing for this series I started out with the title simply Healing Life's Hurts. I wanted to do a whole series on how to heal the hurts of life. The more I tried to get definition for that the more I struggled with it until I came up with the two key words "through forgiveness." It was like a revelation to me because when the words came to me I began to realize that if we're to look at the healing of the inward life and, by the way approaches that talk about the healing of the memory have been very popular and very used by God in Christian and charismatic circles today. But if I were to identify what is it that begins to heal up the inward hurts of life I'd have to say on the basis of the scripture that healing begins when we open our life to the forgiveness of God and to ourselves becoming forgiving people.

In recent weeks I've had the opportunity of learning a new language – computer language. I've never before dealt with computers but it's been a fascinating experience. One thing I've noticed in some of the demonstrations I've seen is if you put floppy disk, a software item, into the disk drive and somehow someone has touched it with their hand and gotten oil on all the microdata impressions that are on the disk or perhaps it's picked up some lint or dust or somehow been scratched, and then you plug that into the computer and begin asking that disk to feed you that information that it's supposed to give you, out on the screen will come a phrase that simply says "bad sector." That simply means that the floppy disk is unable to give you the information you want because that part of the disk has been damaged and you'll have to only get the information that comes before and comes after but it is unable to give you the information you want in that particular sector. It's a bad sector. If you're going to come out of that sector what you've got to do, I guess, and I don't have the expertise to do this, is set down and reprogram the thing so that you get the good sector and the thing can behave like you want it to behave.

I think that's a marvelous analogy to human existence and human experience. Sometimes in our own life we've had a bad sector. Some experience which to use a record album language has scratched our record album of life. Every time we put the record on the drive, the floppy disk into the computer disk drive, and we plug it in and get ready for a print out of some kind or a recording of some kind it doesn't play. It skips that section because of the scratch there. Or an impairment of some kind.

It seems to me that the hurts we experience in life for which we have not received forgiveness or given forgiveness are kind of like bad sectors. Life has a way of kind of programming us so that we keep repeating the same mistakes and having the same attitudes and getting mired in the same situations. We wonder why is it given a particular stressful situation we always behave the way we do. Why is it that we can't be more imaginative and free to break out of this confining thing in our life? The computer is telling us, "Bad sector." And you need to reprogram.

What we're going to be doing in this series is matching the bad sectors in our life with the reprogramming power of the Holy Spirit. Or to put in other words, what we want to do is match life's hurts with the healing power of the Lord Jesus Christ and bring his healing power to bear on the dark experiences of our life. We will seek to bring the health of the presence of Jesus into our experience. When we believe that Jesus Christ comes into our life we believe that he brings his total wholesome and healthy presence into our existence and that the Holy Spirit is the healthy Spirit of God who makes real the presence of Jesus Christ in our experience.

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I want to take a moment at the start of this series to try to identify the source of some of our life's hurts. Mark 2 tells the story of Jesus meeting with a man who comes into a room in a quite unexpected manner. The roof is torn apart by his friends and they lower him in a litter down into the room. Jesus rather than first of all coming to grips with his paralysis identifies his need on a deeper level. He says to him, "My son your sins be forgiven you," because Jesus perceived that he has a more fundamental need than imply a physical or biological need.

Many times it is the case with us. We find ourselves in the presence of God we think for some external reason when all the time the Lord is wanting to get at something deeper in our life and touch us on a level that no one else sees. I think that probably all the paralytic's life, the man in Mark 2, all his friends had ever seen was his external condition. Only the Lord saw his true condition. So when we're gathered together in the presence of the Lord we recognize that the Holy Spirit has power to invade the private and hidden corners and recesses of our life and he has the ability to tap a dimension that no one else can tap. If you find yourself being spoke to him this evening don't be surprised. Open your heart to receive what he is telling you.

When we identify life's hurts we look at the sources which can bring our deepest hurts. There are hurts that can come to us within families that have caused bad sectors in our life from which we have never really been freed. Hurts for example from parents. The person who is an adult has still not come to grips with the fact that they were born an unwanted child. Perhaps there is nothing more damaging to our psyche than a realization to start off with that we weren't wanted in the first place. I've talked with persons who've said their parents publicly reminded them in the presence of others numerous times in childhood, and adolescent that they were an unplanned child. And they were not prepared for me. That kind of information can have a volatile influence on our lives negatively.

There is the battered child, the child who's been physically abused within family that still as an adult bares the scars of the experience.

The neglected child. The child who was left at home, left to fend for themselves while the parents were off doing their own thing. Maybe it's an incredible thing to talk to grown adults who never have memory of a parent ever putting their arms around them and even giving them a gentle hug or saying "I love you." There are so many people in the world who have never had that experience from either one parent or perhaps both parents. That effect of reaching out for love is probably the reason for some of the sexual promiscuity of our day. People are trying to reach out in sexual experience and receive some of the love they may have missed as a child.

There is the abused child, the child of a distraught parent. Such is a person who is on drugs or alcohol. The child of a broken home. Again to see before a child's eyes their home severed can have devastating impact. The child who is an abandoned child. Grew up without parents. Some people realize they were indeed an abandoned child.

There are children who never quite measured up to their parent's expectations. They feel that they weren't the older brother or younger brother that always had their parent's favor. They somehow never did anything that really pleased their parents. They lived in the shadow of someone else. Maybe the parents had tremendous expectations vocationally for them or other

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kinds of expectations and they never lived up to them so they've been a real disappointment and grief to their parents. And it's been a hurt that's come from within the family from parents.

There is another kind of hurt within family and that's the hurt of those of us who have been married or are married, the hurt we've experienced from spouses. Perhaps the most devastating hurt within marriage is the hurt of betrayal or the hurt of infidelity. In many ways it is worse than the physical death of a partner because it seems like in a physical death at least there's an end. It cuts off. One can then go on with living. Whereas in an infidelity or adulterous kind of situation it seems that one is almost confined to a living sort of death.

There is a hurt within marriage of losing priority position. Within marriage persons are supposed to put one another first. Yet how easy it is to let other things take top priority in terms of our interest and our time demands.

There is the hurt of coldness and distance. The hurt of negativity and criticism. "You never do things right! You always do things wrong!" The loaded words: *you always*. Why is it when we say "always" in respect to the negative things rather than the positive things? We generally have the tendency not to say, "You always do the right thing." That can have its sting.

The hurt of not being supported or appreciated. Often it's true within marriage that when we're in a hurting situation our own partner does not even know where we hurt the most because we may have a tendency to clam up. There's a hurt that comes within marriage.

There's the hurt that the parent may feel for the child, another hurt within families. The hurt of a rebellious child. Or if you've had expectations for a child growing up and following the Lord and that child has not followed the Lord. You feel somehow hurt toward that child. Or the child did wrong and perhaps you feel a sense of unforgiveness towards yourself and blame yourself for that having happened in your experience.

Maybe for a parent the worst kind of hurt of all is love unreturned. You poured love into your child. Maybe you haven't always expressed it in terms the child was willing to understand but you've given love to the child and the child has not returned the love and there's devastating rejection in that kind of experience. You may identify with that.

There is another kind of hurt beyond the hurt that is within family. This is part of the hurt that other people do to us. They are hurts within friendship. A good friend that's betrayed you. You don't feel like forming friendships again. Nothing takes the steam out of you as someone like the scriptures says, You broke bread with. They lifted up their heel against you. Turned their back to you. An awful show of contempt. A person close to us really has the capacity to hurt us and wound us.

Then there are hurts within the body of Christ. Hurts of being used, of being unappreciated, being neglected in our hour of need. There are people who come with really sad experiences out of church fellowships. I don't know how we as Christians manage to shoot our wounded but there are people who are hurt by other believers. They've been used. They've been manipulated or they have been neglected. We have to come to grips and cope with that hurt that's been done in our life.

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So there are hurts that have been done by others – sometimes within family, sometimes with friends, sometimes within the body of Christ.

There are hurts that we have done ourselves. Things that we really haven't forgiven ourselves for. The "if only I had" incidents. We have hurts that we have done to ourselves.

We have hurts also that we feel God has done to us. Theologically I believe that God never does anything wrong to us but I sometimes wonder if emotionally we don't need to forgive God, not that God needs forgiving. But sometimes we need to leave off our resentments toward God. We feel that he could have acted differently in a situation and he didn't. Our greatest hurts toward God is he does not answer our prayers as we wish him to answer them and he allows us at times to go through unspeakable anguish and pain for which we see no reason at all. It's very frustrating to have that happen.

I'm identifying some sources of hurt that may touch here you and I are. I think these are the major sources of hurts – the hurts others do to us, the hurts we do to ourselves, the hurts that we perceive that God does to us. Since these are the major sources of our hurt the key to healing these hurts is forgiveness. We cannot change the events. We cannot change the family we were born into. We cannot change the way we were treated. We can't change the way a friend treated us. We can't change the way the body of Christ treated us. We can't change the way God treated us. The only thing we can change is our reaction to the event itself. You cannot go back in time and change the event. It's impossible to change. It's there. It's always going to be there. There is no way you can change the event and that is where so much time is spent wrongly because we relive the scenario and we say over and over again, if only, if only... but the fact is it is never going to change. No amount of thinking, no amount of praying, no amount of restructuring will ever change the thing that happened which brought the hurt to our life. The only thing that can change is that which is in the present because the event itself is in the past. The thing that which is in the present is us and our attitude and our perspective toward what happened. That is the key that God needs to get into if we are going to change and have healing in our experience.

Now comes maybe a difficult moment. But Jesus recognized when he was at the pool of Bethesda and confronted the man who had lain there for 38 years. He said to him what seemed to me when I first encountered it what seemed to be a totally non-sensible question. He said, "Do you want to be healed?" Of course! Why do you think I'm laying here for? I can almost hear him being dis-respectful of the Lord. And calling him something like Dummy or Stupid. That's the dumbest question I've ever heard! Do you want to be healed!" But the fact of the matter is Jesus understands us deeply psychologically and emotionally and he knows that sometimes we become so embittered and twisted in our mentality and thinking that we actually prefer lying in our grief and hurt than going to the trouble it would take to be well again and not having to lie there and be an object of pity and help. So he asks us a very direct question. And unless we're willing to answer that, "Yes, Lord, I want to be healed" the Lord is really bracketed off from being a help to us. We choose to retain our hurts or we choose to seek healing. We cannot change the event but we can see God change us and we must accept the responsibility that we can change.

If we don't change then we must realize that there are going to be some consequences. Whether we change and get forgiveness and give forgiveness or don't and retain our unforgiveness, either

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way there are consequences. That's the focus of the rest of my message tonight and next week. For the rest of this message I want to talk about the consequences of not seeking or not giving forgiveness. There are consequences and often we don't see them. In other words you just can't stay still. You can't act as if something didn't happen. Because either way if you don't forgive or if you forgive, there are consequences. Many times we don't see the consequences of remaining in a condition of unforgiveness.

Realizing the high cost of unforgiveness – DESPAIR. Each letter standing for a different consequence of unforgiveness.

D – Distance. When we remain unforgiving, distance is the result. What do I mean? Unforgiveness brings estrangement, rupture, divorce, death. Unforgiveness separates us from another person. We cannot remain in a close relationship to a person when we remain unforgiving toward them. There is a chasm that's created. Sometimes maybe it's a hair line fracture. Other times it becomes a chasm, which there is no possibility of leaping across at all.

You look at certain events from scripture and you wonder. The first marriage even. Did Adam ever forgive Eve? Or was the lifetime of their marriage saying, You sinned and you tempted me into it. Sin creates distance and I'm sure one of the facets of their relationship was when they began to discover that the intimacy of their relationship was gone and they both realized that they were naked and were ashamed. That's not just a biological kind of thing. That's an emotional thing. They began to realize that the intimacy that they had enjoyed and been broken and the distance had set up barriers between them.

What would have happened if Cain had forgiven Abel for Abel having offered a better sacrifice? There would not have been distance. In fact God says to Cain, "If you do not do right, sin is crouching at your door and desires to have you but you must master it." But Cain was unforgiving toward Abel distance was created in their relationship which produced death.

Joseph however in the book of Genesis teaches us that forgiveness bridges distance and brings reconciliation so his brothers who expelled him and wanted to create distance from him, he refused to let it happen. He says instead, "You meant it for evil but God meant it for good," and he waves the wand of forgiveness over his brothers and brings them back to himself.

It's been said about family relationships and marriages, Marriages are gradually eroded through unforgiveness. A person who continually brings up something his spouse said or did in the past that was hurtful continues to punish the other person and erects a wall of difference and coldness.

If you let things build up and they remain unforgiven it creates distance. First maybe only a little bit. But gradually a tremendous chasm.

The second consequence of unforgiveness I would identify by the letter E and let it represent Emotions.

When we remain in a condition of unforgiveness it has its emotional toll on our lives. We know that unforgiveness, because it is unlike God, therefore cannot lead to the development of the character of God in our life. The fruit of the Spirit is the personality characteristics of God, which He seeks to implant in our life. When unforgiveness is in our life it is very difficult for

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the Lord to plant the vital components of his personality into us which are things like love and joy and peace and patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self control. These can be there perhaps to some degree but they can never be there to the fullest degree where unforgiveness exists. What begins to happen is indifference or hatred displaces love. Bitterness and depression replace joy. Anxiety and upset displace peace. Short temperedness displaces patience. Hardheartedness displaces kindness. Have you ever gotten to a point where you're unforgiving in a situation, maybe with a member of the family, and you finally got so exasperated you said, "I don't care!"

That attitude of I don't care is in direct contrast to kindness. Kindness which cares. Kindness which is fruit of the spirit. Meanness replaces goodness. "I'll get even with them if it's the last thing I do I'll get even!" A demanding nature replaces gentleness. Resignation from responsibility displaces self-control. David summed it up well in Psalm 32 when he says about his state of unforgiveness, "My strength was sapped." Emotionally when we continue in a state of unforgiveness that's what happens. A consequence of unforgiveness – emotions.

A third high cost of unforgiveness S for Scapegoat.

Scapegoat is simply the transfer of blame. It was a mechanism given in the Old Testament by God to help the people of Israel be released from their sin and that's how we got the word "scapegoat." The sins of the people were placed upon the goat and it was sent out into the wilderness. Off it went carrying people's sins. In our day it simply stands as the idea of transferring responsibility to something else or someone else instead of accepting responsibility for our own actions. A state of unforgiveness can bring us to scapegoating where we transfer blame and we say very bitterly "It's your fault that I'm the way that I am!" Ever felt that way? "It's my parents' fault that I'm such a mean and demanding and ugly kid. They made me what I am!" Or you say to your spouse, "If you were more loving and kind I wouldn't be so unloving and unkind. If you want me to change you had better change." Scapegoating simply says the responsibility is upon you to change. I don't accept responsibility. You've got all the meanness and wrong. You get with it and I'll consider whether I want to change or not.

Spurgeon said, "May the grass grow green on his grave when he dies for nothing ever grew around him while he lived." Scapegoating.

P – Punishment. Not only is somebody responsible for the way that I am but someone is going to pay and I'm going to make them pay. You exact a punishment of them. This again is part of the games that married people play. Games children play on their parents. Part of the way we treat one another in the body of Christ sometimes.

Who needs forgiveness when he's already paid? Forgiveness does not demand that the other person pay up. Forgiveness lets the other person off the hook without ever having paid the debt. That's the whole nature of forgiveness. A vital key of forgiveness. Forgiveness lets the other person go free. You won't have to pay the price for this. I'll release you from that punishment.

The high cost of unforgiveness. The letter A in Despair is for Alienation.

Alienation is different from distance. Distance is physical removal. Alienation more stands for inward removal. The bitterness resulting from unforgiveness leads to estrangement. It says,

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"I've been hurt. Everybody's against me. Nobody cares." You become cynical, uncaring, caustic and critical. Show me a super critical person, a super argumentative person I think without fail that person is without forgiveness in their life. Unforgiveness produces alienation inside our heart. We become cynical and uncaring. We once had faith in people but now we don't trust anybody. Optimism has turned to pessimism. Faith has turned into doubt. We withdraw turtle-like into our shells so we won't be hurt again.

I in DESPAIR is for Illness. We've learned in modern medicine that our emotions effect our bodies. If there's a high degree of unforgiveness in our life it works on our physical system. High blood pressure, upset digestive works, ulcers, nerves, breakdown, coronary attacks can be linked to emotional condition. Sometimes wrong emotions produces things wrong in our body. Not all sickness is the result of sin. Some is just due to the second law of thermodynamics – everything is winding down.

Bad emotions can produce illness and that is the high cost.

That's why James by the way gives the teaching. It's amazing how on the scripture is without the help of modern psychology. Scripture had it right in regard to human nature. James 5:16 "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. If any of you are sick, let him call for the elders of the church. If he has committed sins they will be forgiven him." Strange to link sin with healing but there is sense in which we cannot be freed of our physical illness if we continue in a state of unforgiveness because the unforgiveness impedes the condition of the body. And the two become related to one another.

"The thorns I've reaped from the tree I planted have torn me and I bleed. I should have known what fruit would spring from such a seed."

The last letter in Despair – R – is Retention.

If we do not forgive then sins are retained. John 20:23 "If you forgive anyone his sins they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them they are not forgiven." Strange verse. Mark 11:25 "When you stand praying if you hold anything against anyone forgive him so that your father in heaven may forgive you your sins." Two teachings on retention. If we do not forgive another person their sins their sins are retained. Our unforgiving attitude makes it more difficult and in some cases impossible for another person to be freed with the forgiveness they need. I believe if anyone wants to be forgiven of God for sin they can be forgiven. But if a person isn't actively seeking forgiveness on their own and if they have committed some sin against me and I am unwilling to forgive them, I make it more difficult for them to experience God's grace and forgiveness because I am wrapping cords of bondage around them which makes it more difficult for them to see the healing and love of God. If I can begin releasing them by forgiving them the sins which they have committed against me I then can actually through the spirit place them in a position of being more susceptible to the grace and love of God. I believe that's what Jesus is saying in John 20.

I believe again in Mark 11 if we do not forgive when we stand praying then our sins are retained. Not just the other person's sins are retained but our sins are retained and not forgiven. Jesus on the cross cried, "Forgive them." And Stephen at his death cried "Forgive." Stephan had learned well from Christ. We often think of forgiveness as something that is only given in the event that

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it is asked. So we may think we may not need to forgive another person for what they've done to us unless they come like good Christian and ask us to forgive them. But the pattern of Jesus is to say, let forgiveness be an instinctive response of your life. Rather than waiting for the request to come forgive before the request ever is given. That's Jesus' attitude on the cross. He has cried Forgive! Before the person has said, I repent!

The gospel has something that became a very important word in the Vietnam war but basically it's a Christian word – amnesty. The concept of amnesty is such is that the condition of forgiveness in the Christian life is such that the Christian lives in a perpetual state of amnesty. The injuries done against the believer are not retained, not held, because the attitude of the Christian is such that all is forgiven. And the guilty go free. Amnesty. And if I do not do that I retain sins.

The high cost of unforgiveness is retention. When we don't retain then we can begin to let the healing processes flow in our life.

Jesus teaches us that the final cost of unforgiveness is that we retain our own sin and we lose our own relationship with God if we retain a personal sin. He tells us in Matthew 6 "If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins your heavenly father will not forgive you." The consequence in the end if we refuse to forgive another person, God's hands are tied. He cannot forgive us even of our own sins. There is a high cost to unforgiveness.

There's a spiritual cost to unforgiveness. As I've indicated it effects our relationship to God. It's a personal high cost of unforgiveness because it effects our relationship to other people. It damages those relationships. It may mar those relationships. Not only with the person directly involved but there is a spillover to the other people in our life.

The third consequence is it damages relationships within ourselves. If we remain unforgiving something bad happens in us. That we begin to descend in to a kind of personal pit. God calls us as part of stepping into healing to recognize the high cost of an unforgiving heart. Once we begin to recognize that we can begin to move past that. And begin to get on with healing. But the first in a series of four is meant to put before us is there unforgiveness in your life and do you realize the high cost that's being exacted in you.

Our gracious heavenly father, you have not counted our sins against us. But as far as the heavens are from the earth, as far as the east is from the west – that far have you removed our transgressions from us. Part of being like you is that we release others of their sins. Lord as we are now in this moment of prayer I ask that your Holy Spirit would illuminate to our own hearts any unforgiveness that we have toward any person. We're not now trying to remember what others have done to us and their need for forgiveness is, we're asking Lord about ourselves. Is there any person whom I have not forgiven? Is there any hurtful incidence in my life, which I have not released another person for what they did to me? Would you mentally as we're praying make an inventory of that in your life and realize that it's there. The Holy Spirit is prompting you and he's faithful in calling to remembrance the things that need to be called to remembrance and haven't been dealt with and put under the blood. If there's unforgiveness in your life the Holy Spirit is now making you aware of that. You can be sure of what comes to mind is the Holy Spirit working within you. This is a

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very sacred moment and the Holy Spirit is free to operate. The enemy cannot operate in an atmosphere where the spirit is working like this. What comes to you as unforgiveness, born to your heart by the Holy Spirit, who lays it now before you and asks you to begin making a step. This may not be all that he'll ask you to do. But he'll ask you to make a preliminary step. He asks you to visualize writing that on the board, writing what's been done to you. Visualize writing what somebody's done to you. Spell it out. How they wounded you, hurt you, were unfaithful to you, criticized you, didn't believe you, never hugged you, stole from you. Write that on the board of your mind. Whether it was a long time ago or present you've never released them of that. It's got a cost in your life. Now say, Holy Spirit give me a chalk board eraser. I want to wipe it out. Holy Spirit help me to wipe that out so it becomes no longer this pain in my life. Later in this series we'll talk about forgetting and remembering in a positive way. Sometimes we can't actually forget what has happened to us. But we can remember it in a different way. We'll talk about that. But now it's sufficient that the Lord sees the desire in your heart to erase that and be forgiving. That's all the spirit asks you to do right now. Erase and forgive.

Lord we do that. If I regard iniquity in my heart against my brother, how can God hear me. Lord I lay aside that iniquity in my heart. Release. God, help me to forgive.

Lord, thank you what you've begun to do right now in our hearts. We've made a step in the direction that gets us off dead center where we were. Now you're free to work. I pray that during this coming week you'll begin to show us how we can begin to move past that. We'll learn how to move past that. That's a start to recognize the unforgiveness was there and that we can retain it no longer. We can lose and let it go. Free the person who is bound up with our unforgiveness. Release them to experience your love and grace so that they may be healed even as we're being healed right now. We ask this in your name. Amen.