

## **THE DIFFICULTY IN FORGIVENESS**

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

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Again the series of Healing Life's Hurts through Forgiveness. I've indicated thus far that the real key to experiencing inner healing is that repentance and forgiveness should be preached in Jesus' name beginning in Jerusalem to all nations. We've looked at two themes. The high cost of unforgiveness which I spelled out in an acrostic – DESPAIR. Then last Sunday night, the high cost of forgiveness, which I spelled out in an acrostic – RESTORE. Next week we'll look at the theme How to Give Forgiveness. Tonight, the Difficulty in Forgiveness. As has been the case of all this series, I'm using acrostics to help spell out the truth.

Before I look specifically at the acrostic for tonight – we're going to use two words FAILURE or WORSHIP – I'd like to give us all a self inventory to help us know whether we are living in a state personally of forgiveness or unforgiveness. Answer yes or no. Again, when we talk about forgiveness rather than generalizing it helps to be specific. I ask the Holy Spirit to bring to your mind any person or groups of persons in your life which you have not forgiven and keep that person or group in your mind as we move through the message, through these questions.

Five statements. Do you say yes or no?

I feel a sense of freedom. I am a new creation. The old has passed away. The new has come. Is there still that presence of the old in my life? Things I haven't come to grips with and therefore still have me bound up emotionally inside. Or have I come to a sense of freedom about that altered relationship between myself and someone else.

I feel a weight has lifted. When we are in a state of unforgiveness frequently there is feeling of depression, oppression, a feeling of being bowed down. The shoulders of our spirit are bent down with a heavy load that unforgiveness presses upon us. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:19 "We do not count men's sins against them." The state of forgiveness causes us to release the weight that we would push upon ourselves or upon someone else.

In regards to forgiveness, I feel a sense of strength. I have given forgiveness or I have received forgiveness and I feel therefore a sense of inner strength, a mending, of wholeness in my life. David has a beautiful comment that is so descriptive of what he had gone through with his sin with Bathsheba. "When I declared not my sin my body wasted away." As long as David lived in a state of unforgiveness with himself, with God, he found his strength was sapped.

I feel cleansed and washed inside. David again cried in Psalm 51:7 "Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." And Isaiah said, "Though your sins be like scarlet they shall be white as snow." I feel cleansed and washed inside. I compare the readiness, the willingness to give forgiveness as the process of grooming ourselves.

Hopefully most of us living in our culture at least wash once a day. When I was a kid living on the Tibet and China border we had a bath once a week. I thought that was heaven to only have to take a bath once a week. Sometimes Mom would go to work on my ears. That hurt. It wouldn't hurt nearly so bad if on a daily basis I had washed but I had let it accumulate. The Tibetans themselves never washed from the time they were born until they die. It was against their religious behavior. Actually it was good climatically. They lived in the open air in cold weather.

## THE DIFFICULTY IN FORGIVENESS

### Healing Life's Hurts

If they were washing, they would probably be catching pneumonia all the time. To have gotten one of them really clean you would have had to take a Brillo pad.

I sometimes think when we have accumulated hurts in our lives that we haven't disposed of, that we haven't been cleansed from. Like a daily washing. "If we confess our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." If we don't do that on a rather regular basis what can happen is we accumulate those things in our life. When we want to go get them cleansed there's some Brillo pad work by the Holy Spirit that may tenderize us a bit. I'm convinced that that's one reason why when people are going through a real cathartic release, a real forgiveness in their life, a lot of tears are shed. There's a whole lot of work being done. Tenderness that is there underneath the sickness of grime and hard shell and casing and the like. I feel cleansed and washed inside.

A fifth question in our test of self-inventory is I feel good about standing before God. That's a problem where a lot of us have inferiority complexes about standing before God. Maybe our concern about not being able to stand before God doesn't relate initially to forgiveness and yet it does. If we know that we've been forgiven by God we can have confidence to stand before him. If we know that we're forgiving other people, God also forgives us, brings us a confidence in our relationship with the Lord.

In Zechariah 3, Satan accuses the high priest Joshua who has come back from the exile of standing before the angel of the Lord in filthy clothes. The order is given for the filthy clothes to be removed. The Lord says, "See I have taken away your sins. And I will put rich garments on you." What God wants to do is turn the failures of the past and the accusations of the past into something else and put new robes on us so that we feel good about standing before God.

If you were able to say yes, I feel a sense of freedom, I feel a weight has lifted, I feel a sense of strength, I feel cleansed and washed inside, I feel good about standing before God, the chances are very strong that you're not in a condition of unforgiveness with someone else.

The acrostic gets a little complicated tonight. It seems to me that how we handle the difficulties in forgiveness will lead to FAILURE or to WORSHIP. So we'll spell out the word and first letter in FAILURE will be counterbalanced by the first word in WORSHIP.

F – Feeling. That's one of the difficulties in forgiveness. I would select as the opposite of feelings Will. We will either function in forgiveness with our feelings or with our will, our volition. The fact of the matter is often we do not *feel* like forgiving. There is anger, there is hurt in our life. In many cases there is apathy and we don't want to take action. Often we do not ourselves feel forgiven. We don't feel like forgiving others and we don't feel forgiven ourselves.

I have come to the deep and abiding conviction in my own Christian experience that feelings are not a foundation on which to build a relationship and commitment with God. Feelings can be extremely deceptive. Feelings, on the other hand, can be right. But if our relationship is based on what we feel to do, our feelings do not have the strength to carry us through in perseverance and deep commitment.

I believe that biologically God created us with our thinking processes over the word we use for our emotional processes – our head is to be in control of our heart. Not visa-versa. I believe

## **THE DIFFICULTY IN FORGIVENESS**

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

scriptures teach us that very same thing. To turn and serve the Lord and be faithful to him and even to be a forgiving person whether or not we feel like forgiving. Real genuine love begins with commitment and stays there whether the feelings do or not. It continues. I think it's important that we seek to make things clear between us and God whatever our feelings are.

Sometimes we just don't have the will to wait things out. So I need to give a cautionary word. It's not all a matter of will power. I'm not saying that every situation can always be cured by someone just hanging in there. Because to make a relationship go two people must also agree together. One person cannot totally make a broken relationship whole. But there are occasions when our will, when we seek to live on a deeper level, that we run out of will power to do something. I think then that's where the Holy Spirit comes in and gives us an ability that we ourselves didn't know was in us. He often takes us to the limits of what we're able to do and when we've gone as far as we can with what we know we can do and we depend upon the Lord he gives us the ability to go beyond that. God can carry us beyond our will and give us the power to do his will in respect to forgiveness.

If you have a person who your feelings are very strong against and you don't know how you will ever forgive, begin to call out to God and say, Help me to will to forgive them.

A second difficulty in forgiveness in the word FAILURE is A – Ambivalence. The feeling of simultaneous attraction and repulsion. Ambivalence results in indecision. The second letter in WORSHIP is O – Order. Ambivalence must be replaced by a directive that orders a particular course of action. When we come and meet in a church meeting such as this and the Holy Spirit is moving among us and when we hear God breathe a word to our heart, we're moved upon to do something about the unforgiveness that is in our lives. But we leave here and a few hours later, a few days later we may be reassessing. Saying, Do I really want to do that? Maybe I was carried away in the emotionality of it all. Perhaps the pastor is just a good talker and it wasn't the Holy Spirit after all and the Lord would be content if I would just leave things in my life at this point undisturbed. The Lord does not will that any area of our life we live with un-reconciled tension with another person. The Lord wants us to make every attempt possible to be reconciled.

We obviously are not responsible for the other person's decision. The other person may choose to remain un-reconciled to us. But our responsibility is to give every effort, take every step to achieve reconciliation. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself and he's called us to be along with him reconcilers in this world.

Jesus reminds us to give an order. He says in Matthew 5:23-24, "If you're offering your gift at the altar and there remember your brother has something against you, leave your gift at the altar and go, be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift." Jesus is teaching that the moment of worship is when we review all of life's relationships. When we reach that moment of worship let's re-evaluate. Not only our relationship with the Lord but our relationship with other people. Let's keep clearing the decks. We choose not to worship God in a separate compartment of our relationship with other people.

Where there is regularly appointed worship there can be regularly appointed and ordered forgiveness.

## **THE DIFFICULTY IN FORGIVENESS**

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

Third letter in the word FAILURE is I. The third letter in the word WORSHIP is R. I'm going to let I stand for Intractable. What is an Intractable person? It's an obstinate person. An intractable person is a person set in their own ways and not liable to change. One of the difficulties in forgiveness is probably you have some person in your life that no matter how much you attempt to establish communication with them they don't want to establish it with you. No matter how much you want to clear the deck, they aren't willing to clear the deck. No matter how many times you say I forgive you, they go on hurting you. Intractable. They're not going to change and after a while you quit even having faith that they're going to change.

One of the things that faith does is reorders things. Faith doesn't let things rest as they are. One of the ways that you grow in faith is to begin to have a different vision of the person than the vision of themselves that they communicate to you. Re-imagining them. Seeing them in a different way and beginning to believe that God can break through all that mold and crust that they have. But there are intractable people.

How do you respond to the person who keeps hurting you in spite of the fact that you keep forgiving them? The opposite of Retractable is Repeat. Peter had that problem. "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?" Peter was willing to extend unilateral forgiveness. He was willing to extend forgiveness even though he hadn't been asked for forgiveness. He was willing to give it. But he said how many times, seven times? The Lord told him an infinite number, a Jewish metaphor that would stand for an infinite number – seventy times seven.

It's critical in forgiveness to realize that when we extend forgiveness to another person forgiveness does not necessarily require for completion, their acceptance of that. You've done your part when you've sought forgiveness. When you've extended forgiveness. You've done what you could do. Many times we can give forgiveness without saying a word to a person. You can simply in your heart forgive them because sometimes an intractable person is not even aware that they're hurting you. They're so oblivious to anything but their own lifestyle, their own self-interest, they're wrapped up in their own world and that's it. But the Lord says keep on repeating the act of forgiveness. So that you don't obviously build up anger and resentment and rage in your own life. It's important psychologically. It's important emotionally for us to keep repeating forgiveness.

Keep on forgiving an intractable person. Repeat the forgiveness.

Another difficulty in forgiveness unless we deal with it successfully will lead the Law. The corresponding word in WORSHIP is S – Soar. One of our real difficulties in forgiveness is the Law, the legal law of the land.

For example, a husband runs off with another woman and sues his wife for divorce. The legal question and the moral question from the Christian point of view is should the Christian wife seek the support of legal protection. Should she counter sue? Sue for child support? Sue for personal support? How does a person go about in a situation where wrong has been committed how does a person go about handling their legal rights which permit them to exact a financial penalty for the other person's clear moral and legal wrong. Some persons have taken an attitude toward this, As Christians we don't have legal rights. So the legal rights are surrendered. Others have taken the attitude of I'm going to get all I can get whether I'm a Christian or not.

## **THE DIFFICULTY IN FORGIVENESS**

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

It seems to me that truth on this matter is somewhere in the middle. The Christian has an attitude toward the law that goes somewhat like this. The law is given in society to restrain unlawfulness and to punish the wrongful doer. If therefore in a legal situation one party is clearly the person who has deprived the other person because of their wrongful activity the law as it applies to the Christian gives that Christian recourse not to seek personal vengeance but recourse to exact a penalty from the other person in order to help acquaint that person with the consequences of their own sin. The law is given as an instrument of punishment so that it might have remedial action upon the person. If it cannot have a remedial action it would have a punitive action. That is it would simply say there is a consequence for wrong doing and if you choose not to have a remember, not to return or repent, at least there is an exacting that it makes. So the Christian is well within their moral and Christian responsibility within the legal system if they seek recourse.

The problem is in attitude. Get so caught up in the legal battles that the legal process itself grinds down our spirit and we begin to have a kind of complex like the merchants of Venice where we go for the pound of flesh. As an antidote that the recourse the law can give us in giving us satisfaction God calls us on the inside in the midst of the whole legal process to simply have an inner spirit that soars and rises above the conflict. And is able to distinguish the difference between justice which promotes righteousness and vengeance which promotes self interest and the ability to say "I got even!" isn't there a difference between justice and vengeance. The Lord calls us to soar. Sometimes he calls us to surrender our legal rights. Because we become so consumed with our pursuit that we're unable to sore as long as we pursue them. That is a matter that's up to the individual and their conscience. In the midst of a legal matter God an give us the power to soar, to rise to a more exalted level that just the get-even process. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall soar on wings like eagles." Isaiah 40:31.

A fifth difficulty in forgiveness, represented by the letter U in FAILURE is Unrecoverable. The fifth letter in WORSHIP is H and I'll let it represent Heal. Unrecoverable versus heal.

A real difficulty in forgiveness is this. What if the person we have wronged is now gone. They're deceased. What if in a marriage relationship there's been a dissolution of marriage and the other person has remarried or you have remarried. And there's no way possible you can ever put that relationship back together. The situation is unrecoverable. Fortunately the scriptures have some answers for us in that respect. Two examples from the life of David.

One example is from 2 Samuel 12. Nathan tells David the story of the person who had the little sheep and it set at the poor man's table and the rich man had everything but he came along and wanted the little sheep so he took it from the poor man and killed it. David said, "Let me get a hold of that guy. I'll take care of him!" Nathan said, "You're the man!" Through David's sin with Bathsheba, God told him that one of the consequences of the many was that the son that was born from the illicit union between him and Bathsheba would die. When that son was born David fasted and spent nights lying on the ground. For seven days of that child's life. When that little boy died the servants were in terror about coming to David. They said if he has acted this way when his son was alive (David was the kind of person who would kill the messenger of bad tidings) he'll do something to us for bringing the bad news. When they came and said, Your son has died, David did an incredible thing. He got up. He washed. He put on fresh cloths and he

## **THE DIFFICULTY IN FORGIVENESS**

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

ate. His servants said to him, "We don't understand your actions. The seven days your son was alive you laid on the ground and you fasted. Your son dies, you get up you shower and shave, eat a meal. We don't understand." David said this, "While the child was alive I fasted and I wept. I thought, who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me and let the child live. But now that he is dead why should I fast, can I bring him back? I will go to him but he will not return to me." David was willing to get closure on the experience. He said, "I've done all I could. There's nothing more I can do. I have to leave it in God's hands. I must go on." That's what you have to do in an unrecoverable situation. You cannot bring back the past. You cannot dig it up. There comes a point where, like David, you say, when there was still hope I fasted and prayed and waited before God. But the situation is over. It's done. God help be bear it and let it no more impede the direction of my life. I release it to God and ask for his healing.

Another example from David's life. When he wanted to build a temple to the Lord and the Lord said, "David you can't build the temple. I'm going to let your son do that." What a disappointment that must have been to David. But the Lord comforted him with these words. "Because it was in your heart to build a temple for my name. You did well to have this in your heart." You may be in an unrecoverable situation but if in your heart there is a willingness to forgive, God sees that and God reckons that to you as a completed act as much as if you'd actually been able to do that. The person is no longer available to either be forgiven or to ask for forgiveness. God knows and God accepts that and you can be freed from that and you can be healed.

Let these scriptures be healing to the un-recoverability of situations.

The sixth letter in the word FAILURE is R. The difficulty there is Risk. The sixth letter in WORSHIP is I. I'll let it represent the word Impart.

A real difficulty in forgiveness is to be vulnerable. To ask someone forgiveness is to risk being silly, to risk being put down once more. It's to be emotionally naked before another person. Have you ever gone to someone saying, "Some time ago I did something against you..." and you name the specific event. "This has bothered me in this period of time. I've come to you because God has spoken to my heart and I've come to you to ask you to forgive me." And the person says to you kind of blankly, "I've forgotten all about that!" and it makes you so mad you want to haul off and hit them. Here you've been through all this struggle, all this emotional pain and risk to ask them for forgiveness and they say, "I don't even remember that."

There is a way when someone comes and asks you for forgiveness that we need to be trained to realize that that's a very nervous moment in their lives. Even if we have forgotten it say, "I understand. And by all means I give my forgiveness."

Willing to take the risk. Don't, by the way, ask for forgiveness by going to the person and say, "If I have done anything to hurt you would you please forgive me?" and not being specific. That places the burden on the other person to name what it is that you did. You either know you did something to hurt them or you don't. If you don't know, don't go. If you know, be specific. Don't make them having to carry the burden of having to identify where your wrong was.

Impart is the response from our heart to forgive another person from the store of our own abundance. I went through the gospels and did a close search when this came to me. No one

## **THE DIFFICULTY IN FORGIVENESS**

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

ever came to Jesus and asked him verbatim "Forgive me my sins." As I thought about that something struck me from the gospels. The reason why there is no record of anyone doing that is he gave them the forgiveness before they had the chance to ask. The guy dropped through the roof: before he can open his mouth Jesus says, "Thy sins be forgiven you." The woman taken in adultery: before she can say a word he says, "Neither do I condemn thee. Go and sin no more." He has such forgiveness in his own life that he just kept imparting it and kept blessing people with his forgiving spirit and forgiving heart.

In regard to unforgiveness we ought not to wait and say, "I'm not budging till they come to me!" The Lord calls us to have the attitude of Christ. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Impart forgiveness.

You'll never lose your peace over someone else's sin. You will lose it over your own response and your own activity and reaction.

The last letter in the word FAILURE is E. I'll let it stand for Ego. The last letter in WORSHIP is P for Prayer. Ego versus Prayer.

So often pride stands in the way of forgiveness and is a real difficulty in forgiveness. We do not want to admit that we have been wrong. Or worse yet. We don't want to admit that we have been wrong while we've been in the right. It's possible to be in the right and still be in the wrong! You can be in the wrong if you go about doing something in the wrong way even though your cause is right.

Empathetic prayer – where you try to get in another person's skin and feel where they are. Where we invite God to judge and deal with our ego, to judge in us what we condemn in another person. I find what I most often judge in another is sometimes what I secretly long to experience myself. The reason why I'm so harsh in judging it is that I'm concerned that I might have done the same thing. The Lord calls us to prayer.

Failure or Worship. These it seems to be are some of the difficulties in forgiveness, which the Holy Spirit would call to our attention.

Our lives are a cup before you, Lord. Many times our lives are a cup that has been dropped and shattered. You as the mender of our lives come and pick up every scattered piece and put it together. But initially we simply see it as a patchwork quilt of broken pieces. We see all the places where the glue has knit everything back together. There are still little pieces of glass that can never be recovered so there are open places in the cup and it's not a very pretty cup. It's a chipped cup. A broken cup that is now patched back together. But as we yield ourselves into your hands and as we seek to have your forgiving heart you come and do a thing which man cannot do. You take the broken cup of our life and with your hand you caress it and you bring a whole new glaze and finish so that it is as though the cup had never been broken. But the new glaze adds a strength that had never been there. So along with the new beauty is a new strength to behold. Will you take our lives, Lord, that in some cases have been dropped by others carelessly on the floor of life and broken into several pieces? In some cases many pieces. Would you skillfully and with your potter's hand take us, glue us, laminate us, bring us to a new refreshing product of excellence and quality. Fit vessels again for your use. Will you heal the fault lines in our inner life and would you

## **THE DIFFICULTY IN FORGIVENESS**

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

cause to flow from us, Holy Spirit of God, a river of forgiveness toward others. And would you help us, Holy Spirit of God, to acknowledge the presence of cups that we have carelessly dropped, the lives of others whom we have disappointed and disillusioned and brought grief to. Could we with you participate in the repottery process? Could you take your hand and place it over ours and show us how we can with your skillful guidance help another person to put some pieces back that are missing. To glue, to re-glaze and to bring to another brokenness and to another broken life a new thing of strength and beauty. Would you mend up the brokenness that are within us and with others whom we know and bring us to complete and total healing and forgiveness? Help us, Lord, to surmount the difficulties of forgiveness that in our inner being we might be free and whole. Through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.