

HOW TO GIVE FORGIVENESS

Healing Life's Hurts

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Today is the fourth and last in the series "Healing Life's Hurts Through Forgiveness." As a preface to the message today, a couple verses in the Old Testament. "Like water spilled on the ground which cannot be recovered, so we must die. But God does not take away life. Instead he devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him." 2 Samuel 14:14-15.

How important this whole emphasis is on forgiveness. We never know when it will be too late to say, "I'm sorry" to someone. We never know when we say good bye in the morning to our family that that might be the last chance we have to say something to them and to their hearts. Life is so short. To live in unforgiveness even longer than a day is to live in unforgiveness too long. God wants us to be healed.

We've shared that together. We've talked about the high cost of unforgiveness in terms of the word DESPAIR. The high cost of forgiveness in terms of the word RESTORE. We've talked about overcoming the difficulties that if we don't overcome those difficulties, FAILURE is the results. With God's help we can overcome and WORSHIP is the result.

Today just some practical words. How to forgive. How to give forgiveness. I want today to use the word what I think best sums up how to give forgiveness. That is the word GRACIOUS. To give forgiveness with grace.

G – Genuine. If we're going to give forgiveness in a practical way to one another we start by seeking forgiveness that is genuine. Forgiveness, if it's anything less than genuine will never bring healing to our lives. Isaiah denounced outward form that is unaccompanied by inward change. He says "'The multitude of your sacrifices, what are they to me,' says the Lord. 'I have more than enough of burnt offerings, the rams and the fat of fattened animals. I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and goats and lambs.'" People thought they could go through a religious ceremony and please God. God said no ceremony unless it's accompanied by the inward renewal of the heart, unless it's genuine. David recognized this when he committed sin. So he said God won't have sacrifices. Instead he prayed from the depths of his heart. Psalm 139 "Search me O God, and know my heart." God calls us in forgiveness to begin by being honest with ourselves and being honest with other people, honest with God. All forgiveness if it's to be genuinely extended must be indeed from the heart and must be honest.

R – Re-evaluate. I say this especially to those among us today who perhaps have given up on the idea of forgiveness and they don't know how to give forgiveness if they wanted to give it. The person who needs to be forgiven seems so impossible to forgive because they've been like that for the last 30 years and every prospect seems that they'll continue that way for the next 30 years. I simply say re-evaluate.

Many times we get so used to a situation. We've tried to do something be for and always hit a wall so we're unwilling to try again. We say, if that's the way it's going to be I'll just lie here the rest of my life! We may be denying ourselves the opportunity of a new situation. I've seen people die spiritually because they did not re-evaluate. People who lock each other in a box in a marriage. The marriage has died because people have so locked each other in a box and said, He

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or she will never change. They never take time to evaluate the possibility of change and renewal and reconciliation and repentance occurring.

So we say in re-evaluation as we look at a situation that we've tried time and time again and nothing has happened, we say God help me keep going. The situation may have changed. Re-evaluate.

A – Approach. The basic issue in the word approach is sometimes we don't know in forgiveness especially if there's a lot of unforgiveness around us or maybe a lot of unforgiveness in us toward people around us. We don't know who to approach first. Whether to take the greatest hurts first or to take the lesser hurts first. There's probably good counsel on the idea of maybe beginning with some of the lesser hurts and gain strength to then work through some of the greater hurts later. We must remember that in the beginning in forgiveness that it may be sufficient to simply *want* to forgive. Maybe for a while we don't have the strength to act on it. We just want to. God's able to build on that want. Then to start with the smaller hurts and forgive – fully and freely to go on the way to the greater hurts.

Sometimes there are people we have never met to whom we may need to extend forgiveness. There is such a thing as institutional anger. Maybe a church institution. And just the thought of it, the mention of it brings the whole thing to mind. God wants us to begin to approach that before we approach people closest to us. Some begin with the far off and work to the near by. I approach the opposite. I start with the difficult and work down to the less difficult. If there are a lot of problems I try to take the most difficult one first. If I get it put to rest then I can somehow manage the others. Isn't God good to work with us according to our personalities? God may want you to start with the most difficult problem in your life first and get forgiveness. He may on the other hand know you need to work up strength to approach it. Whichever way, pursue forgiveness and God will bring healing whichever end of the line you start with.

C is for Confess. Confession is to forgiveness what oxygen is to air. There cannot be forgiveness without confession. There is no air without oxygen. I'd like to give you some practical guidelines on confession.

Confession should be as public as the commission of the act. If that sounds a little bit complicated let me put it another way. The circle of confession should be limited to the circle of the sin as a general rule. If you've done something against one person as a general rule don't stand up and confess it to the whole congregation. Unless God later wants you to do it by way of testimony. But the problem was one to one and it needs to be solved in the circle of one to one. Extending the circle of confession when it didn't affect the deed itself is not necessary and in some cases can be extremely harmful.

A second guideline is confession should be shared when it is a help not a hurt or a hindrance. If confessing would provide another person with excuses or temptations to stumble then don't share the confession. One of the things we struggle with when we share what God has done in our life is will this lead to someone else's harm or hurt. This can even occur within a marriage context. A person who is coming to spiritual life after failure and deep sin may need to assess whether their married partner has the strength to bear the confession. It may be a wonderful catharsis for them to confess but it may be a very harmful and hurtful thing to place on the partner that is not ready yet to receive it.

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I think in most cases all matters between a husband and wife can be shared. There may be sometimes where something is shared and a partner was not yet ready for it and instead of producing healing which was the intended hope it instead produced great division and strife and hurt. God has to keep us sensitive in this area as to when a confession will be good for another just like it's good for us. There may be some things that we've done that we just have to confess to God and hold for a while until we sense the other person has the strength to hear it.

Another guideline on confession is confession should not be so intimate and revealing and painful that it would wound or scar the person to whom the confession is addressed. You don't have to go into all the sordid details in other words.

To confess in the Greek is simply to say the same thing. Basically confession is lining up our life with God's word and with God's will. It is to say I stand in agreement. When the Lord judges this in my life when I confess I am standing in agreement. I'm lining up with. I'm speaking the same thing as what God says about what I've done. Confession, an integral part of giving forgiveness. To go and to say I confess.

I in GRACIOUS is for Immediate. That is when the hurt has occurred, seek at that time the forgiveness. Don't let days and months and years pass. Immediate.

When we do not immediately begin to forgive then we become used to it. We settle in with that in our soul. I've been struck in doing this series, what a close relationship there is between anger and unforgiveness. Show me an unforgiving person and I'll show you an angry person. There's such an interlock, they're inseparable. Anger and unforgiveness go hand in hand. So we don't forgive and it builds up. Then what happens is we become capable of far greater hurts in our life. We almost begin to look for somebody to hurt us so we'll have another sort of "Poor me" to add to ourselves.

To forgive immediately, how much better! To give forgiveness the day that it occurs. Jesus said, "Don't let the sun go down on your wrath." By that he meant clear up the day's agenda before the day passes. Don't carry it over to another day. Be immediate. Be forgiving person. Develop forgiveness as a trait in your life.

O in GRACIOUS is for Over and Over. We not only forgive one time, we forgive many times. Jesus taught us to forgive seventy times seven. Forgiving over and over. No marriage can last without continual forgiveness. No good human relationship can last without real forgiveness. Sometimes we look at a marriage relationship and it seems like it all of a sudden falls apart. Yet no relationship all of a sudden falls apart. It's a culmination of things. Over a period of time it gradually leads to a break. Nothing happens over night. It's in degrees.

It's always been an assurance to me to know if the Lord tells me to forgive someone else seventy times seven then he must forgive me that many times. That's been so liberating in my life. I do the same thing over and over again and I say "Dare I ask God for forgiveness about this since I've asked him so many times? He's weary of it. He's not going to forgive me." Then the scripture comes to me, Jesus telling Peter "seventy times seven." If the Lord tells us we're to forgive each other this infinite amount of times how many times do you think God is willing to forgive us? Over and over.

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U is for Unilateral. That means one sided. The forgiveness that doesn't wait for somebody else to come and say I'm sorry will you forgive me. But the forgiveness that's given even if the other person doesn't ask. It's always given. One-sided forgiveness. Stephen had this as he was dying Acts 7:60. His very last words as he looks at the people who are stoning him to death he says, "Lord do not hold this sin against them." There was a man there that day – Saul – and these words of Stephen serve I think as a prick that eventually prod him to God. Unilateral forgiveness.

Peter in Acts 3:17 is preaching and he says to those that are around him who have been responsible for the death of Christ. He says, "Now brothers, I know you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders." The death of Jesus was anything but an act of ignorance. He was deliberately set up and murdered. But yet in the apostolic preaching he was murdered in ignorance. Peter knew enough about the Old Testament that in the Old Testament there are two kinds of sins – sins of the high hand which are deliberate, premeditated, first degree sins for which there was no forgiveness under the law. And sins of ignorance for which there was forgiveness. Unilaterally the apostles extending forgiveness saying, God forgives you. God sees it as ignorance. Some persons have raised the question, "I have forgiven but the other person has not acted on that forgiveness. What do I do?" You've done what you could. Keep extending the forgiveness unilaterally. You can do nothing more. Jesus, in spite of the fact that he so desperately wanted to could never establish a relationship with some of the people that were gathered against him. Even though from the cross he cried out "Father, forgive them!" They refused to receive the forgiveness. But that didn't change his attitude. He would continue to exercise a forgiving spirit so that if they ever came to themselves and came to change they could immediately come under the canopy of his forgiveness. Unilateral.

S in GRACIOUS is for Supernatural. I want to talk about this in two ways.

One way we forgive supernaturally is some things are so difficult to forgive. Some things that seem to be so deep rooted within us and very difficult to forgive that Jesus may be saying to us what he one time said to his disciples when they could not exorcise a demon. He said, "This kind comes not out except through prayer and fasting." It may well be that there are some kinds of forgiveness that come not out except through intensive prayer and fasting, joining together with someone else in a covenant prayer to ask God for a release and God will grant it. This kind comes not out except through prayer and fasting.

A second meaning of forgiving supernaturally to me also means forgiving with the forgiveness of God rather than with the forgiveness of man. The scriptures put before us in the Old Testament and New Testament stories of two fathers who handled forgiveness entirely differently. How they handled it is all important in the result that occurs.

One example of human forgiveness is that of David. The story is told in 2 Samuel 13-18. David had many sons. Two of them, Absalom and Amnon. Absalom had a full sister, Tamar. Tamar was raped by her half brother Amnon. Absalom despised Amnon for what he did. He waited and waited until there was an opportune moment and he had Amnon killed. Absalom knew that he would face the judgment of his father King David so he fled from David's presence to Geshur. There he waited – for years. About three years in Geshur removed from David. Joab who was David's chief of staff and knew David's heart more than anybody else sensed that

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David longed for reconciliation. So Joab got a wise old woman and set her up to come before the king and tell a story which would have a moral to the story and would illustrate David's need to bring Absalom back. The woman came and told the story and the scripture at the beginning of the message is some of the counsel this woman gave to David. She said, "Like water spilled on the ground which cannot be recovered so we must die. But God does not take away life. Instead he devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him." Tremendous counsel. God devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him. The counsel to David is if God does this, bring Absalom back. David gave the order: Absalom could come back. But he laid a restriction on Absalom. He could come back to Jerusalem but he was not to see David's face. So for two more years Absalom lived in Jerusalem and he did not see David's face. Finally at the end of that time Absalom was so desperate to see his father David that he finally arranged an encounter. But the end results appear to be very surface. Their remaining meanings appear not to be the wholesome father-son relationship at all. What had happened was David was willing in a sense to forgive Absalom but his forgiveness was conditional. He placed limits on it. He placed restrictions on it. He said you can be forgiven but only this much. And for five whole years he didn't see his face – three years in isolation, two years in Jerusalem. The forgiveness was incomplete and the result was disaster. Absalom rebelled openly against David and Absalom finally is executed by Joab's troops. Terrible story! Forgiveness that was human but incomplete.

Then Jesus tells us the story about another father. This father had a son who took the father for half of all that he had. He went into a far country, spent it in wild living, sat down one day in a pigpen and came to himself. He said, I will go to my father. The father was waiting for him, wanting to be restored to him, threw his arms around his neck, kissed him when he came back, put a beautiful garment upon him, put a ring on his finger, killed a fatted calf and welcomed him completely home – restored!

The difference between the two fathers tells us the difference that there is in forgiveness. Or going only to an extent and to a limited amount or forgiving completely. Totally. Irrevocably. When we forgive completely rejoicing is the end result. God wants us to exercise complete forgiveness. It's possible to do that because Christ has set us free to forgive.

In these weeks we have looked together at the theme of forgiveness. To bring things kind of to a climax I remember the favorite story which Jesus told which he said this story is the foundation of all my other teaching. And if you understand this you will understand the rest. If you do not understand this then none of the rest will make sense. He told about the sower who went out to sow.

Some seed fell upon the path. As we have shared on forgiveness some here may have heard words and not taken truth to your heart. You need above all things to extend forgiveness or to ask for forgiveness. The word has fallen upon the beaten path. If your heart and life is not open to receive it what will immediately happen as you leave this place and in days to come is that this teaching will be robbed of its power in your life. It will be banished from your mind and heart and never exercised. The birds of the air, Satan himself will come and devour it and you will go away unchanged because you have not been open in your spirit to receive.

Jesus said other seed fell upon rocky ground. It grew up for a while but the sun came out and scorched it. That certainly is the case in trying to give forgiveness that we might with

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enthusiasm respond to a teaching and set out to do it. But the first person we go to ask forgiveness of or seek reconciliation with and we have imagine a beautiful thing happening they might very well say to us "No, I will not forgive you!" The sun scorches if we will allow it what has been sown. A look, a hardness, a stern word could take all of this which God wants to cleanse our life out of our life.

Jesus said some seed fell among the thorns and the cares of the world and the desire for riches cluttered it out. Here again Jesus is speaking to us and saying one of the things related to forgiveness is just the anxiety of going to someone and making things right. Tremendous anxiety. Anxiety can rob us of the word of God flowering our life. And the delight in riches. What does this speak of? This speaks to me of the person who is oriented toward the material. Accumulate more and more things and their emphasis and priority is on things and the relationship of things rather than on a relationship. The emphasis is on the job rather than the home. It's upon success in dollars and cents rather than success in loving people. The delight in riches crowds out the word of God.

Then Jesus says some seed falls upon the good soil. I pray that we are. If it falls upon the good soil it bears fruit – thirty fold, sixty fold, a hundred fold. It has tremendous impact upon our life and the forgiveness that we have sensed and felt is forgiveness that is spread to others so that it goes out like ripples in a pond. It has its impact. It radiates to others. God seeks to bring us to a position of being full of grace – gracious.

Give forgiveness. Be like God. Gracious.

We've shared these days together around your word and person. We've sought again in our heart to apply your word in our lives. We confess that the way is not easy. But the way that you set before us is a way that's victorious. It will bring liberation. It will bring the healing of our spirit. I pray again for each person here today. You knew each life, you knew each heart, you know the struggles that are in each one. Your heart is full. You want to bring your healing forgiveness to each one here. If there's a person here who has been far from you, distant from you and rebellious against you that they could never be forgiven. That's not true. Your heart is full of forgiveness toward them today if they would only come in under the tent of your forgiveness. And they will. They've heard the gospel, the good news. For other relationships that are represented here today that have been up to this point either bruised or in some cases severed, we pray for you to do in us what no other person or power can do. Bring healing to our lives, bring forgiveness to our spirit, in the name of Jesus. Amen.