

T H E

P O W E R
O F

F O R G I V E N E S S

March 21, 2023

Lesson Three

Last week we looked at Jesus and forgiveness—how he role modeled forgiveness for us while he was here on earth and what he taught us about forgiveness. What is the most amazing thing to you as you see how Jesus forgave?

In a sentence or two, tell us what Jesus taught us about forgiveness and forgiving.

Unforgiveness Is Sin

The first thing we need to establish is that for a child of God who has been forgiven so much, unforgiveness is sin.

Matthew 6:14 – 15: *For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*

Many believe that forgiveness is simply optional. But God has made it clear to us all it is mandatory.

The Torture of Unforgiveness

Last week we looked at the parable in Matthew 18 about the servant who had been forgiven a great debt, but he refused to forgive someone else a small debt. Remember how Jesus told the ending of this parable:

Matthew 18:32 – 35: *“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³ Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ ³⁴ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. ³⁵ “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”*

Unforgiveness is self-inflicted torture. Here are some of the tortures of unforgiveness.

Ruins Your Health

From Johns Hopkins Medical Newsletter:

“Whether it’s a simple spat with your spouse or long-held resentment toward a family member or friend, unresolved conflict can go deeper than you may realize—it may be affecting your physical health. The good news: Studies have found that the act of forgiveness can reap huge rewards for your health, lowering the risk of heart attack; improving cholesterol levels and sleep; and reducing pain, blood pressure, and levels of anxiety, depression and stress. And research points to an increase in the forgiveness-health connection as you age. “Chronic anger puts you into a fight-or-flight mode, which results in numerous changes in heart rate, blood pressure and immune response. Those changes, then, increase the risk of depression, heart disease and diabetes, among other conditions.”

David describes the physical suffering and harm he brought on himself because of his sin:

Psalm 38:1 – 10:

LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. ²Your arrows have pierced me, and your hand has come down on me. ³Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; there is no soundness in my bones because of my sin. ⁴My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear.⁵ My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly.⁶ I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning. ⁷My back is filled with searing pain; there is no health in my body.⁸ I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart. ⁹All my longings lie open before you, Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you.¹⁰ My heart pounds, my strength fails me; even the light has gone from my eyes.

Name some of the physical issues David faced because of his unconfessed sin, which he held onto for a year.

Can you connect some physical symptoms in your own life with an unwillingness to forgive?

Turns into Bitterness

Another torture caused by harbored unforgiveness is that it turns into bitterness—overnight!

Ephesians 4:26: *“In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.*

This passage gives us insight into how bitterness can harm you:

Hebrews 12:15: *See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.*

Long-held bitterness shows on your face; it ages you; it makes you ugly! And it spills over to all your relationships—it defiles many.

So, what should you do when there is bitterness in your heart?

Ephesians 4:31: *Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.*

Another translation says:

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. (ESV)

Now, whose job is it to “get rid” of any bitterness you may have—to put it away?

But the question is HOW? Here are two important steps you may need to take.

1. Lament

What is a lament?

Psalm 102:1: *A prayer of an afflicted person who has grown weak and pours out a lament before the LORD. Hear my prayer, LORD; let my cry for help come to you.*

The Bible exhorts us to lament. God has given us the gift of lamenting and we need to learn how to use it.

Lament is often accompanied by despair, lots of questions, and even confusion. Your lament may be short:

Psalm 30:5b: *...weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.*

Or it may be a season of lament that drags on awhile.

How did Jesus respond to the death of Lazarus?

John 11:33 - 35: *When Jesus saw her (Mary) weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept.*

He lamented. He needed to lament and so did his friends.

Romans 12:12: *Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.*

So, when you have been hurt and that is causing you to find it hard to forgive, the first step in finding relief from that pain is to pour your heart out to God in a lament.

Lamentations 3:19-20: *I remember my affliction and my wandering; the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.*

Psalm 142:1 – 2: *I cry aloud to the LORD; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy.² I pour out before him my complaint; before him I tell my trouble.*

This lamenting may take an hour or it could take weeks or months, but don't skip it. It will enable you to "get rid of bitterness."

2. Ask God to restore you

To "get rid of bitterness" ask God to restore you, to make you whole and deliver you from bitterness. You have to want to get rid of the bitterness more than you want to hold on to that grudge, that anger and resentment that keeps welling up inside you.

Psalm 71:20: *Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up.*

Ask God to restore your life again; to bring you up again; to set you free from the torture of unforgiveness.

Interrupts your Fellowship with God

This is the worst thing that happens when you don't forgive—you lose that sweet, intimate relationship you had with God before.

1 John 1:6: *If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.*

The Benefits of Forgiving

Now I want to emphasize what's in it for you when you can forgive people who've done you wrong.

Freedom from Bitterness.

In his book *Total Forgiveness*, R. T. Kendall tells the story of how he was unable to forgive for much of his life. His friend said to him, “RT, you must totally forgive them. Until you totally forgive them you will be in chains. Release them, and you will be released.”

He writes that the Holy Spirit spoke to him through what his friend said to him that day. As his friend told him, his chains were gone; his bondage to that unforgiving spirit was finally broken.

Don't be deceived by bitterness. Don't call it another name to make it sound less bad—names like *hurt* and *offended* and *emotional pain*. Don't let the enemy keep you mired in bitterness. It is the most miserable place to be.

Avoiding Much Trouble

In **Hebrews 12:15** we read:

See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

Bitterness causes trouble; forgiveness helps you avoid trouble. What kind of trouble will you avoid?

- You avoid physical troubles
- You avoid relationship troubles
- You avoid defiling others with your bitter spirit
- You avoid being out of fellowship with God
- You avoid wasting time and energy
- You avoid “falling short of the grace of God”

What does it mean to *fall short of the grace of God*?

J. B. Phillips translation of Hebrews 12:15:

Be careful that none of you fails to respond to the grace which God gives, for if he does there can very easily spring up in him a bitter spirit which is not only bad in itself but can also poison the lives of many others.

The Greek word for “fall short” means *to miss or fail to reach the goal*. So, the benefit of forgiveness is that you don't miss out on the good stuff—the blessings and grace—God has just for you.

Renewed God-Power

When you harbor an unforgiving attitude, God isn't able to bless you or use you like before. The truth is, bitterness causes us to be unclean and unfit vessels.

Oh, the benefits are well worth the cost of forgiveness. Forgiveness is not easy. It is costly.

What did your forgiveness cost God the Father? God the Son?

What will/has/does forgiveness cost you?

The benefits of forgiveness far outweigh the torture of unforgiveness.