

The Witness of Forgiveness

Presented by Lisa Bishop

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Day One

Is your life a witness of forgiveness?

When someone lies about you, a friend or family member betrays you, or a coworker speaks harsh or dismissive words, do you extend grace and work to forgive, or are you prone to hold onto a grudge?

1 John 2:9-10 says,

Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble.

These verses are speaking specifically to and about our relationship with fellow believers. But the call to love and live in the light of Jesus applies to every relationship and interaction we have. The Apostle John is teaching that you cannot say you love Jesus and live in his power when you are harboring hatred. You may be saying, "I don't hate anyone." Hate is a strong word, but let's not get hung up on that because John is juxtaposing hate with the ultimate command to love. Anything other than love, even the slightest dislike for someone can have us walking in darkness. Along with hatred, comes some form of unforgiveness, which is a stumbling block. You cannot walk in the light and hate at the same time, and hate has a way of ruling our lives.

The power of the Gospel rests on the forgiveness you and I received by the atoning blood of Jesus. He shed his blood for people who slapped him, spit at him, mocked him, yelled cruel words. These were people who threatened his life and ultimately hung him on a cross. When you forgive others, your life becomes a witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When you forgive, your life become a witness to the forgiveness and saving grace of Jesus.

In his final days on earth, in the very throws of being betrayed and hunted down by his enemies, Jesus leaves his disciples with these words.

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another (John 13:34-35).

As the saying goes, "Actions speak louder than words."

How we treat each other speaks louder than the Christian doctrines we teach. Let your life be an overflow to the supernatural love of God. Let your life be a witness of forgiveness.

Day Two

Are you giving the enemy permission to disrupt your peace?

I want to examine a way you may be giving Satan a wide-open invitation to harass you and mess with your internal harmony.

Unforgiveness.

I know the topic of forgiveness is a familiar one, but the real question is this, "Is the practice of forgiveness a part of your life?" As a follower of Christ, it is one thing to know you are called to forgive, but do you actually practice what the Bible preaches?

Ephesians 4:26-27 says,

In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

When you give the devil a foothold, it means you are giving the enemy an opportunity. Anger is a byproduct of holding onto unforgiveness, and if you do not forgive, anger will get a hold of you. The devil will use it as an opportunity to influence your life, to control or manipulate you. Anger and unforgiveness are powerful and destructive emotions when we let them run wild and do not run to the cross.

I'll never forget a conference I went to several years ago. The speaker was talking about anxiety and depression and the link to unforgiveness. The bottom line is that unforgiveness can meddle with your mental health.

When someone you care about hurts you, you can hold on to anger and resentment—or embrace forgiveness and move forward. Making the intentional decision to let go of resentment and bitterness has been proven to decrease stress and anxiety, lessen symptoms of depression, improve heart health, lower blood pressure, strengthen your immune system, and improve your mental health. Forgiveness is a prerequisite for a healthy life and flourishing relationships, and it is also a command from God.

Your father knows best! God knows the impact of unforgiveness, and he wants you to experience the fullness of life in Jesus. So don't give the devil a foothold. Now, forgiveness doesn't mean excusing the harm done to you. But working on forgiveness will lessen its grip on you.

Remember, we all sin and fall short of the glory of God. Ask God to help you release your offender so you can be set free from the weight of holding on to hurt. I have heard unforgiveness referred to as the bait of Satan. Give your feelings to God and ask him to replace them with understanding, empathy, and compassion for the person.

Make a practice of forgiveness. Keep short accounts and don't take the bait.

Day Three

Are you grieving the Holy Spirit?

Did you know that unforgiveness grieves the Holy Spirit?

Ephesians 4:29-33 tells us,

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.” To grieve means “to cause to feel sorrow, pain, unhappiness, or distress.” As the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit has a personality and the ability to feel emotions. Sometimes we can forget God is a personal God. We disregard the fact that Jesus is relational and the Holy Spirit feels. The Holy Spirit grieves when we sin and behave in ways unbecoming of a follower of Jesus. When we hold onto bitterness and anger and have malice in our hearts through unforgiveness, we hamper our relationship with God. When you do not forgive you forgo the full power of the Holy Spirit working through you. But remember when you struggle to forgive, the Holy Spirit is right there to help you.

In John 14:15-16, Jesus says,
If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth.

You have the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in you, ready to help you 24/7/365. Forgiving others is possible and it flows from your fellowship with God. When you abide in Jesus you become like him. You think, feel, speak, and act like him. When you spend time in his word, the Holy Spirit speaks to you through scripture. You grow in sensitivity to hear God’s voice and he matures you, softens you, and sanctifies you.

So, give up grieving God through unforgiveness and grow in forgiving as God in Christ forgave you.

Forgiveness is hard work. But the more you do it, the easier it will get! And I am growing right alongside you.

Day Four

Did you know forgiveness is referenced more than 125 times in the Bible? If forgiveness is so important to God, then why do we struggle with it? Why can it be so hard to bury the hatchet and pardon people, to forgive them for an error or offense? I think one reason is pride. We think too highly of ourselves and hold others to a higher standard than we are willing to hold ourselves to. We forget that just as others fall short, we all fall short of the glory of God with our mishaps.

Proverbs 16:18 says,
Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

I’m sorry to say pride and my attitude of arrogance have blinded me at times and led me to believe I am better than others. With thoughts of “I cannot believe they did that,” leading to judgment and a feeling of superiority; when I know darn well that I am less than perfect, too.

A key to forgiveness is allowing other people to be imperfect and make mistakes. Make allowance for other people’s faults just as you would want them to do for you.

Hebrews 12:1-2 says,
...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

Throw off every weight that hinders you. It’s like being in a boat and you just cannot seem to get anywhere until you intentionally pull up the anchor. Unforgiveness is an anchor and when left unchecked it is heavy and it hinders. Pride impedes our relationship with God and others.

Pride can cause you to hold people’s shortcomings over them. And in some ways, I think unforgiveness can be an attempt to control another person. We think if we withhold forgiveness we can inflict hurt and pain—and while that may be true—the one who really suffers is you.’

I once heard it said, "Our response to offense determines our future." Make it your goal to be quick to forgive just as God in Christ Jesus has forgiven you. Don't let your future be governed by the bondage of unforgiveness.

You are not alone on your journey of forgiveness. I know some of us have experienced pretty horrific things in life and I am always amazed when I hear stories of forgiveness from those who have experienced great loss at the hands of others. It's only by the power of Jesus that we can fully forgive, and forgiveness is an act of faith.

Day Five

Do you find it hard to admit when you are wrong?

This week we have been talking about forgiveness, and today, I want to talk about playing your part in restoring and strengthening relationships through the power of an apology.

If we are honest, we can be prone to refusing to humble ourselves and ask for forgiveness for our misgivings. We have a tendency not to see our faults but to be quick to point out the transgressions of others.

But as a follower of Jesus, we are called as 1 Peter 5:5-6 says,
Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.'
Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

When you come clean and confess your shortcomings, you humble yourself before God. Confession is not only the right thing to do, it is the righteous thing to do. Whether you gossiped about a coworker, lost your temper with a teammate, or neglected to follow-through on a commitment to a friend or family member, take responsibility for your failure.

As a first step, heed the words of 1 John 1:8-10.
If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

Confess your sin to God, and then come clean with the person you hurt or offended. Take responsibility for your error. And when you do, be specific about what you are asking to be forgiven for.

For example, with a co-worker you might say, "I was wrong when I talked over you in the meeting. Will you forgive me?" Or when talking to a loved one, "I was impatient and overreacted. That is not how I want to be. Our relationship is important to me, will you forgive me?"

The key to apologizing is to be sincere and to make sure your admission is heartfelt, knowing that when you behave poorly it grieves the heart of God in addition to driving a wedge in relationships.

While a sincere apology will not guarantee that you will be given grace, a genuine request for forgiveness can be the start of a renewed relationship. Rather than settling for a fractured friendship, be humble, move toward reconciliation, and do your part to repair the damage and restore connection.