

Women & More

Giving and Getting Forgiveness

Lesson 3: **September 17, 2015**—*grace*

Think twice before you speak; count ten before you strike.

And if you choose to write, let the ink dry overnight.

Don't give a piece of mind—your peace of mind to gain.

Though it may seem quite right, let the ink dry overnight.

Next morning...you may be humbled in your prayer:

Thanking the God of *Light* you let the ink dry overnight. —anonymous

Wisdom resides in lengthening a fuse. The prudent—wise, judicious and cautious—will give the offense a little time before a response. In fact, we do not have to take up an offense; we can choose to overlook it, to forgive. The question is: can we accept another believer for who they are and realize that they, too, are moving in the direction of Christ-likeness—though not there yet, and not this side of heaven, but advancing every day? Someone has suggested that the forgiven does not forget and forgive, but the forgiven remembers and still forgives! And what if the offender is not a believer—maybe our husband? What can overlooking the offense altogether sometimes bring about?

There was a man in Abraham Lincoln's day that hated him—loathed him. The hater's name was Edwin M. Stanton, and he mockingly called Lincoln a "low cunning clown" and "the original gorilla"—once stating that one need not travel to Africa to see a gorilla, because there was a giant one right here on American soil. Reason is not given for his hatred, but he took every opportunity to goad our country's future president. But Abraham Lincoln never retaliated.

When Lincoln became president, and needed a Secretary of War, he surprisingly chose Stanton to fill the position. Friends of Lincoln asked him why in the world he would choose his enemy for such an honor, and Lincoln said it was because he was the best man for the job. Years later, as the murdered president lay in state, Stanton, with tears in his eyes, looked into the coffin and said these words: "Here lies the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen!"

Abraham Lincoln had something! He was born-again into the family of God through faith in the atoning death and powerful resurrection of Jesus Christ; **He was forever forgiven!** And he gave forgiveness away—forgiving the hateful and spiteful. Ralph Waldo Emerson characterized Abraham Lincoln like this: "His heart was as great as the world, but there was no room in it to hold the memory of any wrong." Proverbs 17:9 "***He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.***" Proverbs 19:11 "***A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense.***"

“Forgiveness is a beautiful word,” says C. S. Lewis, “until you have something to forgive. Forgiveness is almost a selfish act because of its immense benefits to the one who forgives.” In Matthew 6:14, Jesus explains the Father’s response to those who forgive others: *“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15But if you do not forgive men their sins, **your Father will not forgive your sins.**”* If we are a believer and our sins have been forgiven, then what does *“your Father will not forgive your sins”* mean? Woe! It means that if we don’t forgive others, then we are incapable of receiving forgiveness from God. Here is another Scripture passage for clarification.

Later in Matthew 18:21-22, Simon Peter asks Jesus about the ‘rules’ of forgiveness—*“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘**Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?’**”*

22“Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.’”

And to demonstrate the pleasing philanthropy of forgiveness versus the pitiful pitfall of un-forgiveness, Jesus tells Peter, the gathered disciples and us, a story—the *Parable of the Unmerciful Servant*—in verses 23-35.

23“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. 25Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

26“The servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ 27The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. Stop and imagine the overwhelming debt of the servant and the forgiveness of the master—a picture of salvation. What great debt; what release! The servant should have been thrilled beyond belief to be so freed from his unbearable debt. But what would be his response? Shockingly, he would not offer another what he had been freely and fabulously given!

28“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

29“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’

30“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

32“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ 34In anger his master turned 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 from your heart.”

Jesus is telling us **how God will treat us—to be tortured**—if we do not forgive our offender from our heart. Barker-Kohlenberger’s *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* on these passages: “Jesus sees no incongruity in the actions of a heavenly Father who forgives so bountifully and punishes so ruthlessly, and neither should we. Indeed, it is precisely because he is a God of such compassion and mercy that he cannot possibly accept as His those devoid of such compassion and mercy. This is not to say that the king’s compassion can be earned: Far from it, the servant was granted freedom only by virtue of the king’s forgiveness. As in Matthew 6:12, 14-15, **those who are forgiven must forgive, lest they show themselves incapable of receiving forgiveness.**”

In his book, *When Forgiveness Doesn’t Make Sense*, Dr. Robert Jeffress shares: “For a moment I want you to visualize some injustice you’ve suffered in life—not just a slight offense from which you recovered long ago, but some deep hurt from which you’re still attempting to recover. That hurt might be:

- an unwanted divorce
- a crippling illness
- an undeserved loss of your job
- a tragic accident that claimed the life of a child
- a betrayal by a close friend....”

Who is to blame? Who, exactly, are we to forgive? “Certainly the easiest target for our blame is **1) other people**,” Jeffress suggests. “The irresponsible doctor, the unfaithful mate, the insensitive pastor, or the disloyal friend can be held directly responsible...the ability to link our pain to a specific face may not make forgiveness easy, but at least it makes it possible.” In the list of who to blame he further includes: **2) ourselves**—the ‘if only I hadn’t’—**3) circumstances** (no face), and **4) Satan**. “Satan is a created being with definite limitations,” Jeffress explains, “...like a junkyard dog on a very long chain. His freedom to destroy is considerable, but not unlimited. That’s why he cannot be held ultimately responsible for the pain in our life. So who is to blame?”

“Blame is a prerequisite for forgiveness,” says Jeffress. “Before we can release someone of an obligation they have to us, we must first determine who is responsible for the offense.” He says that ultimately we have to go to the top: the person in charge; the store manager, the General, the CEO—**God!** In last week’s lesson on suffering, we quoted Dr. Jeffress as saying that God takes full responsibility for suffering—**and the offenses we endure?** Remember he asked: “If God is willing to accept the blame for creating deformed babies and for the horrific death of His own Son, don’t you think His shoulders are broad enough to take responsibility for the hurt you have endured?”

Whether or not we agree will not make it less true: God is Sovereign! Exodus 4:11 *“Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes him dumb or deaf, or seeing or blind? **Is it not I, the LORD?**”* This is why the forgiven are not always the best forgivers, even though accepting God’s sovereignty includes understanding that He is at the top—He is in charge—and that no offense can come to us except He allows. In a 1999 random poll by the George Barna Research Group, only 1 out of 7 adults (14%) agreed (believed) strongly that God is ultimately responsible for allowing pain and hurt into our lives; many somewhat disagreed, many more disagreed strongly, and a whopping 72% objected to that statement altogether.

So we harbor bitterness and anger; hatred and resentment, and some will seek revenge. There’s a devastating account of revenge in Scripture from an unexpected source—David, the sweet singer of Israel, in 1 Kings 2:5-6; 8-9.

*“Now you yourself know what **Joab** son of Zeruiah did to me—what he did to the two commanders of Israel’s armies, Abner son of Ner and Amasa son of Jether. He killed them, shedding their blood in peacetime as if in battle, and with that blood stained the belt around his waist and the sandals on his feet. **Deal with him according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to the grave in peace.**”* And he’s not finished: *“sAnd remember, you have with you **Shimei** son of Gera, the Benjamite from Bahurim, who called down bitter curses on me the day I went to Mahanaim. When he came down to meet me at the Jordan, **I swore to him by the Lord: ‘I will not put you to death by the sword.’** **But now**, do not consider him innocent. You are a man of wisdom; you will know what to **do to him. Bring his gray head down to the grave in blood.**”* David wanted his son Solomon to make sure that Joab and Shimei got what was coming to them after his death!

When we are tempted to seek revenge, what should we do? Paul warns us in Romans 12:17-19 *“Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. ¹⁸If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: **‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’** said the Lord.”* Scripture says that when Jesus was reviled, *“He reviled not again”* KJV. Further warning: a person who is seeking revenge will open themselves up to demonic activity in their life. Ephesians 4:26-27 *“In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷and **do not give the devil a foothold.**”*

Some don’t get even; they get bitter—you can’t get better if you’re bitter! C. S. Lewis: “Bitterness is the poison you take, hoping it will kill the other person.” We’d better check bitterness at the door of forgiveness. Ephesians 4:30-5:1 *“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption, ³¹Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³²Be kind and compassionate to one another, **forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.** ^{5:1a} **Be imitators of God....”***

“At the root of the bitter, angry spirit is an unwillingness to forgive,” says Dr. David Jeremiah. “If you are to deal with an evil disposition and a bad temper, you need to resolve to forgive the one who has injured you...the person that did something to you that was unforgivable and so you never forgave.” The “torture” of harboring the bad “root” can affect our spirit, mind, and body.

In *None of These Diseases*, Dr. S. I. McMillian says, “Medical science recognizes that emotions such as fear, sorrow, envy, resentment and hatred are responsible for the majority of our sicknesses. Estimates vary from 60 percent to nearly 100 percent.” Doctors tell us that hating people can cause ulcers, heart attacks, headaches, skin rashes and asthma—and it doesn’t make the people we hate feel too good either. There is a cost to resentment illustrated in this story: During a visit to Yellowstone Park, someone observed that the only animal that the grizzly bear would share his food with was the skunk. It wasn’t that the grizzly wanted to share his food, but rather that he chose to do so. With one swing of his powerful paw he could have crushed him, so why did he allow the skunk to eat with him? **Because he knew the high cost of getting even!**

A grudge is one thing that does not get better when it is nursed! Dick Innes sites a report of an astonished patient who went to see his doctor on one occasion and the doctor said, “If you don’t cut out your resentments, I may have to cut out part of your intestinal tract.” The man took the doctor’s advice. He had been nursing a bitter grudge against someone, and their differences had grown to be the all-encompassing fact of his life. It happened to be his business partner, and he went to see this man, resolved the conflict and he was forgiven. When he returned to the doctor, his physical condition had totally cleared up.

To forgive is to pardon or excuse—no longer to blame or be angry with someone who’s done us wrong. And forgiving someone who has done the unthinkable, the unutterable is nothing short of **grace!** Hebrews 12:15 “*See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble and by it many be defiled.*” We must release our claim on vengeance—to see our offender suffer! Forgiveness means: 1) we reconcile, so that 2) we are free to move on, 3) to end more suffering, and 4) it is the obligation of the forgiven.

Can we always forget an awful thing? No, but **we can choose not to remember—not to keep rehearsing it.** A friend of Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross, once reminded her of a particularly cruel thing that someone had done to her years earlier, and Miss Barton couldn’t remember it. “Don’t you remember?” asked the friend. “No, Clara said, “I distinctly remember forgetting it.”