

Date: October 4, 2009

Title: Give Forgiveness

Scripture: Matt 18:21-34 (NLT)

21 Then Peter came to him and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?" **22** "No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven!

23 "Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. **24** In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. **25** He couldn't pay, so his master ordered that he be sold—along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned—to pay the debt. **26** "But the man fell down before his master and begged him, 'Please, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.' **27** Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt. **28** "But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment. **29** "His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it,' he pleaded. **30** But his creditor wouldn't wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full. **31** "When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. **32** Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. **33** Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?' **34** Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt.

Matt 18:21-34 (NLT)

This morning we are continuing to consider the question, How would we live if we knew that we only had 30 days left to live. Right now we are at the end of our 3rd week and if you are like me you have been noticing some things about yourself that you may want to do just a little different from here



on out. We have talked about speaking sweeter, about loving deeper and this week we are going to talk about '*giving forgiveness.*'

Our scripture for this morning gives us a little window into just how important Jesus thought forgiveness was for the development of the Kingdom of God. I think that Peter really wanted to show Jesus how generous he was when he asked Jesus if forgiving a person 7 times was enough. And you can see where he was coming from, right. The Old Testament law prescribed an eye for an eye, which seems to put things on a one to one basis. We think of 'eye for and eye' to be harsh and legalistic, but really what that scripture was doing was limiting the revenge to a mere eye for and eye rather than something as severe as if you steal we'll cut off your hand.

I imagine that Peter thought to himself, "I know that Jesus is merciful, so I'm sure he will want us to forgive more than once. But when he offered 7 times of forgiveness, Jesus said, Oh, no. Not just 7 times but 70 X 7. In effect, Jesus was saying that we are to forgive more times than we can count. Forgive until you loose track of how many times you have forgiven someone.

And then, Jesus follows up with a story about forgiveness that brings home our personal position when it comes to forgiveness. Our materials for the Live like You Were Dying campaign give us a modernized version of Jesus' parable.

It seems a man worked for a large corporation as a purchasing agent and in his capacity, he made some unwise, unethical, and illegal purchases while he was working for the company. It turned out that as a result of these purchases the company was going to lose several hundred thousands of dollars. When this was discovered the CEO summoned the



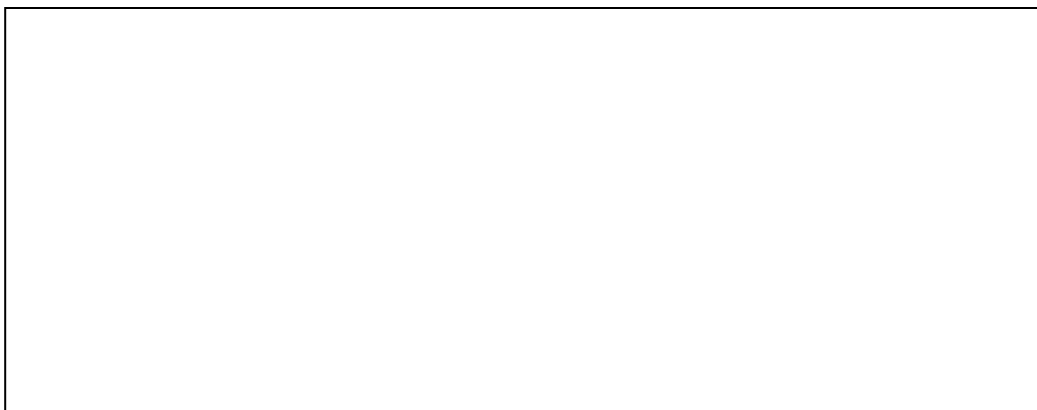
offender to his office and confronted him with the evidence. He said that unless the man paid all the money back in full immediately, he would be criminally charged and the company would sue him for everything he had.

The offending employee begged for mercy and much to everyone's surprise the CEO said that he would forgive the debt. The man was overjoyed and thanked the CEO profusely.

On his way out of the building that day he ran into one of his business associates who owed him a few hundred dollars. He grabbed the man by the collar and told him that he had better pay up everything today or this forgiven man would destroy the man's credit and publicly expose him for not paying what he said he would. Other people who had heard of the CEO's generosity just that day saw all of this happening in the lobby and reported it to the CEO who was, of course outraged at this and brought the full punishment possible upon the man.

The CEO was outraged and we understand why, don't we? This man who was guilty was forgiven, but when he had the chance, he refused to pass that forgiveness on to someone else. That just flies in the face of our understanding of justice, doesn't it? How could a forgiven man do such a thing?

For sure, this upsets our sense of fairness, but I want you to think about the man who was forgiven. Why would he not pass the forgiveness on to the next person? What was going on in his mind that kept him from passing it on? I guess that is possible. Perhaps the man was just selfish and greedy. But I tend to think that when a person is selfish and greedy there is some deep underlying fear at the heart of his or her greed. I believe that the person grabs at material things because she or he is afraid of losing something it seems would be unbearable to lose.

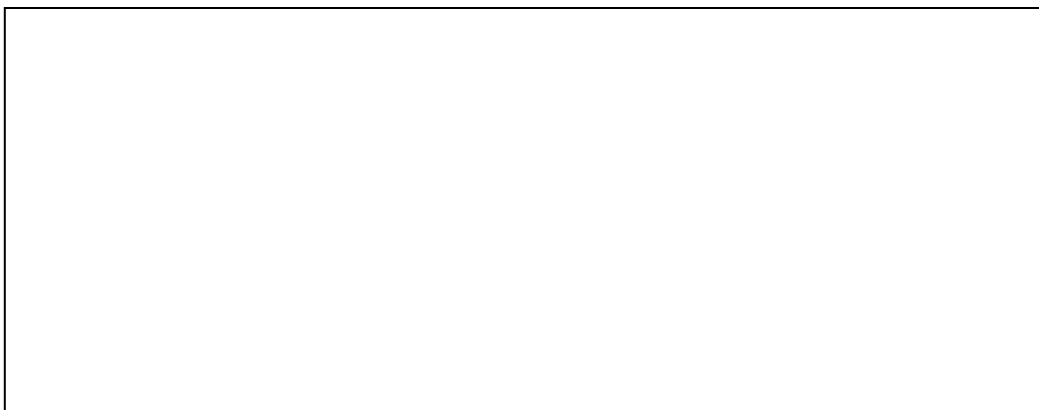


Does that make sense? This forgiven man has already been given more than he had any right to expect, but he is still acting as if every cent due to him is essential to his well-being.

What seem obvious to me is that the forgiven man doesn't really understand the full implications of forgiveness. He doesn't get it that he doesn't have to worry about collecting every penny because he has been liberated from the debt that previously had consumed his entire life. He is still acting out of a mistaken belief that he must manipulate and control his life and as many others as possible in order to be safe and sound. With this sort of belief in mind, there is no way he can forgive another person. He is caught up in resentment and bitterness and it's obvious that as wonderful as the gift is that he has been given, he is not fully realizing it. Does this make any sense?

Here is a man who is about to lose everything he had and go to prison but because of the mercy of another man, he will now be able to live out his life as he wishes. But somehow, he is still imprisoned and yes even impoverished by his own resentment and bitterness. Even after having received the most life-restoring gift imaginable he will suffer the consequences of his merciless heart until the day he is able to let go of the wrong that has been done to him. It is my belief that far worse than anything a person does to us, no matter how terrible it is, is the damage we do to ourselves when we harbor resentment and carry a grudge. The toxic emotions that can build up in our lives affect everything we do.

Last week we were talking about loving deeper, and you remember what Paul said, in 1 Corinthians 13: that love is patient, love is kind, it is not irritable and so on. It is almost impossible for us to be patient and kind when our hearts are full of the venom of resentment and bitterness. That

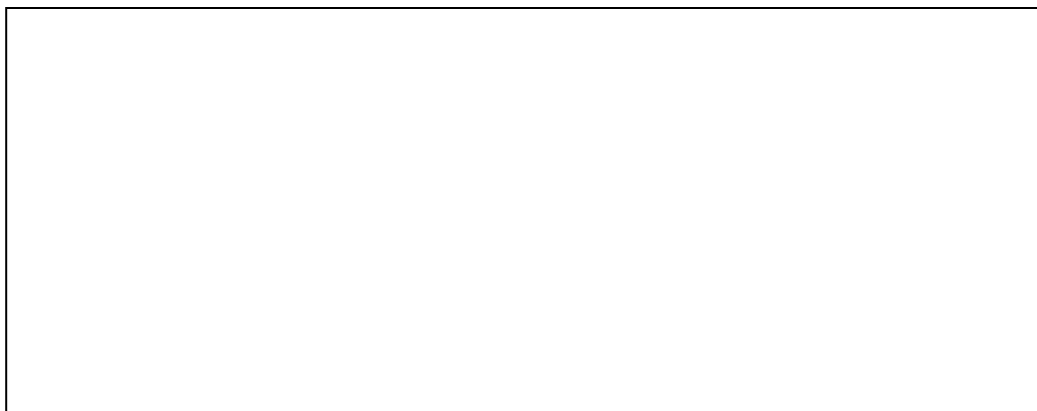


gunk just seems to leak out all over everything we try to do. It affects our relationships, our health, our ability to concentrate just to name a few. I came across a review of an article in *Harvard Woman's Health Watch* that said this:

The following [are] five positive health effects of forgiving that have been scientifically studied:

Reduced stress. Researchers found that mentally nursing a grudge puts your body through the same strains as a major stressful event: Muscles tense, blood pressure rises, and sweating increases. Better heart health. One study found a link between forgiving someone for a betrayal and improvements in blood pressure and heart rate, and a decreased workload for the heart. Stronger relationships. A 2004 study showed that women who were able to forgive their spouses and feel benevolent toward them resolved conflicts more effectively. Reduced pain. A small study on people with chronic back pain found that those who practiced meditation focusing on converting anger to compassion felt less pain and anxiety than those who received regular care. Greater happiness. When you forgive someone, you make yourself—rather than the person who hurt you—responsible for your happiness. One survey showed that people who talk about forgiveness during psychotherapy sessions experience greater improvements than those who don't.

As compelling as these reasons are, they are only the tip of the iceberg. When people go through the work of intentionally and willfully forgiving someone, their lives get better. I have seen it many times and I bet you have too. But, sadly, many of us would rather hold on to our resentments and take the consequences rather than let them go and live a redeemed life.



See, that is the challenge that faces each one of us. It's kind of like the monkey trap that you've probably heard of where they tie a jug to the ground that has an opening in it just big enough for a monkey's hand to go into. Inside the jar, they place a ball. The curious monkey reaches into the jar and finds a ball, but he can't pull it out because the opening is too small for both the ball and his hand. So, he just sits there and even when someone comes to capture him he will not let go of the ball. In our case, our hands are in the Devil's jar and it is our grudges, our resentments and even the guilt that we feel for things we have done to others that hold us captive as we refuse to let go of them. As we continue to explore what it means for us to live like we are dying, letting go and living free is one of our most important if not most difficult challenges.

Jesus came to this earth so that we can let go of those things that hold us captive. Jesus paid for all of it with his death on the cross. We can accept the forgiveness that God grants to each one of us through Jesus Christ and allow that forgiveness to cleanse our souls, or... we can hold onto; nurse along; allow ourselves to be blinded by the injustice, the injury, the awfulness of what has been done to us.

I know that we human beings do some despicable things to each other from time to time. Our capacity to bring harm to each other can be evil and horrific, but it is important to realize that in no way does forgiveness condone the sinful actions of another person.

1. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting – there are things that people have done to you that you may never be able to forget.

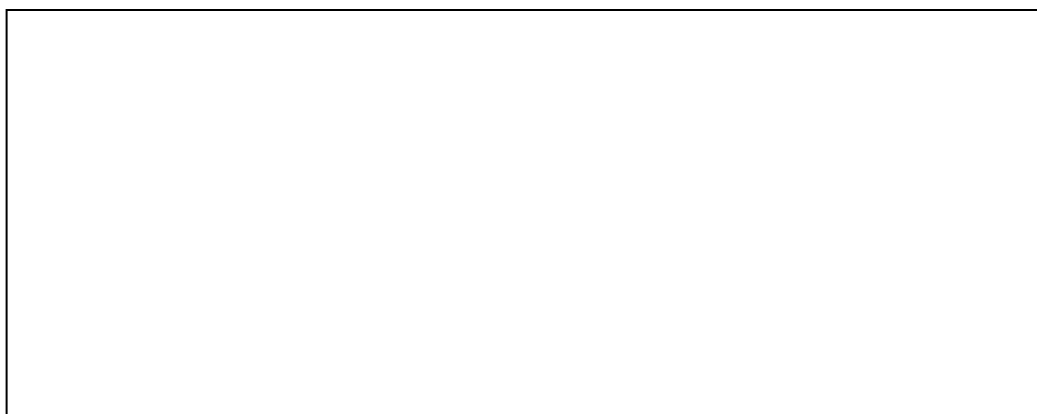


2. Neither does forgiveness mean that you have to let a person or persons keep on hurting you either. That would be foolish.
3. Forgiveness does not mean you simply roll over and let someone do whatever he or she wants to do to you.

What it does mean is that you will no longer hold on to the hurt that was done to you. The way Christian author, Anne Lamott says it, “Forgiveness just means you give up your right to hit back.” You don’t have to agree with, or support or even allow the other person to hurt you. When you are forgiving another individual, you are simply letting go of the negativity, putting aside the resentment and bitterness and moving on with your life.

So, the question is, with such a limited amount of time left to live; thirty days – thirty years; is it time to move on with your life? Do you really want to go to your grave holding onto the toxic remains of some terrible thing someone did to you? It really is your choice. As impossible as it may seem, you **can** let go of what has happened to you and move on with your life if that’s what you choose to do. I’m not saying that it will be easy. You might have to work at this for months or maybe even years, but you can begin the process right here and right now.

We passed out some small polished stones this morning, but my guess is that the rocks of resentment many of you are carrying around with you are much weightier than the little quartz pebble you received this morning. That little pebble is polished and smooth because for most of us we have polished our resentments very well. We value them highly as if they were precious. It’s not easy to lay down something that is precious is it?



You can do it, though, if you want to. And today, as we close our service you can let the little pebble you received symbolize the heavy resentments and bitterness that you have been carrying around with you, maybe even for years.

Today, we are going to celebrate the Sacrament of Communion. We are going to have two people serving communion while I play a song about forgiveness. On the altar I have placed a basket. As you come forward for Communion, you are invited to bring your pebble to the altar and place it and all your resentments, regrets, anger, and fear in the basket that is here at the foot of the cross. If you are not ready to do that you may keep your pebble as a reminder of what you are carrying around. Jesus paid for all of it on the cross and he is inviting you to give it all to him now. Amen.