

Summary

This sermon focuses on the destructive power of bitterness and the liberating power of forgiveness. Pastor Jason opens with a striking observation from a physician who has practiced medicine for over 40 years, noting that bitterness destroys more lives than cancer, addiction, and heart disease combined. Using Matthew 18 as the primary text, the sermon explores Jesus's parable of the unmerciful servant to illustrate how God has forgiven us an unpayable debt, and how that reality should compel us to forgive others, even when the offense is too large to simply step over. Pastor Jason walks through five common misconceptions about forgiveness: that it means saying what happened was okay, that it is a feeling, that it requires forgetting, that it equals trust, and that it depends on the offender saying sorry. By dismantling these misperceptions, the sermon reframes forgiveness as a decision to release the debt owed, not for the offender's benefit, but for the freedom of the one who was hurt. The message closes with two practical challenges: to receive God's forgiveness through faith in Jesus, and to extend that same forgiveness to others, recognizing that unforgiveness ultimately traps and poisons the one holding on to it.

Intro Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come before You today carrying different weights. Some of us are holding onto hurts that run very deep, and others are still learning what it means to be forgiven by You. As we open Your Word and discuss what it means to truly forgive, we ask that Your Holy Spirit would do what no human words can do. Soften our hearts, open our minds, and help each person in this group to receive exactly what You want them to receive today. May this time together draw us closer to You and to one another. In Jesus's name, amen.

Ice Breaker

What is one of your favorite movies or TV shows that involves a redemption or forgiveness storyline, and what do you love about it?

Key Verses

- Ephesians 4:31
- Ephesians 4:32
- Matthew 18:21-22
- Matthew 18:32-35
- Romans 3:23

Questions

- Pastor Jason opened with a physician's observation that bitterness destroys more lives than cancer, addiction, and heart disease combined. Does that surprise you? Have you seen bitterness take a physical or emotional toll on someone you know?
- Jesus told Peter to forgive not seven times but seventy times seven, essentially saying there should be no upper limit. How does that challenge the way you naturally think about forgiveness?
- In the parable of the unmerciful servant, the servant was forgiven an enormous debt but refused to forgive a small one. In what ways do you think we act like that servant in our own lives?
- Pastor Jason listed five things forgiveness is not: saying it is okay, a feeling, forgetting, the same as trust, and dependent on an apology. Which of these misconceptions have you personally struggled with the most, and why?
- The sermon made a distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation, saying forgiveness only requires one person while reconciliation requires two. How does that distinction change the way you think about a difficult relationship in your life?
- Pastor Jason said that when we hold onto unforgiveness, we end up bleeding all over the people who never hurt us. Have you ever seen or experienced that kind of spillover effect? What did it look like?
- The sermon challenged us to consider that one reason we struggle to forgive others is that we have forgotten how much we ourselves have been forgiven. How does regularly remembering what Jesus did for you change your capacity to forgive?
- Is there someone in your life right now that you know God is calling you to forgive? What is the biggest obstacle standing between you and making that decision?

Life Application

This week, take a few minutes alone with God and write down the name of one person you have been struggling to forgive. Then, using the prayer framework from the sermon as a guide, pray through it in your own words. Tell God honestly what happened, ask Him for the strength to forgive, and declare your choice to release that debt the same way He has released yours. You may need to pray this every morning for a season, and that is okay. Forgiveness is a decision before it is a feeling. Take the first step this week.

“God, I’ve held onto unforgiveness against _____. I’m asking you to give me the strength to forgive them so I can be free from the trap of offense. My unforgiveness is making me bitter and holding me back from the future you want for me and my family. So today, I choose to forgive_____ the same way you’ve forgiven me.”

Key Takeaways

- Bitterness that grows from unresolved offense causes serious damage, not only spiritually and emotionally, but physically as well, and it affects everyone around you, not just yourself.
- Forgiveness is not saying what happened was okay, and it is not a feeling, forgetting, automatic trust, or dependent on an apology. It is a decision to release the debt someone owes you.
- The parable of the unmerciful servant reminds us that God has forgiven us an unpayable debt through Jesus, and that reality is both the motivation and the power source for forgiving others.
- Forgiveness only requires one person, you, while reconciliation requires two. You can and should forgive freely, even if the relationship cannot or should not be fully restored.
- Holding onto unforgiveness traps you, not the person who hurt you. Forgiveness is the only key that unlocks that trap and frees you to move into the future God has for you.

Ending Prayer

Lord, we are grateful that You did not wait for us to get it right before You offered us forgiveness. While we were still sinners, You sent Jesus to pay a debt we could never pay. As we

leave this time together, we ask that You give each person here the courage to take the step of forgiveness that You are calling them toward. Where the hurt is deep, be deeper still. Where the wound feels too large, remind us that Your power is larger. Help us to stop drinking the poison of bitterness and to instead drink deeply from the well of Your grace. May the forgiveness we have freely received flow freely out of us and into the lives of those around us. In the name of Jesus, amen.