

Building A Life of Love ***“Love With Forgiveness*** (Part 5)

Intro: The world’s way of dealing with being hurt and wronged is to hurt people back! (Don’t get mad get even...take out your frustration on others. An “eye for an eye” ...right?) But this just sets off a chain reaction of more pain. We have a world filled with hatred, animosity and deep resentment because we have rejected Jesus’ priority of forgiveness. Today we are going to explore how to choose to love by choosing to forgive.

This is a topic of forgiveness every person can identify with. WHY? Because every one of you has been hurt, wounded, and wronged by someone else. We all have opportunities to love with forgiveness.

This is a tough topic, yet I believe it is one of the most life changing ones in the series.

- Before I begin, I want to acknowledge there are those of you who are dealing with tremendous pain from being wronged – betrayed – abused – wounded in horrible ways. Forgiveness might feel unimaginable today. That’s OK. There is grace for your journey because that’s what forgiveness often is...a messy journey.
- What does it look like to love with forgiveness? Today we will cover the basics.

1. Forgiveness is Continual

Matt. 18:21-22 “Then Peter came to him and asked, “Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?” “No, not seven times,” Jesus replied, “but seventy times seven!” (NLT)

Luke 17:4 “Even if that person wrongs you seven times a day and each time turns again and asks forgiveness, you must forgive.” (NLT)

- Why would Jesus ask us to do such a crazy thing? Whatever happened to 3 strikes and you’re out? 70 times 7? Really?

A. Continual forgiveness best illustrates God’s extreme love for us

1. Isn’t this how God treats us? Aren’t you glad you don’t get 3 strikes and you’re out with God? Isn’t it just an awesome thing that God forgiveness for us is continual, constant and ongoing throughout our lives? No limits!
- No matter what we do / how many times we’ve blown it / - His forgiveness is always available – *I John 1:9 “If we confess our sin He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from ALL unrighteousness!” (ESV)*
 2. How can we accurately represent God in this world as His followers if forgiveness is not continual? If we’re going to have limits / if it runs out.
 3. Isn’t this why God’s forgiveness is so extreme? The world’s way of understanding forgiveness will always have limits. God’s forgiveness has no limits.

4. Do you have people in your life where you have put limits on your forgiveness? Where your forgiveness has run out? Where you have forgiven this person multiple times but now you're done...you just can't forgive anymore

B. Continual forgiveness is more of a character issue than an action

1. I know we probably all think of forgiveness as something we choose to do. When we forgive, we choose to release the offender of whatever debt (emotional or physical) we think they owe us.
 2. But continual forgiveness moves us past simply the act of forgiving someone. Now, forgiveness becomes part of our character. Forgiveness is part of who we are. We become forgiving people. It becomes part of our nature.
 3. This means that the choice to forgive is already in us before we need to use it. It's forgiveness in advance. That is a character issue. It's a lot like loving unconditionally but with forgiveness. We forgive unconditionally!
- When someone offends you / hurts you / wounds you / do you take your time deciding IF you will forgive them, or is forgiveness already in place? Has the decision already been made in advance?
 4. This doesn't mean it doesn't still hurt / disappoint / wound / but character trumps emotions. Which governs our lives as followers of Jesus. Feelings or character?
 - I'm not saying our feelings don't matter. I'm also not saying that we often have to process our feelings before we can choose to forgive. That's why forgiveness is a journey. BUT the choice has already been made.
 5. The only way for our forgiveness to be continual is for us to be people where our character and values of following Jesus directs our lives more than our feelings. Our feelings are real but they can't be our authority on how we live.
 6. If we are going to ever build our lives with love, we are going to have to decide that we must also forgive continually. There's no limit.

2. Forgiveness Connects Us With God

Mark 11:25 "But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too." (NLT)

A. Forgiving others influences our connection with God

1. Jesus connects forgiveness with our relationship with God. If we choose not to forgive / hold grudges / harbor bitterness / this creates a barrier in our relationship with God.
2. Forgiving others is a spiritual issue not just a relational issue. When we refuse to forgive we think we are somehow hurting the person who hurt us but the reality is all we're doing is hurting ourselves.
3. The very One we desperately need to help us embrace forgiveness is the very One we are cutting ourselves off from.

4. We must understand that our relationships with each other and our relationship with God are connected. We cannot compartmentalize these two principles. It is a spiritual impossibility to love God and be unforgiving at the same time.

I John 4:20 "If someone says, "I love God," but hates a fellow believer, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see?" (NLT)

5. People rationalize this verse by saying; "I don't hate anyone. I just don't want to forgive them." The word "hate" is unacceptable to us. BUT biblically, it is the same thing.
6. To be unforgiving / bitter / resentful / is synonymous with hatred in the Bible. These are the emotions of hate. Choosing to hang on to these severs our connection with God. We lose intimacy...we lose fellowship / blessing /
7. Therefore, the only way for us to keep following Jesus maintaining our connection is to choose forgiveness. If we are not forgiving, we are NOT following Jesus.

B. Forgiving others connects my life to blessing from God

1. Why? Because "obedience =blessing". God allows us to set the standard of how He will treat us. Forgiveness is part of this standard. *Matt. 7:2 "For you will be treated as you treat others..." (NLT)* There are blessings and consequences connected to forgiveness. A lack of forgiveness creates a spiritual lid on our lives.
2. It's a lid on blessing. It's a lid even on experiencing God's forgiveness of us. How can that be? I thought you said His forgiveness is continual and unconditional? I want to take a few moments and explain this.

- Positional forgiveness before God that gives us relationship and eternal life. This is all based upon what Jesus did on the cross. (Explain) – Justified – declared righteous
- Experiential forgiveness before God creates fellowship / intimacy / closeness. This is all based upon my behavior / actions / obedience. (Like a parent- child relationship)

3. Choosing to not be forgiving will create a barrier in our daily experience with God. In essence, we're not going to feel forgiven, cleansed, from all our daily mistakes, and failings until the relational barrier is removed.
4. If my kids were acting rebellious, they would have positional forgiveness with me. Even though they are misbehaving, they are still my kids. The relationship is not threatened. BUT, it will not be until they ask for forgiveness will they have experiential forgiveness and feel connected to their dad.
5. If we choose to not forgive, we forfeit the experiential forgiveness. You are choosing to live out of fellowship with God and therefore, hindering the blessing of God being poured out upon your life.
6. It's only as we choose to forgive do we keep the lid off our lives so that God can pour blessing into our lives. Some of you are frustrated with God for the lack of connection when you are the one who has placed the barrier there.

- Forgiveness is what connects us with God.

3. Forgiveness Looks Like Jesus

Eph. 4:32 "Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you." (NLT)

Col. 3:13 "Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others." (NLT)

A. Jesus' standard was complete forgiveness

1. What's complete forgiveness? Haven't you ever forgiven someone 90% but held on to just a little bit? You said the right things...did the right things...but inside, there is still a thread of resentment?
 2. Maybe you can forgive people 95% of the wrongs they do, but there are just some things that are unforgiveable. I couldn't ever forgive that! (I've heard this a lot.)
 3. Jesus forgives us completely. Every sin / every mistake / every time / completely! Jesus doesn't have a list of the unforgivable. He doesn't forgive 95% and leave the other 5% that no one can forgive.
 4. What about mass murderers? Serial killers? Abusers? Drug lords? You mean if they turn to Jesus and genuinely ask for forgiveness God will forgive Him? Yes! No sin is beyond the power of God's forgiveness. No sin is more powerful than the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. (Honestly, in my humanity, I struggle with this – explain – if I was on the receiving end of evil I wouldn't want them forgiven)
 5. So, what does our forgiveness look like? Does it look like the world or does it look like Jesus? Is it complete or is it partial? How can we love like Jesus if we don't forgive completely?
- The Lord will give us opportunity to live this by the way. I think living in a small town it's hard to run from the people you haven't forgiven. (Share – When we started Foothills, there were some pretty mean things that were said and done. ...)
 - Are you forgiving completely?

B. Complete forgiveness liberates your life

- Illustrate with Jar / tennis balls
 1. Every person you choose to resent steals your capacity for love. Every person we choose to not forgive takes up space in our hearts and hinder you. Unforgiveness steals your capacity for love. (Place tennis balls into the jar)
 2. Freedom is only found in complete forgiveness. Bitterness and unforgiveness will always create bondage. You become a prisoner to these people forever. You carry them with you everywhere.
 3. Forgiveness expands our capacity to give and receive love. (Take the tennis balls out of jar)
 4. When our forgiveness can look like Jesus, we are the most liberated people on the planet.

- What fills your heart?

4. Forgiveness is A Witness

John 13:35 “Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”

(NLT) Our commitment to love with forgiveness is a witness to the world of the reality of Jesus in our lives! To love crazy means we must forgive crazy.

- A. Forgiveness sets us apart in this world
 1. The world can't forgive like this. The world won't forgive like this. Unconditional forgiveness is a powerful testimony of the love of God poured out in our lives. Love is THE proof and forgiveness is an extension of love.
 2. This world is filled with hatred. Everywhere there is conflict. Countries in conflict / cities in trapped violence / drug cartels terrorizing communities. Racial hatred. Hatred is everywhere.
 3. Where are the followers of Christ in all this? Many of them are caught up in the same attitudes and behaviors. Maybe not the violence, but the same spirit.
- (Divorce rates are the same / conflicts in churches / Christians posting comments of hatred and venom on social media
 4. How can we say we follow Jesus and yet our lives are so contrary to the core teachings of Jesus regarding relationships? It's no wonder people are leaving the church in record numbers. There's no proof!
 5. If we genuinely want the world to know about Jesus, then we must get serious about forgiveness. We must show the world something different.
- Are your relationships setting you apart or making you blend in?

Some of you are thinking; “What about unsafe people?”

- B. Forgiveness is not the same as trust
 1. Forgiveness is unconditional. We forgive for our sakes. We forgive so we can be healthy. We forgive so we can enjoy connection with God. We forgive so we have the capacity to love others. Forgiveness is the only way to be fair to ourselves.
 2. Forgiveness doesn't make us relational doormats. We forgive but that doesn't mean we automatically trust. Forgiveness is one way street. Reconciliation is two way. It requires two people moving towards each other.
 3. Forgiveness doesn't mean we don't establish boundaries with unsafe people. I can choose to forgive people knowing that we will never be friends or will they ever be allowed in my life.
 4. God is not asking anyone to continue allowing themselves to be abused, damaged, wounded, betrayed by unhealthy and unloving people. He's asking us to forgive...and sometimes in the forgiving, we also have to move on.
- With these issues, every situation is unique and we need the HS to guide us.

Our forgiveness must be continual
Our forgiveness must connect us with God
Our forgiveness must look like Jesus
Our Forgiveness must be a witness

Foothills Assignment

- Are there some people you need to forgive today? Remember, forgiveness is journey. The deeper the wound the longer the journey. HOW?
- Choose forgiveness every day regardless of feelings and slowly God will heal your heart.