



## A Word Every Relationship Needs #4 - Forgiveness

- one of the first lessons that many of us learned when we started driving a car was the importance of changing your oil on a regular basis...
  - my dad drilled that lesson into his kids...he would constantly encourage us to go out and check our oil or quiz us about the last time we had it changed...
  - if you wanted to buy me a gift I really like – you could buy me one of those coupon books from a place like Sears where you could pay for 6 oil changes and get two free ones...
  - those two freebees would bring tears to my eyes...
  
- but he was right – and I’m no engine expert – but I know that an engine has to be properly lubricated because of the metal parts rubbing back and forth on one another at high rates of speed
  - and the design of the engine includes the important principle that the oil keep the friction down and therefore the temperature inside the engine at an acceptable level...
  - it also captures any of the dirt and impurities and changing your oil regularly allows a way for those harmful objects to be removed simply and inexpensively compared to the investment you have in the engine before they create a much larger problem...
  - and here’s what happens if you don’t change it...you engine starts looking like the inside of most garages
  - and before long, what started out as just a few particles of dirt start building up...and creating more and more friction...and more and more drag on the engine...and higher and higher temperature...until eventually it will seize up and you’re not going anywhere...
  - it’s like the commercial where the guy is in a mechanic’s shop with an engine like this one and he takes a finger full of sludge and sticks it right in the camera and then says...change your oil...
    - use your engine the way it was designed...clean those impurities out in a timely fashion before they build up and lead to a significant breakdown...change your oil...
  
- now, in case you’re wondering...this isn’t “national oil week is it? ”...
  - but this picture illustrates a very important principle of relationships...
  - we are all very busy people...so our pistons are generally moving at a high rate of speed...
  - we’re also living under the curse of sin...so there are constant impurities flying out of our hearts, and our minds, and our mouths, and our bodies...
  - and then you put two or more of us together into a relationship...a tightly confined space like a friendship, or an office, or a family, or a community, or a church...and there’s going to be friction...we’re going to rub one another the wrong way...
  
- and God has created a process...to remove those impurities before they build up into relational sludge...and eventually lead to a full blown breakdown on the side of the road...
  - it certainly qualifies as one of the **Six Words Every Relationship Needs**...it’s the oil of **Forgiveness**...and that’s what I’d like to talk to you about today...
  - with that in mind, please open your Bible to Matthew chapter 18

- we're actually going to be looking at several different passages of Scripture today – but one of the uniqueness's of biblical Christianity is the doctrine of forgiveness...so this concept is part of the very DNA of the Word of God because it is central to the very character of God...
- Matthew 18 is a pivotal place in the Word of God...
  - this gospel is written to a Jewish audience, and Jesus is presented to them as the promised Messiah of Israel...
  - His claims are authenticated by His holy life, and His miraculous deeds, and His powerful teaching...
  - but amazingly in chapter 12 the religious leaders reject Christ as their Messiah by committing what Scripture refers to as the unpardonable...ascribing the deeds of Christ to the devil...
  - that is followed by Jesus giving a series of 7 parables in chapter 13, all with the common theme of delay...
  - because Israel rejected Christ as their Savior, Lord, Messiah, and King---God's plan with them as a nation would be set aside for a period of time, and of course the obvious question becomes...what will happen during that period of delay...
  - that question is answered in Matthew 16, when Jesus takes His disciples a place called Caesarea Philippi, the city of the unknown gods...and He asked His disciples who people were saying He was...and then who they thought He was...
  - Peter, in a moment of unusual wisdom and clarity that Jesus later says was from God the Father Himself...responded by saying...Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God...
    - in other words, in contrast to the religious leaders who just rejected you by saying your works were from your father the devil – I believe you are the promised Messiah, the Son of God...
    - and in contrast to the people in this city who worship statues that are dead – I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the living God....
  - Jesus commended Peter for that response, and went on to say that on that rock – on that confession, He was going to build His church—ekklesia – a called out group of people who would glorify God on this earth the way His chosen nation currently was not...
    - He said that He would build His church, and the gates of hell would not prevail against it...
  - then he started explaining that in order for this church to be built, He would have to go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things at the hands of the elders and the chief priests and scribes, and then be killed, and then be raised again the third day...
    - that news erased Peter's favored position when he blurted out...not so, Lord....may it never be...
    - illustrating that he didn't understand that the only way he could be truly reconciled to a holy God is if he received absolute forgiveness of his sins...and that could be achieved only if the Messiah, the perfect Lamb of God, would die in His place...
      - the entry point to the Christian life is lined with forgiveness secured by the shed blood of Christ...
      - that's the only way the church could ever be built...
- in chapter 17, Peter, James, and John are allowed to experience the transfiguration...a glimpse of what Christ will be like after He has accomplished the mission of dying on the cross to make forgiveness available to every person who will subsequently repent and believe...

- it's in that context that Jesus builds on this teaching of vertical forgiveness—between a person and his God...to horizontal forgiveness...addressing problems between a man and his friend...read Matthew 18:15-35
- I think we would all agree that forgiveness is surely one of the Six words that every relationship needs...and with the time we have remaining, let's think about **4 principles to help us understand and practice forgiveness well.**

### **I. Forgiveness Begins with the Problem being Addressed.**

- imagine talking to a person who said – the reason I don't want to check my oil is because I don't like the thought that it might be low...or I don't want to change it for fear that it might be dirty...
- you would certainly respond with – and that's exactly why you need to do it – ignoring the problem isn't going to make it go away...
- well, when it comes to relationships...there is no question that there will always be problems...we're all cursed by sin...and life is a lot like bumper cars where we're constantly banging into each other, and scratching one another's paint, or denting one another's fenders...
  - the pistons are rubbing against the cylinders and the oil's going to get dirty...

#### **A. Wise people address problems right away.**

- a couple of passages of Scripture that really help us on this one are:
  - **Ephesians 4:26 – BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger,**
    - in other words, use the energy created by anger to solve the problem biblically, and solve it today...because...
  - **Matthew 6:34 – Each day has enough trouble of its own.**
- so when there's some sort of a breach...one person has sinned against another...that needs to be addressed right away...
- one of the beautiful things about Scripture is – it tells us what to do regardless of which side of the equation we're on...here in Matthew 18, the setting is...

#### **B. If you have been sinned against.**

- the Bible is clear – you have a responsibility in that matter...and I realize you might say – but that's not fair, I didn't start it---the other person ought to have to do something...that's true and we'll actually look at that in a minute...ideally both parties would meet one another on the road toward reconciliation...but the text is clear...
- 1. Step 1 – Speak to the person privately and tentatively.**
  - **Matthew 18:15 – If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.**
  - maybe there was a misunderstanding on your parts or theirs...
  - but frequently that quick oil change is all that's necessary to get things back on the right path before the sludge of bitterness starts building up...
- 2. Step 2 – (in the context of the church) – Bring another person or two into the discussion.**
  - in situations outside the church, if the person will not repent---you may not have much recourse but at least you did your part...
  - but with brothers and sisters in Christ...there are other resources to help facilitate forgiveness...
  - **Matthew 18:16 – But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.**

- that tells you how much God wants forgiveness to occur, and how high a priority He places on this topic...
- and in my experience, the vast majority of problems are solved at this level if it had to go that far...but in rare cases, you may have to...

### 3. Step 3 – Involve the church family.

- **Matthew 18:17 – If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.**
- and the idea behind telling it to the church is bringing all the resources to the table to bring about repentance and forgiveness in this matter...
- a church will eventually come to a grinding halt if there are all sorts of unsolved problems between the members – it will be as seized up and ineffective as a motor whose oil was never changed...
- now, that's one side of the equation---how the forgiveness process begins if someone sinned against you...but Scripture also addresses what should occur if...

#### C. If you sinned against someone else.

- you probably know what needs to happen if that's the case, right?...
- **Matthew 5:23-24 - Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.**
- it's amazing that Jesus would talk about something as being more important than worship...
- that's tells you what a priority He places on seeing problems between people addressed and solved...

- now, there are...

#### D. Two important caveats.

##### 1. You are only responsible for your side of the issue.

- I have known of situations where a person is trying to ask someone else's forgiveness...and the person won't even speak to them...or won't grant forgiveness...it that occurs outside the church, you really have no other recourse...
- or where you speak to a person whom you believe sinned against you – and they refuse to acknowledge their sin or ask your forgiveness...again, if it's outside the church you may have very little recourse...
- some people are incredible game players and they almost seem to thrive on being odds with people...
- that's why there's this delightful passage in Romans 12 which says...
- **Romans 12:18 - If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.**

##### 2. There are times when love should cover what someone else did to you.

- this is a very dicey topic, but this principle is taught in both the Old and New Testaments...
- **1 Peter 4:8 - Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins (cf. Proverbs 10:12).**
- theoretically, if we confronted one another for every sin we committed, that's about all we'd ever be doing...
- and you have to be careful here – because if you tend to clam up and ignore problems, you might be running to passages like this when you shouldn't...

- and you might say – how do I know?...
  - if what happened isn't habitual on that other person's part, and no one else stands to be hurt...it may be a candidate for love covering it this time...
  - but here's the big picture – forgiveness always starts by someone having the courage and the godliness to address the problem from either side of the equation...
  - and one of the questions we have to ask is – do you do that?...or do you have a relationship right now that's really in need of an oil change?...
- now if you'd respond with – but this hard...I agree..which is why we need to run to the cross and think about how and where the gospel intersects what we're talking about...

## II. Our Ability to Forgive Finds Both its Model and Enablement in God Himself.

- let's bring this critical passage into our thinking...
- **Ephesians 4:31-32 - Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.**
- what a great passage, huh?...in part because it gives us...

### A. Some of the opposites of forgiveness.

- **bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking...**
- all of that just sounds like sludge in your engine, doesn't it...
- and some folks who will hear this message would say...yes, and that's what one or more of my relationships feels like right now...there's increasing friction...less power...less traction...less progress...this bitterness and wrath – lack of forgiveness is like a ball and chain...thankfully the passage also has...

### B. Some of the cousins of forgiveness.

- **kind, tenderhearted...**
- doesn't that even have the feel of fresh oil lubricating the relationship?...
- and of course the key phrase is..."forgiving each other, just as God in Christ..."
- the principle is...

### C. Experiencing God's forgiveness in Christ is the prerequisite to being able to consistently practice forgiveness with others in your life.

- ...**forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.**
- and that's why it's so important to understand where you get the fresh oil...it's not something you conjure up on your own...it's just too hard...
- but many people here would be able to say – and that's what drew me closer to Christ – asking Him to give me the strength and the grace necessary to forgive someone else just like He was willing to forgive me.

- now, if you're trying to process all of this carefully, one question you might have is – well, is biblical forgiveness conditional or unconditional...do I immediately forgive people who have sinned against me or do I only forgive them if/when they repent?...
- that is a very important question – and honestly, there's quite a debate on the evangelical world over that very issue...
- I think the most balanced answer to that question is...

## III. Some Aspects of Forgiveness are Conditional while Others are Not.

- so far we've been using the word forgiveness but we've not carefully defined it...

### A. Definition.

- **Complete forgiveness is a 3 fold promise made to a repentant person that you will not speak about their sin to their face, behind their back, and that you will not dwell on it in your heart.**
- it's not based on feelings because God's forgiveness of us is not based on feelings

- it doesn't mean you'll forget what was done, because God doesn't forget things...
- His forgiveness is much better...He chooses not to remember
- **Psalm 103:12 - As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.**
- now you might say – what do you mean by “complete forgiveness”...

### B. Complete forgiveness

- one of the clearest and simplest illustrations is in this passage...
- **Luke 17:3-4 - Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, “I repent,” forgive him.**
- there's the complete process...someone sins against you...you confront that person...they repent...and then you forgive them...
- that kind of forgiveness is clearly conditional...
- and there are senses in which God's forgiveness is conditioned on man's repentance...otherwise God is a universalist and trusting Christ as Savior and Lord would not matter... (John 3:16 – For God so loved...)
- but the \$100 question is – what am I supposed to do in between the time the person sins against me and the time they are willing to repent?...
- the answer is – to for the example of Jesus on the cross...we could call that, possessing...

### C. A forgiving spirit.

- one of our Lord's seven sayings from the cross was...
- **Luke 23:34 - But Jesus was saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.**
- now, does that mean that everyone within the sound of Christ's voice was forgiven, including the guys gambling at the foot of the cross for his clothes?...
- of course not – but our Lord was demonstrating a forgiving spirit in that He was praying for their eventual repentance and focusing on the forgiveness they would receive as a result...
- and one of thieves hanging on the cross next to Him repented and Jesus said – this day I will see you in paradise...because he was forgiven after he repented...but Jesus certainly did not say that to both thieves...because the other chose to do anything but repent...
- now, there's a lot of principles here...but in Matthew 18 – the original passage we read...Peter was able to put his finger on what's hardest...
- when he heard those three steps...he wasn't concerned about having to confront someone from time to time...he knew the hardest part would be to forgive those who repented...
  - which is why he asked... **Matthew 18:21 - Then Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”**
  - the rabbis taught that you had to forgive three times – so Peter threw a few more in just to be sure he was on the safe side...
  - don't you know he had to be shocked when Jesus said...
    - **Matthew 18:22 - Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.**
- and the principle is this...

#### IV. The Real Challenge is Being a Forgiving Person.

- if you love people enough to communicate with them and tell them ways you believe they sinned against you...there are plenty of times when they will acknowledge what they did and ask your forgiveness...
- and that's when the real work begins...and Peter knew that...to make and keep your promise not to bring it up to the person's face, or behind their back, or dwell on it in your mind...
- so Jesus told Peter a story...

##### A. The first servants' dilemma

- **Matthew 18:24-25** - When he had begun to settle *them*, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. But since he did not have *the means* to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made.
- that's the equivalent of millions of dollars...Jesus purposely made it an outrageous sum...
- **Matthew 18:26** - So the slave fell *to the ground* and prostrated himself before him, saying, "Have patience with me and I will repay you everything."
- of course that was ridiculous – he could have never repaid the debt—that's the point...

##### B. The king's response

- **Matthew 18:27** - And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt.
- of course the assumption is that this servant's heart would have been so full of gratitude that he would have gone out looking for anyone and everyone to forgive in any conceivable way...
- like Ebenezer Scrooge on Christmas Day...
- but that's not what happened, is it?...

##### C. The second servant's dilemma

**Matthew 18:28-33** - But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and *began to choke him*, saying, "Pay back what you owe." So his fellow slave fell *to the ground* and *began* to plead with him, saying, "Have patience with me and I will repay you." But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord said to him, "You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?"

- I assume we all realize – Jesus wanted Peter to see himself in the first servant, and he wants us to see ourselves in the first servant...
- the principle is – your willingness to forgive others demonstrates the amount of appreciation you have for how much God has forgiven you
- Take aways?...

1. How are you doing at the matter of lubricating your relationships with the oil of biblical forgiveness?....

- is there anyone you need to confront? To get the process started?...

- is there anyone you need to have a forgiving spirit toward because they haven't been willing to repent yet?...

- is there anyone who has asked your forgiveness whom you've not really forgiven?