

Someone hurt us deeply or hurt one of our loved ones. Can we ever forgive that person who caused such damage? God tells us we have to. But how is it possible? We saw last week the great release that comes to us from knowing that our sins are forgiven by God. We saw it in the words of King David in Ps 32. He had been hiding his sin from God and went through physical and emotional torment by doing so. But then came the time when he decided to be open with God and tell God about his sin. He tells us, *5 I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.* He encourages others to seek forgiveness in the same way by being open to God and asking for forgiveness. If they do then there is great blessing which he spells out in Ps 32:1-2. *Ps 32:1 Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. 2 Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

When we acknowledge and confess our debts or our sins to God, He forgives them. He covers them over. He doesn't hold them against us ever again.

It's like the parable of the Unmerciful servant in Mat 18 where the forgiving master did 3 things for the man who was indebted to him. 18:27, He decided to show mercy to the one who was indebted to him for millions of dollars. He cancelled all the debt the man owed him. He let the sinner go free. By contrast the Unforgiving servant did none of those 3 things.

You see, that's what God did for us in His love, mercy and grace. He decided to show mercy to us who owed Him so much. He cancelled all our debts, all our sins through Jesus' death on the cross. He lets us go free as His children, forgiving the sin, covering it over and not holding it against us ever again.

That's the pattern of forgiveness. It's the pattern we have to follow.

Paul wrote in Eph 4:31-32, *Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, (Eph 4:32) and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.* We have to forgive others in the same way He has forgiven us.

How did He forgive us?

i. By deciding to show mercy to us, **ii.** by cancelling the debts we owe Him and **iii.** by letting us go free.

If we forgive in the same way God does, then **i.** we will decide to show mercy to those who owe us. **ii.** We decide to cancel the debt they owe us. **iii.** We decide not to hold those things against them ever again.

All of us have a need to forgive other people for the hurt they caused us or our loved ones. None of us has been exempt from the damage caused by the sin or insensitivity of people throughout our lives.

For many of us the damage came in our family situation. For others it was in a work situation. For others it may have come from a teacher or some other authority figures who humiliated us. For some even to have thoughts of the past brings renewed pain or shame even today. None of us has escaped hurt. All of us have people to forgive.

1. THE NEED TO FORGIVE OTHERS.

We see a connection between our forgiving others and our own experience of forgiveness from God, in many places in the Bible. e.g., Mt 6:12, *Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. (Mat 6:14) For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; (Mat 6:15) but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.* If we decide not to forgive someone, then we will not experience the liberating effect of forgiveness in our own lives. If we have determined to forgive the person who hurt us, then we can receive God's ongoing grace and strength. It's a truth that applies to those who follow Jesus. As Jesus told His own followers, *(Mark 11:25) "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses."*

Prayer isn't going to get very far if we live with any unforgiveness in our hearts. Nor will we get very far if we harbour the emotions associated with it, such as anger, resentment, bitterness or hatred. It's as we decide to forgive, and do so, that the experience of God's love and forgiveness can flood our hearts and bring healing.

2. FORGIVENESS MEANS CANCELLING THE DEBT AGAINST OTHERS.

No-one would ever say that forgiveness is easy. Sometimes we have to keep on forgiving people for the new hurts they keep inflicting on us. That's what Jesus told his disciples in Luke 17:3,4 *Be on your guard! If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive.*"

Pretty hard teaching from Jesus? You know what the reaction of the disciples was? Lk 17:5-6, *The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"* The apostles saw that the need to forgive seven times in a day was going to be so difficult that they would need a great increase in faith to do so. *The Lord replied, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.*

Jesus' answer was to put the onus back on them. If they felt their faith was too little to be able to obey Jesus' command to forgive in such a way, then they could be comforted by the fact it only needed a tiny amount of faith to do so. A mustard seed sized faith would be able to remove a mountain of unforgiveness. What they had to do was to exercise the little bit of faith they felt they had, and they would be enabled to do the impossible in forgiving others.

Often the problem is not a lack of faith to forgive others; it is the lack of willingness to do so. Where there is faith to be willing to forgive, God can work through that little bit of faith to enable us to forgive. Instead of storing up the memory of the seven hurts inflicted on us during the day, or adding them to the memory of all the hurts we have received throughout our lives, we cancel the debt owed to us by those people.

3. FORGIVENESS MEANS RELEASING THE OTHER PERSON.

That's what the master did in the parable of the Unforgiving servant. He cancelled the massive debt of millions of dollars owed to him by the first servant and let the servant go free. However that unmerciful servant wouldn't let the debts go, or free the one who owed him just few dollars. His attitude was *"You owe me and you will pay!"*

Are you and I like that. Someone owes us and we want repayment. They sinned against us and we won't let it go or let them go. While we don't forgive, we are the ones who are bound in our unforgiveness. While we don't forgive we are the ones who suffer from inward torment. While we don't forgive we are the one who have no peace. While we don't forgive we are the ones who bring physical or emotional damage upon ourselves. While we don't forgive we are the ones who continue to be filled with bitterness and resentment. If we're going to forgive as the Lord forgave us, then it means cancelling the debt people owe us, seeking their best interests and even be willing to accept them in Christ.

4. FORGIVENESS MEANS BEING RELEASED OURSELVES.

When we don't forgive others we can become the victims of our own negative emotions. We lose our freedom to receive love and to express love. We grieve the Spirit and we know deep internal grief ourselves, knowing deep down that we aren't really free. Not only are we grieving God, but we are destroying ourselves in the process. Paul writes to the Ephesians telling them how to be free, *(Eph 4:30) And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption.(Eph 4:31) Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice,(Eph 4:32) and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.* The Spirit of God within us doesn't want to be grieved, but He wants to help us to win the victory over these negative emotions. As we make the decision to forgive others, the Spirit comes in power to enable us to get of all that negativity, and to become kind and compassionate, forgiving others just as God forgave us.

Does forgiving others bring healing?

One woman we met had been going to a succession of doctors, psychologists and psychiatrists and was still unable to function as a wife and mother after several months. She asked that Carole and I might pray for her. We asked the Lord to find the root of her problem for us. We were praying silently when all of a sudden she got really angry and cried out “*I hate them, I hate them.*” It turned out that she had hated some of her Christian friends who had hurt her through their insensitivity as she saw it. As she confessed her sin of bitterness and unforgiveness before us and the Lord and received prayer, she was released and healed. She no longer needed to go to the psychologists and psychiatrists. God healed her that night as she forgave those who had hurt her.

Another woman we met had had the symptoms of Parkinson’s disease for many months. As she learned about forgiveness in one of our seminars she decided that she would forgive her mother for all the hurt she had caused her during her childhood. Her mother had died years before. As she said the words before God, *Mother I forgive you in Jesus’ name*, the shaking stopped and years later has never come back.

There is power in forgiving others. They can be healed and so can we. One writer put it like this, *Your act of forgiveness will set the captive free, then you will realize that the captive was you!*

Whom do you need to forgive?

Why not do it now and see what God does?