

The Journey of Forgiveness
“The Mindset of Forgiveness”
Part 3

Intro: How we think is one of the most influential choices that impacts our behavior. If we want to change any behavior, we first have to change the thinking. Why? Because we cannot live beyond how we think. Your thinking will either help you grow and change or sabotage growth and change. Let me illustrate this:

- Let’s say you wanted to get in better shape in 2017. You paid for a gym membership / you changed your schedule so you can go in the morning early before work / Your plan is to go 3 days a week / You set your alarm to go off at 5am.
- Now imagine you are 3 weeks into this new routine. You are already thinking how horrible 5am is / you’re telling yourself it’s not worth it / you’re thinking that sore muscles really sucks / you start telling yourself that being out of shape really isn’t that bad – besides, most people are out of shape...
- Question: How many more weeks in the gym do you think you will last? WHY? Because you’re thinking will sabotage your goal. Your thinking will trump your new behavior.

When it comes to the issue of forgiveness, what we believe about it and how we think about it will dramatically impact how we apply forgiveness in this life. If you’re struggling with forgiveness, there may need to be some changes in your thinking. Today we’re going to talk about the mindset of forgiveness. Forgiveness is never an easy journey, but it will be an impossible journey without the right mindset...without the right thinking to empower it.

*Rom. 12:2 “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by **changing the way you think**. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.” (NLT)*

Let me give you 4 ways we can embrace the mindset of forgiveness.

1. Choose the mindset of the Spirit rather than the flesh

As followers of Jesus, we all face a daily choice to either live by the Spirit of God inside us or allow our fleshly desire dictate how we live. We can set our minds after listening and following the Spirit of God or we can set our minds listening to the flesh.

- You and I cannot effectively forgive as long as we are trying to do so while our flesh is in control of our lives. You do not have enough will power to forgive. Your flesh doesn’t even want to forgive.

Rom. 8:5-8 “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind

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that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.

⁸ *Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” (ESV)*

I want to point out a few observations from this passage.

- Refusing to forgive is a fleshly mindset.

Your mind is set on the flesh (you are mentally focused on the wound / the offense / the need for retribution / how wrong they are / your feelings / how innocent you are compared to them/ - mentally obsessing over all this is from the flesh.

- Refusing to forgive is letting your flesh dictate how you live

Jesus is no longer leading your life and you are no longer following Him. You are now following what your flesh dictates you to do. It now is in charge rather than the Spirit of God inside you.

- Refusing to forgive will create negative consequences in your life (flesh=death)

The flesh can only produce death. Doesn't always mean literal, physical death. It means the results of the flesh will always kill rather than breathe life into something. The flesh will kill your joy / fulfillment / relationships / hope / kill forgiveness. The Spirit of God breathes life into everything. Spirit=Life.

- Refusing to forgive makes you hostile to God

This doesn't mean God is angry with you. BUT it does mean you are living in a way that is so opposite of God's way and Kingdom that it makes you hostile to Him. Unforgiveness is a hostile thing in the Kingdom of God. WHY? Because it destroys people...the most valued commodity in the Kingdom of God.

- Refusing to forgive keeps you from pleasing God.

When we have allowed our flesh to consume our thinking, we are now living in a way where we cannot please God. We are choosing an independent path rather than a dependent one. "I'm going to do my own thing." Now you have stopped following Jesus altogether.

If we allow our flesh to control our minds we make forgiveness virtually impossible. If we allow the Spirit of God to control our minds then our thinking will be consistent with the word of God and the values of the Kingdom of God. This is a choice we all face.

Even when we are wounded, we can still choose to follow after the Spirit of God in us rather than the flesh. We can set our minds / our thinking on the Spirit.

2. Do not mentally demonize people

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- This is so hard not to do. When someone wounds us deeply, we naturally want to make them out to be all bad / all evil / all terrible. Their actions are incomprehensible and therefore must come from a character that is so deeply flawed they are evil.
- Demonizing people in our minds helps us justify our unforgiveness / bitterness and resentment. If I can make you into a completely horrible person then I can justify my negative attitude and actions towards you.
- Take a moment and consider if you are doing this to anyone in your life. Are your thoughts consumed by their bad behavior / bad attitude / their moral failings / the pain they caused you /
- When you see them is your first reaction internally; “There’s that horrible person” / “There’s that lame excuse for a human being”. You’re well on the path to demonizing their character.

Why is this such a big deal? Because of what Jesus said...

Matt. 7:1 “Do not judge others, and you will not be judged.” (NLT)

- This is such a misunderstood statement by Jesus. Let me bring some clarity to this. Jesus is referring to judging character NOT actions. Only God can judge the character of an individual. Only God sees the heart. Only God sees what is really going on inside an individual.
- We only see actions / behavior / the external. We can judge behavior...we can judge what we can see because God’s word already has. If God’s word calls some behavior sinful then when I call it sinful I am merely agreeing with the word of God. That is NOT judging someone.
- What we are forbidden to judge is the character or the heart of an individual. Just because we call some behavior sinful does not make someone a bad person. Just because someone sins against me I have no right to judge their character.
- Why am I making this distinction? Because when we demonize people we are judging their character which is a role reserved for God alone. Demonizing a person is going way beyond simply calling a behavior sinful. It is judging their very internal character.

Is there an individual you struggle demonizing?

3. **Do not think you are morally superior**

This is a close companion to the one we just talked about. They go together.

*Rom. 12:3 “Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don’t **think** you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us.” (NLT)*

- We just love to feel morally superior to the people who have wounded us. When we begin to measure ourselves compared to the ones who have hurt us we naturally begin to feel and believe we are morally superior.

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- We erroneously believe that just because we have not sinned in the very same way as another person has that this alone makes us morally superior. For example, do you feel you are morally superior because...
 - You never had a substance abuse problem
 - You never had an affair
 - You don't struggle with porn
 - You've never sinned against another person like they sinned against you
 - You're convinced you could never fall into that type of sin. You're beyond it
 - You've never been attracted to someone of the same sex
- Moral arrogance can be one of the greatest hindrances to forgiveness and right relationships. So many Christians are guilty of this issue. They are so convinced of their own moral superiority that they have lost sight of their own depravity.
- When we forget that it is only because of the grace, mercy and forgiveness of God that has delivered our own lives, we treat others with contempt. We believe we are morally superior.
- When the Apostle Paul wrote the book of Romans, some of his Jewish audience believed that the Jews were morally superior compared to their non-Jewish counterparts. Here's what Paul told them.

Rom. 3:9-10 "Well then, should we conclude that we Jews are better than others? No, not at all, for we have already shown that all people, whether Jews or Gentiles, are under the power of sin."¹⁰ As the Scriptures say, "No one is righteous— not even one." (NLT)

- Paul goes on to explain everyone's equal need for Jesus and His forgiveness. It is so important that we keep this in the front of our minds when dealing with forgiveness issues. WHY
- My sin makes me just as guilty before God as anyone else's sin. My need for Jesus is just as great as anyone else's need. If we lose this perspective, we become morally superior people making forgiveness a very difficult thing.
- Keeping my own brokenness in view and my desperate need for Jesus in view makes forgiveness a reasonable choice.

4. **Think about forgiveness with the cross in mind**

This naturally comes on the heels of what we just talked about. Forgiveness doesn't even make sense if we lose sight of the cross. BUT, if we keep the cross central in our thinking, then forgiveness is simply part of the lifestyle of following Jesus.

Col. 3:13-14 "Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others."¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony." (NLT)

- Remembering the Lord has forgiven us is foundational thinking when it comes to forgiving others. Lose sight of the cross as it applies to your own life and you make forgiveness a ridiculous idea.

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- Jesus told a parable about forgiveness and how God views it
Matt. 18:21-35 – Summarize story – Peter asked Jesus about the limits of forgiveness. Jesus responded by telling Him a story.

Matt. 18:33 “Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?” (NLT)

- The cross is the mindset of forgiveness. Without the cross, none of us could repay the debt we owed God because of sin. Whatever debt we may release another person from it pales in comparison to the forgiveness God has offered humanity through His Son.
- What justification are we going to give God someday for refusing to forgive...for holding grudges...for hanging on to our resentment? He will look at us and say; “I forgave you everything...how could you not forgive?”
- For those of you that are still refusing to forgive the one who hurt you, how do you justify that choice while looking at the cross? I understand the emotion / feelings / maybe even the grief and anger. Experiencing these things is normal and reasonable... BUT Jesus is calling you to follow Him in forgiveness.
- Without the choice to forgive you’re not even giving Jesus the chance to heal your broken heart. That wound will now become the driving force of your life rather than your relationship with Jesus. It’s a price that’s too high to pay.
- Our journey of forgiveness must include the mindset of forgiveness for it to make any sense. Will you embrace this mindset today? Will you trust Jesus with your wounded heart? Will you forgive with the cross in view?

Prayer time

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