

The Journey of Forgiveness
“The Lifestyle of Forgiveness”
Part 4

Intro: We have spent the past 3 weeks talking about forgiveness. I know this has been a tough series for many of you. Thank you for taking this journey together. As we wrap up this topic of forgiveness today, I want to talk about more than just the choice of forgiveness. I want to explore the lifestyle of forgiveness.

- A lifestyle is more than an occasional action. When something is a lifestyle it is constant, it is repeated, it is defining. Lifestyle reflects who we are. For example; I have a lifestyle of serving (over 30 years as a Pastor)...I have a lifestyle of fishing (I have decades of pictures to prove it)...I have a lifestyle of valuing my family (now it is seen by playing with grandkids). Lifestyle is who we really are.
- When it comes to the issue of forgiveness, it should become a lifestyle.

Col. 3:13-15 “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.¹⁵ And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace...”
(NLT)

These verses are a description of a lifestyle. Our relationships as followers of Jesus should be defined by forgiveness / love / relational harmony and peace. Our relationships just might be the greatest testimony we have to an unbelieving world. We need more than the act of forgiveness. We need a lifestyle of forgiveness. Our entire relational DNA needs to be different than the worlds. How do we cultivate a lifestyle of forgiveness? Let me share with you 3 simple ways to build this lifestyle.

1. The lifestyle of forgiveness expects imperfection from others

“Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

We are to actually expect imperfection from others relationally. We are expect that people will disappoint us occasionally. How do I build this expectation into my relationships? How do I live this?

- Be self-aware of your own brokenness

The more critical you are of others the less self-awareness you have about yourself. Criticism will create self-blindness. Criticism of others will remove your ability to see yourself as you really are.

- Most of you have heard the phrase: “That is the pot calling the kettle black.” How does this happen? When we lose sight of our own stuff.

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- One of the best things we can do relationally is be keenly aware of our own flaws, brokenness, hypocrisy, inconsistencies. WHY? Because this will create relational humility.
- If forgiveness is going to become a lifestyle, I can't lose sight of my own need for forgiveness...my own need for grace and mercy...my own struggle with good and evil that dwells in me.
- This is not about thinking less of ourselves; it is about thinking correctly about ourselves. We are all a part of the broken humanity Jesus came to rescue through His blood on the cross.

How does one keep a daily self-awareness of this truth?

- Practice the habit of daily confession.

If we are not daily stopping, learning to be still, and giving God the opportunity to search our hearts we will become calloused and blind to our sin. If you and I are not talking to Jesus daily about our sinful struggles we will become blind to them.

- Let me explain how this works for me – This helps me to be constantly aware of my own brokenness. (Illustrate with a mirror – word of God and prayer)

- See faults as an opportunity to grow not an opportunity to wound

The word of God is very clear when it tells us that all difficulty is an opportunity for us to grow. Therefore, when we experience relational difficulty as we experience the imperfections and brokenness in others, we all have an opportunity to grow.

- If forgiveness is going to become a lifestyle, it will require us to choose growth rather than wounding others back...rather than blaming...rather than judging others.
- If you are having marital issues, you have an opportunity to grow. If you are having issues with your co-workers, you have an opportunity to grow. If you have a friend who disappointed you, you have an opportunity to grow.
- If you chose to wound back, growth is sacrificed. You can't wound back, be unforgiving, become resentful and still grow in your relationship with God. It's one or the other.
- Here is a truth from my own life: It has been the pain that I have experienced through relationships that has been one of the greatest tools God has used to make me more like Jesus. God has used the flaws and brokenness of others to grow my dependence on Him.
- If you are experiencing the painful emotions that have come from the imperfections of others, instead of wounding back, retreating, becoming bitter, why not go to Jesus and ask Him how He wants you to depend on Him?
- The pain of relationships has shown me my own insecurities; my lack of faith and trust in God; my own self-centered tendencies; my lack of grace-mercy-patience and love.

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- The brokenness of others has shown me just how much I need to depend on God for this life and not put my trust in others for what only God can provide.
- I've met far too many people who never seem to learn through these painful experiences. They sit in a victim mentality blaming others around them for all their pain. When all we do is blame others for our pain we miss God's pathway out of it.

For forgiveness to be a lifestyle, we see faults as an opportunity to grow.

- Choose forgiveness before an offense happens

What do I mean by this? Make the decision to be a forgiving person. Make forgiveness a part of your relational DNA. Build forgiveness into the very environment of all your relationships.

- Often people wait until an offense happens and then decide whether or not to grant forgiveness. Some people may even say; "It depends on what it is." Or...I have heard people say; "I could never forgive that." I completely understand the emotions of these statements...but...
- But as followers of Jesus how can we have conditional obedience? Are we not all called to be forgivers? Jesus didn't put conditions on this issue. He simply said to forgive as we have been forgiven. Forgiveness is like love...it is unconditional.
- In order to make forgiveness a lifestyle we must tell Jesus YES in advance. Yes, we will follow Him in this area even before we know what it is.
- If we are going to try to decide in the moment whether or not we will follow Jesus our emotions will win out every time. We need to decide in advance.
 - 20 years ago when I was voted out of the church I was currently a part of there was a tremendous amount of relational wounding. There was a lot of relational ugliness. There was a need for an enormous amount of forgiveness at many levels. How did we forgive? The decision had already been made. We were going to follow Jesus regardless. Forgiving people is what following Jesus looks like.

Expecting imperfections in others is not making excuses for bad behavior. It is living with the realization of our own brokenness and the brokenness of others. When broken people get together, there is bound to be issues to growth through.

2. The lifestyle of forgiveness prepares for reconciliation

Forgiveness takes one person. Reconciliation requires two. The greatest miracle is not the forgiveness, it is in the reconciling of two people. Listen to what Jesus said.

Matt 5:23-24 "So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, ²⁴ leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God." (NLT)

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Reconciliation is a priority to Jesus. It is so important that it should be given priority even to worship. How can we live in a way that prepares us to not only forgive, but be ready and willing to reconcile

- Be willing to pray for reconciliation

I believe this is where reconciliation begins. If we are not willing to pray for it, reconciliation becomes very unlikely. Are you at least willing to not only forgive the one who hurt you are you willing to pray that God reconciles you?

- Some of you are already thinking; “Absolutely not!” I don’t even like this person. I will never trust this person. Our relationship can never be restored.
- BUT, can you see that you are looking at this relationship only from a human perspective. You see it only from the perspective of your wound. You understand it as it is currently without God.
- Reconciliation is the heart of God for every relationship. Wouldn’t it be an amazing Jesus story if He transformed your heart and the offender’s heart? Miraculous...yes!

- Be willing to pursue reconciliation even if it seems impossible

Let me explain what I mean. Reconciliation requires two people. As long as the other person is unwilling to pursue this there really isn’t anything you can do. BUT, what if God opens a door and gives you this opportunity? Will you take it?

- I realize there are unsafe people...abusers...engrained addictive behavior in others. I am not advocating putting yourself in any type of unsafe or unhealthy situation. This is not what reconciliation is. Reconciliation is not becoming any type of relational doormat to bad behavior.
- BUT, what if God begins a work in the offender? Are you willing to take a step in the direction of the person who wounded you if you see God in it? I know this is a tough question...but are you willing to follow Jesus there?

- Be willing to humble yourself in order to reconcile

Reconciliation does not happen because someone is right and someone is wrong. Reconciliation becomes a reality when two people choose to humble themselves, forgive and love each other. Reconciliation happens because two broken people decided to follow Jesus.

- If you have to be proven 100% right in order to reconcile, this concept and experience will forever be a mystery to you. It simply goes beyond right and wrong. Of course there is confession and forgiveness granted but reconciliation is about relationship. All healthy relationship require mutual humility.
- It takes humility to try again...trust again...open your heart again...to risk again...to feel again...to try to follow Jesus together. Without a humility before God and the other person, a relationship can never be resurrected.

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3. The lifestyle of forgiveness is willing to follow Jesus anywhere to reconcile

A lifestyle of forgiveness is a radical departure from the way our world does relationships. Reconciliation is what it looks like to follow Jesus **fully**. If we are willing to follow Jesus anywhere, He will lead us into miraculous relational adventures we could never dreamed possible. Reconciliation is miraculous.

- Allow your relational brokenness to become a redemptive story

If you are navigating your life, it will have no redemptive theme to it. You are the one charting your course, you are making the decision and you will have the sum result of what you can accomplish. YET, if Jesus is the One charting the course of your life, He will weave a redemptive thread through your entire life.

- The only way to see God's redemptive thread in your relationships is to allow Him to be the Lord over them. He can take your relational brokenness and do something redemptive with it. He promises to do so.

Rom. 8:28 "And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them." (NLT)

- This verse is not true for everyone simply because they exist. It is true for those who love God and walk according to His purposes for them. Give God yourself and your relationships and He will create a redemptive story beyond what you can imagine. Hard to believe?

- Let me introduce to you someone who is taking this redemptive journey with Jesus. Jesse Coats testimony.