

How To Build Better Relationships

The Building Block of Forgiveness

Part 1

Intro: Relationships are a lot like physical structures. They have to be built over time and you have to use quality materials if they are going to last. Today we begin a new series focusing on relationships. “How To Build Better Relationships”. Here is a topic we all can relate to.

- In the next four weeks, we are going to look at 4 foundational qualities that every person must build their relationships on if they are going to last.
- In May of 2016, Lisa and I had the extreme privilege of traveling to Europe. If you want to see structures that have stood the test of time, they have it. (Pic of Coliseum and Athens Acropolis) It’s amazing seeing structures standing after more than 2000 years.
- God’s word tells us how to build our relationships with lasting strength. I love how often the Bible talks about relationships. It is a relational gold mine.
- Today we begin looking at the issue of forgiveness. The building block of forgiveness.
- Jesus had a lot to say about this issue.

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) Jesus is saying that forgiveness is the constant environment of relationships. 70 times 7 = 490 times was not the point. The point was it is constant. It’s foundational.

Eph. 4:32 “Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.” (NLT) Easier said than done for sure!

- Let’s understand the significance of building relationships on forgiveness.

1. Forgiveness is a requirement for imperfect people

- Our own brokenness makes forgiveness a relational requirement

Rom. 3:10 “As the Scriptures say, “No one is righteous—not even one.” (NLT)

Rom. 3:23 “For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.” (NLT)

- The bible describes every human being on planet earth as having a sin issue. We are all imperfect. We are all broken and flawed people. We all have the same disease.
- The only way for imperfect people to have healthy relationships with other imperfect people is to build forgiveness into their relationships.
- The fact of life is imperfect people will make relational mistakes. We will disappoint others / let people down / wound / hurt / ignore / betray / they gossip / they are critical / they will say and do unloving things.
- If we do not build forgiveness into all our relationships, we set ourselves on a pathway to loneliness. This is where unforgiveness will take you. WHY? Because you’ll keep looking for perfect people to be friends with...and they do

Listen to this message at foothillsonline.com

Page 1

- not exist! (It's like trying to find bigfoot) This is often why people just move from relationship to relationship.
- This understanding does not excuse bad behavior it simply allows us to live in relational reality.
- Our own brokenness makes withholding forgiveness relational hypocrisy
 - What do I mean by this? Isn't it hypocritical that imperfect, flawed people (who require forgiveness themselves) would withhold forgiveness from another broken flawed person?

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)

- To put this in the realm of a physical example: It would be like one cancer patient taking chemo criticizing another cancer patient because they need chemo.
- As human beings, we all have the same disease and we all require the same cure. Therefore, withholding forgiveness becomes very hypocritical.
- What we want to do is compare our brokenness to others so that we feel better about ourselves. We start feeling self-righteous. "I've never done what they have done." "My brokenness isn't as bad as their brokenness." This must make me a better person.
- Once again, this is like two people on hospice comparing different diseases that are killing them both. My disease isn't as bad as yours. BUT it doesn't matter because it is still killing you. WHY do I explain it like this? Because the bible does.

Rom. 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death..." (NLT) The disease of sin creates the exact same result in every person. Sin always brings death. Sin always destroys, always damages, always takes life never gives life. AND, we all have a sin issue.

- This is the entire point of why Jesus came. Jesus came to be the cure for our disease and give us forgiveness and life through His death on the cross.

Gal. 3:22 "But the Scriptures declare that we are all prisoners of sin, so we receive God's promise of freedom only by believing in Jesus Christ." (NLT)

Therefore, before we can build better relationships, we have to have the conviction that forgiveness is a requirement because we are all imperfect people.

2. Forgiveness is a requirement for emotional health WHY?

- Unforgiveness creates emotional weight
 - **ILLUSTRATE:** Get a volunteer – Have backpack and begin filling it with rocks.
 - Without forgiveness we carry the weight of the offenses with us forever
 - Without forgiveness, we carry the offenders with us forever.

Listen to this message at foothillsonline.com

- It is a human impossibility for you to be an emotionally healthy person without forgiveness. You are destroying yourself without it.

Prov. 27:3 “A stone is heavy and sand is weighty, but the **resentment** caused by a fool is even heavier.” (NLT) Resentment is a heavy thing.

- Unforgiveness distorts relational reality

- What do I mean by this? When we refuse to forgive, we are impacting the very chemicals in our body. In our brains we all have this very small thing called the amygdala. This walnut sized gland is what secretes the chemicals to create our fight and flight response. (Explain)
 - When you need to jump out of the way of a car
 - When you need to run from a bear
- The problem with fight and flight is our higher brain functions shut down. This is why grown adults duck down another aisle in the grocery store to not be seen by the person they haven’t forgiven (FLIGHT)...OR it’s why rational adults can yell and scream in the same grocery store in front of dozens of people and not care (FIGHT).
- Living this way is also very hard on your body in general. Our bodies were not designed to exist in fight or flight. It was meant for very short intervals. Unforgiveness and resentment can keep our bodies in a fight and flight mode.
- Unforgiveness even distorts your healthy relationships. You view even your close relationships through your wound / bitterness / unforgiveness.
 - This is why guys when you leave your dirty socks in the middle of the living room and your wife goes ballistic on you...it’s not about the socks.
- To think you can resent someone else and not negatively impact your other relationships is part of the denial. Unforgiveness distorts your relational reality and negatively impacts all other relationships.

If you want to be an emotionally healthy person, you must forgive.

3. Forgiveness is a requirement for spiritual connection

- Unforgiveness limits our experience with the presence of God

- I believe one of the greatest barriers to people experiencing the reality of Jesus in their own life is this area of unforgiveness. Why do so many believers in Jesus rarely or never experience Jesus in their daily lives? Unforgiveness.

Matt. 6:15 “But if you refuse to **forgive** others, your Father will not **forgive** your sins.” (NLT)

- Refusing to forgive creates this huge barrier between us and God. It kills the experiential part of our relationship with God.
- Jesus said that His sheep hear His voice and follow Him. This is what following Jesus looks like...feels like...sounds like. We are in an experiential relationship with a living person who we follow in real life. We have not been

Listen to this message at foothillsonline.com

Page 3

- invited into cold religion. We have been invited into the warmth of a genuine relationship.
- BUT, because so many people hang on to bitterness and resentment, this truth is foreign to them. Terms like; “What’s Jesus telling you”; “How is Jesus leading you”; are foreign to so many people.
 - When you read the word of God this is the normal experience of those who say they believe in Jesus. So what’s the problem? For many it is unforgiveness.
 - Unforgiveness is so contrary to the Kingdom of God that it literally shuts down your relationship with Him. We are forgiven people who must forgive as we have been forgiven.

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

- Matt. 18:21-35 Jesus told a parable to illustrate to His followers what a big deal forgiveness really is. (Summarize)
 - If God seems distant / you feel spiritually dead or disconnected, this may very well be the issue. You may have to choose between your bitterness and your relationship with God.
- Unforgiveness limits the power of God in your life
 - For the follower of Jesus, the source of our strength, stamina, courage, and life change comes from our connection with Jesus. His very life flows into us. BUT, we must stay connected.

John 15:5 “Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.” (NLT)

- Unforgiveness breaks the relational connection. It breaks the intimacy; it hinders the flow of His life into your life. Therefore, hanging on to unforgiveness and bitterness cuts off the very resources you need when you’re hurt and wounded.
- Yeah, but you don’t know what that person did to me. You’re right, I don’t. I do know that your bitterness will destroy you and I do know that Jesus has everything you need.
- Therefore, no matter what someone did to you without forgiveness, you are continuing to allow someone else to destroy your life and you are resisting the only One who can heal your life.
- Withholding forgiveness cuts us off from the very power source we desperately need.

4. Forgiveness requires us to make a choice

What do I mean?

- Forgiveness is a choice not a feeling

Listen to this message at foothillsonline.com

Page 4

- I don't know if I have ever "felt" like forgiving someone that truly wounded me. I'm not talking about the little stuff either. When someone deeply wounds your heart, feelings of forgiveness are tough to come by.
- Forgiveness is first a choice. If we wait around for our feelings we may never forgive people. Those feelings may never happen.
 - This is especially true if the offender has never asked to be forgiven or never changed any behavior.
 - Should we still forgive a person like this? Absolutely! Remember the damage unforgiveness and bitterness will do to you? The cost is too high not to.
- Making this choice is the step of obedience that unleashes the presence and power of God back into our lives. It is this choice that re-connects us to the One who has the resources to heal us. The choice you make determines what you end up being a slave to

*Rom. 6:16 "Don't you realize that you become the slave of whatever you **choose** to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can **choose** to obey God, which leads to righteous living." (NLT)*

- This is how the Kingdom of God works. When we make choices of obedience, the power of God shows up. You must cross the line of obedience first. Stop asking God for the power or desire to forgive. Choose to forgive first, and watch the power and desire show up.
 - Make the choice to be even more loyal to Jesus than your feelings. This is a faith choice that He will always bless. This choice sets you free.
- Forgiveness is a faith process not a fairness issue
 - Forgiveness has nothing to do with what is fair. Forgiveness is not a fairness issue. It is a faith issue. Do you believe Jesus knows best? Will you trust Jesus with your wounds / emotions / your relationships?
 - Fairness is an issue we all have to learn to trust God with. We live in a world that will always be unfair and unjust. Therefore, we entrust our lives to The Righteous Judge. God will settle accounts.

*II Cor. 5:10 "For we must all stand **before Christ** to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body." (NLT)*

- This verse is true for you and the offender. Therefore, your faith response is to forgive and let God handle the fairness.
- The reality of forgiveness is that it is an ongoing process. We have made the choice, but now we have to live daily in that choice. This is not easy. Therefore, we learn to choose forgiveness daily...even moment by moment, trusting Jesus for the power to forgive.

Listen to this message at foothillsonline.com

Page 5

Now, the most important question of the day. Who do you need to forgive? Haven't you carried this bitterness long enough? Haven't you given this person (or people) enough control over your life? Isn't it time to be free? Will you trust Jesus with your broken heart today?

Prayer time: Reference the prayer team in the back.

Listen to this message at foothillsonline.com
Page 6