

## Relating, Dating, and Mating: A Series On Relationships Part #5 "Forgiveness: Luke 17:3b-19"

C.S. Lewis *"Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea until he has something to forgive."*

### I. Jesus Teaches Us What Forgiveness Means (vs. 3-6)

- **True forgiveness has a particular goal which is to stop the spread of sin.** Notice that Jesus links forgiving and rebuking (coming against sin in the name of God) in vs. 3. To really rebuke someone with the goal of them changing (rather than you just getting it off of your chest), you must have already forgiven them in your heart. Do you want them to flourish? Do you want the kingdom to expand? Or is it all about you?
  - If you are one who rebukes sin and yet it never leads people to be softened, you are probably a peace-breaker, and people sense that your rebuke is designed to punish, not to heal.
  - But on the other hand, if you only want to "forgive" (i.e. ignore the issue) without rebuking, then you are probably a peace-faker. If you are one who never confronts, your real goal is not love but your own selfish peace. The goal in forgiveness is to stop evil not just to tell the person off, or end the tension.
- **Forgiveness is an action, not just a feeling, and it is not based on the other person's sincerity!**
  - Forgiveness can't be a feeling because how could you just get rid of your anger 7 times in one day? (vs.4)
  - Forgiveness is not based on performance, or the other person's sincerity, because if he sins against you 7 times in one day, the person obviously isn't sincere in their repentance! Now you may say, what do you mean forgiveness isn't dependent on the other person's performance, isn't that what vs. 3 says? Well, not exactly. We read in Mark 11:25 that we are to forgive, period. This is the forgiveness in your heart that is presupposed by the directions here in Luke 17 regarding reconciliation. To be able to do Luke 17:3 you must have already forgiven in your heart in a way that is not based on the person's performance or on your own feelings.
  - Asking for forgiveness should involve confessing specifics – an apology is not the same as asking for forgiveness!
- **Forgiveness is the acceptance of a debt.** This Greek word is often translated as "let it be" or "consent" (like in Mt 18, where it is translated as "forgive") it means to assume a debt.
  - To do this (as Tim Keller says) we must first assess how much we have been robbed (because you are robbed whenever you are wronged) rather than pretending that everything is OK. Forgiveness does not equal forgetting! Often this wrong idea is based on Jeremiah 31:34 where God promises to remember our sins no more. But God is not saying here that He will suddenly develop amnesia, rather he is assuring us of His promises to not deal with us as our sins deserve. *"I do not believe forgiveness involves forgetting the past and ignoring the damage of past or present harm. To do so, even if it were possible, would be tantamount to erasing one's personal history and the work of God in the midst of our journey. The only way for the "forgive and forget mentality" to be practiced is through radical denial, deception, or pretense."* (Dan Allender)
  - But then, we must pay the debt, we must assume it ourselves rather than requiring payment from the person who wronged us! How do we make others pay? We are cold with them. We try to shame them by our being overly merciful (which is really self-righteousness.) We are demanding with them. Sometimes we slander them to others under the guise of wanting to share our hurt or warn others about the person who wronged us. We can actively seek to hurt them, or we can just secretly root for their failure in our hearts. Dan Allender says *"Forgiveness involves canceling the debt that is owed in order to give a taste of the glory of God."*
  - Making payments on the debt ourselves is costly, but that's what Jesus calls us to. This means to be cordial and warm (even if you don't feel like it.) It means to not let them continue to sin against you because you want their good – not just your own comfort! It means to affirm and praise them to others, to pray for them and to will their good! You have to grant forgiveness to feel it.
  - To forgive we must revoking our right to revenge without losing our hunger for it (Dan Allender) Look at Rom 12:17-21. Vengeance is the Lord's (vs. 19) and we are to leave it to Him. But this does not mean the desire for justice is wrong and should be denied or suppressed. There is a day coming when all will be set right. Are we willing to trust that God will make it right?

### II. The Disciples' Perfect Response (vs. 5-6)

- **The disciples feel the overwhelming weight of Jesus' words and cry out, "Increase our faith!"** We should do the same! But Jesus says that if we have true faith, it *does* have power to do the impossible. (It was believed in Jesus' day that a mulberry tree would stay planted in the ground for 600 years!)

- **Faith is powerful because of its object, God Himself!** Faith is not, as is commonly believed, the ability to keep our head up somehow when life looks dark. It is not naïve optimism! Faith is a whole-souled reliance on Jesus who lived and died in our place, and living life in the implications of that truth! **And faith grows by feeding on the character and promises of God!**

### III. How Jesus Increases Our Faith (vs. 7-19)

- **He teaches us about humility (vs. 7-10)**
  - You must be humble to forgive. You can't forgive someone you feel superior to, you can only pity them. Jesus says we are to think of ourselves as servants who deserve nothing. Do we know what we owe God? Whenever we refuse to forgive, though we are mere servants, we act like kings and judges.
  - Where do we get this humility? Not just by looking at Jesus as our model for humility -- there is no power in that because there is no power in the Law (Rom 8:3) to change us even when we see it perfectly modeled by Jesus! As Keller says, *"We must see Jesus, the King who became our servant, for us to overcome being a servant who acts like a king."*
- **He teaches us about being cleansed, and thankful (vs. 11-19)**
  - You can't forgive unless you see yourself as rich! ***If we only see ourselves as an unclean leper we will never be able to forgive because you can't forgive if you are filled with insecurity.*** You won't think you can afford to assume the debt unless you see yourself as fabulously wealthy in the gospel! If you are a Christian, you are a sinner-saint who is a co-heir with Jesus! As one Puritan said, *"Those who are riding on their way to be crowned, care little if it rains on them along the way!"*
  - You know that you have to see yourself as rich to be able to forgive because the people who have hurt you where you are most insecure are the ones you refuse to forgive! You may be able to even forgive them for *some* things, but in *this* area you feel you just can't afford it. For example (and this is Keller's example) if you are insecure about your romantic desirability, you will find it very difficult to forgive one who rejects you in this way. You must see Jesus as your worth rather than your own romantic desirability if you would hope to forgive someone who has hurt you in this area! We must be truly thankful as we ponder what He has done for us. Do we realize that Jesus became a leper, an unclean untouchable one, so that we could touch Him?
  - Practicing thankfulness as a regular spiritual disciple is vital for your heart to feel rich. This is the point of another of Jesus' famous parables on forgiveness in Matthew 18, the parable of the unmerciful servant. Unless we are constantly conscious of the debt we've been forgiven we'll never develop a heart of forgiveness towards others.
  - Where are you insecure? What thing can't you forgive? We need to see Jesus has made us wealthy in the very places where we feel so needy and empty and poor. And He did it by taking our shame and our sin and giving us His wealth and His beauty! What glory! As Tim Keller puts it, *"The currency of forgiveness is nails and wood. Forgiveness is always about pain. You will be in pain if you refuse to forgive, and you will be in pain if you do forgive. So which pain will you choose? Will you choose the pain that heals?"*

### Conclusion:

- **Forgiveness is costly but it brings healing.** We may think that to forgive means that the other person wins but this is a lie. To forgive means that Jesus wins. *"Unforgiveness is the poison you drink hoping someone else will die."* (Scotty Smith) Sometimes we hold on to our pain as a kind of righteousness that we don't want to give up.
- **Forgiving others is the door into understanding the Lord's forgiveness.** To fail to forgive others means that we have failed to grasp the whole point of the gospel and the kingdom that has come! It is through forgiving others that we really come to appreciate the hugeness of the gospel and what it cost to redeem us! The command to forgive is actually one of the chief ways God increases our faith because it drives us to Him for forgiveness! C. H. Spurgeon *"You cannot sin so much as God can forgive... You can only sin as a man, but God can forgive as a God. You sin as a finite creature, but the Lord forgives as the infinite Creator."*
- **As we daily drink in the forgiveness of the gospel, it should form us into a forgiving community!** NT Wright makes this point very well explaining how Jesus is teaching His followers that they must live the kingdom vision they have received in their little "Jesus-cell" groups. *"As soon as someone in one of these Jesus-cells refused to forgive a fellow-member, he or she was saying, in effect, 'I don't really believe the Kingdom has arrived. I don't think the forgiveness of sins has actually occurred.' Failure to forgive one another wasn't a matter of failing to live up to a new bit of moral teaching. It was cutting off the branch you were sitting on. The only reason for being Kingdom-people, for being Jesus' people, was that the forgiveness of sins was happening; so if you didn't live forgiveness, you were denying the very basis of your own existence..."*