

Somebody asked Billy Graham one time, what's the last thing he do before he goes and speaks and thinking he'd have some kind of profound answer. But his answer was, I check my zipper. So I want you to know I do the same. And I actually preached a sermon one time. I had a sport coat on and somehow the collar got flipped up on my sport coat.

I preached an entire sermon that way and one of the guys from the church said to me, wow. I said, well, why didn't you tell me? He said, well, I thought it was a style statement. I'm not that styler. So if I ever have something wrong, somebody please tell me and come up and change it or whatever.

So anyway, I would never turn my sport anyway. Whole sermon. I'm sure nobody listened. So, hey, today I wanna talk to you about something that Jesus teaches us to do and wants us to obey. And it's life giving, it's powerful, it's supernatural, it brings joy and peace.

It's exhilarating. Some people follow Jesus because of this very thing he tells us to do.

So today I wanna talk to you about something Jesus tells us to do, that he wants us to obey. And as we try to obey, it's painful, it's difficult, it is almost impossible. It brings up feelings of anger and bitterness and revenge. I know people that have stopped following Jesus because this very thing Jesus teaches us to do. I'm talking about the same thing, talking about forgiveness.

One of the most exhilarating, yet difficult things that Jesus tells us to do that is only possible with his spirit inside of us. My name's Matt. I have a new life in Jesus. But I still struggle at times with unforgiveness and bitterness because I'm human, as are you. You've been hurt, I've been hurt.

So this series is called Hope and Healing. So forgiveness and letting go of that is huge part of healing. It's a huge part of the healing that Jesus brings us. So Beth just read part of the passage, but the passage we're gonna look at today, Peter asks Jesus a question about forgiveness, and Jesus gives Peter. I'm calling it a shocking answer.

All right, so let me just read the rest of the passage. She just read the passage where Peter asked Jesus, how many times should I forgive? Seven times, thinking he was being generous. And Jesus said, no, no, no. 70 times 7.

For those of you who weren't math people, that's 490. All right. I taught junior high math, right? Jesus wasn't saying 490 then on the 490, first step. You could stop, he was saying.

It's endless, the forgiveness you offer. And then he went on to say this. Explaining forgiveness. He said, therefore the kingdom of heaven

is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him 10,000 bags of gold think millions of dollars was brought to him.

Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. At this, the servant fell on his knees before him. Be patient with me, he begged. I will pay you back everything. The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him 100 silver coins, think thousands of dollars. He grabbed him, began to choke him. Pay back what you owe me, he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, be patient with me and I will pay it back. But he refused.

Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison so he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. And the master called this servant in and said, you wicked servant, I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you? In anger, his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured until he should pay back all he owed.

And here's what I find to be a very shocking statement of Jesus. That's how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart first. Point is this. You, like Peter, will struggle with unforgiveness.

A couple years ago, my wife and I were interacting with some people and having conversations. And after the conversation was over, my wife, just my wife and I, in our home, in our living room. And she said, you have a forgiveness problem and it's holding you back, right? I'm just like.

But within a few seconds, truly, 10 years ago, it would have taken me five days to come to this conclusion. But then in a few seconds, I realized she was right. I had a forgiveness problem and it was holding me back. And I had to go put through a list of people that I needed to forgive. Don't think lists like pages.

Just a handful, right? But I had to deal with it. And God helped me understand some ways to deal with it, to take steps toward forgiveness for my own heart's sake.

So here's the question of the morning. Who is someone that's difficult for you to forgive, and how are you currently doing with that? All right. Who is someone difficult for you to forgive, and how are you currently doing with that? It could be a hurt from the past, could be

a serious hurt from the past.

It might just be somebody that irritates you right now that you can't love. You don't feel like you can love them or offer them any grace. So it could be anywhere from a severe trauma or abuse to just irritation. But who is that person?

I'll give you time for the photo album of your mind to spin through and the Holy Spirit to stop it on somebody's face.

Who's that person or persons, and how did they sin against you? How did they offend you? How did they wound you? How did they trespass against you? I'm not dismissing that at all.

Those are real things. And how did you feel when they did that to you? You might have felt rejected, shamed, guilty, anxious, dirty, embarrassed, degraded, overlooked, belittled, stupid, misunderstood, accused, or worthless, or any of those in combination. Because then when somebody wounds us or hurts us and we're on the edge of needing to forgive, all those feelings kind of rush to the surface. Let me say a couple things first about forgiveness, too.

Not at all. Not at all saying that forgiveness means what happened to you didn't matter. It's not at all denying of your pain or emotions. What happened to you matters to God. If you were hurt by somebody, if you were abused by somebody in any variety of way, big trauma, small trauma, it matters to God.

For forgiveness, according to Jesus, does not mean take a pencil eraser and just wipe it out. Doesn't mean. It doesn't mean your feelings and the pain isn't real. It was really. It's real.

And for some of you, that pain is still real. And it matters to God. So please don't hear me saying, especially don't hear Jesus saying, just let it go, let it go, let it go. All right. I don't know why that song came to my head.

Sorry, it wasn't in my notes. But some people think that's where forgiveness is. And it doesn't mean you're excusing. Yeah, they did that. But if you knew their family, it makes sense why they treated me that way.

Forgiveness doesn't mean excusing them either. If they hurt you, they hurt you. God knows that.

So we all struggle with forgiveness. But then Jesus, then the second point is this. Forgiveness is gonna stretch you beyond comfort. And more than just Jesus says, well, not just seven times, like 490 plus times. That's like, really?

That's a lot of forgiveness. He stretches. Jesus stretches us. And it's easy. You know, we pray the Lord's Prayer, the line, forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors.

And that's part of the Lord's Prayer that we read it kind of like Charlie Brown's teacher. Wah, wah, wah, wah, wah, wah, wah, wah, wah, wah. Forgive us our debts, wah, wah, wah. And we kind of gloss over it, but it's a hard statement. In the same Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says this thing, these things about the people that fall in that category of needing our forgiveness.

He says, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.

Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you. Wow, we should have a Sunday morning class on that. The class would be titled how to love your enemies and do good to those who hate you. And I'm only partially joking, but some of us probably wouldn't want to go to that.

But it's like, shouldn't we learn how to do Jesus? That's a huge part of what Jesus wants us to be. How do we become the people who. Who love our enemies and bless those who curse us?

It's not easy. In the core class that I taught in the last couple months, I asked people to write down in notecards what's hard about forgiveness. And they all wrote on these note cards, and it's all those things like, well, my hurt still matters. And what if the person doesn't think they did anything wrong? All these feelings.

But forgiveness is still your issue to figure out how God wants you to do that. And here's typically the continuum. Cause I've been through this. You hurt by somebody and you hurt, you are angry. And if you're honest, you want them to hurt.

You want them to hurt. You may not do it yourself, but you don't mind. If you find out they had a bad car accident, you feel like you want them to hurt, then we think, I don't want to be that way. So then we move to the place of, I'm just gonna not think about it, I'm gonna ignore them, I've forgiven them, I'm ignoring them. According to Jesus, that's not forgiveness.

I'm angry, I want revenge. I'm just gonna ignore them and not think about it. But then Jesus says this, no, you need to bless them. Bless them. What do you mean, Jesus, do you know what they did to me.

Can I just go back into my ignore world? Can I just ignore them? No. Jesus, I want you to bless them. Bless those who persecute.

Do good to those who hate you. Who does that? Right? I mean, Jesus even said, one of the things he said was if you're asked to carry a

soldier's gear one mile, carry it too. Now let me give the context there.

A Roman soldier by law could require you if you were a Jewish citizen. Cause Rome occupied Israel at the time, you had to carry their gear for 5,280ft by law. He could just ask you to. And you had to do it. Me, after 5279ft, 11 and 7, 8 inches, I'm going to drop it.

I'm done. And Jesus says, no, keep going. But Jesus, I hate the Roman soldiers. I hate Rome. Yeah, keep going.

Carry it another mile. Shock them with your grace.

So again, forgiveness doesn't mean you declare neutrality and ignore them. Forgiveness means you bless them. And there's been times.

There's one time I remember where there was somebody in my life that had brought a lot of hurt to my life. Maybe not to me, some of it to me directly, but to a lot of people. And I was just kind of holding on to. I was holding onto Grudge World. The check engine light of Grudge was always on in my mental car.

Right. You know what I mean? And you know what I'm talking about, I think. Right. And so I felt like God wanted me to forgive him, this person.

Not to his face. Cause that wouldn't have worked in that case. And sometimes that's the reality. So I was in a basement bedroom of our house at the time. And I felt like God wanted me to say out loud.

I was by myself. God, I'll just call the person Tom. God, I love Tom. God, I forgive Tom. And I want you to bless Tom.

I'm by myself in a room, but God, why do you want me to say that out loud? I feel like God was like, I want you to hear yourself say it. So I said, God, I. I love.

I don't wanna say that. God, I love Tom. I started crying. I love Tom. God, I want.

I forgive Tom. And God, I want you to bless Tom. That may be something you do just in your own car by yourself. Now, I'm not saying God bless them in their wicked behavior. No, I'm saying God bless them.

Bring the Holy Spirit to their life and bring them to life in Jesus. I've sent gift cards to people anonymously. Not White Castle. I've sent gift cards. So there's somebody in this congregation I encourage send a gift card to, because sometimes your heart follows your money.

And, you know, you're not gonna say, I am sending this to you to let

you know I'm forgiven. That's not forgiveness. Sometimes figure out some way to bless somebody anonymously, especially somebody that you don't like. Why would God want you to do that? Right.

One of my. There's a podcast I was listening to one time, and a woman was talking about a time when she was sexually abused as a child by a relative and how she spent years working out that situation. And she said, I'm to the point now in my life where I want my abuser in heaven with me.

I pulled my car off the side of the road. Wow.

How do you get to that kind of forgiveness? I want my abuser in heaven with me. Can you say that about the picture in your mind? And then you might know the story from Acts, chapter seven of Stephen, one of the early leaders in the church, was confronted by the Jewish leaders because he was talking too much about Jesus and they decided to stone him to death. So here's Stephen getting pelted not by pebbles, but by stones.

Eventually would kill him. In the midst of that, what does he say? Shocking God, do not hold this sin against them.

I want to be that way. Do you? Don't you? As he's being tortured, stones thrown, he's bleeding, he's probably dying, he's probably gasping for air. Father, don't hold this sin against these people.

But God, I do want you to hold it against them. Right? That's what you and I think I do want you. They need to pay. No, God, don't hold it against them.

You forgiving somebody will absolutely stretch you beyond any sense of your comfort zone. You can only do it with the spirit of Jesus in you. Again, I'm not. It's not dismissing pain. It's not excusing it.

It's not saying life should go back to normal. It's saying you are asking God to bring that person blessing through Jesus, and you're gonna trust God's sense of justice. I talked to somebody after the first service, and they said, well, isn't there a place for righteous indignation? And you want justice. I said, yeah, we do want justice.

You might feel righteous indignation about something somebody did, and you want justice. But somehow what Jesus does is he also puts mercy in that same bucket. So you can. You want justice, but you also live out mercy. Again, it doesn't mean forgiving, as if it doesn't matter.

But how do we be like Jesus in that way? Justice and mercy.

Last thing is this. And this is probably the most shocking statement. If you don't forgive others, God won't forgive you. Well, that sounds

kind of heretical, doesn't it? Sounds like.

Makes sense. God. It's like a big meanie, right? So you're going to read this with me. But Jesus had just told that parable about the servants.

And so I can't believe he said, you wicked servant, you didn't forgive this person. I'm gonna have you thrown in jail. And then this is what he says. Read this out loud with me, all right? One, two, three.

That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart. Now let's do it one more time. Instead of you say me. Not me, Matt, you. Right?

All right. So that's what my heavenly father will do to me if I refuse to forgive my brothers and sisters from my heart.

Sounds a little harsh, Jesus.

That sounds like some mean football coach that's gonna make me run laps. All right, this is a shocking reply that I think from Jesus. And let me. Here's how I've come to understand this. All right?

I want you to picture over my head a huge red funnel. I actually went on Amazon and tried to find one, but I can't find a huge one. I wanted a really big one, but that would have been kind of awkward, right? Big opening at the top, small down to my head, right at the big opening. God hit the heart of God as he wants to pour abundant mercy and life and joy into me.

But this little part of the funnel, it's under my control. It's clogged up with unforgiveness garbage.

Garbage. I'm not gonna let that go, God. So when Jesus says, your father won't forgive you, the reality is God's like, I can't. If I start pouring blessing into this funnel to you, you've got it clogged up with your unforgiveness trash. And until you clean out that before me, I can't.

I can't. And I won't pour blessings into you. Cause it won't get there. So it's not that God's saying tit for tat. He's saying, I wanna pour blessing into your life.

I wanna pour joy. I wanna pour more of the Holy Spirit into you. But as long as you have that feel clogged up with Your unforgiveness junk and your bitterness junk. Why would God pour it in if it's just gonna flow out and miss you? So when Jesus says that.

Cause later in the gospel, earlier in Matthew, he says this. If you forgive those who sinned against you, your heavenly Father will

forgive you. But if you don't, if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins. And it sounds like I said so, tit for tat. But if you think about this, you gotta clear out the funnel of unforgiveness or God can't pour anything into you.

He won't. Why would he? But he wants to. So here's some questions you may want to. Because you might think, well, I think I've forgiven them all right?

But here's some self reflection questions about forgiveness. Do you find yourself often dwelling on the hurtful event?

Not just once in a while, but you dwell, I can't believe what they did to me. Do you bring up this incident again and again against them? Now I'll step on some toes here. Cause I'll monetize. Maybe it's in marriage, maybe your spouse is, you know, you think you've forgiven them, but you keep wanting to bring that up in the conversation because it's a trump card.

That's a check engine light that's on that says you haven't fully forgiven them. Forgiveness is a process. It's not an event. It starts with an event. It starts with a decision, I'm gonna forgive them.

But it's a process because it keeps coming up. You talk about it with others too much. If you keep talking about your hurt to other people, you probably haven't forgiven or you're not on the road to forgiveness in that process. See, because forgiveness is like this. I read this because I thought it was a good analog.

They said it's kind of like you're walking in the dark in the middle of the night and you step on a Lego on the floor. Unexpected but painful. And sometimes you remember what happened to you and what that person did to you. And it's like the pain of a misplaced Lego on the floor. Weren't even thinking about it and boom.

And then you think about what that person is doing to you or did to you. And you don't know what to do with that. And I thought I forgave them. Doesn't mean you haven't forgiven them. It just means you're still in the process of forgiving them.

God, you might step on other Legos. They will, you know, I do that poof. The think of a gas grill. I had to light my gas grill the other day and you throw the match on there, you know, it poofs up. So you might think, well, I forgave them.

Well, then a couple weeks later, poof, you step on Lego and the flame, oh, I must not have. No, it just means now you're still in the process. God, I want you to bless them, I forgive them. Then a couple of days later, a couple weeks later, you see them, poof, poof. Forgiveness means those poofs will happen less and less frequently

with less and less intensity and the flame goes out faster.

If you're poofing all the time with your under and the flame is hot every time, and months later, the flame is hot every time, and you're also dancing on Legos every time, then you may have to have another conversation with Jesus about your forgiveness. But if it's just a matter of LEGO here and a poof here and the flame gets smaller and lasts longer, it means you're on the journey of forgiveness. It's not a one time thing, it's a process.

This was many years ago. There was somebody in my life that had brought a lot of hurt to many people. But I was one of the many people and I wanted justice for them, right?

So I was talking to a friend of mine, Tom, and he's actually a missionary, he was in Austria, we were actually in Vienna. And it was a good place for me to vent cause nobody would know what I'm talking about. And I was just telling him all the things this person had done that had caused me and others great pain. And he listened to me for a while as I was ranting about justice. He needs to hurt, you know.

And then Tom stopped me and he said, matt, can I tell you one thing? God is more than just, he's also merciful.

So in my reaction to this person, I learned over time, yes, justice matters, but mercy matters. And how do I be? How do I blend justice and mercy? That's Jesus. It's not 50 50.

It's all mercy and all justice. Like, how do I, yes, I demand justice, but I trust God to execute the justice, not me.

But how do I have a posture of mercy toward that person? And you might say, you don't know what that person did to me. And I don't.

But if this woman can say, I want my abuser in heaven with me, then I know that kind of forgiveness is possible. But by the power of the Holy Spirit in you, it's not willpower. Try willpower. It will fail you. You'll be dancing on Legos all the time.

Right? It's not willpower.

The last thing is this. And this. Always. It always stirs me when I think about this. So.

Remember the movie Passion of the Christ came out? I've probably used this illustration before, but I don't mind. I'll use it 50,000 times. I was watching the theater at College Mall. This is no longer a theater.

And I remember. And of course, like you, I knew the Bible stories. I

knew Jesus got arrested and flogged and all those things, you know? And I'm sitting there watching this. And of course, if you've seen the movie, it's pretty graphic.

Cause it was graphic when he was arrested. Tortured, whipped, flogged, beaten. And then he's on the cross, still being tortured, not yet dead.

And what does he say? Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. But no, God, they do know what they're doing. They knew what they did.

I know what they did to me. And they knew they were hurting me. Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing.

And I remember in the movie theater, how does he say that? In the middle of being tortured, I can forgive. As if five years passed, I can forgive. If a month passed, I can even forgive a day later. If my wife said a harsh word to me, I can forgive that.

But in the middle of pain and suffering and being tortured, God, you want me to forgive them, Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. Is that verse up on the screen, Father? So, yes. Here's what I want you to do.

I want you to think. Go back to that photo album of your brain and think of that person or persons that have hurt you, abused you, or just frankly irritate you. And you don't wanna be graceful to them. Cause they're just a jerk. My wife doesn't like when I use that word.

But I did a sermon one time on forgiving the jerks in your life. And when the sermon was over, somebody came up at the front and said, you're the jerk I need to forgive. It's a whole nother story, and it was a legitimate issue. But I'm sorry, but who is that for you? And can you say that about them?

All right, I want you to read this out loud with me, but I want you to have a clear sense of who the them and they are. Who's the them and they that you're asking God to forgive and they really don't know what they're doing. Right out loud with me, here we go. Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. Say it again, Father, Forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.

Now close your eyes.

And now I want you just to whisper. Prayer it. Now you're talking to God. You're not talking to the screen, you're not talking to me. So I'll say it and then you can just repeat it as a whisper.

Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. Ready? God,

we want to be the kind of people. We want to be like Stephen, who forgave.

Don't just hold sin against him. We definitely, absolutely want to have the spirit of Jesus in us that says, father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. And in doing so, can we bring grace and mercy to others. Because you said, God, we have the ministry of reconciliation.

So as we forgive others, it opens a whole new door for a life of peace and reconciliation. God, I even pray, when I think about the Middle east situation, I pray that your people, the church, your people in Iran, your people in Israel, your people in the Middle east, anybody who calls on the name of Jesus, I pray that they would be the avenue for peace and reconciliation in that part of the world. Not politics. No, we want the people of God to lead the way in peace and reconciliation and forgiveness because we want to be those kind of people. So I pray, God, as we think about the people in our own lives that pop up on our mental photo stream, tell us what, tell us what steps you want us to take that will take the next step in that process of forgiving them, and then takes us in that process of asking you to bless them, telling us how to do good to them who hurt us.

We want to be those kind of people. We want to change the world with that spirit inside of us. We want to change our families, change our marriage. And it's only possible if you do that, if you're in us and we ask this all in your name. Amen.

So we have a response time. And the response is, you can. I think we have offering boxes up here. But the primary part of the response is communion. And we have these cups and little bread in there.

And it can seem kind of rote if you do it. When you do it all the time. It's a good thing to do it regularly, I think. But we kind of. We're more concerned.

I'm more concerned if I can get the stupid paper off to get my juice open, right? You know, that kind of thing. But Jesus said, every time you do this, remember me. And then he said this in one of the passages when he talked about this. And every time to disremember me, this is my blood poured out.

For the forgiveness of many starts with you, forgiveness of you, between you and God. But that forgiveness then flows through you. That's why we put it into our bodies. That forgiveness of the blood of Jesus flows through you into those very people who've wounded you, abused you, hurt you, or irritate you. So when you're taking it today, I want you to think of the person that came up on your photo filter about who hurt you.

And I want you to pray as you take this in your mouth, I want you to ask God to bless that person. Ask God to bring them to Jesus. And ask God to remove from you the bitterness and the anger that you're holding onto, because that gives you a weird sense of loss, life. So he says, remember me. Remember that his blood was poured out for the givenness of many in this room.

And those who you're thinking about who are out of this room, people on the side with Orange Landers there praying for you. If you just simply want somebody to pray and they. You can just go to somebody and say, I just need to forgive. You don't need to give details. Maybe you just know you need somebody to pray for you that will give you that supernatural reality inside of you.

But do this in remembrance of me, forgiveness of sins.