

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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Stunning Love

PART

6

TITLE

Love Is Forgiving

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 13:4-7



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The Bible says that love is one that actually forgives. We have to ask a few things when we even start to process the sentence, a short sentence, love is forgiving. I think the first thing we need to process within our own heart is who won't we forgive? And maybe the second is what won't we forgive?

In 1965, the light of the civil rights movement lit upon a dark place in the south called Selma, and most of us have seen this photo. It's one where they marched basically from Selma over a bridge to Montgomery. But just days before this moment took place in our own nation, and in its history, a man actually came up inside the lobby and asked to shake the hands of Martin Luther King. As you would expect from what we know of him in history, is that he gladly accepted.

The man was able to come much closer, and what you read in history it's not quite the same as in the movie and that was, that the man actually instead of shaking his hand when he got near enough, he actually punched him twice and then he kicked him to the place to where Martin Luther King, he fell to the ground. As was his nature, such poise and impulse control is instead of retaliation, he stood up and he walked away and he said to a friend who was really upset, he said, "Man, that man sure can hit."

Can you possibly imagine what the world would look like if our heart was naturally disposed to de-escalating a situation of tension? Can you imagine what it would look like in our homes or in our friendships or in our church or in our city or world? Can you imagine Washington DC being full of people that were inclined to overlook offenses and to offer forgiveness to one another? If you can possibly imagine a world where those were the inclinations of our heart, then you can imagine a world that the Bible calls love. It's love. Love is forgiving. Love is also impossible without supernatural influence within and upon our lives. We want to pray and ask God for grace as we even study his word. Would you bow and would you pray with me?

Father in heaven, we come before you and we thank you that you modeled the perfect example of showing us what a heart looks like that's naturally inclined to de-escalating a situation to overlooking offenses and to offering forgiveness. We thank you father that you have by your grace that you move in people's lives. We've seen it in our own life. We read about it in history, we've seen it in other people and we thank you father for the persistent but imperfect examples of what you do so freely. People that have de-escalated a situation even in our own life or have overlooked offenses in our life or even who said, "I forgive you." We thank you for the love that you have shown us and I pray father, that you as you long for your church to resemble the love that Jesus displayed while he was on the earth, God, I pray that you would do a miracle in our hearts, that you would open up our hearts, open up our ability to understand, open up our heart's ability to find interest in your word.

God would you help us to repent? Would you help us to believe what you say? And God, would you mark us with love? Would you speak through weakness and would you speak through all of the distractions that we bring into the room? We want to engage you through your word. We ask that you would help us by your spirit and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, I'm glad to see you. For those of you who are guests, welcome to Providence. I'm so happy that you are here. In your Bible, I would love for you to look with me at 1 Corinthians chapter 13, and then in a few moments we'll also read from Matthew chapter 18, but most of it will be from 1 Corinthians 13, where love is really described. It's painted on a picture and then it's hung on a wall as a mirror for us to be able to walk in front of, in order to see our life against the backdrop of love that is embodied in Jesus himself. Love is a remarkable thing, and the fact is the church in Corinth that it was first written too, is that they fell short and the reason they fell short is because they did what we all do as people, and that is this.

Is that they polish the externals of their life, they ignore the internals of their life, and as a result of that they became a living sink hole that's hollow but pretty, that's gifted and talented and knowledgeable about theology and all things about God and yet as dangerous to stand near because it's irritable and resentful and unkind and impatient. And so what Paul does for the church, you see he's far away from Corinth and he hears what's happening in Corinth. What he does is he writes this to them in order to turn it around and say, "Is this you? This is genuine Biblical love. Your king and my King stood on this earth and said, "By this all people will know that you're my disciples if you have love for one another." This is love. Is this you?"

He was so disturbed within his heart over the discrepancy between the perfect love of Jesus and the imperfect love of the church in Corinth, that he picked up his pen and this is what he wrote. "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I'm a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have and if I deliver up my body to be burned but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind. Love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. It never ends."

What we've been doing last month and we'll do through June is, from verse four through seven he gives several basic descriptions, facets of a diamond, and he says, "This is what love is." We're just looking at a few of them each week and seeing what the Bible says about those, and today we look at the words, love is not irritable or resentful. I'm going to show you that he's actually talking about forgiveness.

There's three big truths and then there's a few applications for us. The first is this, is that love lives in a broken world. We need to remember this, that love has staying power in a broken world. If you and I, we close our eyes and we just try to imagine what love is, we imagine what love will be in our life, then pleasant things tend to appear, don't they? We think of things that are warm and comfortable and close, where we're together and where there's unity and there's laughter and there's good food, and there's a fireplace and where it's all sustained by where we just perpetually treat each other right.

Some of you right now you want to be married. Like you look and go, “Oh love, one day I’m going to be in love and it’s going to look like this,” and we just naturally imagine that one day is that we’re just going to be sitting with somebody. We’re going to be able to make out with them on the side of a mountain. Even though it’s sunset, there’s 15 minutes left to get down the whole mountain, we don’t care about that, and there just happens to be a professional photographer who just lives there and we just sit there and we look good in orange and the wind is blowing perfectly, and all of these things that are happening all... this is love. Or sometimes what we think is, I’m married, I want a family, we want kids. Or just have this idea of this loving family where we have these opportunities to take pictures with the whole family and we’ll just... it’d be so great. Everyone’s going to just love when a photographer comes over to the house and everybody’s in a good mood and just unlimited smiles and like we feel it... Is that not the greatest lie in the world? You see a great family photo and you’re looking at a miracle, is what you’re looking at.

I know there’s a few photographers in the room and you do a great job, but the reality is when we close our eyes and think of love, we romanticize love, we make it more special than reality tends to bring. And rooted in our text is a reminder that we do not always treat each other right, in fact, we often treat each other wrong. Love, he says it’s not irritable. Some of your Bibles say love is not easily angered, it’s the same word. It’s seen almost perfectly to me in a word picture you find in proverbs 19 where it says, “The good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.” This is what it means for love not to be irritable. You get poked, you get poked again. I don’t like being poked, you probably don’t like it either, and you get poked again and yet we’re not easily angered. We overlook in an offense. I’m like, “It’s a little irritating, but it’s not a big deal.” Love moves on, it doesn’t count up all of those things.

Then he goes on and he says, “Love isn’t resentful.” That word actually comes from two different Greek words. One of the words means to count or to calculate or to store up, and the other is offense or injury or wrong. And so some of you say love does not keep a record of wrongs. Same as resentful, full of resentment, full of memories and angry and hatred and bitterness that’s stored up over time like a mountain towards someone.

What we need to see is that in both of these words, in both of these cases, someone is mistreating us. Our irritation and their record of wrong is increasing, it’s growing, it’s getting taller, and what the Bible says is this, this is so sobering but it’s that we all contribute to this chaos. Titus 3:3 says this, it says that, “We ourselves were once foolish, passing our days in malice and envy,” then he says, “Hated by others and hating one another.” These are such descriptive ideas.

When he says that we’re foolish, it means that we deal in our friendships, in our relationships, in a way that’s simply not wise. When he says to us that we pass our days in malice and envy, what he’s saying is this, is that we try to kill time by hurting people. Sitting down with a friend, so what should we do? I don’t know. What do you want to do? We could hurt somebody. Yeah, let’s hurt somebody. Let’s gossip. Let’s talk about somebody. Let’s go steal from somebody. Let’s go hurt somebody.

Then the last one he says, we were hated and we were hating. In other words, is that we participated in the mutual relational destruction that takes place in the world. Some of you go, "Well, that just wasn't me." That's what God remembers when he looks at you and me. He remembers that that's in us, that that was a part of our story. This is a pretty significant thing and that is that we all have this ability. We all have the ability to hurt, we all have the ability to have envy towards other, we all have the ability to be hated by others, to hate other people, to show foolishness, all these sorts of things. We all have the ability to turn a friendship, a marriage, a church, a life group, a family, photo opportunity, into a briar patch, that is sharp and that scratches and that produces blood.

We all have that ability, but there's good news and that is... that we learn here is that love is not intimidated by briars. Love has staying power to stand up in the briar patch. Love has capacity to endure in a broken world, and do you know why? The reason is number two, and that is that Jesus forgives in a broken world. Love lives in a broken world because Jesus forgives in a broken world.

I recognize, I know that some of you in the room, there's some of us have been wronged so deeply. In fact, the fact is, is that when you... when I teach about forgiveness and when we teach each other about forgiveness and we read about forgiveness and we talk to other people about forgiveness and about what we all experience, is that there are various levels of hurt that we have experienced within the room. There are some people here who know the bitterness of being lied to, and that is one level of angst and frustration, but there is some in the room who have been raped. And that is a deeper level. That is a more life changing. It's more intimidating. It's so hard, and so when... You know where I'm going to, and that is we have to forgive one another.

If love forgives, you know where the sermon is going to get to. That we're supposed to forgive one another. And the fact is that some of us in the room, this doesn't cause a tremendous amount of angst because you, by God's grace, have been protected from such deep wounds that have been inflicted by others, but not everybody in the room can say that. But what I do know is this, and what I hope that you'll be able to see in this second point is this, is though some of us have been more deeply wronged than others in the room, nobody has been wronged like God has been wronged.

Psalm 51:4, says, "Against you and you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." Think about what's taking place here, this is David. He's writing his psalm of confession and repentance after he committed adultery with Bathsheba and killed her husband, Uriah. He betrayed the confidence of God. He betrayed the confidence of Israel. He murdered a man. He was unfaithful. And he has the idea to write within scripture, inspired by God that though there are other victims, he says, "Against you and you only, have I sinned."

What's he saying there? What does he mean there when he says that, even though I'm sinning against my wife Tabitha, ultimately I'm sinning against God? This is why. Whenever somebody in this section sins against somebody in this section, you don't sin against me so I don't feel the offense, but you've sinned against God and that person. When I sin against you, I don't sin against you, but I've sinned against you and God. In other words, God is always a part of the victim. He is always the one who takes the brunt. That you think about the collective, the summation of universal sin, you think of things that have been done to you and you think, "Okay, I can... These are the things that I can remember that people have done to me."

I want you to think about this. Think about every single person on the face of the earth who has ever lived or ever will live, and every single inclination of a heart that has sinned for every single, every decision, every single one of them is a violent poke at God's chest. Every one of them. He feels every one of them. And as a result of that, what the Bible tells us is that his righteousness responds to our rebellion in wrath.

We don't like to talk about wrath, but the Bible says that God gets angry at sin. He gets angry enough that the Bible says, is that unless we actually trust his remedy to be reconciled and forgiven is that we will literally live forever after our time on this earth in a place that's called hell. It's a place of eternal separation from God. It's a place where we are constantly reminded of our sin, of our loneliness. It's a place of perpetual pain.

God Almighty within the scripture says, "This is how offensive sin is to me." And yet the Bible says that God is love, which means that he's not irritable and he's not resentful. When humanity first sinned against God, the very first thing God did in love was he promised a rescuer. Then what the Bible did... What God did it's stunning to me. Is that he littered the world with road signs that pointed to the coming Messiah and then after Jesus came to the earth, he gave us the new testament that literally littered the entire world with road signs that point back to what Jesus did. That's the local church in every village in every city, is that we are a road sign.

As a congregation, our collective purpose is to declare his excellencies, and to help people understand who he is and what he has made available through Jesus Christ. What God did was he gave us all kinds of metaphors, all kinds of symbols, in both directions that point to the rescuer and that is Jesus Christ. One of those symbols that I love to talk about because it's such a vivid metaphor for forgiveness, is the day of atonement.

The word atonement it literally means covering. On the day of atonement, one time a year, the whole country would gather together in order to deal with their sin problem together. They would sacrifice, and there were meat. God prescribed everything that would happen, and he prescribed that there needed to be two goats. Two unblemished goats. The first goat would be brought up, the high priest would place his hands upon the goat's head symbolically placing the sin upon that goat and then that goat would be killed. It would be sacrificed for sin.

Then the high priest would come over and he would place his hands on the second goat's head symbolically placing the sin, the people upon the goat, and then that goat would be sent so far away into the wilderness, that it would be impossible for that goat to find its way back into camp. The word forgive within the scripture literally means to send away, to send away. And you see these goats, they were just a metaphor. They were a temporary covering, sort of like tarp in a roof. You get a tree that falls through your roof, or some big storm comes through and all of a sudden you have a roof... It takes time for the roofers to get there. So what do you do? You put a tarp over it. It's temporary. It does a job for a time, just like atonement. It's a covering, but it's not a solution.

In the fullness of time, Jesus Christ came to this earth and you know what he did? He fulfilled each role of the symbolic goats. Jesus Christ, we're told like the first goat, he died for our sin. It says that, "Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God." He died for us, but not only did he do that. Like the second goat, Jesus took our sin and he literally sent our sin away.

Psalms 103:12 says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." This is how powerful Jesus is. Love lives in a broken world because Jesus forgives in a broken world. How has this been applied to our life? Some of you, you're not forgiven today. You've not trusted in Jesus Christ. What the Bible says is this, is that Jesus came, he died on a cross, but then he rose from the dead three days later and he extended an invitation to you personally and to me, and that's this. If you will stop, literally repent, from trying to save yourself, and if you will place all of your trust upon Jesus and his record of accomplishment. Confess him as lord of your life. The Bible says that he will forgive you of all of your sin. Have you done that? Don't leave this room without doing that. You can call upon him right now even while I'm talking and just say, "God, I believe in the accomplishments of your son alone and I confess him as Lord of my life," and the Bible says you'll be forgiven.

For those in the room, just like myself, who after trusting in Christ, continue to wrestle with sin to the place where I fall short, do you know how his perpetual forgiveness continues to be applied? He says, "If we confess our sin, he's faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and cleanse us from all of our unrighteousness." When we confess it to him, we turn from sin and we look to God and we say, "I get you. I believe. I see. I confess what I've done is wrong," and he says, "He forgives us of all of it."

Two, love lives in a broken world and Jesus forgives in a broken world, and third is that Jesus enables us to forgive in a broken world. "He enables us to forgive in a broken world." And all depending on the depth of the wound that you carry around, I know that forgiveness can feel absolutely impossible. There's a few reasons why we struggle inherently, intrinsically with forgiving another person. One is simply the pain. You get punched in the face and knocked to the ground, it hurts. If you're injured, if you're lied about, if you're maligned, if you're gossiped about, if you're mistreated, it hurts. The hurt makes it hard to forgive.

I think the second reason we struggle so much with forgiveness is because forgiveness seems so unjust when we're giving it. We love it when we receive it and it's so unjust, but it's so hard to give it to other people because it just seems like, "Man, we're letting them off the hook. There's no justice here and there's no consequence here. They can do all of that and I just forgive them and it's gone? It feels so unjust."

I think the third reason that we struggle to forgive is because debt is power. Somebody sins against us and now they're indebted to us. We have something over them. We have something we could hold over them. We have something to justify our attitudes towards them, or how we talk to them. We feel superior to them. They feel that we are superior. They're always indebted. A spouse that's unfaithful to his spouse, it's so easy for them to feel like, "Okay, forever I have something over this person and that person has something over me." That is power and it's so hard to give away power.

There's another reason, and the last one I'm going to share with you, is why I think it's so hard for us to forgive. That's because many of us, the injury that's been done to us, we allow it to form an identity in our life. We start seeing ourselves through the lens of, that person did something to me. And so anytime we have an identity, identity shapes behavior. If we walk around thinking, "That person owes me," or, "That person injured me," or, "I am a victim in life," then what happens is this. Is it becomes terribly threatening to try to give away the one thing that creates our identity because then what is there to justify my attitudes and my behaviors and my thoughts and my actions? You want me to just give all of that away? What would that I been be? Who would I then be?

Forgiveness is, "Oh man, it's so hard," which is why the only way to overcome our wrath towards others is to see how God's wrath was overcome towards us. 1 John 4:19 says that, "We love because he first loved us." In verses one, two, and three if you notice each time he says I may have all this, he goes, "But if I have not love," he doesn't say, "If I'm not loving," he says, "If I have not love." You cannot give to others what you do not possess, and that's why he talks about having it. You have to experience God's love first. You have to experience forgiveness first. You have to experience grace and mercy being poured over you so that you have a surplus to be able to give to someone else.

He says to us, listen to me. He goes, "We love because he first loved us." This is where we get to Matthew 18. In Matthew 18, Jesus is talking with his disciples about what happens if somebody sins against us. What are we supposed to do? How are we supposed to respond to that? And Peter has this amazing question, it's a human question, it's so normal. This is what he says. Starting in verse 21, "Then Peter came up and said to him, Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him?" In other words, how many times do I have to forgive somebody? What's the cutoff? As many as seven times? Why would he say this? I don't know exactly. The law says three, at the time it said three. You have to forgive up to three times. Not God's law, that was man's law. It says we'll just say three times. Three times you're out. Three strikes.

Maybe Peter said, "I'll tell you what, I'm going to double the law and add one for good measure. Just to show you how mature I am. How about seven times? Is seven times enough?" I don't think that's exactly what's taking place because if you go all the way back, there was two brothers in the fourth chapter of Genesis. One killed another. A few generations pass, and there's this guy, his name is Lamech, and he kills a man? One of the things he says in chapter four, verse 24 is this, he says, "It's been said that anyone that would avenge Cain, they're going to get it seven fold can."

He says, "But anyone that avenges me, you're going to get it 77 fold or 70 times seven," and so Jesus, that's how he responds. He goes, "No Peter, not seven times, but 70 times seven." In other words, what he's saying here is this, he's not saying 490 times because God's word says, "He keeps no record of wrongs." You're 488, you better be careful. I got my little ledger here and you're really getting close. No, that's not what he's saying. What he's saying is this, he's saying, "Make forgiveness as natural as refinishes to the world."

Make inside of Christian's heart, allow forgiveness to be as routine and natural as retaliation is to those who do not know me as savior and Lord. Jesus wants to tell a parable, and you guys know I've been working through several parables recently, and what a parable does is it speaks into a context. It only gives enough information to get to his conclusion. And so if your question's about the parable or not answered in the parable, it's because that's not what the parable's about. It's not meaning to tell you everything about God, everything about theology, it's one thing. And he normally tells us what that one thing is.

At the very end there's a culturally shocking moment. He stops the parable and he says, "All right, this is what I'm talking about," this is what he says. He says, "Therefore the Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who wish to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him 10,000 talents." Now we don't speak in talents, but a talent... Your 10,000 talents actually equal 200,000 years of a laborers wage, a debt you couldn't pay.

Verse 25, and since he couldn't pay, of course he couldn't pay, he's not going to be alive that long to pay. His master ordered him to be sold with his wife and children and all that he had and payment to be made. The servant fell on his knees, imploring him, "Have patience with me and I will pay you everything." This is the comedy of a workspace salvation. We owe 200,000 years, and we say, "God just have patience and I'll pay it all off."

He says, "And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred days wage. And seizing him, he began to choke him saying, pay what you owe. His fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him. He says the same thing. Have patience with me and I will pay you. But he refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.

When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place, and then the master summoned him. He said to him, "You wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you?" And in anger, his master delivered him to the jailers until he should pay all his debt. Period, end of parable.

He looks up, he's looking at his disciples. He's in first person context now he's talking right to them and he says, "This is what I'm talking about. So also will my heavenly father do to every one of you who do not forgive your brother from your heart." He's not saying that we earn God's forgiveness by forgiving other people. What is he saying? He's saying that a person who grasps what God has forgiven them and how sizable of a debt that we had towards God, that person that understands that will now be a forgiving person.

We can only forgive what we can only give, what we have. This is the beauty. May have already gone up, but God lavishes. It's like a cup that he just constantly pours water into. And God lavishes both mercy and grace upon us at such a level that not only does he fill us to the brim, but he gives us enough to be able to share with anyone who would mistreat us.

Mercy and grace, what are these two things? Mercy is not receiving the wrath we deserve. We deserve God's wrath. We deserve separation from him in hell forever. That's what we deserve, but that's not what we receive for those of us who are in Christ. And this mercy relates to love not being irritable. Let me show you how. When we're mistreated and our irritability ignites, our anger ignites, we could be like this bear. We could growl, we could pounce, we could maul, we could cause blood, but what does love do? Love gives mercy. How? Forgiveness is to send away, remember? So what mercy does, is mercy sends away our wrath so we're not easily angered. We're sending away our wrath, but what is grace? Well, grace is the opposite.

Grace is when we receive the blessing we don't deserve. We receive forgiveness. We receive eternal life. We receive heaven. These things we don't deserve, and this corresponds to love is not resentful. How? When we are mistreated, again, we could record it in a ledger but love gives grace by sending our offense away. In both cases we are sending something away. We're either sending away their offense or our anger, and in both cases what we're doing is because God has given us such forgiveness, such mercy, such grace, he lavished upon us that we are now able to give to others.

What do we do with these things? A few applications before we're going to sing. First is this, is let's examine our heart. There is no way that we could possibly look at these two passages and not spend a little time looking into the mirror. James says that, the word of God is a mirror that we're supposed to stand in front of to see what we actually look like in comparison to God's plan for our life. Let me ask you, how did you react the last time you were mistreated? Are you today nursing a record of wrongs against someone? Is there somebody in your life that you're simply not willing to forgive? Is there somebody in your life that you are absolutely unwilling to even hear them confess their sin to you?

If this passage is a mirror, then we have to ask the question, what does it say about our heart? Second thing is let's receive God's forgiveness. If this kind of forgiveness is available by confessing our sin to him, then we want to receive that. For those of you in the room who've never trusted Christ, I beg you, I implore you, I invite you to trust Christ and you will be forgiven of all of your sin. But let me ask those of you who've already trusted Christ the question and it's this, have you believed Jesus word that you are forgiven?

There's so many of us and I hear it frequently. I hear it frequently from somebody who's aware of how they've sinned in their past and they form an identity around that, and they just think, "God simply could not forgive me." So many people even who know Christ the savior and Lord they live as if to say these words, "Jesus, I know what you have written, that I am forgiven, but I don't believe you." I do not believe that your blood is sufficient to tilt the scales of justice in my favor. So what I'm going to do is I'm going to punish myself by forming an identity around my past. I'm going to grovel, I'm going to walk on my knees a half a mile, I'm going to hate myself, I'm going to inflict myself with all sorts of your horrors, and maybe all of these penants that I pay will contribute to your blood on the cross, in your grave. And in doing so, it may be enough to secure my freedom.

We don't intend to say when we say those words, "My sin is so big. I don't know if he could forgive me," we don't intend to minimize or insult the blood of Jesus Christ. But think about what you're saying, "Jesus, my past is stronger than your death." It's simply not true. Ephesians 4:32 says, "God in Christ also has forgiven you." That's past tense. Whether we live in it or not is a big variable. Let me tell you something, those who live under the weight of unbelief about what God says about us, that we're forgiven, will inevitably place this weight on those who sin against us.

If we force ourself to grovel and contribute to God's forgiveness, then we will demand that someone grovel to us, and so we have to receive forgiveness. Third is this, is let's give forgiveness to others. I don't have enough time, I wish if I had 10 minutes I think I could get what I want to say out, but I don't have 10 minutes, and so if you want to talk about this in a personal way, whether with me or a pastor or some leader here at Providence, we would love to do that.

But I want to talk just really briefly about what does it look like to actually give forgiveness? What does it look like to honor the Lord by forgiving other people? I'm just going to do this very briefly and you're going to go, "Man, you just basically created more questions than you gave answers," that's what I'm about to do.

The first thing that giving forgiveness looks like is, resisting revenge. Romans 12:17 says, "Repay no one evil for evil." It's natural insult begets insult, abuse begets abuse, evil begets evil. That's natural retaliation. We move in that direction. One of the first things that we do is actually resist retaliation. That's part of the forgiveness process. You injured me, but instead of me injuring you immediately, I am going to just wait. Hold on, I'm not going to do that.

This week I read just a phenomenal sermon from Martin Luther King, and one of the things that stood out to me was when he said, “We must see that a person’s offense towards us is not all that he is.” That when we see that somebody mistreating us is... that’s not everything about that person. It allows us to not crush them just as they’ve crushed us and say, “Wait a minute. That’s not all. There’s more there.”

The second thing that giving forgiveness does is well, we respond with good. We respond with good. Luke 6:31 Jesus says, “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” What is he saying here? He’s saying this. Live in such a way that you hope someone’s going to retaliate. Someone has to stop the cycle of abuse or injury or lying or whatever it is. It’s natural. It’s like a great big boulder, so it’s running down. If somebody sins against us, well, the inclination is to sin against them, and then they’re going to sin against us and then we’re going to sin against again and we’re going to... we’re just going to keep going this way. So what does forgiveness do?

We’re sinning against them. The first thing we do is we resist retaliation and then we respond in good in the hope that they’re going to retaliate with what we just did to them. Treat others as you want to be treated. In the hope that now this boulder will actually move, “Oh, you did me good. I need to stop doing that. I want to do you good. Oh, you did good to me, I want to serve you now,” and suddenly this is the course of our relationships. People first have to stop towards retaliation and they have to give goodness, and that gets to the third and that’s to pursue reconciliation.

This is the one that you’re going to go, “Okay, what about my situation?” And I’m not going to be able to answer it. Matthew 18:15 says, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.” This is specifically saying if someone sins against you, and if they do not have the spiritual debt to go to you and say, “I am so sorry,” it’s our responsibility to say, “This relationship is so important. Forgiveness is so important that I’m going to pursue reconciliation and recovery.” There are some injuries though that I believe that even this passage would say, “Hold on just one second with that.”

If someone sexually assaults you, do not go in private to that individual in order to pursue reconciliation and recovery. That’s just one example, and you’re, “What about this one?” Come talk to me afterward, okay? “If the offender’s so blind to his air then the offended is supposed to go,” he says. Think about this. Peter and Jesus, who offended who? Peter denied Jesus. Peter and Jesus, who made the first step towards reconciliation? It was Jesus. Who should it have been? It should have been Peter, but he didn’t. He didn’t. For whatever reason, he didn’t. Jesus didn’t say, “I’ll tell you what, passive aggression. That’s what I’m going to... I’m going to sit over here until... They have to come to me and this whole thing is done until they...” “No, we go... we say, “I want to pursue reconciliation and recovery.”

Now a few thoughts and we're going to end. Forgiveness does not mean consequences evaporate though it hopes for the day that they do. Forgiveness does not mean full trust is restored though it hopes for the day that it will. Forgiveness what it does is it sends the debt away and then it removes the barrier that we allow to form within our heart. Anger that's not resolved turns into bitterness, and when that's not resolved, it turns into resentment. And when that's not resolved, it turns into hatred.

When you get to that place, someone could even finally come to you and say, "You know, I really did that to you. I'm so sorry," but now we have so much bitterness, resentment, and hatred, we don't even want to hear it anymore. What does forgiveness do? It sends away the debt and removes the barrier in our heart, making recovery possible with repentance. It sets the stage so that if that person were to ever confess, if that person were to ever repent, is that we would be inclined at that moment at least on a level of one. We may not get to the place of trust and relationship that we once had, but at least we can move towards that step with a little step. I encourage you, for those of you who are battling with this, contemplate the grace and mercy of God towards you. I prayed that God expands our ability to love by giving us the courage to forgive. Let me pray for us.

Father in heaven, we thank you for your magnificent love towards us, a stunning love that you tell us can actually invade our hearts so that we can live in stunning ways. I thank you father, for those that have gone before, that have shown us tangible evidences of de-escalating situations or forgiving other people of overlooking offense. I pray father, that you would move in each of our hearts. We thank you for what you have done in our life. We are amazed that your mercy, how you've forgiven us, and God as we sing about that mercy now, and as we give resources with the hope that the good news, that mercy is available that would be able to kit to the ends of the earth.

We pray that as we take this offering and as we sing, that you would receive these things as they are, and that is just a simple, tangible expression of our love for you. And so we pray that you would be glorified in our hearts, would you distinguish us by love, and we pray all this in Christ's name. Amen.



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