

JESUS SAID WHAT?!15

15th August 2021 – week 7

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THE KEY TO FORGIVENESS

Blurb:

Last week we faced the struggle we all have with loving EVERYBODY always!

This week we are challenged by the key of forgiveness;

Who, how and when should we offer forgiveness?!!

The world says: be bitter toward people who make your life bitter.

Jesus says: Be gracious to those who have hurt you.

Matthew 18:21-45

³² "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³ Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' ³⁴ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

³⁵ "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Sermon

This is the most appropriate follow up to the challenge we heard last week of loving everybody always. For me love and forgiveness wander through our lives hand in hand, closer than twins. I would say that you cannot even be in a loving relationship, without forgiveness, nor can you forgive without love; it is the oil that allows the engine of community to work smoothly. Notwithstanding all of that, forgiveness is one of the hardest practices for followers of Jesus; very often we are perceived as unforgiving, closed minded, and judgmental. So why do we battle so much with something that should be a 'God-given' ability?

Perhaps because we tend to be more self righteous than we care to admit, perhaps because we still want to be seen to be tough and uncompromising, never a push-over? After all is said and done though, shouldn't we learn from the parable we've just read; and offer those around us the forgiveness that God has offered us through Jesus? Absolutely we should, but we are ordinary mundane beings, not divine... one day we will be, but for now we are only on our way there.

It is an easy option to hold Jesus up as our ultimate example, and go the whole WWJD route. That could be useful and some of us will be able to find practical application of the example in our everyday relationships. The risk is that we would constantly compare ourselves to Jesus and find ourselves falling short; which could lead us into a why bother frame of mind. But I want to take us in a more pragmatic direction.... I want to share some thoughts that are proposed by Robert Enright in his book Eight Keys to Forgiveness:

We first need to understand that forgiveness is not pretending nothing happened to cause hurt, or making excuses for the other person's behaviour. It is not always the removal of consequence or restitution, nor is withholding forgiveness an action that reciprocates the hurt in the offending person's life. It is not an admission of defeat or weakness, in fact to forgive is brave and strong taking all the emotional strength we can muster. Yet the benefits are shown to decrease depression and anxiety, and even the symptoms of PTSD in the one who forgives.

It therefore stands to reason that we need to become forgivingly fit.... It requires work and practice to live a forgiving life! We start by committing to do no harm, making a conscious effort to not talk disparagingly, or maliciously, about those who have hurt us. You don't have to praise them, just refrain from talking negatively about them. Develop empathy, try to understand why the other has done whatever it was that hurt you; it could be a manifestation of a larger issue in their life that they need help with. This is important because it helps us realize our common humanity. It is hard to discount someone as unworthy of forgiveness when you see their humanity. Especially for us followers of Jesus who see his image in everyone.

Then a bit of self-examination, why did I get hurt by that behaviour? Address your inner pain, perhaps you get offended too easily, or even find offense where there is none. Acknowledge the emotional turmoil as partly coming from your own perceptions. Recognize that everyone sees a particular situation differently... so the offence might not be intended, nor apparent to anyone else but you. Then deal with those revealed issues as separate from the offense. Remember the person we need to forgive most, is the one in the mirror. Build up your own emotional strength. Then try to learn about yourself and relationships from the hurtful experience, there may just be something in you that needs to change for the better.

Notwithstanding the truth in all I have just said, the exception is if you are in an abusive relationship.... Get out of it. Forgiving is not a license for abuse in any form. Healthy relationships grow all the participants.

The most important key is to ask for help. Sometimes just to gain perspective, other times because forgiving others is very difficult, and emotionally exhausting. Be gentle on yourself and gather wise, compassionate people around you. The more emotionally secure you are the easier it will be to forgive others. Remember as followers of Jesus we have the never failing presence of the Holy Spirit to guide and protect us. Beyond our relationship with Jesus forgiveness becomes a behavioural concept, within our following of Jesus forgiveness is life giving and transforms whole communities.

Let's take that to prayer.

Loving gracious Jesus, so often we pray to our Father asking the our trespasses be forgiven, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Today we ask your help in growing our strength and thereby our ability to forgive just as you do. We thank you for your eternal patience with us in our reluctance to live as you have called us to. Guide us into a complete relationship with you, by your grace, Amen.

Now to the one who is able to keep you from falling and to make you stand joyful and faultless in his glorious presence, to the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus the Messiah, our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority before all time and for all eternity! Amen.