



HILLSIDE'S JULY – AUGUST SERMON SERIES AND DAILY MATERIAL

It is not easy to follow the Lord Jesus.

He said things that sometimes seem to us to be impossible or undoable. Should you mutilate yourself (“If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off”) or love your enemies (“I tell you: love your enemies”) or never find fault (“Do not judge”)?

But behind all these statements of Jesus there are the most wonderful keys to life. Not only do they make life possible, but are secrets that create the way for us to a meaningful life and good relationships.

Week 1: The Key of Being Poor in Spirit

Week 2: The Key of Commitment

Week 3: The Key of Living a Pure Life

Week 4: The Key of Denying Oneself

Week 5: They Key of Suffering for Jesus

Week 6: The Key of Loving Your Enemy

Week 7: The Key of Being Able to Forgive

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MONDAY

Daily Reading

Week 7: The Key of Being Able to Forgive

Matthew 18: 15-20

FORGIVE! – GOD IS WITH YOU

Matthew 18: 20 ²⁰ *For where two or three come together in my name,
there am I with them."*

In Matthew 18 verse 21-45, Jesus tells a story that would easily have us say: "That is impossible!"

To forgive will always be something that we do not find easy to do; this is due to our self-centred nature. We continue to focus on what someone has done or said to us and the pain it has caused us. Like the official in the story, we forget about the exemption we received. We force others to correct their mistake or we try to cause them the same amount of harm. Reconciliation is God's work. This is clear from Paul's explanation in 2 Corinthians 5 verses 14 to 21. God takes initiative to ensure reconciliation and he works towards maintaining the reconciliation. Because of this, we are no more than ambassadors to whom the responsibility of the ministry of reconciliation has been entrusted, and where two or more gather in His name, there He will be.

Therefore, it is important, on the first day of a week where we will focus on forgiveness and reconciliation, to make God's promise to us our own and take it with us on our journey. If your brother or sister has wronged you, visit him or her, take another brother or sister with you and even talk to your congregation. Yes, do everything you can to fix the relationship. Most importantly, go to your brother in the name of the Lord our God! Do not merely go to him as John, Peter, Sarah or Ann, but go as a new person who has left the old version of him / herself behind and who is serious about having the attitude Jesus revealed to us. Visit your brother or sister while wearing Jesus' garment of reconciliation. Remember what Jesus promised time after time: *"I am with you"*. If we know and remember this, we enter a world where *"nothing is impossible."*

Prayer: Lord, today I realize that I can't take one step without You by my side. From now on I only want to act in Your Name. If I stray from this path, Lord, protect me as a mother would her children. Bring me back to You. Amen.

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TUESDAY

Daily Reading

Week 7: The Key of Being Able to Forgive

Matthew 18: 21-22

LIMITLESS FORGIVENESS

Matthew 18: 22 ²² *Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.*

Yet again, it is the talkative Peter, the disciple we can truly identify with, having his say. The Rabbis taught the Jews to forgive those who had wronged them as many as three times. Peter has a suggestion that should impress Jesus! Should we not rather forgive those who have wronged us as many as seven times? To this, Jesus answers: "". Do you also try doing sums when it comes to forgiveness? Jesus teaches us that maths and forgiveness are worlds apart.

Once again, Jesus explains this with a story: A king decided to go over his official's books. He discovers that one of his officials owes him millions. The official begged for another chance and promised to correct his mistake. The king felt sorry for him and cleared his debt. However, the official seemed not to understand the grace he was shown, since as soon as he leaves the king's quarters, he starts with a new calculation. A co-official, who owes him a small amount of money, can surely pay back this small amount? The co-official begs for understanding but the first official refuses to clear his debt.

When the king heard about this, he was furious and withdrew the exemption of the official's debt. He handed the official over to be tortured until all of his debt was paid.

Like the official, we won't be able to forgive others if we continue doing forgiveness calculations and don't understand the incalculable extent of our exemption. If we understand this (also read 2 Corinthians 5: 14-21), should we not stop calculating what others owe us?

Limitless forgiveness – our task of earth!

Prayer: Lord, teach me to forgive like You do. Help me to live in a way that allows others to see more of You in me. Amen.

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WEDNESDAY

Daily Reading

Week 7: The Key of Being Able to Forgive

Matthew 5: 38-48

FORGIVENESS ... "PAY IT FORWARD"

My ability to "pay forward" the forgiveness I was shown, is tested when I am willing to ... Turn the other cheek when I am slapped, hand over my coat as well if someone wants to sue me for my shirt, walk the extra mile, to give someone who asks something of me, be friendly with someone who is rude to me and to love someone I do not like.

It is a lot harder to forgive someone who you don't want to forgive than to forgive someone you can't forgive. *"To be Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you."* ~ C.S. Lewis

In Matthew 5: 38-28, Jesus explains how to live a lifestyle of forgiveness in everyday society. Jesus challenges us to forgive or "pay it forward" in situations where people disrespect you and treat you as a doormat.

To hit someone on the right cheek, vs 39b, meant that you hit them with the inside of your right hand. To slap someone across the face in this way has always been a way of showing your contempt of the person. Jesus asks you how you will react if someone disrespects you for who you are. My instinct is usually to hit back, this is the "eye for an eye" reaction that Jesus talks about. We react like this because we feel that our dignity is at stake. Jesus tells us that it is rather our understanding of forgiveness at stake. If a Christian is being humiliated, the question is not how long he will endure the beating or whether he will start to hit back after the second slap. No! To turn the other cheek actually says: "Treat me like an equal and not like the scum you meant that slap for."

Jesus uses the other three examples to ask us about our ability to forgive when our will to forgive is under pressure. How do you forgive when someone wants to take your shirt, vs 40? Jesus wants to know what your forgiveness will look like when someone wants to exploit your humiliation.

The example of someone forcing you to carry his belongings for one kilometre, vs 41, refers to any Jew's worst nightmare ... to become a Roman pack donkey. Judea and Galilee were ruled by the Romans and the soldiers had a rule that allowed them to use the locals to carry their belongings for a 100 years. By this example Jesus asks us about our ability to forgive the bullies in our society.

Continue...

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WEDNESDAY continued

Daily Reading

Week 7: The Key of Being Able to Forgive

Matthew 5: 38-48

FORGIVENESS ... "PAY IT FORWARD"

The last example – to give to those who ask something of you, vs 42, is not about how you will help your friends or someone who has already done something for you. With this example Jesus wants to ask you about your ability to forgive the beggar at your door who has a different excuse every day.

Jesus doesn't tell us how and when we should forgive the characters in these examples. Jesus seems to say that you should, when you are in the situation, be able to pay forward the forgiveness you were shown so that other people can experience the unconditional love of God you have experienced.

"The practice of forgiveness is our most important contribution to the healing of the world.

~Marianne Williamson.

"Only those who have received true forgiveness, can forgive others."

~Martin Lloyd-Jones

In the words of Neale Donald Walsch:

"Life is not "for getting", but "for giving" and in order to do that you need to be forgiving to others – especially those who did not give you what you thought you were going to get."

Prayer: Lord, give me the desire to forgive because I know that I'm forgiven and the grace to forget the injustice committed against me and never to fret about it again. Amen.

THURSDAY

Daily Reading

Week 7: The Key of Being Able to Forgive

Matthew 6: 14-15

THE CONSEQUENCES OF UN-FORGIVENESS

*¹⁴ For if you forgive men when they sin against you,
your heavenly Father will also forgive you.*

¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Matthew 6: 14-15 NIV

Jesus taught us to pray “*forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.*” He felt it necessary to expand on this further and to explain the consequences of un-forgiveness. A very serious one is that we effectively cut ourselves off from the grace of God. If we won’t forgive, then the forgiveness of God can’t get through to us. That’s a perilous predicament to be in!

When we’re unwilling to forgive we place ourselves in a self-imposed prison. In the parable of the unmerciful servant, the master was enraged that the servant who had been forgiven so much and yet was unwilling to forgive and “*turned him over to the jailers to be tortured ...*” (Matthew 18:34). To harbour un-forgiveness in your heart is torture to say the least. It will impact on your emotional well-being and may even adversely affect your physical health. As someone said, “*bitterness is the poison you drink in the hope it will kill your enemy.*”

Bitterness is contagious, it can contaminate others too – sometimes whole families are infected! Spend some time in silent reflection and ask the Holy Spirit to show you if you are harbouring un-forgiveness in your heart against anyone. Don’t remain imprisoned – release forgiveness to your offender and get freed.

Prayer: Dear Father, God of grace and forgiveness, thank you so much for fully and freely forgiving me. Thank you that though my sins were as scarlet, yet you have washed me as white as snow. I pray that the grace of forgiveness may overflow from my life toward others also. I now choose to fully and freely forgive my offenders and to set them free.

In Jesus’ name! Amen.

FRIDAY

Daily Reading

Week 7: The Key of Being Able to Forgive

Matthew 18: 21-22

FORGIVENESS IN BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS

²¹ Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

²² Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

Matthew 18:21-22 NIV

Forgiveness is not about keeping scores. Don't even keep tally as forgiveness is supposed to be limitless. It's interesting that the word "give" is in the centre of the English word "forgiveness". We could say that "forgiveness is a gift that you give to someone who does not deserve it". Forgiveness starts when we make a tough but transforming choice, but it does not end there ...

That first choice must issue forth in a lifestyle of forgiveness. Yes, you may have forgiven your ex, but how will you react the next time he reneges on his maintenance payment? Or how about the boss you forgave ... How will you react the next time she rubs you up the wrong way? The fact is there are some people we can't simply forgive and forget – they're in our face and we are going to have to deal with their hurtful behaviour as often as it rears its ugly head!

So the bad news is that you are going to have to choose to forgive today, tomorrow and the next – seventy times seven. But the good news is that you will be free and that hurt in your heart will be healed and will no longer dominate your days or disturb your nights. Who is that person that hurts you so often? Choose to forgive him / her fully and freely, but also commit yourself to living a lifestyle of forgiveness.

Prayer: Jesus, you asked the Father to forgive even those who nailed You to the cross. Take out the poison of anger and bitterness from my heart and give me Your heart of forgiveness. Give me the grace to make the tough choice to forgive and the perseverance to follow through and live a lifestyle of forgiveness. Amen!

SATURDAY

Daily Reading

Week 7: The Key of Being Able to Forgive

Matthew 18: 21-35

TO FORGIVE MYSELF

Matthew 18: 35 ³⁵ *“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”*

*Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive ...
And then, to mention the subject at all is to be greeted with howls of anger.*

CS Lewis 1898-1963

This is exactly what Jesus and Peter’s discussion in Matthew 18 was about. When Peter wanted to know till when and where one has to forgive someone, Jesus answered him clearly that forgiveness is not about how much or how many times. To explain what he meant Jesus told the parable of the man whose great debt was forgiven, but who couldn’t forgive a small debt of another. That is as absurd as to expect that God must forgive me, but I don’t have to forgive anyone around me, including myself.

When you look closer at the parable, you realize that a “gap” in the parable occurs, which could explain why we struggle so much with forgiveness. The first person in the parable, upon hearing that all his debt is written off, never shows joy or thankfulness. He does not truly experience forgiveness. This is why, although he knows that it is very unlikely to happen, he begs for *“patience ... to pay back everything”*, vs 26. Because he didn’t accept the forgiveness that he was shown, he could not pay it forward, vs 28. Forgiveness is not about paying back my debt, it is about whether I can pay forward the grace that I was undeservingly shown.

The conclusion in verse 35 wants to teach us that forgiveness involves a change of heart that cannot be calculated on a *quid pro quo* basis. Oprah Winfrey once said: *“true (self) forgiveness is to forget that you can ever change the past, about that you can merely say “thank you for the experience” and move on”*. With the example in Matthew 18, Jesus asks us *how we, who have already been forgiven, live amongst those who still have to be forgiven? Already having received forgiveness, is not about whether I sin or not, but about whether I get along with people who still have to be forgiven*. I can only do this if I have experienced forgiveness. Someone once said ...to forgive is to release a prisoner and then realize that the prisoner was really you.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the fact that forgiveness can heal people, those who have already been forgiven and those who must still be forgiven. Amen!
