

OFFERING FORGIVENESS

Ten Values for God's People

Hillsboro Presbyterian Church

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"You shall not murder." Exodus 20:13 That is pretty clear. But when Jesus teaches on this commandment in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-26), Jesus says don't even get angry and to actively seek reconciliation. Jesus goes way beyond the letter of the Law to the spirit of the Law... what is in our hearts. Are our hearts full of hatred? Jesus goes on to show the way to break the cycle of revenge and separation is to practice forgiveness.

WE FORGIVE BECAUSE GOD HAS FORGIVEN US. * Ephesians 4:32 **Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.** When I remember how much God has forgiven me, it causes me to want to be more forgiving to other people. You will never have to forgive anybody more than God has already forgiven you. We aren't perfect, but we are forgiven - living in the light of God's love and grace.

WE FORGIVE BECAUSE RESENTMENT DOESN'T WORK. * Job 5:2 **Resentment kills a fool.** Resentment is self-destructive and counterproductive. Resentment always hurts you more than anybody else. If anybody had the right to be resentful it was Job. Job was a godly man who had everything. One day he lost it all...his possessions, his children, his health. The only thing he had left was a nagging wife. And friends who said, "Job, it's all your fault." If anybody had the right to be resentful it was Job...but three times in the book of Job we are told that resentment does not work. People filled with hate or resentment do really foolish things that are counterproductive.

WE FORGIVE BECAUSE FORGIVENESS IS SOMETHING I NEED AS WELL * Matthew 6:15 **For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.** You can't expect people to forgive you if you are unwilling to forgive other people. Forgiveness is a two-way street. Note what forgiveness is NOT. Forgiveness is: 1) NOT minimizing the seriousness of the offense (wounds can be accidental and a part of life; wrongs are intentional and they are a big deal...and only God can get you through them); 2) NOT instant restoration of trust (rebuilding trust takes time, effort, and follow through); 3) NOT resuming the relationship without any changes (remorse, repentance, restitution, and rebuilding trust require genuine change). Forgiveness means I'm going to let go of the hurt, but they have to do some things in order to rebuild the trust. Forgiveness is what you do. Only the victim has the right to forgive. You don't have the right to forgive people for hurts that they did to someone else.

That's the WHY. The hard part is HOW. HOW DO CHRISTIANS FORGIVE?

1st. RECOGNIZE WE ARE ALL IMPERFECT * Ecclesiastes 7:2 **There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.** When we hate somebody, we tend to lose our perspective about them. When we're filled with resentment or bitterness or hurt, we dehumanize the offender. We treat them like an animal. We demonize them. We forget that they're a human being too. The fact is, we're all sinners. We're all capable of hurting others...maybe not to the same degree or in the same way but you have been hurtful in your life and so have I. We're all in the same boat. We're all imperfect. They are not an animal but a human being. They are an offender and they have wronged you and that's serious. We're not minimizing it, but they are not an animal. They are not beyond the reach of God...the love of God - or the justice of God.

2nd. RELINQUISH THE RIGHT TO GET EVEN * Romans 12:19(Living Bible) **Never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God, for he has said that he will repay those who deserve it.** This is the heart of forgiveness. When you say, "I give up my right to get even with you. You deserve to be punished, and I deserve to get even, but I'm going to give up that right." Unfair? You bet. But who said life is fair? God never said life is fair. This is not heaven. This is not a place of perfection. This is a place where people sin, where people make mistakes. There is a lot of injustice. But, God says one day He is going to settle the score. God has said He is going to repay those who deserve it. In the meantime, you let go of your right to get the last word because it's making you miserable. Your resentment doesn't work. It keeps you from being forgiven. It makes you unhealthy. Let God be God. Let God settle the score. Release your right to get even and ask God to fill you with His peace.

How often do we have to release our right to get even? As often as the hurt comes back. Every time you start to get resentful again, you have to do it again. Jesus taught this in Matthew 18:21-22 **Peter asked, 'Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?' 'No,' Jesus replied, 'seventy times seven!'"** In other words an infinite number. Every time you remember that hurt, forgive again until you know that you've released it. It is not always advisable or even possible to go to that person who has hurt you. They may be unaware. They may have changed. Maybe it would make matters worse. They may have moved or even died. Sometimes you use the empty chair technique...where you imagine that person sitting there and you say, "_____ in the name of Jesus Christ I forgive you. I release my right to get even with you. I am not going to carry the pain any more. I am not going to allow this to control me any more. I give it all to God." You may choose to write a letter...and then tear up the letter. Do not send it. Release it and them. Why? So you can be free. Stop letting people from your past continue to hurt you in the present.

3rd. RESPOND TO THE EVIL WITH GOOD * Luke 6:27-28 **Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you.** Humanly speaking, you don't have enough love and forgiveness in your life to continually forgive everybody who's hurt you. It takes God's power. The only way you can do what this verse asks of you is to get Jesus Christ in your life -let the love, peace and forgiveness of Jesus flow through you, because human love runs out. You don't have it in your heart to do good to those who hate you continuously and to pray for those who have mistreated you continuously. The only way is through the limitless love of Jesus.

4th. REFOCUS ON GOD'S PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE * Job 11:13-16 (LB) **Put your heart right, reach out to God then face the world again, firm and courageous. Then all your troubles will fade from your memory, like floods that are past and remembered no more.** Stop focusing on the offense...on the hurt...on the person who has offended you. Instead refocus on God's purpose for your life which is greater than any problem or any pain. It is a law of life that we become like whatever we focus on - whether good or bad. Job offers the three steps for refocusing your life. 1) Put your heart right (release and forgive the person who's hurt you); 2) Reach out to God (ask Christ into your life get God's help); and 3) Face the world again (refuse to be the victim and live again as God's child). Notice what happens: **"Then all your troubles will fade from your memory like floods that are past and remembered no more."** The memory will fade. We know from Katrina, it takes time and effort...but with God's help...memories can be healed and the hurting can stop.

To follow Jesus is to follow the example of the one who prayed from the cross, **"Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing."** Luke 23:34 It is to discover that forgiveness is why Christ came - and a big part of why we are here as God's people. God wants us to value forgiveness, to practice biblical forgiveness, and know in Christ...we are forgiven.