

Love Is Forgiving – Session Four

The Motley Crew
March 17, 2010

We opened with praises and prayer.

KEY VERSE

Love . . . doesn't keep a record of wrongs that others do.
1 Corinthians 13:5 (CEV)

We watched the video lesson at this time.

What we have studied so far:

1. Patience
2. Kindness
3. Truth

Now: *Forgiveness*.

Love Is Forgiving

A Test of Love

The ultimate test of love is how you respond when somebody hurts you.

Learning to forgive is the most necessary thing to learn about love. The key verse for today summarizes this lesson: "Love . . . doesn't keep a record of wrongs that others do." 1 Corinthians 13:5 (CEV).

Forgiveness Quiz

Mark each one as either true or false:

	A person should not be forgiven until they ask for it.
	Forgiveness includes minimizing the offense and the pain that was caused.
	Forgiveness includes restoring trust and reuniting a relationship.

You haven't really forgiven others until you have forgotten the offense.
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According to Pastor Rick, if we study the Bible, and what Jesus says, all four are false.

1. Forgiveness is not minimizing the seriousness of the offense.

Being wounded and being wronged are *two different things*:

- Being *wounded* is accidental. [and does not require forgiveness]
- Being *wronged* is intentional. [definitely requires forgiveness]

Minimizing the hurt is insane, and it cheapens forgiveness.

2. Forgiveness is not resuming a relationship without changes.

- Forgiveness is instant, but *trust* must be built over a long period of time.
- Forgiveness takes care of the damage done by "letting the person off" the hook," but does not guarantee the relationship will be restored.

Trust can be lost in an instant, and takes a long time to rebuild.

To restore a relationship, the offender must:

- demonstrate genuine repentance
- make restitution wherever possible.
- prove they have changed over time.

If a person *repeatedly* wrongs you, you are obligated by God to forgive that person. But you are **not** obligated to trust that person, to let them continue to hurt you, or to instantly restore the relationship.

Forgiveness is very different than resuming a relationship. Forgiveness is a grace; trust means work.

Three Steps of Forgiveness

1. I relinquish my right to get even.

Never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God, for he has said that he will repay those who deserve it. (Romans 12:19 LB)

You don't hurt the other person with your resentment — you're only hurting yourself.

One day, God will right *all* the wrongs. He will even the ledger, and He can do a much better job than we can to avenge wrongs. In addition, forgiveness gives you a moral “up.”

Resentment is a cancer. We can't change our past. I am hurting myself, not the other person – who probably doesn't know or even care!

Three reasons to forgive others:

- God has forgiven you.
- Bitterness makes you miserable
- You are going to need more forgiveness in the future.

The Lord's Prayer says,

"Forgive us our debts, *as we forgive our debtors*."
(Matthew 6:12 NKJV)

Pastor Rick said that forgiveness is a two-way street. If I can *never* forgive another, than I will *never* be forgiven. If I don't release and forgive them, the more I will resemble them.

[This issue of forgiveness being a two-way street generated a great deal of discussion after the video was finished. See below.]

2. I respond to evil doing good.

²⁷ "Do **good** to those who hate you, ²⁸ **bless** those who curse you, **pray** for those who mistreat you."
(Luke 6:27-28 NIV)

The ultimate evidence of goodness is being Christ-like.

Do not be overcome by evil, but *overcome evil with good*.
(Romans 12:21 NIV)

"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Matthew 5:48 (NIV)

If we can pray to God to bless them, then the forgiveness is complete (and you can begin to see their hurt).

Pastor Rick recalled an old saying that “Hurt people hurt people.” They take it out on others. Once we understand their hurt, then we can pray for them.

If you can't forgive others for all the hurt that you have experienced, then you know that you

need the love of Jesus Christ!

Forgiveness: "To infinity and beyond!"

Pastor Rick told the story of Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross, who had been hurt very deeply early in her life. Much later in a conversation, the name of that person came up. The other person asked whether that was the one who had so hurt Clara. She said yes, and then she distinctly remembered forgiving him early in her life.

3. I repeat the process as long as necessary.

²¹ "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?" ²² "No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven!"
(Matthew 18:21-22 NLT)

Peter was trying to go well beyond the requirement of Jewish law. But Jesus countered, saying that forgiveness is beyond counting. Just keep loving each other as long and as necessary as the need exists.

It is not easy to forgive. It's very hard, in fact, But, it's critical. If you have been hurt in your marriage, and have not forgiven the other, it is *you* that is destroying the relationship, not the other person.

Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.
(Colossians 3:13 NLT)

Don't try to forgive on your own power. Recognize and accept God's forgiveness of you. Then ask for his strength and power to go *through* you to forgive others.

This is now to get past the hurt. Only God in you will allow you to fully forgive.

The video session closed with a prayer to bring God into our hearts, so that we might fully forgive anyone who had previously hurt us.

Discussion

1. Turn to the true/false quiz on page 55 [near the beginning of this chapter]. Were you surprised that all of the answers were false? Which "false" seemed to be most "true" for you? Why?

There was a good discussion of this. Items 1 and 4 were particularly difficult for some.

There was a lengthy discussion about our forgiveness of others as a condition to heaven. It is clear that forgiveness is commanded by God. It is not an emotion, but an act. And once we have forgiven someone, it might be necessary to remind ourselves that we have forgiven that person ... as often as necessary! One person shared the story that she had to remind herself that she had forgiven someone who had deeply hurt her – every half hour for three days!

You'll still have the hurt, even though you've forgiven the person. God is the avenger. And you are only hurting yourself by holding on to the hurt that you experienced.

One person noted that in some parts of the world, people have watched “ethnic cleansers” kill entire families, shove their bodies into a mass grave, and cover them up with dirt shoved over by a bull dozer. Surely some of those people will have a hard time forgiving their enemies. But will they be denied God's forgiveness?

There is a fine line between forgiveness and the hurt that remains. The forgiveness is an act of grace that isn't related to the emotion that we feel. And it is necessary not to “lord it over them.”

Jesus sets the bar high. We cannot always reach that goal, but we can continue to try, while asking for the help of Christ Jesus. Pastor Eddie pointed out that the Greek language in the Lord's Prayer included not merely a present state of forgiveness, but of a future state in the present of forgiveness – that is, that we will *always* be in the current state of forgiving others.

Pastor Eddie pointed out the story of Nehemiah, who first prayed, and then went before the King ... and whose prayers were answered. See: Nehemiah 1:1-8.

Another person told the story of Catherine Marshall in her book regarding prayer, who was faced with the difficult necessity to forgive someone, and who was able to do so only by asking for God's help.

There was a discussion about a comment by Pastor Rick to the effect that heaven will be denied to anyone who fails to forgive others, citing the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our debts, *as we also have forgiven our debtors.*" (Matt. 5:12 NIV). He made the point that our forgiveness is conditioned on whether or not we forgive others.

There was the concern that this was bringing good works into the question of salvation. In Ephesians 2:8-9, Paul writes: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast."

However, Paul also continued: "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10). Likewise, in his letter, James also writes that "... faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." (James 2:17)

It was noted that, as we have discussed before, Jesus intentionally sets the bar higher than we human beings can ordinarily reach, so that we will continue to strive to achieve the kind of goodness that God desires, while praying for the only help that matters: that of Jesus Christ. So, while we may not always reach the goal of forgiving others fully, so long as we try to do so, while seeking the help of Jesus and believing in Jesus as our Savior, then our salvation is not in danger.

Luther wrote:

" ... faith is God's work in us, that changes us and gives new birth from God. (John 1:13). It kills the Old Adam and makes us completely different people. It changes our hearts, our spirits, our thoughts and all our powers. It brings the Holy Spirit with it. Yes, it is a living, creative, active and powerful thing, this faith. Faith cannot help doing good works constantly. It doesn't stop to ask if good works ought to be done, but before anyone asks, it already has done them and continues to do them without ceasing. Anyone who does not do good works in this manner is an unbeliever. He stumbles around and looks for faith and good works, even though he does not know what faith or good works are. Yet he gossips and chatters about faith and good works with many words."

He continues: "Because of [the Holy Spirit], you freely, willingly and joyfully do good to everyone, serve everyone, suffer all kinds of things, love and praise the God who has shown you such grace. Thus, it is just as impossible to separate faith and works as it is to separate heat and light from fire!

Source: "An Introduction to St. Paul's Letter to the Romans," Luther's *German Bible* of 1522 by Martin Luther, 1483-1546, Translated by Rev. Robert E. Smith from *Dr. Martin Luther's Vermischte Deutsche Schriften*. Johann K. Irmischer, ed. Vol. 63 (Erlangen: Heyder and Zimmer, 1854), pp.124-125. [EA 63:124-125] August 1994.

On the topic of judgment, Pastor Eddie noted that sometimes he wished that judgment came at the end of the day – especially for someone such as the rapist in California – rather than judgment at the end of time. Someone mentioned that of the two men who were crucified with Christ, one confessed his sin and asked for forgiveness. Luke 23 has the account:

39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? **41** We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

43 Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

As for the other criminal, the one who insulted Christ, we can only assume that he a quite different experience at the time of judgment.

The issue of private confession came up, and Pastor Eddie noted that again we seem to be throwing the baby out with the bathwater. He noted that private confession can be an excellent way for one to unburden their conscience. A couple of members pointed out that private confession was specifically retained by Luther in the *Small Catechism* (see pp. 217-223 of *Luther's Small Catechism With Explanation* {Concordia Publishing House, 1986}, and also in the *Large Catechism*). In the *Augsburg Confession*, it is written:

It is taught among us that private absolution should be retained and not allowed to fall into disuse. However, in confession it is not necessary to enumerate all trespasses and sins, for this is impossible. Ps. 19:12, "Who can discern his errors?" (Art. XI)

In his Eighth Sermon at Wittenberg, preached during Lent in 1522, Luther addressed the issue of private confession, saying:

... I wish [the Pope] to keep his hands off the confession and not make of it a compulsion or command, which he has not the power to do. Yet I will let no man take private confession away from me, and I would not give it up for all the treasures in the world, since I know what comfort and strength it has given me. No one knows what it can do for him except one who has struggled much with the devil. Yea, the devil would have slain me long ago, if the confession had not sustained me. For there are many doubts which a man cannot resolve by himself, and so he takes a brother aside and tells him his trouble. What harm is there, if he humbles himself a little before his neighbor, puts himself to shame, looks for a word of comfort from him, and takes it to himself and believes it, as if he heard it from God himself, as we read in Matthew 18:19 "If two of you shall agree as touching anything that they shall ask, ill shall be done for them."

Private confession in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod was discussed in a recent article in *The Lutheran Witness* (March, 2010), which also provided additional quotations from Luther favoring private confession (<http://www.lcms.org/pages/wPage.asp?ContentID=727&IssueID=42>). There is a form for Individual Confession and Absolution in the *Lutheran Service Book* (2006, pp. 292-293), based on the rite in Luther's *Small Catechism*, and also in *Lutheran Worship*, pp. 310-311.

One of our members told the story of her young grandson who just made his first confession (he is being raised in the Roman Catholic Church). He was bubbling with joy when he explained the experience to her, and also told her that the priest told him that he should feel free to come back any time (which drew a good laugh).

Living on Purpose: Fellowship and Evangelism

FELLOWSHIP

1. What would happen to the relational life of the church if we would pray for those who hurt us, show patience toward those who offend us, refuse to gossip, and offer forgiveness?

Pastor Eddie asked us to think about this. The result would probably be a very different church than we now have.

Prayer Direction

1. People who have trouble forgiving others often have trouble forgiving themselves. Have you accepted God's forgiveness? Have you forgiven yourself? In the group setting, ask God to help those of you who wrestle with these issues.

The thought is that we are sometimes more hard on ourselves than we are on others. Sometimes we set the bar too high for ourselves, forgetting God's forgiveness through Christ.

We closed with prayer.