

THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

By Rev. Linda Pierce

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In January, during one of our prayer meetings, the Lord was working through me as I prayed for people who carry unforgiveness in their heart, because it is such a hindrance to our walk with the Lord. Recognizing the powerful way the Holy Spirit was working, Pastor Will said, "Linda, that's your next sermon topic!"

So, today I will talk to you about The Power of Forgiveness.

Diane, a young mother of three, was confronted by an assailant. Pleading for her life, she cried, "Please don't kill me!" But she was shot and killed.

It was later discovered that she was murdered by a woman who was having an affair with her husband. Within 24 hours, the suspect was arrested and the victim's husband was also arrested shortly after.

Sydna, a neighbor of the murdered woman, was overcome with hate and rage. Her dear friend was taken and her three children no longer had a mother. Sydna felt she had every right to hate the woman who had murdered her friend.

Sydna said she grew "physically hot" whenever the suspect's name, Jennifer, was mentioned by anyone, or her face appeared on TV. She could not bear to read the newspaper for awhile, because the news reports would intensify her anger. Whenever she passed her deceased friend's house, grief, mingled with fiery anger, would overcome her. Her anger and bitterness were eating her alive.

Shortly after Jennifer was convicted and sentenced, Sydna joined a Bible study group that was reviewing a chapter on forgiveness. She prayerfully asked God who she needed to forgive and Jennifer's name came to mind. Her head suddenly recoiled in protest, "No way I can forgive her. She killed my friend! She killed a mother of three children!"

Jesus made forgiveness His lifestyle and He taught His disciples to do the same.

But because we live in a world filled with hurting people, where hurting people tend to hurt others, we need to talk about unforgiveness first, so we may understand how powerful forgiveness is and why it is so important.

Matthew 6:14 Jesus said, "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you.

¹⁵ But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.

What does it mean to forgive? By definition, it is:

- 1) To grant free pardon for an offense or an offender.
- 2) To give up all claim on an account.
- 3) To cease to feel resentment against an offender.

Therefore, to be *unforgiving* would be:

To *hold* resentment, to make an offender *pay* in some way, to *refuse to release* an offender or pardon him.

What Is the Impact of Unforgiveness?

1. (Revenge) When someone hurts you in some way, you might not want to forgive them because you want them to pay for what they did (road rage, a lie about you). You want them to feel some pain and maybe even more pain than what you have experienced. We tell ourselves that it is up to us to keep the offense alive.

Many times people who are in pain emotionally, will inflict pain on others. Even others close to them, who may have had nothing to do with their hurt, may become a target, directly or indirectly. (They may be riding in the car with the person who begins to express road rage, hearing the words that are being spewed out.) They end up hurting themselves and others around them. How pleasant is it to be around someone who is spewing out hurtful and insulting words against another person?

It becomes a vicious cycle, because the more pain they dish out, the more they themselves hurt.

Romans 12:19 “It is mine to avenge, I will repay”, says the Lord.

2. (Denial) Sometimes we try to press it down and push it way back, thinking we’re not going to let this thing bother us. We think we have it well hidden and it’s no longer a problem. We think that if we ignore it and no one else notices, maybe it will just disappear.

As an example, let’s say you get a deep cut on your hand. You try to stop the bleeding, clean up the wound, and put something on it to try and keep it from getting infected. Depending on how bad that cut is, you may really favor, protect, and pamper that area until it doesn’t hurt anymore and it’s on its way to being healed.

In a sense, when there is unforgiveness, it is like an infection. The longer we neglect it, the worse it gets. If we don’t deal with it, don’t clean it up, the infection will continue to grow. Sometimes, we may carry such wounds for years and years. Sometimes, people carry them to their graves, refusing to let the other person off the hook.

These wounds on the inside can lead to bitterness, anger that turns to rage, self-pity, depression, anxiety, etc.

What Can Be Done About Unforgiveness?

Remember Sydna, whose friend had been murdered by an adulterous woman? Made aware by the Bible that her heart was full of bitter unforgiveness, she cried, “No way I can forgive her. She killed my friend! She killed a mother of three children!”

In spite of her reaction, she finally gave in and wrote a carefully worded letter to Jennifer, the convicted murderer, expressing her forgiveness.

Sydna was caught by surprise by what happened inside her. As soon as she dropped the letter into the mail, “a weight lifted. She felt like she had lost 20 pounds! That’s when she learned that anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness will keep you from experiencing the depths of (the Lord’s) joy.”

She initially responded out of obligation. She didn’t expect to ever hear from Jennifer, but she did. Jennifer responded by writing, “I’m sorry I killed your friend.”

As Sydna read those words, they hit her like a thunderbolt. She hadn't realized how much she needed to hear that, but she did.

As a result, a pen-pal relationship grew. What Sydna once viewed as an obligation—forgiving Jennifer—ended up ministering to both women. She admits that if she hadn't forgiven first, Jennifer never could have confessed to her, since Jennifer didn't even know Sydna existed.

Ironically, Jennifer began ministering to Sydna through her letters. “For some reason, her letters always came on dark days for Sydna. Jennifer became one of her greatest encouragers.” Over time, Sydna began to consider Jennifer a friend “just as much as she had once considered Diane a friend.”

Your pain may be legitimate, as Sydna's was, and it may not have been your fault, but you cannot live in the fullness of what God has for you while hanging onto your past hurts.

When we release the other person to God, we are allowing God to do the work that needs to be done in that person's life. When you don't let go, you are in a sense becoming their judge and that is God's position, not ours. Even if that person is no longer alive, they need to be released to the Lord. You need to let go and let God heal your heart.

An Act of the Will

Corrie Ten Boom was a survivor of one the Nazi prison camps. Her father, sister, cousin, and others had died there. Years later, she traveled around the world telling people about her experiences and about what God had done in the midst of a terrible place.

One time, back in Germany, she had just finished speaking about forgiveness, when she noticed a man approaching her from the back of the room. He had a big smile on his face and had his hand extended toward her. Then, she recognized him as one of the cruelest guards from her prison camp experience. She did not want to shake his hand. Her sister died on his watch.

Silently, she spoke to the Lord and told Him that she did not want to forgive this man or shake his hand. But she relented and told the Lord she would, since this was what He wanted her to do.

As he approached, he said, “Isn't it wonderful that God is so good and He forgives us of everything?” and then again extended his hand. This time, she reached out her hand and when she did the power of the Lord went from her shoulder, down her arm, and into both their hands. She was able to experience the love of God flowing through her to this man that God loved.

Corrie Ten Boom wrote: “Forgiveness is not an emotion. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart.”

If you have unforgiveness, you need to make a decision: Do you prefer the peace or the bitterness?

Ephesians 4:31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior. ³² Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

Matthew 7:2 For others will treat you as you treat them. Whatever measure you use in judging others, it will be used to measure how you are judged.

That may mean you need to go to the person you have offended or the person that has offended you to make things right by asking for forgiveness from them and from God. Even if you were not the one that did the offending, if you hold any kind of unforgiveness, bitterness, or anger, you need to release it to the Lord, because it is a *sin* in your life.

It really needs to be lanced or dealt with to remove the infection. To lance that wound can really hurt, but it is necessary for the healing process to take place. We wouldn't do it because it feels good, but because we know, if we want to heal, the infection has to come out. It is a decision we make.

It needs to be cleansed. That means clean water to wash away the infection (bitterness, anger, depression, self-pity): those are the words of repentance. And a healing salve put on it, which is forgiveness. And a bandage to protect the wound and keep it clean until it is completely healed — that's staying close to the Lord (in relationship with Him) and letting Him help you.

If we continue to re-run the injury through our mind over and over we will not be set free from it; it will become more deeply imbedded. It has to be brought to the light and taken care of to be healed, just like the open wound on our skin. Give it all to the Lord. Don't pick at that old scab. Let it be healed and stay healed.

Colossians 3:13 *You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.*

Luke 17:3 *I am warning you! If another believer sins, rebuke him; then if he repents, forgive him. ⁴ Even if he wrongs you seven times a day and each time turns again and asks forgiveness, forgive him."*

Matthew 18:21 *Then Peter came to Jesus and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"*

²² *Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven." (There is no limit!)*

There are so many verses that talk about forgiveness, and they are telling us that *we must do this*, not only if we feel like it. This is so important that Jesus was willing to die for it. You cannot have a good relationship with the Lord if you refuse to forgive. He will help you to do what you don't desire to do, *if you ask Him*. He knows you will find freedom by being obedient to Him and He can give you all that He has desired to give you, if you will trust Him with this.

Don't just talk about forgiveness. Researchers are finding that really forgiving others has important effects even on your health. Research shows links between forgiveness and physical and mental wellbeing.

The London Daily Express (June 5, 2000) carried an article with this headline: "Can You Learn to Forgive?" It began with the following declaration: "Bearing a grudge can hold you back and even damage your health."

There was a popular program on TV called "This Is Your Life." Some of you that are about my age and older may remember it. For those of you who don't, they would feature a celebrity or someone who had made a great contribution with their life. They would surprise them with family and other people from their past who came to talk about the featured person's life and incidents they remembered. The celebrity had no clue in advance who might show up or what they would say.

This Is Your Life

What if today was *your* day to have your life reviewed and shown on film and you had a front row seat to watch “This Is Your Life” in front of a packed theater? Everything about you and your life will be shown: your words, your actions, and even your thoughts! Everyone is there: your friends, family, and enemies. They will hear and see *everything*. Will you be there at the end to take a bow? I think you would probably want to leave before the film had ended and the lights come back on. I would.

The Bible says all things will be exposed and even now God sees all things. Everything you have done under cover of darkness will be exposed in the light.

Romans 3:23 For all have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

This is why Jesus Christ came. To take away that video of your life. Never to be seen, never to be judged.

Jeremiah 31:34 I will remember their sin against them no more.

Psalms 103:12 As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions (sins) from us.

If we thoroughly forsake them, God will thoroughly forgive them.

This is what forgiveness means to us. Our sins never to be seen, never to be exposed.

What Happens When You Forgive?

H. Norman Wright said, “Forgiveness involves letting go. Remember playing tug-of-war as a child? As long as both parties on each end of the rope are tugging, you have a ‘war.’ But when someone lets go, the war is over. When you forgive... you are letting go of your end of the rope. If you have released your end, the war is over for you.”

How Forgiven Are You?

One day a while back, a man, his heart heavy with grief, was walking in the woods. As he thought about his life that day, he knew many things were not right. He thought of those who had lied about him back when he had a job.

He thought of those who had stolen his things and cheated him. He remembered family that he had lost. He remembered the illness he had, that no one could cure. His very soul was filled with anger, resentment, and frustration.

Standing there that day, searching for answers he could not find, and knowing all else had failed him, he knelt at the base of an old oak tree to seek the One he knew would always be there. With tears in his eyes, he prayed:

“Lord, you have done wonderful things for me in this life. You have told me to do many things for you, and I happily obeyed. Today, you have told me to forgive. I am sad, Lord, because I cannot, I don't know how. It is not fair Lord, I didn't deserve those wrongs that were done against me and I shouldn't have to forgive. As perfect as your way is Lord, this one thing I cannot do, for I don't know how to forgive. My anger is so deep Lord, I fear I may not hear you, but I pray you teach me to do the one thing I

I cannot do: Teach me to forgive."

As he knelt there in the quiet shade of that old oak tree, he felt something fall onto his shoulder. He opened his eyes. Out of the corner of one eye, he saw something red on his shirt. He could not turn to see what it was because where the oak tree had been there stood a large square piece of timber in the ground. He raised his head and saw two feet held to the wood by a large spike that pierced them.

He raised his head higher, and tears came to his eyes as he recognized Jesus hanging on a cross. He saw spikes in His hands, a gash in His side, a torn and battered body, deep thorns sunk into His head. Finally, he saw the suffering and pain on His precious face. As their eyes met, the man's tears turned to sobbing, and Jesus began to speak.

"Have you ever told a lie?" He asked.

The man answered, "Yes, Lord."

"Have you ever been given too much change and kept it?"

The man answered, "Yes, Lord." And the man sobbed more and more.

"Have you ever taken something from work that wasn't yours?" Jesus asked.

And the man answered, "Yes, Lord."

"Have you ever sworn, using my Father's name in vain?"

The man, crying, answered, "Yes, Lord."

As Jesus asked many more times, "Have you ever?" The man's crying became uncontrollable, for he could only answer, "Yes, Lord."

Then Jesus turned His head from one side to the other, and the man felt something fall on his other shoulder. He looked and saw that it was a drop of blood. When he looked back up, his eyes met those of Jesus, and there was a look of love the man had never seen or known before.

Jesus said, "I didn't deserve this either, but I forgive you."

Paid In Full

Attached to this message is a Billing Statement — a simple visual to help to understand what Jesus Christ did for you. The customer on this statement is you. You are His precious child.

God knew we needed to be redeemed and we couldn't do it ourselves. We could never pay that bill. It required a perfect sacrifice and since none of us is perfect, the Lamb of God, who is Jesus Christ, was the only one who could pay. He's the only one who is perfect. Jesus was willing to give His life, to go to the cross and endure excruciating pain, physically and emotionally. He died to set each one of us free and He rose again on the third day.

He never intended for us to carry these wounds alone but to bring all of them to Him. He said He came to set captives free.

Your bill and mine has been *paid in full* because Jesus, as our sacrifice, took our place on the cross to pay for all our sins. If you have never asked Jesus to come and live in your life, all you need to do is, with a sincere heart, ask for forgiveness for your sins and then follow Jesus as he leads you. You *can* receive this free gift that He wants you to have.

Give Him all your sins, hurts, and pains. He paid for all of it. Follow the One who loves you more than anyone else is even capable of loving you. He loved you so much He was willing to give His life for yours. He truly has paid the full price for your redemption. There are no strings attached. No secret plan. It is a free gift to you.

If you have not received this precious gift today you can. Invite the Lord Jesus into your life today.

Don't let fear stop you. Jesus went through so much to give you eternal life and relationship with Him.



Billing Statement

From

God

Ship To

My Precious Child

Customer My Precious Child

Terms Ask and you shall receive

Agent Jesus Christ

Receive Today

Order # 777

Delivery Via Holy Spirit

Item	Quantity Ordered	Description	Unit Count	Unit Price	Total
Lamb	1	Salvation Healing Peace	1	Perfect sacrifice	Jesus the Savior
Total					Jesus the Savior

Special Notes

John 3:16
"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Roman 5:8
But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

Isaiah 53:5
But he was wounded and crushed for our sins. He was beaten that we might have peace. He was whipped, and we were healed!

Date

Today

Approval Signature

God