

March 28, 2023

Lesson Four

What makes it so hard for us to forgive?

We live in an unforgiving culture.

In this “cancel culture” there is no forgiveness. Instead, there is harsh punishment for the smallest infraction of ill-defined social rules.

We live in an unforgiving world—a world that basically has no inclination to forgive and is proud of their unforgiveness.

Forgiveness goes against our natures and instincts.

We are born with a natural bent to be unforgiving. It doesn’t take much to stir up that old nature even in those of us who have been born again and serve the most forgiving Savior ever—Jesus Christ.

In Romans 8 Paul defines our natural tendency as living in the flesh, and he warns us against it:

Romans 8:5-9: *Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.*

⁹ You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.

When it comes to forgiveness, what does the flesh have its mind set on?

Don’t be surprised if you find yourself wanting to get revenge. It’s a real temptation to hold on to grudges. But here’s the good news:

1 Corinthians 10:13: *No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.*

God is providing a way out, a way to escape for you from that unforgiving spirit, so it cannot rule over you. Name some “ways out” that God provides for you.

A true believer in Christ can sin, but sin can never be the normal pattern of behavior for someone who is in Christ.

1 John 3:4-6: *Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. ⁵ But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. ⁶ No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.*

Forgiving will excuse the behavior that caused pain.

Once again, your natural desire for justice and fairness can cause you to refuse to forgive because it just isn't right—it's not fair.

Remember this: Nobody gets by with anything in God's sight.

Ecclesiastes 12:14: *For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.*

Romans 12:19: *Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.*

Luke 8:16 -17: *"No one lights a lamp and hides it in a clay jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, they put it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light. ¹⁷ For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open."*

Luke 12:1-3: *Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. ² There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. ³ What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs."*

Forgiveness is not about being passive in the face of injustice, abuse, or condoning the wrong actions of others. It takes the power of God's Spirit to have the courage and strength to forgive.

Forgiving means we must humble ourselves.

"Pride is your greatest enemy; humility is your greatest friend." John R.W. Stott

Dealing with our pride is a life-long challenge because pride is at the heart of most every sin in our lives.

C.S. Lewis: "Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind..... it is pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began."

"Pride is spiritual cancer: it eats up the very possibility of love, or contentment, or even common sense."

Pride provokes God's displeasure, and he opposes it.

James 4:6: *But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."*

One of the more notable examples from the Old Testament of what pride can do is that of Uzziah, who was a believer. When he became king of Judah at age sixteen, he set his heart to seek God and put himself under the spiritual mentorship of Zechariah.

2 Chronicles 26:5: *He sought God during the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fGod. As long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success.*

As a result, he acquired wealth and also became politically and militarily powerful. Then things changed.

2 Chronicles 26:15-16: *In Jerusalem he made devices invented for use on the towers and on the corner defenses so that soldiers could shoot arrows and hurl large stones from the walls. His fame spread far and wide, for he was greatly helped until he became powerful.*

¹⁶ *But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the Lord his God, and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense.*

Is pride keeping you from offering forgiveness? Dig deep and see if that might be true.

Why is it difficult to forgive yourself?

You keep thinking of what you should have said or done.

This battle is in your mind—in your thought processes. And if you stay with those thoughts for a long time, it starts to literally change your brain. God is so good to us. He could remember our sin for a lifetime but chooses to forget.

Isaiah 43:25: *“I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.*

It may take you some time to reprogram your thought processes and view yourself through the lens of grace, but you need to set your mind and heart to do just that. How?

2 Corinthians 10:5: *We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

You train yourself for godliness:

1 Timothy 4:7: Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly.

Here is a practical, doable training program to be godly—to begin to forgive yourself as God has forgiven you:

1. Pray about it every morning:
“Lord, today please help me recognize wrong patterns of thinking and whenever I drift toward thinking incorrectly, as you would have me think, please nudge me, remind me, and help me to recognize my wrong thought patterns.”
2. Replace wrong thoughts with right and true ones.
Count your blessings; sing a song of thanksgiving; talk out loud to yourself if you can.
3. Memorize Scripture verses.
Memorize verses like Isaiah 43:25 and 2 Corinthians 10:5.

Enjoy Freedom

Forgiving others and forgiving yourself is the road to freedom. God’s grace is enough for us. His death on the cross was enough for us. We have no penance that he requires of us—no penalty box. We just get to live life free from the shackles of sin.

Don’t let the enemy rob you of this freedom.

1 John 4:4: *You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.*

1 Corinthians 15:57: *But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*