

April 11, 2023

Lesson Six

I have found one book especially helpful, *Total Forgiveness* by R. T. Kendall. I will be using some quotes from that book in this lesson.

Forgiving those who are NOT your enemy

Jesus taught us to forgive our enemies but quite often it is the people who would not fit into that category that we need to forgive.

They could be:

- someone who has simply distanced themselves from you with no explanation.
- someone who disagrees with you on some point and they have put the relationship “on hold”.
- someone who argued with you and that disagreement hangs between you.
- someone who no longer needs you as they did, so they’ve withdrawn.
- someone who has found someone else and has chosen to replace your relationship with a new one.
- someone whose lifestyle is one you cannot accept and that has affected how they interact with you.

“The irony is that it is sometimes harder to forgive those who are not enemies, but who have hurt you deeply, than it is to forgive one who is indeed an enemy” (p.166).

Have you been hurt by someone who was not and is not your “enemy”?

Forgiving an “enemy”

What are the characteristics of a personal enemy?

- A person who wants to harm you.
- A person who says things about you in a malicious way, intending to cause harm.
- A person who would be happy if you failed in some way.
- A person (even a fellow Christian) who would not pray that God would bless you but would hope God would bring you down.
- A person who hates you, even though they might never admit it (Christians might use other words like loathe, despise, I just can’t stand them, they make me sick).
- A person who would take unfair advantage of you.
- A person who seeks revenge on you.
- A person who would persecute you—pursue you because they simply want to hurt you.
- A person who dislikes you and treats you badly because you are a believer.

“When Jesus said, ‘Love your enemies, He assumed that we would have one or more, and most people do. Sadly, many, if not most of them, will be from within the community of faith. . . Much persecution comes from those who claim to believe in God as much as you do. And yet the issues between you may not be theological. Your enemy simply may not like you!’ (p. 171-172).

Is there a person in your life now that would fit some of this description of an enemy?

Matthew 5:11 – 12:

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

What does Jesus say you should do when you have a personal enemy? What is the condition he states?

What’s the difference in someone who says all kinds of evil against you but NOT because you are a believer? Should you still rejoice and be glad?

Here is what Kendall says:

“If you have a true, relentless enemy—someone who is not a figment of your anxiety or imagination—you should see yourself as sitting on a mine of twenty-four carat gold. Not everybody is that blessed. But if you have been blessed in that way, take it with both hands. You should take this person’s picture; enlarge it, frame it, and thank God every time you look at it. Your enemy, should you handle him or her correctly, could turn out to be the best thing that ever happened to you” (p.167).

“When you totally forgive your enemy, you have crossed over into the supernatural realm. . . You may not speak in tongues; you may not have raised a person from the dead. But when you totally forgive an authentic enemy, you are there: you have made it into the big leagues” (p. 170).

“The greater the hurt, the greater the blessing that will come with forgiveness” . . . (p. 166).

Do you believe that? Can you testify to that?

Take action to forgive

It could be really helpful if you would write down exactly what it is you need to forgive. Ask God to reveal any unforgiveness in your heart of which you may not be aware.

And then get alone with God and pray much about it. Tell him exactly how you feel.

It could take some time to do this right. You may have some difficulty putting things in writing. Remember, this is between you and God, so no one else need ever see it.

Then read those things on your list to the Lord and say out loud, "I forgive them, Lord."

Then take that piece of paper and burn it or tear it in shreds or bury it. Then when they start to come back to your mind, as they probably will, you can say out loud to your enemy, "I've forgiven that. I wrote it down and tore it up, and I don't intend to dredge it up all over again. It is forgiven!"

Asking for forgiveness

Sometimes we make mistakes. Big ones. It may be hard for you to ask for forgiveness. When we ask for forgiveness, we humble ourselves as the Bible tells us to do.

Some things to consider before you ask for forgiveness:

- Will this help the situation—the relationship?
- Are you asking for forgiveness because you really are sincere and want to be forgiven, or because you want to reveal the harm done to you?
- Choose the right time and place—a private place when emotions are not out of control.
- Do it in person, if possible.
- Is this person aware that they have done you harm? If not, do you need to confront them with this?

Here are suggestions to consider when apologizing:

1. Acknowledge your failure. Don't make excuses.
2. Take responsibility and don't try to shift the blame.
3. Explain how you want to rectify the situation, if that is relevant.
4. Keep your explanations as short as possible. Avoid letting this deteriorate into an argument or a long harass about wrongs done.
5. Don't involve other people. Don't allow this to evolve into a gossip session.
6. Allow them to react angrily, or perhaps to respond in ways that surprise you. Don't interrupt them!
7. If this person is a non-believer, don't "spiritualize" your apology.
8. If this person is a fellow believer, refer to Scripture and prayer, etc.

Matthew 5:23:24: *Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.*

James 5:16: *Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (ESV)*

Proverbs 28:13: *Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy. (ESV)*

Walking in forgiveness

Forgiveness needs to become a way of life for us. We should be better "forgivers" today than we were last year, and next year forgiving should come easier for us than it does this year, if we're growing in grace.

2 Corinthians 3:18: *And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

As Christ-followers, we are all in the transformation process.

Psalms 119:92: *"If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction."*

Psalms 107:20: *He sent out his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave.*

We find healing through the Word.

How are you doing in the discipline of spending time in the Word of God?

Psalms 119:16: *"I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word."*

Don't neglect the word of God in your life. It will empower you to forgive and to live in forgiveness.

Another prerequisite is to depend on God's grace to do it through you. It takes superhuman ability to live in forgiveness.

If forgiveness is a difficult thing for you, or if there's one particular situation you're struggling to forgive, make yourself accountable to someone you love and trust; pray with them about your need to forgive; ask them to check up on you from time to time so that you will not allow that root of bitterness to grow again.

Jesus would have never told us to forgive if it were impossible to do. With the Holy Spirit in you to give you that superhuman power you need, you can forgive, even though the damage is great, even though the hurt is deep, even though you may not have even been asked to forgive.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some specific things you've been forgiven by God. Where would you be if God had refused to forgive you?
2. Do you have difficulty believing you have been forgiven? Do you keep dumping guilt on yourself over the failures of your past?
3. What is keeping you from living in the freedom of "no condemnation"?
4. Isaiah 43:25: "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more." What does this mean to you personally?
5. Is there someone you have to forgive over and over for the same offense? Can you think of times when God has had to forgive you over and over for the same offense?
6. Why is it important for us to forgive, even if we're not asked to - even if that person who has wronged us shows no signs of remorse?
7. What happens to your fellowship with God when you harbor unforgiveness?
8. Does forgiveness come easy or hard for you? Why? Does it come easier for some people than for others?

I need to forgive:

WHO:

FOR WHAT:

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By God's grace, I have forgiven all of these, and will continue to as long as necessary.

Signed _____

Date _____