

***Pass It On:
Forgiven And Forgiving***

Matthew 18:21-35

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It came as a surprise to us that he was one of the five. We've known him over the years as the guy on the next street who was crazy about dogs. Rob always was out with one or more of them. Which he'd run over to the park every day.

What a surprise to recently see Rob leading them down our street in a wheelchair. Turns out he was one of the five bikers that were mowed down earlier this summer by a hit and run driver. Rob now has a body full of pins, and severe after effects from a concussion. And the feelings towards the guy who hit them, and took off.

How would you deal with stuff like that?

Rob's wife, at least, didn't have to deal with a funeral. Jennifer Teague's family wasn't so fortunate. Remember the young girl, so brutally murdered in Barrhaven?

The pain that her family experienced was unreal.

What is almost more unreal was the response of the family.

Some time after the murder, Ed Teague, Jennifer's dad, told an Ottawa reporter that if he could meet the perpetrator he would forgive him. Another reporter did a feature length article on Mr. Teague, as well as on the parents of Ardeth Wood. Remember her? And the reporter put this label on her story:

Confounding!

She was confounded by what Ed Teague said. And, she was confounded by a statement of Catherine Wood, Ardith's mom about the murderer --

"I will pray for him, as all our family will."

The reporter found it utterly confounding how the parents of Ardeth and Jennifer *"have forgiven the men who killed them."*

"They are people of deep conviction and faith in God..." wrote the reporter. *"...For all that faith gets a bad rap these days, when the chips are down, those who believe deeply seem to be able to draw on something the rest of society... could never imagine."*

To be able to forgive - even in the face of unimaginable horror.
And to draw from the power of faith in order to do so.
Enter Matthew 18.

Forgiveness - When someone owes you a debt, and you let go the right to demand payback, to get even.

You let go, and let God.

Romans 12.19 says, *"It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord."*

Forgiveness is when I can look at the drunk driver, the negligent child, the cheating employee or loose-lipped friend

and give the raging desire to *"let them have it, let 'em rot, wish they were dead,"*
the yearnings to get even.....

.....to bundle that all up and drop it at the feet of Jesus,
trusting **Him** to deal with it.

You take your hand off their throat, stop choking them, and let 'em go.

Forgiveness – it can be one of the **biggest, most difficult** projects we'll ever face.

It's big for most of us because of the constant barrage of little piddly stuff we face all the time.

You noticed, didn't you, the difference between the debt loads mentioned in Jesus' story?

10,000 talents - more money than most people could accumulate in a lifetime, since one talent was worth 15 years wages for a laborer.

Compared to the little 100 denarii, roughly equivalent to three months wages.

Still significant. But way smaller.

Representing all the little violations - significant and real but not huge - that pop up in our lives all along the way. A hurt here. A whispered word there. A few dollars lost. A friendship betrayed. A promise broken. We all have had it happen to us.

Just like we've all done it -- to God.

How often we've violated His space, stood Him up, wronged and betrayed our relationship with Him. Yet we come here, week after week, seeking His forgiveness; we go through a Ministry of Reconciliation every week, praying that the Heavenly Father, for Christ's sake, would let go of that legitimate right He has to get even, to make us pay, to have us suffer hell.

We're multiple offenders. Ten thousand talents worth.

The gospel promise is that forgiveness **IS** available – full and free in Jesus. Amazing. It flows into and through our lives like a crystal clear river, sweeping away the sin and guilt and wrong we've done.

The cross at the front of the sanctuary reminds us of that each day.

HOWEVER

When we, who seek holy forgiveness so often, refuse to forgive others we behave like beavers building a dam across a sparkling country stream. The water backs up and floods the landscape. Brush and debris accumulate. Nothing gets washed downstream. Everything clogs up. Trees begin to rot and eventually death happens.

God's mercy no longer washes through our lives. Bitterness, sullenness, dark attitudes begin to gather. Joy rots away.

Forgiveness - letting go, and letting God.
Vital for our own spiritual life and liberty.

Someone shared with about their spouse who had an affair and then walked out, taking everything. It was awful - **way more** than any 100 denarii debt, and left this person struggling with questions of self-image and value, empty, ashamed.

Somewhere, and quite some time after, this individual said, "*Pastor, I **had** to forgive my ex. Not for their sake. For mine. It had hold of me. I needed to forgive in order to get free; to live.*"

The Son of our Creator knew so well that if we hang on to the hurts caused us, and nurse the desire to exact revenge, to get even, it will eventually hang on to us and imprison us and torture us.

Forgiveness, says Lewis Smedes, is

God's invention for coming to terms with a world in which, despite their best intentions, people are unfair to each other and hurt each other deeply.

[Forgive & Forget: Healing The Hurts We Don't Deserve xii]

And, let me say it again, it begins with the little things.
You understand that, right?

Some members here at Calvin participated in the Army run last weekend: 21.1km through our city streets. They didn't just wake up that morning and say, "Hey, think I'll go for a bit of a run today." They trained for it. Worked up to it. There was a lot of sweat and effort put into crossing that finish line. Starting with lots of little runs.

Don't think for a moment that Ed Teague or Catherine Wood were able to suck out of thin air the ability to forgive in the face of the vile crime of murder.

It began with lots of little efforts at forgiveness.

For all those little annoyances and wrongs committed against us.

And if we don't let go of those little things, they pretty soon build up into a large pile.
Like the garbage in Toronto this summer.

It's my observation that most of the problems of unforgiveness in peoples' lives, and the nasty fallout it brings, tends to come from the clutter and stench of a whole series of little wrongs left unforgiven, rather than from one or two horrors such as those that Rob experienced.

So the question for our lives is:

Are we willing to learn, and willing to try to live a life of forgiveness?

Allow me to share with you some very practical stuff on doing this forgiveness project.

First - some potholes to watch out for.

1. Forgiveness **isn't** avoiding or ignoring the hurt done to us; pretending it doesn't matter or didn't occur. And it's **not** excusing the wrong. The parable in Matthew 18 deliberately counts the cost of the debt. Up front.
2. Forgiveness is not giving permission for the hurtful behaviour to continue. Consequences of the wrongs are not avoided. The judicial process may still need to be followed. Precautionary measures may be put in place.
3. Forgiveness is **NOT** forgetting. It is letting go of vengeance. Scars may still remain. Relationships may well change. Things may **NOT** be the same as before. Don't confuse forgiveness with reconciliation.

Secondly, and finally - some waypoints to consider as you map out the road to forgiveness in your life.

1. Granting forgiveness may be like peeling an onion. Peel one layer off to discover another below it. It takes time. And is a process. One that can't be rushed. Warning bells go off in my head when I hear people quickly and glibly say, "Oh, I've forgiven so-and-so." I get angry when outsiders say, "Forgive them, and get on with life." How cheap!
2. Forgiveness involves recognition of the wrong. We acknowledge the hurt we feel, the pain, the desires for revenge we have.
3. Forgiveness is an act of the will. Notice that Jesus doesn't command us to **feel** like we should forgive. If we wait till we **FEEL** like forgiving, none of us would ever do it. In your **will** recognize the hurt and your response of rage or resentment or whatever. Then recognize the need of **forcefully, consciously** releasing **that** response into the hands of Jesus.
4. And then, may I encourage you to pray about it. As we begin to recognize the violations, we begin to take them, piece by piece to Christ. Perhaps we may want to write a letter to Jesus. Putting it down on paper sometimes is a big help. Or perhaps sharing this with a trusted Christian friend. And ask for the Spirit's strength along the way. For the job is often too big for us to do alone. It may well help, as we pray, to visualize the cross of Jesus - where **our** offenses against God were forgiven by Jesus - "**Help me, Jesus! Help me to forgive!**" It's hard to forgive without seeing ourselves first as forgiven people.

So.. try to **say** the words, "*I forgive....*" They may be the toughest words you've ever said. Perhaps these words will need to be said over some time, with much prayer, again and again.

Remember - forgiveness is a process.

We begin with the will. And leave the feelings to God.

We just do it.

And then, in time, slowly, inch by inch we will begin to see the miracle.

YES!! we can sense that this forgiveness is coming.

The hold that this event, this malice had on us is melting away!

And - maybe - just maybe we'll even get to the point where we become so healed through the grace of God that we are able to eventually summon the power to wish that other person well..... in time.

Forgiveness is never easy.

It may take terrific courage.

It generally needs good support from trusted fellow believers.

But it's **always** the best thing we can do for ourselves.

For when we forgive
 life is restored.
 Faith begins to grow again.
 We can experience the love and presence of Jesus once more.
 We are
 deeply
 and truly
 free!

 The Teague and Woods families will tell you that. While they will carry the wounds of their precious childrens' deaths, at least they will not continue to be poisoned by the burden of resentment and hatred. For they have handed that over to God. They have forgiven.

And in doing so, they have followed as apprentices along the path of their master, who looked at his murders and said, "Father, forgive them..."

They'd also be the first to tell you that they haven't figured out everything about forgiveness yet. They're still on the way.

 But with their public statements and actions they've shown us Christ's way.

Question is - Will we follow?