

Travelling Light

Part Two: The Heart of the Matter: Forgiveness

Ephesians 4:29 – 5:2

By Pastor Gerald Harder

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

Ephesians 4:32

What we see in this passage is that God’s desire for us is that we live unburdened of the weight of unforgiveness, following his example.

GOD’S HEART FOR US IS THAT WE ARE FORGIVEN PEOPLE

We need to be forgiven. And in God’s great mercy, he made a way for us to be forgiven, through Jesus.

Without Jesus, we’re lost. But because of Jesus, we can have eternal life, and be brought back into right relationship with God. How?

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9

“Here I am!” Jesus says. “I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in.” Rev. 3:20

Opening the door to Jesus is where forgiveness starts, but that doesn’t necessarily instantly and eternally change us into unburdened people – who travel light – and generously offer forgiveness and kindness - people who don’t struggle with pride and temptation.

By admitting our shortcomings and having Jesus in our lives, however, we are unburdened from the weight of our sin – and launched in a new direction.

Jesus comes into people’s lives,

“To open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.” Acts 26:18

Sanctified, set apart, forgiven people, who’s lives and loves stand in contrast to the lives and loves of those who haven’t yet let God shape them. The love and forgiveness from Jesus changes us into forgiving people.

GOD’S HEART FOR US IS THAT WE ARE FORGIVING PEOPLE

When you open your life to Christ, he lovingly guides you, as Paul writes,

“To be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” Ephesians 4:23-24

And when Paul instructs us,

²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

It's because this leads to healthier relationships – and lightens us of regrets about those hurtful words we wish we could take back.

³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

And as we continue to welcome him, the Holy Spirit of God - the literal presence of God inhabits our very being and increasingly influences us and shapes us, helping us to,

³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

And instead, enabling us to,

³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

And, as we see in the gospels, this instruction to forgive is non-negotiable.

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. Matt. 6:14-15

With great privilege comes great responsibility. So, what does it mean to forgive?

Berkeley University's online magazine, *Greater Good*, defines forgiveness as a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you, regardless of whether they actually deserve your forgiveness.

Doesn't that sound freeing? This is how God forgives us. In our Exodus series we saw examples of God having feelings of resentment and vengeance towards his people as he led them out of Egypt to the promised land. But he didn't act on them. He released them, and he forgave his people. Forgive others as in Christ, God forgave you.

And as Jesus instructs us, we need to forgive quickly.

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. Mark 11:25

Notice this doesn't say 'go and forgive them'. Just 'forgive them'.

Easier said than done?

"Focusing on God is the key to resolving conflict constructively. When we remember his mercy and draw on his strength, we invariably see things more clearly and respond to conflict more wisely. In doing so, we can find far better solutions to our problems. At the same time, we can show others that there really is a God and that he delights in helping us do things we could never do on our own. (Ken Sande – *The Peacemaker*, p.20)

And the *Greater Good magazine* continues,

"Just as important as defining what forgiveness is, is understanding what forgiveness is not. Experts who study or teach forgiveness make clear that when you forgive, you do not gloss over or deny the seriousness of an offense against you. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting, nor does it mean condoning or excusing offenses. Though forgiveness can help repair a damaged relationship, it doesn't obligate you to reconcile with the person who harmed you or release them from legal accountability.

Instead, forgiveness brings the forgiver peace of mind and frees him or her from corrosive anger... it involves letting go of deeply held negative feelings. In that way, it empowers you to recognize the pain you suffered without letting that pain define you, enabling you to heal and move on with your life.”

And we see that this forgiveness business is an ongoing expectation of us.

In Matthew 18, starting at verse 21, Jesus teaches that there is no limit to how freely we are to offer forgiveness. 7? 77? 70? x 7? Stop counting. If you’re keeping track, you haven’t really released feelings of resentment or vengeance. You’ve just delayed them.

If you want to travel light, be forgiven and forgive. This is God’s desire. He will help you develop this attitude. This is good for you. This is good for your relationships. This is good for everybody. We can help make the world a better place.

GOD’S HEART FOR US IS THAT WE ARE RECONCILIATION PEOPLE

Read **2 Corinthians 5:16-21**

As we mature as Christians, and prioritize God’s kingdom, we see things differently. Instead of anger toward that person who cuts us off in traffic, with Jesus’ love we feel compassion for them.

And instead of trying to avoid conflict, we see it as “an opportunity to solve common problems in a way that honors God and offers benefits to those involved.” (Ken Sande – The Peacemaker, p. 22)

PERSONAL REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION WITH FRIENDS OR FAMILY

I’ve outlined a way to reflect on this text using a long-standing Christian practice of reflection on Scripture.

(And you can do something similar with any passage of the Bible).

1. Take a few quiet moments to ask God to speak to you as you consider what Jesus’ words in this passage may be saying to you regarding forgiveness this week. It could be somethings simple like: “Speak, for your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3:10), or “Lord, I open my heart to hear from you as I read this text. Give me ears to hear and a heart that is ready to respond.”
2. Reflect on **Ephesians 4:29-5:2**, and/or any other of the aforementioned passages that stood out to you. Read through this text slowly at least two times and pause over any places that seem to be most significant to you in this moment and circle them in your Bible.
3. Next, take time to mull over these words, and perhaps write those words or phrases in a journal. Consider the situations in your life where you particularly need this word of Jesus for you. (It may have to do with a burden of unforgiveness you have been carrying and need to give over to Jesus; it may have to do with an area of sin/self-centeredness/pride you have tried to keep hidden from God; it may have to do with a way you have structured your life that puts your interests before the interests of others).
4. Give thanks to God for what you are hearing, and, if you feel led, write down how you would like to respond to what you were hearing today.