

What does it mean when I forgive someone?

Message for Sunday, March 26, 2017
by Bruce Fraser

Matthew 6:14-15, New Living Translation:
“If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

Children's Message: What are the Ten Commandments? Let's see if we can list them (if they are younger children, show them the list, and see if the adults can get it! Have them mark off the list one by one as the adults get them).

Which one of those is the easiest for you to obey? Which one is the hardest. What if we just dropped that hard one and said, “Keep the other nine, and that's good enough”? Would that be right? NO!

Jesus also gave some commandments about how to live. One of them is, “Forgive others who have hurt you” [Matthew 6:14]. That can be hard, especially if someone really hurt you badly. Maybe you know someone like that. Since that can be a hard command, do you think that it would be OK if we left that one out?

NO! Jesus said,

Matthew 7:24-27, New Living Translation:
“Anyone who listens to my teaching and obeys me is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse, because it is built on rock. But anyone who hears my teaching and ignores it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will fall with a mighty crash.”

Let's sing the song about that, “The Wise Man Built his House Upon the Rock.”

Message “What does it mean when I forgive someone?”

Some of you were here last Sunday when I talked about forgiving others. The key Bible passage was in Matthew 6, where Jesus teaches the Lord's Prayer with the words

“and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us”

and ends with this jaw-dropping conclusion:

The main point of my message was that we must forgive anyone who has hurt us, even the worst offenders.

But forgiveness is not a simple thing. Lots of questions come up: What about this, what about that?

Let me say one thing right off the top: I love it when people ask questions about my messages, or when they outright disagree with me. I love it! First of all, it shows that someone out there was actually awake and listening. 😊 Second, it shows that you are thinking for yourselves, not just lapping up my ideas. Third, it shows that you are thinking deeply about this issue, which is the kind of attention we should give to following Jesus.

1) After forgiveness, how do I relate to the person I have forgiven?

Answer: With an attitude of love, instead of bitterness and vengeance.

Luke 6:27-28, New International Version:
[Jesus said,] “But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”

Romans 12:14, 17-19, 21, New International Version:
Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse...

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord...

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

To some people, that sounds like being a pushover. They think you should fight back when someone hurts you. But that just makes things worse; the situation escalates. Jesus' way breaks the cycle, and opens the door to a peaceful resolution of conflict.

2) Does forgiveness mean I trust them?

Answer: No. We are called to love our enemies, help them, care for them, pray for them—but nowhere in the Bible does it say to trust them.

This could be plain stupid. Example: someone molests your child. Would you leave your child with them, despite forgiving them?

3) What are the responsibilities if any of the forgiven person?

Answer: If they are a Christian, there are a couple:

- ◆ Repent — not just a change of heart, but also a change of behaviour

Matthew 18:3, New Living Translation:

“I assure you, unless you turn from your sins and become as little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven.”

- ◆ Seek reconciliation

Matthew 5:23-24, New Living Translation:

“So if you are standing before the altar in the Temple, offering a sacrifice to God, and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there beside the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.”

But... before you puff up with indignation and exclaim, “Aha! He/she has to make the first move!” read Mark 11:25, NLT:

“But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too.”

If they are not a Christian, then there is only the law of the land, and a person’s own integrity. In other words, don’t count on anything. But you still need to do your part.

Next Steps:

- Receive God’s forgiveness. Know that God loves you, in spite of all the wrong you’ve done.
- Don’t fight evil with more evil.
- Pass God’s forgiveness on to someone else. Let go of the bitterness.
- Seek reconciliation. Be a person of peace, not trouble.

Add to this the Golden Rule, and it gives a complete picture:

Matthew 7:12, New Living Translation:

“Do for others what you would like them to do for you.”

You might be thinking right now, “Yes, I understand all this. But it still is very hard.” You might be asking...

4) How do I forgive and then get on with my life?

Answer: Be real; be honest.

In another church I served, there was a woman who, as a child, had been sexually abused by her father, for several years. When I knew her, she was in her sixties, and the anger she felt towards her father was still very strong. At family gatherings like Christmas and Thanksgiving, it was painful for her to even be near him. She understood the principle of forgiveness, and she wanted to be free of this anger which had been boiling inside of her for more than fifty years. “But,” she said to me, “how can I tell him, ‘It’s OK. Don’t worry about it; it’s all in the past’?” Here’s what I said to her.

First of all, let’s be clear on what it means when you forgive someone. Do you say, “Oh, it’s OK, it was nothing. Don’t worry about it. Let’s just forget all about it, and be happy instead”? Not if someone has really hurt you. That would be lying!

What you say, instead, is something like this: “No, it’s not OK; it wasn’t OK then, and it’s not OK now. What you did was wrong. I’ll never understand why you did that to me. It has caused a lot of pain in my life. But I don’t want that thing to control the rest of my life, or to destroy my relationship with you. So I forgive you.” She was able to do that before he died. She told me she felt like a great sadness and a great weight had been lifted from her.

It can be a beautiful thing to be able to say that to someone. Maybe there’s someone close to you, but your relationship hasn’t been what it used to be. Try saying those words.

Forgiveness is the way of Jesus. And when you look at the options—hatred, revenge, killing, war—it

really is the only way that will ever make our world, our neighbourhoods, and our families the kinds of places we want them to be.

PRAYER:

When a snake bites, what causes the damage? It's not the bite. It's the venom, the poison that stays inside the body. That's what causes the destruction.

When someone says something or does something to hurt you, what causes the damage? Certainly that hurt causes damage. But what magnifies and multiplies it, is what we allow to stay inside us: the grudge, the bitterness that we allow to fester.

So let's bring this to God in prayer:

- God, we begin with receiving your forgiveness, your healing. I know that I've done wrong things, but even though I wish I could do that over again, it's not possible. All of us are in the same boat. It is so wonderful to know that you love us, just as we are, in spite of all we've done.
- Lord, there are some here who have been hurt badly, and perhaps by someone they trusted, even someone they loved. Help us to resist the temptation to fight evil with more evil.
- Instead, having received your forgiveness, let us pass it on to that other person. No, they certainly don't deserve it; but neither do we. So we let go of the bitterness. We just open our hand and heart, and let it go.
- Jesus, thank-you that you show us your way, the way of life: abundant life, life with beauty. Thank-you for your healing.
Amen.