

What if... we forgive as Jesus taught in the Kingdom

Message for Sunday, July 19, 2020
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Luke 11:2-4

Introduction

I hope you had a chance to sing “Cleanse Me” before our gathering. The song talks about God forgiving us for our sins, washing us clean, and giving us another chance, a new life. That is wonderful! To know that God loves you and forgives you and accepts you—just as you are—that is one of the most wonderful things in the world.

Now we are going to take the next step in experiencing forgiveness: forgiving someone who has hurt you.

If you say, “Oh, I can’t! I just can’t forgive what this person did,” then I need to ask you: Have you received forgiveness? Have you prayed something like this: “O God, I’m sorry for what I’ve done, how I’ve rejected you and your ways. It’s not good enough to say ‘I’ll try harder.’ I need your help to live a new way. Please forgive me. Thank-you that Jesus gave his life for me. Now come and live in me and help me to be the person you created me to be.” I’ll say it again: after you have received God’s love and forgiveness, it becomes easier to pass it on to others.

1) Have you been infected with the bitterness germ?

The first step in working through a problem is admitting that I have a problem. Some people never get to that stage. They figure, “This person hurt me. I’m going to get even. What’s the problem with that?”

The problem is that taking revenge doesn’t solve problems. In fact, it just makes them worse. Bitterness and hatred are germs that infect us. As long as we keep feeding them, they grow stronger, and they can become so strong they control us.

Hebrews 12:15, Today’s English Version:
Guard against turning back from the grace of God. Let no one become like a bitter plant that grows up and causes many troubles with its poison.

According to the Bible, bitterness is like a poisonous plant which causes all kinds of problems. The antidote is the grace of God—experiencing God’s love and forgiveness.

Nelson Mandela spent 27 years of his life in prison. He was released only when the South African government abandoned its policy of apartheid. Mandela said, “As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn’t leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I’d be in prison still.”

2) New life in the Kingdom of God

Jesus came to show us a new way of living — the Kingdom of God. We’ve been looking at this for the last few weeks. Very simply, the Kingdom of God exists wherever God’s will is being done.

Most of Jesus’ teaching is about the Kingdom of God: many of his parables, his teaching. Even the Lord’s Prayer!

Luke 11:2-4, New International Version:

“When you pray, say:

‘Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins,

for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.’ “

When we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we are asking for the Kingdom of God to come in our world: “your kingdom come.” A sign of the Kingdom coming in our lives is when we forgive others.

Do not think of this as an unreasonable command. Jesus came to give us life, not to lay heavy burdens on us. Holding on to a grudge, holding bitterness in our heart—now *that’s* a heavy burden to carry around all your life. Jesus tells us to let go of that grudge. Just let it go.

Zig Ziglar, in his book, *Confessions of a Happy Christian*, tells how knowing the future outcome helps us today.

He tells about watching a football game on television, with his favourite team, the Dallas Cowboys. It was a 1975 playoff game, to decide which team goes to the Super Bowl. With a minute remaining in the game, the other team was winning by four points. The Cowboys were down in their

half of the field. But Ziglar had complete confidence in his team.

The quarterback, Roger Staubach faded back with the ball. Drew Pearson, one of the receivers, took off like a shot for the end zone, with two defence guarding him closely.

Staubach threw the ball high up in the air. It came down right in Pearson's hands just as he stepped into the end zone with the winning touchdown. The crowd in the stands exploded with cheering. Ziglar's friends who were watching the game with him were jumping up and down with excitement. But Ziglar remained in his seat, calm and unexcited. He had never doubted that it would happen this way, and in fact he *knew* they were going to win.

You see, they were watching yesterday's game which someone had recorded for them, because they were busy on the day of the game.

Ziglar admitted that had something to do with his confidence! Now that's pretty silly, but here's the point:

If I know how the game is going to end, and I know I've won, then why should I get upset when I get an unfair penalty for something I didn't do? Even if the opponents cheat, and the official misses some calls, knowing how the game will end enables me to take it all in stride.

That's a good description of life in the Kingdom of God. God is in charge, so I don't need to worry or be afraid. I don't need to keep score of hurts and bruises, but I just turn them all over to God.

3) Forgiveness brings life

The danger with God's forgiveness is to presume that God is a pushover; that we have a green light to go ahead and do whatever we feel like, and trust that God will appear like a fairy godmother and say, "That's OK, dear, I forgive you," and then we can go and do it all over again.

When we do that, we make God a puppet, and faith becomes a child's game that we play at. We miss the purpose of forgiveness: it isn't to *preserve* us; it's meant to *prepare* us for a new way of life.

A man was fired from his job because he was unreliable, his work was poor quality, and he was

often drunk on the job. Several months later he was re-hired to the same job, and he was a totally changed person. One of his fellow workers asked him, "What happened to you?"

The man told his story:

When I was in college I was part of a fraternity initiation committee. We placed the new members in the middle of a long stretch of a country road. I was to drive my car at as great a speed as possible straight at them. The challenge was for them to stand firm until a signal was given to jump out of the way. It was a dark night. I had reached one hundred miles an hour and saw their looks of terror in the headlights. The signal was given and everyone jumped clear... except one boy who froze. I left college after that. I later married and have two children. The look on that boy's face as I passed over him at a hundred miles an hour stayed in my mind all the time. I became hopelessly inconsistent, moody, and finally became a problem drinker. My wife had to work to bring in the only income we had.

I was drinking at home one morning when someone rang the doorbell. I opened it to find myself facing a woman who seemed strangely familiar. She sat down in our living room and told me she was the mother of the boy I had killed years before. She said that she had hated me and spent agonizing nights rehearsing ways to get revenge. I then listened as she told me of the love and forgiveness that had come when she gave her heart to Christ. She said, "I have come to let you know that I forgive you and I want you to forgive me for my hatred." I looked deep into her eyes that morning and I saw in them the permission to be the kind of man I might have been had I never killed that boy. That forgiveness changed my whole life.

Sin cuts us off from God and from others, and causes death. But forgiveness restores our relationship with God and with others. It brings life—but a new life, not just any old life.

4) Enough talk; let's do it now

Well, this message is very simple. We know what we should do. We know what is God's will for our lives in this area. Now is the time to practise it.

Think about what someone did that hurt you, or hurt someone you love—just thinking about it makes you mad.

Now imagine you take that thought and put it in the palm of your hand. Curl your hand up, so that you're holding on to that hurt. Do you see how that looks? You've got a fist; it looks as if you are ready to fight. Keep holding it like that, for now.

Feel this burden that lives inside when you hold so tightly to past hurts. Now ask yourself, "Who is suffering? Have I carried this burden long enough? Am I willing to forgive?"

At the start of this message, I said how wonderful is the experience of knowing God's love and forgiveness. If you have never had that experience, you can today, right now. You can confess to God the wrong things you've done, and ask him to forgive you. At the same time, you ask God to help you become the kind of person he created you to be: to grow and become like Jesus.

Let's close our eyes and pray. I'm going to pray and ask you to join me. Let us pray. You can say the words after me.

Prayer:

O God, I'm sorry for what I've done in my life. I'm sorry for the times I rejected you and your ways. It's not good enough to say "I'll try harder." I need your help to live a new way. Please forgive me. Thank-you that Jesus gave his life for me. Now come and live in me and help me to be the person you created me to be.

Lord, I pray for a renewal of relationships with the people in my life with whom I have had a dispute. I pray that the Holy Spirit may heal those wounds.

Each one of us has a particular person in mind. We pray especially for your love to come into this relationship, that there may be true forgiveness. Without you, we're just playing a game. But with you and your power, miracles can happen.

So right now, in this time of silence, each of us can pray for that person. ... Thank-you, Lord. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now open your eyes, and open your hand. Since you let go of your grudge and forgave that person

now your hand is empty and ready to receive God's forgiveness.

Next Steps:

- Just one step: If possible, go and speak with that person, to seek reconciliation. If they are not willing, you've at least done your part. You are free of that weight hanging around your neck.
- Step two: repeat step one with someone else. Repeat as many times as needed.