

SERIES: CHRISTMAS BREAKTHROUGH

Part 6: Choosing to Live a Lifestyle of Forgiveness

Matthew 6:12, 14-15; Ephesians 4:23; Colossians 3:13-14

Forgiveness is at the very core of what Christianity is all about. Why? Because our Heavenly Father is all about restoring and preserving unity. The moment Adam and Eve rebelled against Father God and surrendered their lives to satan, the Father went into action immediately in Genesis 3:14-15, **“So the Lord God said to the serpent, ‘Because you have done this, you will be punished. You are singled out from all the domestic and wild animals of the whole earth to be cursed. You will grovel in the dust as long as you live, crawling along on your belly. ¹⁵From now on, you and the woman will be enemies, and your offspring and her offspring will be enemies. He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel.’”**

Jesus, who is the offspring of Eve, crushed satan’s head when He was crucified on the cross for our sins. At the very heart of our Father, He is a reconciling, restoring, unifying God.

Forgiveness is at the very heart of unity, harmony and oneness in marriage, family life and all of our relationships. There is no growth in Jesus Christ or our relationships unless we’re willing to learn how to live a lifestyle of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is at the very center of Jesus’ example of how to pray. In Matthew 6:12 & 14-15 Jesus says, **“And forgive us**

our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us.... ¹⁴If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. ¹⁵But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

Jesus set the standard for us by teaching us that just as Father God has forgiven us as His children, forgiveness is not a luxury or a privilege, but it is a responsibility as children of God. Forgiveness is not an option, but it is to be a way of life because it is the way of the cross. In Mark 8:34-35 Jesus said, **“If any of you wants to be My follower, you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross, and follow Me. ³⁵If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for My sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will find true life.”**

Learning to pick up your cross and follow Jesus can only happen as you die to your own selfishness. Forgiving someone for the wrong they have done to you is one of the most selfless things you can do. Jesus said if we are truly going to be His followers, forgiveness is the way of the cross. For forgiveness to take place there must be a death.

Ephesians 4:32 says, **“Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another just as God through Christ has forgiven you.”** Again you see forgiveness is what we’re all about, because God has forgiven us through the sacrificial giving of His Son. Colossians 3:13-14, **“You must make allowance for each other’s faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave**

you, so you must forgive others. ¹⁴And the most important piece of clothing you must wear is love. Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony.”

Paul says that forgiveness is how we demonstrate God’s love. It is love through forgiveness that binds our marriages together in perfect harmony. Friends, this is God’s plan for our marriages—that they be filled with God’s purpose, plans and His presence.

I. Dealing with the crisis of forgiveness

How is a crisis of forgiveness created?

How many times have you read a scripture that talks about forgiveness, or you have read a book, and you make a commitment to be more forgiving, and then things happen—you get hurt, someone wrongs you and you’re full blown into what I call the crisis of forgiveness? How does the crisis of forgiveness evolve?

A. When something happens that you did not want to happen

The difficulty at the core of being hurt is how to remain peaceful and keep your joy intact when your spouse or friend or family member has hurt or disappointed you. Another way to state this idea is: How can you be hurt but not end up moving into unforgiveness?

One of the best examples we have of the first person who found himself thrust into the crisis of forgiveness was Cain. In Genesis chapter four we're told that at harvest time, Cain brought an offering of produce, and Abel brought the best from his flock. God accepts Abel's but rejected Cain's. God did not obviously do anything wrong to Cain, but Cain now experiences the crisis of forgiveness. In verse 5 we read that Cain chooses to be very angry and depressed.

Research has proven that a leading cause of depression, which is the emotional cold in our culture, is driven by anger. When you become angry and you don't resolve it properly you move into bitterness, resentment and the **four most toxic emotions of Criticism, Contempt, Defensiveness, and Stonewalling, which leads to Loneliness and Isolation.**

The crisis of forgiveness is created when something happens that you did not want to happen and then...

B. When you spend too much time dwelling on it

This is exactly what happened to Cain. Look and listen to what God said to Cain when he is angry and depressed. Genesis 4:6-7, **“Why are you so angry?” the Lord asked him, ‘Why do you look so dejected? ⁷You will be accepted if you respond in the right way. But if you refuse to respond correctly, then watch out! Sin is waiting to attack and destroy you, and you must subdue it.’**” This is exactly what Cain did. If he had responded the right way in dealing with his anger, disappointment and hurt of not having his

offering accepted by God and doing what he knew he was supposed to, he never would have killed Able. The Bible says he leaves God's presence and designs a plot to kill Able and pulls it off.

Using Cain as our example of how not to deal with hurt, let's look at point II.

II. When a hurt turns into unforgiveness

This happens when:

A. You take something too personally

Friends, being hurt is not a sign of weakness, stupidity, or lack of self-esteem. Often it simply means that we lack training in how to do things differently. Feeling hurt is a normal and difficult aspect of all of our lives, and almost everyone feels hurt and falls into unforgiveness at some point.

However, just because we get hurt often does not mean that it's healthy to stay that way. Unresolved hurts and wounds thwart our ability to sense God's presence, and it makes us vulnerable to the wiles and deceptions of satan, and it causes us to become immature.

Let me be very clear: Learning to handle hurts, wounds, and disappointments more skillfully will not stop things from going wrong in life. Your spouse will still be unkind and hurt

you at times and so will other people, but what will change is when something happens that you didn't want or expect you will have the tools to deal with it more quickly so you can move on with your life and marriage. Choosing to live a lifestyle of forgiveness is the key to having a strong, vital, dynamic marriage and relationships.

There are two ways to find the impersonal in the hurt. What happens to you when you take what your spouse said, or did, or did not say, or didn't do too personally?

1) The easiest way is to realize how common each painful experience is

The truth is that nothing that has happened to you is unique. Remind yourself that there are other women whose husbands don't listen to them like they want them to or are not as sensitive to their feelings. There are other husbands whose wives have the need to talk a lot, and they have a tendency to complain a lot about them not meeting their needs.

Whatever your complaint is towards your spouse or friend or family member you're not the only one who is going through what you're going through. You are not the first and you will not be the last to be hurt the way you are.

The Bible puts it this way in 1 Corinthians 10:13, **“But remember that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so**

strong that you can't stand up against it. When you are tempted, He will show you a way out so that you will not give into it." One of the ways of escape from feeling sorry for yourself and pouting and stewing in your hurt is to admit to yourself and to God you're not the only one hurting in this way, and God will help you out.

2) The second way to uncover the impersonal dimension of hurt is to understand that most offenses committed by your spouse or friend or family member are without the intention of really hurting you

If you take the injustice against you too personally you will move into unforgiveness.

The second step of turning your hurt into unforgiveness is:

B. You blame how you feel on the person who hurt you

The truth is this, friends, you ultimately are the one who chooses how long you are going to feel what you feel. My wife can't make me stay angry unless I choose to stay angry. Just like God told Cain, if I make the right choices and choose to walk through the steps of forgiveness I can be free of the toxic feelings that want to try to control me. Instead of blaming your spouse or friend for how you feel, take responsibility for how you feel and do what you know is right. We will talk about the actual steps we can take in a moment to deal with what we're feeling when we're thrust into the crisis of forgiveness.

C. You create a story of woundedness

This is the phase where you now see yourself as a victim. This is exactly where satan wants you to go with your hurt and pain instead of taking it to Jesus and learn how to process it. A story of woundedness describes the painful things you have endured but not healed from. You will know when you're doing this because just in telling the story you will feel hurt and mad all over again.

One of the ways you know you have worked the process of forgiveness is that when you think of that person and what they did or said, you don't feel the pain anymore. There is no desire to get even or get revenge. Forgiveness is the antidote to the four most toxic emotions and the loneliness and isolation that result from them.

III. How to choose a lifestyle of forgiveness

A. Admit what actually happened

B. Acknowledge the feelings that are attached to what happened

C. Accept the fact that you must confess to God and someone else your feelings

D. Add boundaries that stop you from getting hurt needlessly

E. Annul the debt that is owed you

F. Allow for the possibility of reconciliation