

Luke 11:4
We Forgive Everyone

Main idea: We love because He first loved us. We forgive because He first forgave us. And if we don't forgive, well, that's a problem.

As we begin, I want you to bring to your mind the worst thing you've ever done to someone else. Now, if the worst thing you've done is too painful for you to think about, or maybe even sinful for you to think about, then please, think of an offense less painful for this exercise. For some of you, you might have to dig deep to recall the worst thing you've ever done, but I suspect that for most of us, there are at least a few things that we've done to others that continue to haunt us, even if they were a long time ago.

Maybe it was something you did to a friend, or a family member. Maybe, like David in the Bible, you recognize that that sin was not only against a person, but ultimately against God Himself, so you cry out to God, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." (Psalm 51:4)

Either way, once you have that worst thing, that sin, fixed at the forefront of your mind, let me ask you this: do you feel condemned? Guilty? Like you don't deserve forgiveness? Good. Because we are guilty of sin. We are condemned because our sin.

But let me also ask you this: do you desire that God would forgive you of that sin? Good, because He does, by grace, through faith in Jesus, so that there is now no condemnation for you who are in Christ Jesus.

But let me ask you one more question. If someone were to sin against you in that worst way, or maybe even in a worse way, could you forgive them? If someone were to curse you, abuse you, beat you, even leave you for dead, could you forgive them? And what if they did that not only to you, but to your son? To your only son? Could you forgive them?

I realize that's a pretty heavy way to begin the sermon this morning, so let's do this. I give you permission now to forget about your sin, and to think think about nice things instead. Think about raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens, alright? In fact, here's a video that might lighten the mood a little.

[video of child laughing]

It doesn't happen very often, but once in awhile, she'll just start laughing, and will laugh like that for a few minutes. And we're not sure what causes it. It might be a kind of seizure, or she could genuinely be thinking of something funny, or just had a funny dream. We don't know, but we really like when we see her happy like that. Because you can't possibly be sad when you watch

that video. That video can instantly change any heart, turning sorrow into joy, and mourning into laughter.

But you know what, and I'm sure some of you saw this coming, the love of God is greater than that video, so that by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, there is now no condemnation for our sin, and God's great love changes us so that our very hearts are changed, so that we love because He first loved us. We forgive because He first forgave us. And in light of that, if we don't forgive, well, that's a problem.

We began looking at the Lord's Prayer last week, but I want to come back to it today to look more closely at the last part of the prayer. It says in verse 4:

...and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation. (Luke 11:4)

Father, we forgive everyone who is indebted to us. We forgive the teacher who didn't believe us when the dog really did eat our homework. We forgive our president for being an idiot. We forgive democrats for mismanaging government funds. We forgive republicans for not being compassionate toward the poor. We forgive those who are pro choice for condoning the murder of innocent lives, and we forgive pro life extremists for murdering murderers when they bomb abortion clinics. We forgive the family member who abused us, and we forgive the employer who treated us unfairly. We forgive the friend who betrayed us. And just as we forgive all of these and everyone else, forgive us our sins. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Did my prayer make you a little uncomfortable? Were you able to pray it with all honesty? If you were, I probably didn't go far enough. I could have gone on. Because it's really easy to get offended today. We exalt our own opinions, our own right so much that if someone offends us, pfft, it's all over, they don't deserve forgiveness, and it's on them!

Well, maybe it's not on them. Maybe it's on us. Jesus tells us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. But we tend to say that we love our enemies, and then talk about them behind their backs. Or maybe you don't call them enemies, yet still grumble about them when they offend us. Instead of forgiving, we tend to hold grudges. Instead of forgiving everyone, we tend to forgive no one, because they've offended me! How dare they offend me!

It's really easy to get offended by people in the world today, and so therefore, there are a lot of people in the world to forgive. And we don't like to forgive, because we like to think that we're always right, and since we're right, everyone else is wrong, and they need to make restitution before we offer them any kind of mercy. But Jesus seems to say in the Lord's Prayer that we who are forgiven by God also extend the same kind of forgiveness to everyone who is guilty of offending us.

So we ourselves forgive everyone!

Do you forgive everyone? Do you forgive the person who cut you off in traffic? Do you forgive the person who offended you in something they said? Do you forgive the person who has yet to forgive you, so you hold onto bitterness toward them and you think it's justified because they're still holding onto bitterness against you? Do you forgive the person who killed your son?

You see, God forgives the people who killed His Son. That's you and me. And He calls us to extend that same forgiveness to everyone.

"But I'm not God!" That's true. But is He your Father? And do you want His forgiveness, even though you killed His Son?

"Yeah, but that's different!" Is it?

Jesus told a parable about that. Matthew 18, beginning with verse 23.

"Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' (Matthew 18:23-26)

So there was this guy who was so in debt to a king that it was impossible for him to work off what he owed. A talent in the Bible refers to the largest unit of currency at the time. Nobody today knows exactly what it was worth, but estimates range between \$1,000 on the low end, and up to \$1,000,000 on the high end. So in today's dollars, the man in this parable who owed ten thousand talents owed at least 10 million dollars, or maybe even as much as 10 trillion dollars. He could never pay it off!

You know, our debt to God is kind of like that. And actually, it's more than that, because God is infinite in His righteousness and holiness. So when we sin against God, we've committed an infinitely bad offense. We've so offended God, breaking His commands, that there's no way we could ever possibly pay off our debt. Verse 27.

And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. (Matthew 18:27)

Wow. The king forgave the debt. And God forgives our debt by His grace. And God changes us by His grace. I mean, having received such forgiveness, you'd think the servant in the story who was forgiven would just be changed forever! Surely he'd be so thankful for the grace that was shown to him that he'd extend that same grace to everyone! What an amazing picture of how God forgives us and changes us by His great love! Verse 28.

But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' (Matthew 18:28)

Verse 32.

Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart." (Matthew 18:32-35)

Well that was unexpected, right?

After being released the first time, the servant found a man who owed him a hundred denarii. A denarius was worth about a day's wages for the common worker, so perhaps worth around \$60 today, so a hundred denarii would be worth roughly \$6,000, not an insignificant amount of money, but nothing compared to the 10 trillion or even 10 million dollars that he was forgiven. Even still, the servant refused to forgive the other. And when the king heard about it, he brought his servant back before him and threw him into prison, until, it says, "he should pay all his debt," which we've already calculated would be impossible!

And Jesus says that God will do the same to us, unless we forgive others.

You see, a refusal to forgive is in essence a refusal to be forgiven. It's saying to God, "I don't want your love permeating through me!" And that's not true repentance. True repentance is total surrender to God. And God says, "Forgive everyone!"

So at the very least, we must desire for God to forgive everyone, because that's what God Himself desires.

Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live! (Ezekiel 33:11)

God our Savior...desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:3-4)

And when we forgive, we show ourselves to be God's children.

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:44-45)

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:31-32)

So it's clear that we should forgive, but what if we don't? I've met many people who've said that they simply cannot forgive a certain person, or even a whole category of people. Rapists. Child molesters. Hitler. Do they deserve forgiveness? No. They don't. And neither do you, and neither do I. We've all broken God's commands.

"But that's different!" Is it?

Sin is sin. All sin is punishable by death, and no sin deserves God's forgiveness.

Have you read the story of Uzzah in the Bible? You can read it in 2 Samuel chapter. Starting in verse 3, it says this:

And they carried the ark of God on a new cart and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. And Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart, with the ark of God, and Ahio went before the ark. And David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the LORD, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals. And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God. (2 Samuel 6:3-7)

Did you catch that? Uzzah was killed because he was trying to help! But it was sin to touch the ark of the covenant, because it was holy, not a common thing, and he knew it was against God's law to touch it, but when the oxen carrying it stumbled, Uzzah touched it anyway in order to stabilize it so that it would not fall to the ground. And because he touched it, God took his life right then and there.

If any sin since the beginning of time could have been excused, I think it would have been that one.

And what about this one? Leviticus 10:1-2

Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. (Leviticus 10:1-2)

Sure, they weren't worshipping the way they were told to worship, and maybe they were trying to exalt themselves or their authority in the process, but they were still worshipping before the Lord, and yet God took their lives. And check this out. It says this in Luke 13.

Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:4-5)

Do you get it? Sin is sin! All sin is punishable by death, and no sin deserves forgiveness. So don't think that just because you haven't killed anyone, that your sin is more forgivable than someone who has. All sin deserves God's wrath, which is why Jesus went to the cross and suffered the wrath of God for our sin, so that we would be forgiven of how we've sinned against God, and in the same way, that we would forgive those who sin against us.

So can we be forgiven even when we hold onto our bitterness and unforgiveness toward others?

Well, put it this way. The clear teaching of the Bible is that a Christian person should forgive everyone. And the clear teaching of the Bible is that a Christian should let go of all bitterness. And the clear teaching of the bible is that the Christian should not sin, that we should be perfect, even as our heavenly Father is perfect. But we don't live up to it, and we can't live up to it, because even when we want to do good, sin is right there with us! But there's good news! Because even while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. It was while we were in our condition of sinfulness that God forgave us. Yet not so that we would be content to remain in that condition, but so that we would be changed from the inside out.

So maybe you still hold onto bitterness. Maybe you just don't know how to forgive that person who offended you so much. They've offended you to your very core, and you can't let it go! They deserve wrath! They deserve everlasting punishment! And you can't just forgive how they've offended you without someone paying the price!

Well, if you feel that way, you're actually not far from the heart of God. Because when we sinned against God, God couldn't just let it go. Our sin deserves punishment. Wrath. And God's wrath demanded that someone pay the price. So He did. Jesus paid the price for us. We cursed Him, beat Him, and nailed Him to a cross, God's only Son. And even while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Even while we deserved wrath, God forgave us, because His heart is full of love for you.

And if you've truly trusted in Christ, God will change your heart to be like His own. Long for that. Long for God's kingdom to come not just in all the world, but into your own heart. That God's love would reign even over the very core of who you are.

And yet, that's hard. It's hard to have God's heart. I mean, He is God. He is love. And yet, when we realize just how much He's forgiven us, we do begin to want to forgive others. Even everyone.

You see, when God forgives you, He changes you. And far more than a video of a child laughing, you can't possibly be sad or hold onto a grudge when you realize just how much God's forgiven you. He can instantly change any heart, turning sorrow into joy, and mourning into laughter. But you've got to want Him.

Do you want Jesus? Not just so that He'll forgive you, but so that He'll reign in your heart? That's true repentance. It's when God gives you a new heart, a heart that resembles His own heart. And yeah, it's hard for us to forgive others as God forgives us, but don't you long for that? Don't you at least long to let go of all wrath and bitterness, as God does, so that all that's left is love?

If you at least long for that, I think the only way you can long for that is if God places that longing in you. It's the longing to see God's kingdom come and God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And if you at least long to forgive everyone, then God will help you to do it. So rest not in your power to forgive, but God's power, as you rest in His love.