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Series: Live Like You Were Dying

Part: 4 - Choosing Forgiveness

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INTRODUCTION

Right now, we are in the middle of sermon series called "Live Like You Were Dying". Which is based on the song made famous by Tim McGraw. We are down to the last two weeks of this series, today I am speaking on "choosing forgiveness" and next week at "Church in the Park" Pastor Don will be deliver the final message on "loving deeper".

If you're not familiar with the song, it's about a man who learns he has a terminal disease and doesn't have much longer to live. Because of this diagnosis he begins to look at life from a different perspective. He does some fun stuff like, skydiving, rocky mountain climbing and even rides a bull for 2.7 seconds named Fu Man Chu.

But in the midst of doing all of the fun stuff he realizes the priorities of his relationships need to be adjusted. He says that he now "loves deeper", "speaks sweeter", and he gives "forgiveness he'd been denying". In last line of the chorus, he is telling his son "someday I hope you get the chance to live like you were dyin'". Even though his is dying and in the final days of his life he begins to truly understand that "life is a gift" and lives it accordingly.

If we are honest with ourselves, forgiveness is tough prospect for most of us. When someone wounds us our first reaction is to become upset and angry, rarely do we react with the notion of forgiveness.

We have all been wronged. It starts when we are little children and continues throughout our life. They wounds can be minor and they can be extremely deep wounds. It can come from anyone... a co-worker, a business partner, a friend, a brother, a sister, a parent, a spouse, it can come from anyone through any kind of relationship.

In most cases, the difference between a restored relationship and a broken relationship lies in our ability to seek forgiveness of those we have wronged and to forgive those who have wronged us.

Forgiveness is almost always the last thing to stand in the way of a restored relationship.

WHAT FORGIVENESS IS AND IS NOT?

What forgiveness is.. What does it mean to forgive someone? Dictionary.com defines "forgive" as...

- to grant pardon for or remission of (an offense, debt, etc.); absolve.
- to give up all claim on account of; remit (a debt, obligation, etc.).
- to grant pardon to (a person).
- to cease to feel resentment against: *to forgive one's enemies*.

We too have the chance to be granted pardon from God for all of our sins. Christ sacrificed himself and grants us forgiveness to all those who believe in him.

Romans 5:8 "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Because of this act of love, we are forgiven. When it comes to forgiving.... Jesus set the standard. He gives us the opportunity to start new in the eyes of God.

2 Corinthians 5:17

¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

Forgiveness is a clean slate regardless of what was there before.

What forgiveness is not...

Some of us really struggle with forgiveness. We think that forgiveness does not take the harm the sin caused seriously. But forgiveness does take it very seriously.

Forgiveness does not excuse sin, it does not say "O that's alright, your sin really wasn't a bother!" In fact, it does just the opposite. Forgiveness calls the sin out into the open... and in many ways it holds the sinner accountable for their actions. Forgiveness says, "you hurt me, and what you did was wrong, but I will not hold it against you, I will not try to get back at you and I will not hate you for it."

Forgiveness does not forget what happened. It simply allows us to "let go" and hand over the transgression to God. This is probably the hardest part. Because when someone wounds us we want to see them suffer the consequences of their actions. We want them to pay for what they did.

But can you truly say to God... "Look, I don't think you can handle this one. I will make them suffer the consequences myself. You don't understand what they did to me. You don't understand the pain I am going through. I need to handle this one on my own. "

Romans 12:19 states...

¹⁹Do 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.

If God is powerful enough to create all of creation, I promise he is big enough to handle any problem you send his way. You just need to put your trust in Him.

Proverbs 3:5

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;

THE BURDEN OF NOT FORGIVING

There is a really great book called “The Love Dare”. The book was written for married couples who need to repair or who want to strengthen their marriage. It gives one of the best illustration I have ever read when we are not willing to forgive. It reads as follows...

Imagine you find yourself in a prison-like setting. As you look around, you see a number of cells visible from where you are standing. You see people from your past incarcerated there – people who have wounded you as a child. You see people you once called friends but who wronged you at some point in life. You might see one or both of your parents there, perhaps a brother or sister or some other family member. Even your spouse is locked nearby, trapped with all the others in this jail of your own making.

This prison, you see, is a room in your own heart. This dark, drafty, depression chamber that exists inside you every day. But not far away, Jesus is standing there, extending to you a key that will release every inmate.

No. You don't want any part of it. These people have hurt you too badly. They knew what they were doing and yet they did it anyway – even your spouse, the one you should have been able to count on most of all. So you resist and turn away. You're unwilling to stay here any longer – seeing Jesus, seeing the key in His hand, knowing what He's asking you to do. It's just too much.

But in trying to escape, you make a startling discovery. There is no way out. You're trapped inside with all the other captives. Your unwillingness to forgive, anger, and bitterness have made you a prisoner as well.... Your freedom is now dependent on your forgiveness.

This book paints a pretty clear picture of how we become trapped by our emotions when we are unwilling to forgive.

You are trapped by... Fury, Rage Anger, Bitterness, Hatred, Resentment. You become Ruthless, Merciless, Cruel, Cold hearted, Brutal, Unkind, Malicious, Spiteful, Vindictive, and Wicked. And to top it all off it causes you stress.

Ephesians 4:31-32

³¹Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³²Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

When you are unwilling to forgive you carry the burden of these emotions each and every day. Our inability to forgive affects us more than it does the person we are seeking forgiveness from. Because of our pride, sometimes we hold on so tight to these feelings of resentment and maliciousness that we don't even realize the person who we are mad at has no idea that they even offended us. As we begin to recount their transgression in our minds. It's not even affecting them. It is only hurting us.

When you are unwilling to forgive YOU ARE THE REAL PRISONER, not the person who wronged you.

John 8:32

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

Jesus Christ is the truth, know him, and you will know FREEDOM! A freedom in life that can only be experience by having a relationship with Jesus Christ.

THE BENEFITS OF FORGIVING

I want to share a story with you, told from the perspective of a nurse working the evening shift at her hospital.

"The hospital was unusually quiet that bleak January evening, quiet and still like the calm before a storm. I stood in the nurses' station on the seventh floor and glanced at the clock. It was 9 P.M.

I threw a stethoscope around my neck and headed for room 712, last room on the hall. Room 712 had a new patient. Mr. Williams. A man all alone. A man strangely silent about his family. As I entered the room, Mr. Williams looked up eagerly, but drooped his eyes when he saw it was only me, his nurse. I pressed the stethoscope over his chest and listened. Strong, slow, even beating. Just what I wanted to hear. There seemed little indication he had suffered a slight heart attack a few hours earlier.

He looked up from his starched white bed. "Nurse, would you --" He hesitated, tears filling his eyes. I touched his hand, waiting. He brushed away a tear. "Would you call my daughter? Tell her I've had a heart attack. A slight one. You see, I live alone and she is the only family I have." His respiration suddenly speeded up. "Of course I'll call her", I said, studying his face. He gripped the sheets and pulled himself forward, his face tense with urgency. "Will you call her right away -- as soon as you can?" He was breathing fast -- too fast. "I'll call her the very first thing," I said, patting his shoulder. I flipped off the light. He closed his eyes, such young blue eyes in his 50 - year -- old face.

Reluctant to leave the room, I moved through the shadowy silence to the window. The panes were cold. Below a foggy mist curled through the hospital parking lot.

"Nurse," he called, "could you get me a pencil and paper?" I dug a scrap of yellow paper and a pen from my pocket and set it on the bedside table. I walked back to the nurses' station. Mr. Williams's daughter was listed on his chart as the next of kin. I dialed her number.

Her soft voice answered. "Janie, my name is Sue Kidd, a registered nurse at the hospital. I'm calling about your father. He was admitted tonight with a slight heart attack and -- "No!" she screamed into the phone, startling me. "He's not dying is he?" "His condition is stable at the moment," I said, trying hard to sound convincing. "You must not let him die!" she said. Her voice was so utterly compelling that my hand trembled on the phone.

"He is getting the very best care." "But you don't understand," she pleaded. "My daddy and I haven't spoken since my 21st birthday, we had a fight over my boyfriend. I ran out of the house. I-I haven't been back. All these months I've wanted to go to him for forgiveness. The last thing I said to him was, 'I hate you.'"

Her voice cracked and she began to sob. I sat, listening, tears burning my eyes. A father and a daughter, so lost to each other. As Janie struggled to control her sobbing, I breathed a prayer. "Please God, let this daughter find forgiveness."

"I'm coming. Now! I'll be there in 30 minutes," Click. She had hung up. I tried to busy myself with a stack of charts on the desk. I couldn't concentrate. Room 712; I knew I had to get back to 712. I hurried down the hall nearly in a run. I opened the door. Mr. Williams lay unmoving. I reached for his pulse. There was none.

"Code 99, Room 712. Code 99. Stat." Within seconds, the alert was shooting through the corridors of the hospital. Mr. Williams had had a cardiac arrest.

With lightning speed I began breathing air into his lungs (twice). I positioned my hands over his chest and compressed. One, two, three. I tried to count. At fifteen I moved back to his mouth and breathed as deeply as I could. Where was help? Again I compressed and breathed, Compressed and breathed. He could not die!

"O God," I prayed. "His daughter is coming. Don't let it end this way." The door burst open. Doctors and nurses poured into the room pushing emergency equipment. A doctor took over the manual compression of the heart. A tube was inserted through his mouth as an airway. Nurses plunged syringes of medicine into his IV. I connected the heart monitor. Nothing. Not a

beat. My own heart pounded. "God, don't let it end like this. Not in bitterness and hatred. His daughter is coming. Let her find peace."

"Stand back," cried a doctor. I handed him the paddles for the electrical shock to the heart. He placed them on Mr. Williams's chest. Over and over we tried. But nothing. No response. Mr. Williams was dead. One by one they left, grim and silent.

How could this happen? How? I stood by his bed, stunned. How could I face his daughter? When I left the room, I saw her against a wall by the water fountain. A doctor who had been inside 712 only moments before stood at her side, talking to her, gripping her elbow. Then he moved on, leaving her slumped against the wall.

Such pathetic hurt reflected from her face. Such wounded eyes. She knew. The doctor had told her that her father was gone. I took her hand and led her into the nurses' lounge. We sat on little green stools, staring at the walls, stunned, neither saying a word.

"Janie, I'm so, so sorry," I said. It was pitifully inadequate. "I never hated him, you know. I loved him," she said. God, please help her, I thought.

She whirled her chair toward me. "I want to see him." My first thought was, Why put yourself through more pain? Seeing him will only make it worse. But I got up and wrapped my arm around her. We walked slowly down the corridor to 712. Outside the door I squeezed her hand, wishing she would change her mind about going inside. She pushed open the door. Huddled together we moved to the bed.

Janie leaned over the bed and buried her face in the sheets. I tried not to look at her at this sad, sad good-bye. I backed against the bedside table.

My hand fell upon a scrap of yellow paper. I picked it up. It read:

My dearest Janie,

I forgive you. I pray you will also forgive me.

I know that you love me. I love you too,

Daddy

The note was shaking in my hands as I thrust it toward Janie. She read it once. Then twice. Her tormented face grew radiant. Peace began to glisten in her eyes. She hugged the scrap of paper to her chest. I looked toward the sky and whispered "Thank You, God".

When someone is forgiven you will often hear them say “It felt like a weight being lifted off my shoulders”. Imagine just for a moment the sorrow and regret that must have been felt by the daughter. The enormous weight of her father’s death and her reluctance to forgive. Yet in a glimmer of moment as she read the note an enormous weight was lifted off her shoulders by the power of three simple words. “I forgive you.”

Forgiving and receiving forgiveness help you feel calm, at peace, relaxed, composed, restful, comforted, thankful, at ease, happy, undisturbed, worry-free, content, and even pleased. And to top it all off you are no longer stressed.

GOD’S PERSPECTIVE ON US FORGIVING OTHERS

Matthew 18:21-35

Jesus tell us The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

²¹Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

²²Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

²³"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. ²⁵Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

²⁶"The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' ²⁷The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

²⁸"But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

²⁹"His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'

³⁰"But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

³²"Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just

as I had on you?' ³⁴In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

When you read and understand what Jesus is teaching in this parable it's clear he knows us all too well. When we sin against someone, not only sinning against the person but we are sinning against God our Father. Then we go to him and beg for his forgiveness. And only because of his grace and love for us, are we forgiven.

Ephesians 1:7

⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

Christ paid our debt with his life. Not because we deserved it. Not because we earned it. Simply by his grace and love for us.

So what do we do even though we have been forgiven by God? We go out and withhold our forgiveness from others.

Matthew 6:14-15

¹⁴For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

¹⁵But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

God expects us to forgive others.

DON'T WAIT UNTIL IT IS TOO LATE

One of the best parts of being a minister, I get to be part of many of the milestones of someone's life... Births, birthdays, baptisms, graduations, weddings and many other significant life events. I also get to be a part of the final event of someone's life. Their death... The un-escapable conclusion of everyone in this room. Your days on this earth are numbered there is NO WAY around it.

As I have assisted and officiated memorial services, it will definitely have an effect on your perspective of life. In fact, most people at a memorial service are affected in the same way. People will begin to reflect on their own life. On many occasions, people will come speak with me about how this service has reminded them how fragile life is... and they will talk to me about how they need to re-examine their priorities in life. I notice even more if the person they are mourning passed unexpectedly.

When you think about the reality of an ETERNITY with God in Heaven, our life on this earth is minuscule. Compared to ETERNITY our TIME here on earth is like a tiny single grain of sand compared to all the sand in the ocean.

Don't wait for a life changing event to help you realign your priorities. Your time on this earth is running out. You don't know when your time will come.

Change your perspective now. Don't wait.

Jesus paid the ULTIMATE price for your forgiveness. He gave his life for you so that you could be forgiven, so that you would not have to suffer the consequences for your sin. Don't be like the servant and withhold your forgiveness.

Is there someone in your life you need to forgive?

Don't put it off.

Don't wait until they've suffered a little more.

Don't wait until they see things your way.

Don't even wait until they ask for forgiveness.

Take the initiative. Forgive them.

Let go. Put your trust in God

Are you ready to be set free?

John 8:32

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. If you want true freedom in your life? If you want freedom from the bondage of your sins? If you need forgiveness? You can do that today by accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. He will make you new, your slate will be clean, and you can begin your walk with him starting today. You don't have to wait until you are better or you get things in order. He wants to start a relationship with you right now no matter what is going on in your life.