

UNFORGIVENESS: THE GREATEST BLOCK TO HEALING

THE PURPOSE OF THIS TEACHING - We encourage deep prayerful consideration of any areas of unforgiveness, and we try to help them forgive.

1. INTRODUCTION - Last week we started talking about how we can put ourselves in a place that God can heal us from the limitations of our past; specifically healing through obedience. Lack of obedience keeps us from walking on the path to wholeness.
2. There is another reason why we may not be healed: Healing is not the primary thing that we need. Or more specifically, what we need more than healing, or prior to healing is (1) to grow up, (2) to be obedient, or (3) to forgive. The first two (Growing up and being obedient) are covered elsewhere in New Directions. This session I want to talk about Unforgiveness.
3. I believe, and so do a number of teachers--such as Leanne Payne--that most often the sin that blocks our healing is the sin of unforgiveness; we have not forgiven someone whom we believe has hurt or offended us. Unforgiveness is the sin that binds, the sin that locks us into a place where God's healing power is not free to work. We are going to talk about unforgiveness, particularly as it often applies to addictions.
4. If you still struggle with an addiction, the chances are there is some area of unforgiveness in your life. But it may be hard to discover. I suggest you ask yourself several questions to try and uncover unforgiveness:
 - a. What makes me furiously angry? The answer may reveal a past offense or offender--that seems to have nothing to do with current relationships.
 - b. Who makes me angry at the drop of a hat? You probably are harboring unforgiveness towards that person or to the class of people that person represents.
 - c. Who in your life should be important, but to whom you are totally indifferent? The opposite of love is not hate; it's indifference. If you are completely emotionally detached from a parent, you probably have not forgiven them, and your indifference is a sign of that.
 - d. Note how intertwined anger and unforgiveness are.
5. For us addicts, the person we need to forgive, is most likely:

- a. A parent
 - b. An abuser
 - c. A sibling or peer
 - d. But don't just dig back. Your unforgiveness could also be much more current. You may have to go back through layers of forgiveness, starting with those who have played a more recent role in your life. Maybe it's your spouse, an ex-lover, the people in your church, your boss. We have a real tendency to always go to childhood to seek solutions to our problems. Sometimes, the solution lies more at hand.
6. In dealing with our addictions, the things we may need to forgive for, could be:
- a. Rejection
 - b. Failure to fulfill reasonable obligations
 - c. Abuse: sexual, physical, emotional
 - d. An incident that caused extreme pain
7. A word here about not fully trusting the conscious mind; it seems that about ninety percent of what is going on inside us is below the level of consciousness. So, don't trust your rationalizations that want to say that the offense really wasn't that serious, or you really can see why the person did what they did. If an offense was committed, at any level of severity, or for any reason, there needs to be forgiveness.
8. Let's talk a little about the dynamics of forgiveness. Most of us have probably felt we have forgiven someone, or we've tried to, and then a new situation arises, or we are in that person's presence again, and--wham--the old feelings come back again. We suspect we really haven't forgiven the person after all--at least not very deeply. What's happening here?
- a. We need to recognize that we forgive at different levels. First, consciously--of the will. I choose to forgive my father. But this doesn't always do it emotionally.
 - b. Emotionally forgiveness--truly letting go--is a process; it seldom occurs in a moment with the decision to forgive.
 - c. Bridging the two is the spiritual dimension. Very often we need the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to forgive from the heart--to really set us free. More about that later.

The important thing now is to recognize how forgiveness is a process, often much more than a conscious decision.

9. God clearly commands us to forgive.

- a. Most familiar in the Lord's prayer. Then immediately after the Lord's prayer, Jesus reinforces this one part of the prayer with the words:

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Matt. 6:14-15

- b. Then in Matt. Chapter 18, when Peter asks Jesus how many times he should forgive his brother, Jesus says seventy times seven, or an unlimited number of times.

- c. Paul tells us in Eph. 4:32 that we are to forgive one another, “. . . *just as God in Christ also forgave you.*”

- d. There are a number of other places where we are told to forgive in no uncertain terms, but most of all we have God's own examples:

(1). The Incarnation itself is God's own great example of forgiving us our sins.

(2). And Jesus, from the cross, called out to His Father, “*Father forgive them for they do not know what they do.*” Luke 23:34

10. But you know God doesn't command us to do anything arbitrarily. Every commandment He gives us is for a reason. Every commandment He gives us is for our own good—either for our personal well-being, or to enable us to live in harmony with others. That unforgiveness prevents us from living in love and harmony with one another is quite obvious. Less obvious is how we need to forgive for our own well being.

Unforgiveness keeps us in bondage to the past.

- a. If we don't forgive, we still live under the power of those old offenses. What was done to us is still controlling us--and that's why we can't be healed.

(1). If my mother controlled and dominated me, and I've never forgiven her, I will probably react with hostility to any woman whom I think is trying to exert control over me.

- (2). If I feel my father never affirmed me, and that has never been resolved, I will continue to build walls around all men.
 - (3). If I was molested by an authority figure--say a pastor--I will continue to resent or fear authority figures.
 - b. Where there is unforgiveness, there is an unresolved issue, and unresolved issues continue to come to the surface, often when we least expect them to or want them to. As long as these situations continue to surface, and they will until the underlying issue is resolved, we are not healed. John and Paula Sanford call this "bitter root expectancy."
 - c. When there is unforgiveness, we remain a victim, and victims don't get well.
 - d. With unforgiveness we still live out of the old man.
 - e. Unforgiveness is a sin, and God's power can be blocked from working in us when we continue to sin.
 - f. Jesus equated healing and the forgiveness of sins. With the paralyzed man who was let down through the roof (Luke 5:18-23) Jesus, rather than saying words of healing said, "*Man, your sins are forgiven you.*" When challenged for this, He said, "*Which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or 'Rise up and walk?'*"
11. We know we should forgive. You may even have known that unforgiveness blocks healing. Why then is it so difficult to forgive--at the deep level of the heart. I think there are several reasons. This is important. We need to know what these are if we are to do anything about them. I suggest five reasons:
- a. We don't want to relinquish the role of judge. We want to be the ones to see that justice is done, and possibly the guilty are punished. We are not willing to let God take that role. See now why unforgiveness can be such a sin; we are playing God; we are usurping His role. I will hold onto this thing until you have paid a price to suit me, or until I decide that you have repented adequately. If I forgive you, I will appear to declare you innocent, and I will not do that.
 - b. Closely related to this is the fear that if I forgive, he or she will do the same thing to me again. Perhaps if I forgive, they will think I am condoning what they did, or at least, minimizing what they did. This is a common factor where there is a power struggle, as between husband and wife, parents and a child, or between siblings. I will not relinquish the weapon I have to hold over your head.

- c. Being a victim feels good, or perhaps, it is the only way I know how to live; the only identity I have, and I am afraid to get rid of it. Victims can relinquish responsibility. Victims can engage in that comforting emotional masturbation we call self-pity. If I forgive, I can't be a victim anymore. I'm afraid we see this in a lot of people in "Adult Children of..." groups.
- d. Fourth, and somewhat related to the preceding one, holding on to past hurts can give us a justification for our current sinfulness; whether it is ongoing sin, or an unwillingness to get on with our lives.
- e. Fifth--and this could be a whole family of reasons why we don't truly forgive--we over-spiritualize or over-psychologize our situation:
 - I can understand why he did what he did.
 - It really wasn't that bad.
 - I really brought that onto myself.
 - He wasn't a Christian so he didn't know any better.
 - The problem was not what she did, it was my response to it.

We are not called to quantify or judge the severity of an offense. We are not called to determine why the person offended, and whether or not it was therefore excusable. We are called to forgive. Forgiveness is very simple and straightforward. If we believe we were offended against, we are called to forgive (period).

If I excuse what you did, and therefore don't forgive you, I am still living under the power of what you did to me. My excusing it doesn't take that power away.

- 2. With all this, how then do we forgive? Here's some simple truths that I think will help you.
 - a. We need to be real clear as to what is involved in forgiveness; there is an offense, there is an offender, there is the one who was offended against, and there is God.
 - (1). The only thing I can forgive you for is the offense that you committed against me. I can't forgive you for what you did to others. I can't forgive you for the kind of person you were. We need to localize, and be as specific as possible when forgiving.
 - (2). The act of forgiveness is a transaction between me and God much more than it is between me and the offender. In fact the offender can be dead or otherwise unavailable, or unwilling to acknowledge the offense. In many situations, I suspect the person being forgiven may never need to hear that they are forgiven (although

they may need to know of the offense for other reasons). Jesus forgave those who were crucifying Him, not by saying, "I forgive you", but by speaking to the Father to forgive them. The transaction was between Jesus and the Father.

- b. Here's how we forgive. In forgiving we declare before God:
- I relinquish any right to judge so-and-so for doing the following:
 - I write off any debt that he owes me because of what happened in the past.
 - I choose to start to deal with him without regard to past offenses.
 - Father, I ask you to break the power that these past offenses have had over me.
 - By your Spirit, enable me to forgive from the heart.
13. God does want to heal you. Your job is to seek Him for that healing and to remove any obstacle to healing that are within your power to remove. Forgiveness begins as an act of the will that is within your power to choose. Through a process of the Holy Spirit working through you, you can forgive from the heart. When you do, you are set free from continuing to live under the power of what was done to you, and your healing can proceed.

Scripture Memory Verse:

Luke 6:37 (NASB) "And do not judge and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and

Assignment for the Week:

1. If there is one person in your life who you believe may have played a significant part in your developing an addiction (an abuser, a parent, etc.), whether you think you have forgiven them or not, write them a letter describing how you believe they harmed you.

It is not intended that you mail the letter, but rather, that you get in touch with your feelings about this person. Be ready to share this with your group during the week.

2. Read the article found in your Supplemental Material section, "How Shall We Forgive?"