

A Call to Forgive

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[0 : 00] In a very brief while we are going to talk on the topic of forgiveness.! Before we begin to say a word of prayer. Father, we thank you for this privilege of being able to come before you to feast at your table.

Lord, we acknowledge our inadequacy and we ask, O Lord, that you would do what only you can do. Father, cause your word to come alive. Cause us to say only what you would have us to say and to hear only that which you will have us to hear.

Lord, you are able to do a transforming work in our hearts and that is what we ask today. Have mercy on us. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Alright. Sometimes we do and say the most painful things to one another. Sometimes intentionally and sometimes unintentionally. Yes, we have all inflicted pain on someone we love.

[1 : 33] We've all done that. We're all guilty of it. And if you haven't done so yet, live long enough and I'm sure that you will. We have inflicted pain on someone we love.

And we have also been hurt by someone we love. The question before us today is, how should we as believers respond?

How should we respond when we are hurt? Should we hold a grudge and look for opportunities to strike back?

Or should we forgive? What does it really mean to forgive? Those are but a few questions we hope to answer in today's message.

Which I've titled, A Call to Forgive. The primary passage that we will use today is Matthew 18, verses 21 and 22.

[2 : 51] Of course, you will be aware that the Bible says a great deal about this topic of forgiveness. And indeed, we can spend the remainder of the afternoon just reading about passages on forgiveness.

Why is that? Why is it that the Bible devotes so much time about on this topic of forgiveness? Why is there such significance placed on the topic of forgiveness in Scripture?

As we consider this subject matter today, we hope to answer that question as well. There are two broad categories, if you will, if you are taking notes, that we are going to separate the message into. There are two broad categories, and they are, Why forgive? That's the first category. Why should we forgive? Why should we as believers forgive?

And the second is the attributes of biblical forgiveness. The attributes of biblical forgiveness.

[4 : 10] What does biblical forgiveness look like? So firstly, why forgive? And then secondly, the attributes of biblical forgiveness.

But before we consider those specific areas, let us take a moment to read Matthew 18, 21 and 22. It reads, Then Peter came up and said to him, Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him?

As many as seven times? Jesus said to him, I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.

What an interesting account we find in Scripture. Peter approaches our Lord Jesus Christ. And Peter, no doubt, thinking that seven was a very comfortable number.

[5 : 24] Indeed, I think the tradition at the time was to forgive one's brother about three times. And Peter thought he would exceed that significantly, double it plus.

And so Peter goes to Jesus, and Peter says, Lord, how often should we forgive our brother who sins against us? Seven times. And the Lord says, no, Peter, seventy times seven.

Now, in case you might have done the math already, the Lord was not suggesting to Peter that he ought to forgive his brothers seventy times seven, that is, four hundred and ninety times.

Instead, the Lord was saying to Peter that you ought to forgive your brother as often as is necessary. As often as is necessary.

And then after this question and response by the Lord, Jesus, Jesus went in, and he went on further, and he spoke a parable.

[6 : 34] Spoke a parable that many of us are familiar with. It is a parable that we call the parable of the unforgiving servant. And Jesus shared this parable with his disciples, and by extension with us.

And in this parable, Jesus speaks about a king, a king who had many servants. And one day, this king decided that he would take account, that he would check his books, his accounting records, if you will.

And when he did so, he discovered that there was a servant who owed him a considerable amount of money. Indeed, the text suggests that this servant owed him billions of dollars in today's currency.

Billions of dollars. And so he went to this servant, and he said, pay up. And the servant said, I don't have it. And the king said to him, the king said, and it was well within his right, the king said, well, we are going to put you in prison, make you our, we are going to put you in prison, so that until this debt is paid in full.

But the servant pleaded with the king, and the servant said, please forgive me. please allow me to pay this debt that quite frankly he could never pay.

[8 : 07] And the king had compassion, the king had mercy on him, and forgave this man, this servant, all of his debt. So not only did he not imprison him, but he forgave him.

He said to this man, you are no longer under obligation to pay me. this incredible debt that you have built up. So the servant, no doubt happy, went on his way.

And as he was on his way, he encountered someone who owed him a couple dollars. He encountered someone who owed him about twelve thousand dollars compared to the six billion that he owed the king.

And he asked the man, he said, may I have my money? And this man said to him, I'm sorry, I don't have it. And the servant, rather than extending mercy to this man who did not have the couple dollars that was owed to him, he beat him and he had him thrown in prison.

And then the other servants observed this, they went to the king and they said to him, they said, look at what this man to whom you extended such mercy, look at what he has done to this other servant who owed him very little.

[9 : 41] And the king was angry. And the king went to him and he said to him, the message to him was, I had extended to you such mercy, I forgave you so much.

Look at how you treated this man who owed you so little. And the king decided to reverse his decision and he threw the man who owed him all that money in prison.

That's what he did and that was the parable that Jesus gave following Peter's question to him. But why ought we forgive?

Why should you and I forgive? There are number of reasons why you and I should forgive one another and others.

The first reason I believe we should forgive is because we are commanded to forgive. That's reason number one.

[10 : 58] We are commanded to forgive. Jesus clearly commands his disciples us to forgive. Look at the verses we read earlier in Matthew.

Jesus said to him I do not say to you seven times but seventy times seven. Jesus commands us to forgive.

forgive. And the importance of following the Lord's command is perhaps not stated more clearly and significantly than in Matthew seven and twenty-one when Jesus said these words not everyone who says Lord Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven but the one who does the will of the father.

So we have a command to forgive. And Jesus tells us of the importance of following his command. The words of Jesus Christ and not just mere words but they are words that you and I are to live by if we are his disciples. Jesus reminds us in Matthew seven twenty-one that we should not be those who would simply utter words but rather our words should be accompanied by action.

[12 : 30] Our words should be accompanied by obedience to what he commands. Moreover we read in Ephesians four thirty two the apostle Paul says to us to the church at Ephesus and by extension to us be kind to one another tender hearted forgiving one another as God in Christ Jesus

forgave you.

And we find a similar instruction to the church in Colossians three twelve and thirteen when Paul writes put on them as God's chosen ones holy and beloved compassionate hearts kindness humility meekness and patience bearing with one another and if one has a complaint against another forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you so you also must forgive forgive the command then in scripture for us is very clear the command is for us to forgive and so if you and I are soldiers in the army of the Lord if you and I are his disciples we have an obligation to forgive but why else must we or ought we forgive second reason we should forgive is because of the value we place on relationships particularly relationships in the church particularly the relationships among brothers and sisters why should we forgive because of the value we place on relationships the fact is that in a fallen world fallen humans imperfect humans we hurt each other from time to time that's a fact of life that's not good change but because of the value we place on relationships especially in the church community especially among family we should be quick to demonstrate love which is a byproduct of forgiveness indeed forgiveness is a byproduct of love so we forgive because we value relationships

I forgive you of what you have done to me because of the significance I place on my relationship with you why else might we or ought we to forgive we ought to forgive because unforgiveness has both a psychological and physiological effect on the unforgiving person unforgiveness has both a psychological and physiological effect on the unforgiving person the psychological effects are clear an obsession to exact revenge somebody hurts you and you keep that without forgiving that person there is an obsession to hurt that person an obsession to exact revenge plotting scheming and simply wasting time on a person when such concentration would yield nothing other than pain i think it's clear to us how just sitting there and thinking about the hurt that someone has caused you just thinking about how you might exact revenge or thinking about how you wish something negative could happen to somebody perhaps not as a direct result of what you do but as a result of something else i think we all know how those things just can waste time can waste time so negative but there is also the physiological real physiological effect that we would do well to consider in his book loving the way Jesus loves phil reichen writes about a biochemical research conducted by doctors daniel amen marion diamond and carolyn leaf this is what he writes based on biochemical research these neuroscientists have conducted the toxic chemicals have concluded have documented rather the toxic chemical flood that our bodies release into our brains whenever ever we think malicious thoughts that micrographs show how the chemicals that are released burn tunnels into the branches of our nerve cells dr.

leaf calls these burnt out neurons emotional black holes they're empty spaces in the brain produced by the angry resentments of a bitter soul and then they go on to write yet amazingly it is possible for the brain to grow nerve fibers that fill in these black holes new memories can replace old and one of the virtues dr.

leaf identifies as bringing the most healing is forgiveness so there's a real impact that you and I suffer when we have malicious thoughts when we are unforgiving towards one another so why else are we to forgive the next reason is because there is a high price apart from what we've said there is a high price for unforgiveness apart from what we've talked about physiologically apart from the psychological effect there is an even higher price for unforgiveness scripture teaches us that if we do not forgive we will not be forgiven consider the parable that we just talked about and Peter asks the question consider what

[19 : 54] Jesus did to this man this man who had been forgiven so much and he refused to forgive and can I tell you who we are you and I are like the man who was forgiven much that's who you and I are in the parable we are we stand as the man to whom the king forgave more than he was able to pay and the reason why is when we sin you and I when we sin we sin before a holy God we sin before a holy God you see it's one thing to offend a holy God it's another thing to offend someone who is just like you that's a totally different matter altogether scripture teaches us that if we do not forgive we will not be forgiven consider the prayer that we pray regularly forgive us as we forgive those who sin against us listen further to what

Matthew 6 14 and 15 says for if you forgive others their trespasses your heavenly father will also forgive you but if you do not forgive others their trespasses neither will your father forgive your trespasses forgiveness that's very clear all it's saying is forgive and you will be forgiven don't forgive and you won't be forgiven that's very clear that's what stands before us today perhaps we think of

unforgiveness as a passive emotion perhaps we think that unforgiveness is harmless oh I can just harbor this in my head in my mind but often times unforgiveness is accompanied by wishing evil to befall someone or perhaps wanting to do evil directly and moreover unforgiveness could fester and manifest in ways that were never even considered initially so for our own good you see because unforgiveness can take on a life on its own life on its own something that you didn't consider that moment over time it could build up and cause something that really when you look back at it you say how did

I get to this point so you and I we want to deal with unforgiveness immediately deal with their unforgiveness immediately but what does unforgiveness really look like what are the attributes of biblical forgiveness what does it look like when we speak of the attributes that's what we're asking what does biblical forgiveness look like what are the marks of biblical forgiveness I want to say before we talk about what it looks like I want to suggest to you what it's not what biblical forgiveness is not I believe that it's very important that we make a distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation reconciliation I want you to hear me now

I believe it's important for us to make a distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation reconciliation well it is quite possible that you forgive someone and not reconcile with them but it's not possible to reconcile and not forgive reconciliation presupposes forgiveness but sometimes you can't forgive someone without reconciling with them and sometimes that's the right thing to do sometimes forgiveness so for example if somebody does something to you and that person is not willing to be reconciled to you you can forgive them immediately express your forgiveness demonstrate your forgiveness but if that person doesn't want to be reconciled there's nothing you can do and sometimes quite frankly sometimes because it is clear that that individual has not changed his or her behavior it might be necessary not to be reconciled but to forgive that person nevertheless and also there are times when punishment must be exacted for an individual who harms one or who commits an act against society but while the punishment might be exacted doesn't mean that that person is not forgiven because there are laws there are consequences for one's actions so we ought not confuse the two and also it's very important that we seek to avoid certain experiences so if you know that someone has a propensity to do something though you have forgiven that person though you might have forgiven that person there's nothing wrong with seeking to avoid getting that having that encounter again nothing wrong with that so please I don't want to be misunderstood when we talk about the subject of biblical forgiveness biblical forgiveness requires us to be wise does not demand of us some blind allegiance forgiveness but what are the attributes of biblical forgiveness the first attribute that I want to talk about has to do with frequency we talked about this already we read about it already in the in Matthew in the scripture in Matthew 18 21 and 22 how often should we forgive what does biblical forgiveness look like how often should we forgive Jesus says to Peter in an ongoing way so that's one attribute that's very important so the question is if someone hurts you we all hurt one another from time to time how often should you forgive should forgive the bible the bible tells us in an ongoing way in an ongoing way in an ongoing way that is the command that we have when we talk about the attribute of biblical forgiveness we ought to also consider the effects of biblical forgiveness sometimes biblical forgiveness is accompanied by a restoration a restoration to a prior status as in relationship so for example friendship or marriage sometimes forgiveness results in the restoration of a prior status as in a relationship or friendship or marriage but sometimes it's a removal of debt or sometimes the removal of a burden or responsibility but the point that is being made is that biblical there has to be an effect of biblical forgiveness biblical forgiveness requires some result something must be accompanied by biblical forgiveness and then there is the cost of biblical forgiveness biblical forgiveness has a cost there is a price that we pay when we forgive as the bible requires us to forgive let's share with you some of the costs the first is there is the cost that is associated with our natural desire for revenge you and

[29 : 57] I when you and I are hurt there is a natural desire for you and I to hurt the person who hurt us to seek revenge in one way or the other and you know that that is true based on the experiences that you've had how you long for revenge to put that person to put him or her in their place to do to them what they have done to you in fact to do more to them than they did to you but we are called to do things differently there is a price to pay there is a cost associated that is a burden to us that is not easy that's not easy to do there is a cost cost to cease from anger to cease the bitterness that is accompanied by the hurt that we feel and also to exercise humility that's all we're doing when you and I when you and I live out biblical forgiveness forgiveness you and I are

exercising humility humility is significant attribute of biblical forgiveness because you and I must bow our heads and say

I would rather please the Lord I'd rather do what the Lord says than what I feel I'd rather subordinate my own feelings to the command that I've received from the Lord I know my place I know that I'm an imperfect person I know what I have done I know the people that I have hurt myself I know the debt I owe I know the debt I owe so you and I we when we forgive we bow our heads in humility knowing our places recognizing who we are knowing that we have hurt others what's the source what does biblical forgiveness look like well when we think about what biblical forgiveness looks like we can't run away from the source of biblical forgiveness perhaps something that biblical forgiveness is about gritting one's teeth and saying

I forgive perhaps that's something that biblical forgiveness is simply about gritting one's teeth and saying I forgive it's true that you and I must open our hearts to being forgiving but there are at least two related things that must undergird our forgiveness if it will be genuine and lasting first our motivation to forgive should be the absolutely undeserved forgiveness those of us who are called believers the unreserved unforgiveness that we received the moment we were saved as well as on an ongoing way let me say that again what is the source of your forgiveness what is the source of it where is it coming from when we talk about biblical forgiveness we must consider the source of our forgiveness forgiveness a biblical forgiveness must be undergirded by our consideration of the fact that you and I have ourselves received forgiveness from the moment we were saved and on an ongoing way when we consider the price that was paid for our forgiveness when we consider the price that was paid for our forgiveness and when we consider the one who paid that price and when we consider that the one against whom we sin and who forgives us is perfectly holy and does everything for our good we should be motivated to forgive you see it is sometimes true that when we are wronged we contribute ever so slightly sometimes when we are wrong you know if you are to be honest none of us is perfect so very often when we are wrong we contribute ever so slightly and sometimes even significantly to those events because we are human but

God who is infinitely holy who is incapable of doing wrong doesn't contribute to our sin yet he forgives us so our source of the source of our forgiveness should be an acknowledgement of and an understanding of what Jesus Christ did for us on Calvary how he paid a price the price of his life how he gave his life for us and you and I stand forgiven today you and I stand forgiven because of what he did not only should our unforgiveness be undergirded by our acceptance of our own unforgiveness by our father but we should rely on the enabling work and the enabling power of the holy spirit to help us to forgive so our point is that forgiving someone is not merely about making a decision it's not merely about gritting one's teeth it's about acknowledging the work that God did through Jesus Christ for our forgiveness it's about asking the holy spirit to help us to forgive because we know that we don't we lack the power we lack the ability ultimately to do it on our own you know it's true there have been times when the urge to strike back to strike out against someone who has wronged you has been so strong so strong I know for me that's true indeed I could tell you about several events just this week so strong that the only thing that held you back was prayers and I must say I really I had some situations this week I was in a particular meeting with a client and a bank and I thanked the

[38 : 16] Lord that I made a decision not based on how I felt before going into that meeting I made a decision I can tell you not based on how I felt but somehow deep down inside I felt it was the right thing to do to be humble in that meeting because if I hadn't had that that would have been a different meeting altogether altogether and I must confess Going into that meeting I didn't ask the Lord to help me but it was a decision that I made Lord you know I want to exact punishment on this person for what she is attempting to do but the point that I want us to appreciate and to accept is that if you and I are to live out biblical forgiveness then you and

I need the help of the Holy Spirit we need to ask the Lord to help us constantly Lord help help me to walk through this Lord help me to forgive help me to forgive as you have forgiven me Lord it is impossible for me to do this thing I can't do it indeed I don't want to do it I don't want to forgive I don't want to forgive I don't want to forgive him for what he has done I don't want to forgive her for what she has done I don't want to forgive them for what they have put me through I want them to hurt but Lord your word commands me differently I see in your word that I ought to behave differently so Lord help me I can't help myself in and of ourselves we cannot always forgive and sometimes we fool ourselves into thinking that we can't forgive then hours later days later months

later years later we realize that the thing that we thought we had forgiven it's still there it's still there there is a reminder of that event it hasn't gone completely just for a moment there is an event that happens and it comes back like a flood it comes back like a flood you know exactly what I mean it comes back like a flood and that's because you can't do it by yourself you need the Lord's help you need the Lord's help what else does biblical forgiveness look like what does it look like what is the attribute of biblical forgiveness biblical forgiveness comes from the heart comes from the heart look at what Jesus says in concluding the parable of the wicked servant Jesus says in Matthew 18 35 so also my heavenly father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart biblical forgiveness doesn't come from the head though it is wise to forgive it makes sense to forgive because we've seen already that there is a psychological and a physiological impact of unforgiveness so there you are sitting down wallowing all of this unforgiveness

Meanwhile the person who has done this wrong to you has gone about their business and you are just sitting there you are just sitting there woe is me come see about me so yes it makes sense yes it makes sense when you think about it it makes sense and yeah you can you can have this head thing going on that yeah I'm going to forgive them but Jesus says it's more than that it's more there is more to it than that it unforgiveness you must release them from your forgiveness is not merely about words and for that matter it's not merely about actions biblical forgiveness is more than the words you say I forgive you it's more than the actions that you do you know you can easily pretend to forgive someone you and I have done that before too you know exactly what

I mean we have pretended to forgive when in fact we have not forgiven Jesus says that genuine biblical forgiveness comes from the heart you do not forgive your brother from your heart it's not biblical forgiveness brothers and sisters often times sin against us and it is so serious we are so deprived that only God can change our hearts only God can change our hearts that's why we got to rely on him and that's why we got to come back to him that's why this is a spiritual thing that's why it's not just simply about making a decision that's why you have to invite the

[44 : 32] Lord's help you and I are dealing with things some of us are dealing with some deep deep issues of unforgiveness that only the Lord can help with only the Lord can heal only he can address as we conclude today I must confess that I really can't say why I chose to preach on this topic today most times when I have the privilege to share I get a sense of the need to address a specific topic and I can't say that that was true this time I can't say that I got that sense this time when I decided to preach on the topic of a call to forgive however

I believe and indeed I know that the providential hand of the Lord is at work is at work even now and even in my life over the last few days I saw several evidences of that as I prepared this message of how there was unforgiveness in my own heart as I was dealing with several matters I would encourage all of us to search our hearts to see if there exists evidences of unforgiveness perhaps there is a built in behavior that you have the genesis of which is unforgiveness maybe there is some behavior that you have and you wonder why why do

I behave this way maybe you look at it closely and maybe the source of it is unforgiveness but you chalk it up to something else perhaps you've been carrying the weight of a wrong that was done against you for which the culprit has not even asked for your forgiveness perhaps you've been carrying that perhaps there are little things that need to be dealt with perhaps there are just little matters that just need to be dealt with but whatever it might be I wish to suggest that this is as good a time as Eddie to forgive those who hurt you and to move on I believe the words of the psalmist are appropriate here when he said search me oh lord and know my heart try me and know my thoughts and see if there be any previous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting!

I believe all of us should consider whether there is unforgiveness in our hearts and ask the lord to give us the power to overcome unforgiveness let us pray