

Women's Retreat: "Forgiveness" Session 3

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Preacher: Lorna Ashworth

[0 : 00] Okay, let's pray. Lord, help us just to still our hearts before you.

Help us to be humble. And to be focused on you. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Yes, indeed. Have I turned the what? The recording on. I have done. Yes, yes. I am. I'm hot on this. I'm hot on this. Sorry you missed it, Isabel. I can reenact the whole thing.

No, okay. So I hope your discussion groups this morning, I hope that was helpful.

So as we sat in our discussion group, which was wonderful, I just went, oh, you've just blown the whole of my third talk, thanks. So what I mean by that is, it was so helpful to be aware of the fact that in touching on this subject, there is so much to say, so much that I'm not able to say, that we're not going to say, and you guys have such a wonderful wealth of experience of living and walking all of this.

[1 : 21] So just because I'm the one up here, unpacking different aspects, I look out to all of you guys and go, wow. Just the wisdom, the experience, the love of the Lord, everything that you have learned.

There is so much that we could be talking all the time, all this weekend. So we're just touching, we're just really touching the surface of forgiveness.

And as I begin this session, this is not going to be a long session, although it probably should be, bearing in mind that we're looking at the pursuit of forgiveness. But I'm going to start with a story about myself.

And in telling the story, when I get to the end, it's not because I'm telling the story because, oh, yay, look how good I am, or how noble and humble I am. I'm telling you the story because I'm an idiot. And, you know, we all make really dumb mistakes, and so I'm kind of worried that I am recording this, but here goes anyway. I went to England in December of 1995.

[2 : 24] I had been there prior to that. Mark and I had some things to sort out, and I had to go to Wimbledon in July. And, yeah, just eat.

Just have pins and lemonade. Anyway, it was a lovely time. But I went back in December on a six-month visitor's visa, December 1995, because Mark and I had to sort stuff out, how are we going to move forward.

And so being on a visitor's visa means that you're not allowed to work. You have to behave yourself and have to have the means to support yourself and all that kind of stuff. And I didn't, but I went anyway.

And I thought, well, you know, I have to be able to sustain myself for the six months. We've got life to sort out. I thought, I know what I'll do. I'm going to march myself down to the Canadian High Commission in Grosvenor Square in London.

And I'm going to chat to someone just to kind of get some advice. You know, it's not like we could just zoom around on the web and work it all out. So I thought, I'll do that. I got as far as reception, and I met a woman.

[3 : 29] I'm not going to tell you her name, but she was from Quebec. And so I explained to her what I was there for, to talk to someone. And she's like, go no further. You're just who I'm looking for.

If you can hang on to lunch, we'll go for lunch, and I'll tell you all about it. That's fine. I waited an hour. We went out for lunch. And she's like, I need no pair. Just, you know. Lovey, I'm there.

Like, I'm not good with kids. Don't worry. I'll keep them alive. So I did. So you know what? I moved in with this person. And just, it was just quite next to Westminster Abbey.

And a two-bedroom apartment. Me, her, and her 10-month-old. And the baby's father lived in Eaton Square in a substantial apartment, earning ridiculous money.

But we were happy in this little two-bedroom thing. Anyway, so she just, day one, here's baby. Here are keys. I'm going to pay you 250 pounds every week. And bye, I'm going to work.

[4 : 38] Oh, okay. So for the next six months, I supported Mark while he was doing his PGCE, which is his teacher training. Done his degree in geography. And he was now converting that into a teaching certificate.

So yeah, every Wednesday, Mark would come up to London to see me. And we'd go to the West End. So we were doing a musical a week. And it was so much fun. But you realize the entire time I was working illegally.

It's so fun. Now, that time was up. Mark and I got engaged. And I had to go back to Canada.

Because to get married, you know, there's a paperwork. Then I mean, I mean, I don't know.

So I went back, came back to Canada. Filled out all the forms. All the, to get a marriage visa, thingy-majiggy, whatever it was. Then went to Kelowna.

And then started working. And I was out with my girlfriend, Karen, when I was at, it was a special service one night at the church. And it was a beautiful night of Psalm worship.

[5 : 37] It was just exceptional. And after we were finished, we went to Starbucks, not Steel Bucks. And we got a hot chocolate. We sat in the car park. And we were chatting.

And I said, Karen, I just felt so cold tonight. I just, like, I couldn't engage. It was like there was a big brick wall. And in an instant, she turned to me. She said, what have you done?

But the moment she said that, boom. I just, you lied. I heard, you lied. Because to fill out the immigration forms and all the paperwork, I had to lie.

I lied like I had to lie here. I had to lie back to cover that line to get there. Ooh. And I knew exactly.

And I was just wet. Like, I was just like, oh, such a numpty. Like, why did I do that?

And then it's like, well, that's not good. So we got back home. It was late. She went to bed. And I sat in the study. I typed a fax to the British High Commission.

[6 : 42] And I just, dear British High Commission, I lied on your forms. I said this. I was on a visitor's visa. I worked. I was an au pair.

I didn't tell them who and where. But I said, this is what I've done. My application was for a marriage visa. Just so you know, like, the relationship is authentic.

It's genuine. But I don't want to begin a married life on a lie. Will you please forgive me? And I sent the fax. Kind of going, you know what? I could be banned from the UK for, like, ever or a couple of years.

Or, yeah, like the wedding called off. So this was, we got married in December of 96. So this was, like, I don't even know, September or something.

Well, I can't remember. But anyway. Mark calls up the next day. Hi, how you doing? We lied. You know, I've sent this fax in.

[7 : 43] And he never said a word. So I'm like, yeah, well, we may not be getting married. But just so you know, the British High Commission, now no. You know, he never said a word. He's like, nothing to say.

I'm going to hang up. Like, no conversation. Bye. Bye. Bye. The Lord was doing something with him. But he never actually told me. Because, you know, he doesn't have the gift of the gab like I do. But apparently he was under conviction as well. Because we, you know, made a decision for me to work illegally. And it's like, yeah, well. You know, because you justify these things, of course. Because we're God.

Yeah. So then it went silent. And I worked at Costco. I just at Costco at Kelowna. I was working, you know, finishing, blah, blah, buying the wedding dress.

That's another story. Got the tickets. Time to travel to England to get ready for the wedding. I had no passport. I had nothing. It was all with the High Commission in Ottawa.

[8 : 41] Went back to Saskatchewan. Nothing. I had no passport. Time's coming. I've got to fly. And it was like a week.

A week before I was due to fly. Phone rings. My mum answers it. Lauren, I get upstairs. I'm going to call for you. Hello. Hi, this is, I don't even know who it is.

From the British High Commission. We've received a fax. Hey, this is it. Doomsday. Okay, so here we go. And she said, is there anything else you wanted to say?

Yes. I was dealing drunk. No, there's nothing else I have to say. No, I said no. That's everything.

And then she said this to me. She said, well, we just want you to know that your passport's on the

way.

Back to you. She said, you have your visa. And she said, we want to wish you every blessing. Okay, bye. My passport came in the next 48 hours.

[9 : 49] I was on an airplane. Got to London. And we got married weeks later. You then have to go through a process.

You have to go back to immigration in Croydon. To then get your permanent leave to remain. After your, I think it was two years. I can't remember. It's a long time ago. So I dutifully got on the train. Got to Croydon. Queued up. Did my thing. Got there. Handed my passport in to the guy. He looked at me. He's like, why are you here? Well, because, like, the next part. He said, no, they gave that to you in Ottawa.

Two years ago. So not only did they pardon me, they gave me permanent leave to remain, which I shouldn't have even have had until the two years after, and that I had to go back to get, if they liked me.

They did it all then and there, based on my fax confession. I don't know. Someone once said to me from my church in Eastbourne. He said to me, his name is Peter Moore, and he passed away a month ago.

[10 : 55] But Peter said to me, he said, don't you ever wonder what was going on in that office when they received your fax? No. I don't want to know.

No, but isn't that, no, I'm not, I'm just, I'm telling you that, not because I did anything noble, but because I did something so stupid. When we talk about forgiveness and we expect to be forgiven, we have to be prepared to humble ourselves when we have messed up.

And sometimes it's really painful and sometimes even the consequences can be high. In my case, I was just blessed upon blessed upon blessed. I did not want to start married life on a lie.

So I didn't, and the British High Commission said, okay. So I'm wondering, over the years, as my passport gets renewed, as names get added, I wonder if there's this big flag, this is the woman who lied, and I'll, I've got three children with dual nationality, and then there's, you know, I have no idea. Anyway, being a recipient of the overwhelming gift of Christ's forgiveness should be enough to inform and drive my motivation to love my enemy, to forgive, and to be one who also seeks forgiveness.

[12 : 17] To take equivalent steps to be a seeker of forgiveness. When I have hurt, when I have wronged, when I have been the offender. We must understand that just as we long for justice, others do as well.

And will we give them that when it's within our power? For me, it's understanding that pride and an anemic grasp of Christ's gift to me will prevent this from happening.

If I do not walk in humility, in a spirit of forgiveness myself, it's going to become easy to justify my behavior when I have been the offender.

They deserved it. What else did they expect? Or you put me in an impossible situation, therefore, and so on. And then sometimes we aren't even aware that we've hurt people.

Forgiveness matters to people because we bear the image of God. We are his children. And I'll explain that in a minute.

[13 : 36] But when we have been offended against, or when we have been the offender, there's going to be an element of tension until there is resolve. Or until we find the rest in the care of the great high priest.

So when I say forgiveness matters because we're created in the image of God, I want to look at two, briefly, two family characteristics that we get from our Heavenly Father.

So his characteristics, his character, his nature are perfect. We magnify those things just imperfectly. But they're still there. So first of all, God is relational in himself.

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. And therefore, when he created us, we are relational beings. We are designed for relationship.

He didn't have to create us. He did. And he created us to be in relationship with himself. So now we live out our life here. And we love community.

[14 : 46] And talking and doing puzzles together. And that's what we do. We are designed to be in relationship. And isolation, as people have discovered, especially during COVID, is not healthy.

Even if you are an introvert. So think about it. Sports teams. Workplace. Workplace. Family.

Church family. Family. We have a growing sense of camaraderie when we're together. It's like an unspoken contract which says, I've got your back. We're on the same basketball team. Or, well, we go to St. John's. It's kind of like a sense of, yeah, I got you. You're in my clan. My family. That's how we feel. And when this sense of relationship is betrayed or we're hurt in any way, we discover that sin is painful.

We discover we're relational. When relationships get broken, we hurt. But, God has created us to be relational.

[15:56] Second, God is just. He stands for justice. And so within us, we have an innate sense of justice.

A longing for justice. Wrongs need to be made right. And we don't like when they're not. We expect accountability. Accountability satisfies the need for justice.

However, if you're speaking about me, then I never want my offender to be pardoned. But, frankly, I should. I want justice. Other people, me. You see, if we don't feel that there's been justice for a wrong committed, then the idea of forgiveness is anathema.

We, it's distasteful. We long for justice. But what about those who I've hurt? They're relational.

They long for justice. And as I was thinking about this, I was thinking about children. And this is where we had a really good discussion in our group earlier about this. But children have a keen sense of justice.

[17:09] Take away their toys. Pull their hair. Tell a lie. You will find out very quickly that children have a keen sense of justice. And I believe that when they come running because they're upset, they're not always just taddling.

They're asking for something to be done. They want justice. They expect accountability. Although they may not have the vocabulary to articulate that, or the maturity to express that.

But that's what they want. And in those moments, we have an opportunity to begin to demonstrate a healthy biblical model of how to forgive and how to ask for forgiveness.

So I came up with this perfect image of how that would work. Caroline Holcotter, where are you?

Oh, she is. She added something so dynamic.

So if you want to look on it, I'm going to continue. Caroline. But then go to her and talk to her about how she's handled it in the classroom. Because it was really encouraging to hear another take.

[18:14] So have a chat with her after. So let's just think about children fighting. They come running. Now, this is how I've seen it played out in my own life as a child.

I come running. Something bad's happened. Mommy, or whoever. Please pull my hair. And then usually, you know, the other child's coming behind.

No, I didn't! Or she made me do it, or whatever it was. And then typically what's happened is, Oh, poor baby. So what did you do? Speaking to...

What do you say? Sorry. And then you look over to the other child. Well, what do you say? Oh, that's all right. Okay, go play nicely. Off they go.

And I think in that moment, we haven't done any service to the children. And we haven't demonstrated justice or accountability.

[19:10] We haven't trained or explained forgiveness. But think about yourself, even as adults. If somebody comes up to you, they've done something dumb.

And actually, I was thinking about this the other day. When I spoke to someone who I was a bit sharp with the other day. And I, you know, I did, I was just writing about it and I did it. You go up, you say to somebody, I'm sorry.

What typically will the other person say? Yeah, it's all right. Well, it's not. Well, you know, they may be like, ah, you know, don't worry about it or whatever.

But with children, that's not good enough. Like, it's not okay. Is it? You pulled my hair. You broke my toy. They're not happy to say, it's okay. That feels wrong.

When they say, okay, now go ahead and play nicely. Nothing's been satisfied. That longing for justice hasn't been satisfied. Children might want to say, yeah, but you've not sorted it.

[20:11] And I think saying sorry is important. But it's only part. It's only part of the sentence. So let's just rethink that a little bit.

I come running up to mummy. Let's say, what's happened? Mummy looks to the other child. Well, what's happened? What have you done? Okay, I pulled her hair or whatever.

Okay. So, in that moment, there are other ways to do this. I'm now thinking this through, Caroline. But in that moment, to model sort of that basic idea of forgiveness.

Saying sorry isn't just good enough. It's like, okay, so you broke the toy. What do you say? And what maybe we're teaching our children is, I'm sorry that I broke your toy.

There's an acknowledgement of wrongdoing. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Will you please forgive me? Do you know what? That child now has something to respond to.

[21 : 16] They now actually, I see the balls back in their court. But rather than feeling obligated to say, that's okay. They now have something to say. Will you forgive me? Will you forgive me?

Will you forgive me? You know, will you forgive me? Okay, so the child may say yes or they may say no. And this is where I suggest you speak to Caroline because she put a spin on it. I can't remember the way she did it, but which I found was really helpful.

So there are other ways to deal with that and to teach children that. And I think one point that came out in our discussion group that maybe in that moment the child isn't ready. If I've explained this correctly, not quite ready to, you know, they're still crying.

You've just broke my, you know, to say will you forgive me? Oh, you know, maybe that's too much at once. But so just thinking about the model, imperfect model. And what about accountability?

Well, maybe the child who broke the toy just needs to have some time out. Now there's justice. It's just an idea. But it's, for me, the concern is we have grown into a habit of saying, I'm sorry.

[22 : 21] And the response is, that's okay. We have to think about that. I don't think just saying sorry achieves anything.

It's part of the story. You see, the idea of forgiveness here takes it to a different level. Because God took it to a different level.

He says to us, when you've been asked for forgiveness, you give it. But we are looking at my role when I've hurt someone.

You see, we need to forgive each other just as in Christ God forgave us. Forgiveness works both ways. I need to offer forgiveness. I have to have an attitude of forgiveness.

I need to be prepared to give the forgiveness when asked. But I also have to be prepared to ask for forgiveness when I have got it wrong. So we already looked at Matthew 5, 23 and 24.

[23 : 28] Therefore, if you are offering a gift at the altar and then remember that your brother has something against you, go. Now look at that. We're used to it.

I don't think we're quite used to seeing it this way. This verse is pointing us to when we have done something wrong. This is not when I'm standing at the altar and I feel sad because you hurt me.

It's saying when you're standing at the altar, do you remember that you've hurt someone? Go and sort it out. So what happens then when we have done something wrong?

Well, here's just an idea that I've, thoughts I've worked through. When we know that we have hurt someone. As Christians, I think it is our responsibility, first and foremost, to go before the throne of God.

To acknowledge our sin and our wrongdoing. Because as we said earlier, Psalm 51 tells us, Before you and you only have I sinned and have done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you judge.

[24 : 38] When you speak, you are justified when you judge. We acknowledge our sin before the Lord and we ask for forgiveness. And then I would say, secondly, I would pray for the person that I have wronged.

I would pray for the hurt that I've caused them. Or once I've realized that I've caused the hurt. I pray for them. I pray for their heart. I pray for their healing.

And then I really, really desperately pray that the Lord would go ahead of me. As I prepare to make contact with them. Have a conversation. Face to face, not text.

That's what I would say. And then, when we meet up, I would acknowledge what I have done without excuses.

Well, you know, you made me do this. Or, I'm coming to ask for forgiveness. But just so you know, you're part. It's like this, you know, we see it everywhere about these signs on business doors.

[25 : 44] You know, we're changing our hours. Sorry for the inconvenience that we may have caused or something. I don't go to somebody and say, sorry for the hurt I may have caused. No, we've hurt people.

We know when we've hurt people. And I think if we add this modern sort of phrase that I may have, I may have. I think that's a denial. A lack of willingness to repent for our behavior. I think pride simmers underneath. But I'm not quite ready. Because even if I hadn't realized I've hurt someone and I realize. You know, even if it's not so in my face. But actually I've come to realize. Maybe they've come to me. Did you know that you've hurt me? I didn't realize I may have hurt you. No, you hurt me. We don't make excuses. We lay our pride down. We humble ourselves. We let them know that we repent of our behavior. We are sorry.

[26 : 45] And we ask for their forgiveness. And it'll mean nothing otherwise. But in saying that, we need to apply wisdom and discernment. Because it's one thing to have gossiped behind somebody's back.

Or to have blown your top in anger. But it's another thing to have committed adultery. Or to have hurt someone very, very deeply. Maybe theft at work. Maybe fraud's a convenient thing for you. I don't know. But grace and patience must always be on offer.

You might come to somebody and ask them for forgiveness. And if they're a Christian, you might be thinking, Oh, I know God's obligating you to forgive me.

But they may not. They may be in a different place than you are. You need to give them time, grace, patience. Someone might not even be a Christian.

[27 : 57] And they're so angry at you. They might not even like you anymore. You may ask for forgiveness. And they could say, You know what? When hell freezes over, come back and talk to me. And you might just have to walk away.

Say, Okay, Lord. And then you keep praying for them. They might not be ready. But don't we know that the Lord God has been patient with us?

He gives us grace. He cares for us. Let's offer that to the person we have hurt. Let's not judge them. And then I would say, Let's pray that God would impress upon our hearts anyone that we need to ask forgiveness from. But let's be sensible.

I mean, I'm not talking about starting a list, you know, from back when you were three. And, you know, like the Lord will show you if you are willing to open up your heart and be humble before him.

[28 : 58] Lord, who? Who do I need to speak to? Who do I need to go to? And give me your wisdom. So I keep repeating from Psalm 51, three and four, Against you, you only have I sinned.

Well, if you read further on in that chapter, you're going to see King David longing for cleansing. Cleanse me with hyssop that I will be clean.

Wash me and I'll be whiter than snow. Let these crushed bones, in these bones you have crushed rejoice. He just, he longs to be in a restored relationship with God. But actually, if you go a little bit further, in verse 17, you're going to read this.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and a contrite heart of God you will not despise. So without spending time here discussing temple sacrifices, let's look what lies behind that.

A broken and a contrite heart. This is not God wanting to crush us or break us for our wrongdoing. It is God, again, asking, longing for restoration of relationship.

[30 : 14] It is the Lord saying that he looks for those with a humble and a repentant heart. Broken and a contrite heart is a humble and a repentant heart.

And we have to ask ourselves at this point, what is the condition of our hearts? So not only with attitudinal forgiveness where we have to ask, what is the condition of my heart?

What is the condition of my heart when that is flipped around? Will my pride prevent me from asking for forgiveness?

See, I think it's really easy to say I'm sorry. I don't think that's very hard. But I don't know about you, but my tongue gets really swollen and fat when I say, what do you think it's forgive me?

Because that really nails your colours to the mast. Like that really, that's where the rubber hits the road. I think that's where we are required to be in our most humble.

[31 : 23] And will we do that? Will we lay our pride down? So are we willing to approach God for him to forgive our sin, but too proud and too arrogant to lower ourselves?

before another person? Are we going to be someone who cares not only that we have hurt God and seek his forgiveness, but that we also long to seek forgiveness from those we have hurt?

Tomorrow we're going to look at the power of forgiveness and the role of reconciliation. But for the moment, I think we just need to consider the condition of our heart.
Thank you. Thank you. comes ■ convcope Also, keep going