

FORGIVING YOURSELF AND OTHERS

We are continuing the series on dismantling the wall between you and God by walking free from your past.

Have you applied these lessons so far? If you have not watched all of these lessons so far, you need to do that because each lesson is all by itself and it is so important. God has such a deep love for you and you are so special to God. Do you know that? Do you think, "Maybe other people are special, but I am not." That is not true, you are special. If you were the only person who ever lived on the earth, Jesus still would have come and died just for you. That is how precious you are to God. He wants you to be free.

He wants you to dismantle this wall and just take the past out. Today, we are going to talk about one of the biggest pieces of the wall. This may be the biggest piece. When we remove it, what freedom is going to come to you!

What is this piece I am talking about? It is forgiving yourself and forgiving others. We all have hurts in life and we all have things done to us that do not even make sense. We did not do anything to them; why did they hurt us. We have hurt people, too. You know that about yourself. I know that about myself. To really be free in life, you have to deal with the pain once and for all. You have to deal with it with Jesus helping you. You can say, "I tried a lot of times. I have been to a lot of counselors. I have done everything. It's still there." This time, I want you to do it with Jesus. I want you to tell Him, "Jesus, I mean it. I am serious. I know You understand better than I understand. I know You know things about it that I don't know. I want to do it once and for all with you."

How do you forgive the unforgiveable? Do you have things like that in your life? Has it been done to you?

Have you done the unforgiveable to someone else? What most people want to know is how do you really do it. What do you do if people keep doing the same thing to you over and over, or you keep doing the same thing over and over? I want to share a quote with you, "To forgive is to set a prisoner free, and then discover that the prisoner was you." Whether it is for what you have done or what has been done to you, unforgiveness makes you a prisoner. Forgiving sets you free. It does not matter if they change, if they recognize they did wrong, it does not matter if they do not forgive you. None of that matters. What matters is you are free. You have done it and it is over. You can walk free.

Look at this picture of a man and woman arguing. They are probably shouting so loud at each other that they are not even listening to the other people. You can tell they are both wrong by their anger. They both think the other has done wrong and they both have done wrong. Look at this scripture in Jeremiah, "For I will forgive their wickedness and I will remember their sins no more." God made us to be good people. God made us to live good lives. What have we done? Ever since Adam and Eve, we have done wrong. At times, when your children have messed up and done things, sometimes horrible things, you think, "I am such a failure. I have to forgive them again, and again, and again." Just remember, God started out with two children, Adam and Eve, and they both did wrong. Yet, for thousands of years, God says, "You have done wickedly. People have been wicked, but I will forgive it. Then I will not remember it."

Wouldn't you like to be like that? Wouldn't you like to have forgiveness occur in your life so much that you really do not think about it anymore? Do you ever forget it? I do not know that you do, and I do not think you have to wait until you can forget it. I do know one thing though. God can take the sting out of it so much that even when you think about it, you might think "I used to be so upset about that. I used to be so upset with them. That was such a struggle in my life. God has done a wonderful thing for me." You see, God can do that for you.

Forgiving others is hard. I am not minimizing that it is hard. Some of it is not hard, but the big stuff is really hard. Some of it you have to do over and over and over. I have one of those in my life. I was sexually abused by a pedophile and I know for sure that man sexually abused many, many children, probably hundreds. I know he was still doing it 25 years later. How do you forgive someone who does something so bad and harms so many little children? How do you really forgive them? I want to be very honest with you. I have to do it over and over, and I have to say, "God Your Word says 'I cannot forgive you, Betty, if you do not forgive him', so I forgive him God." I am going to show you what forgiveness is not. Maybe that will help you be able to forgive the unforgiveable. Asking forgiveness is hard. Once I heard a man say, "Make a list of all the people you need to ask forgiveness of." You think there might be hundreds but there are not. There might be six or seven. Ask God to prepare them for you to come and ask their forgiveness.

Ask God to let you see that sin through their eyes. Then ask God for the right words. If you do it right, when you go to them, you will see a Christ-like love spring up in you and they will forgive you. It is hard but you can do it. Sometimes the unforgiveness in you has been there so long, or the offense was so bad, that bitterness has developed. In Hebrews it says to be real careful you do not let a root of bitterness spring up in you because it defiles people around you. You do not want to do that. You could be a mother or dad that defiles their children, or a worker that defiles their co-workers. You know you do not want to do that. God says, "Of everything, do not have bitterness within you." Why? Having bitterness within you is like drinking poison and hoping the other person dies. It is not going to happen. Even Shakespeare said, "To err is human, to forgive is divine." Forgiveness is divine. It truly is. It is the way God is. God said "I am going to forgive your wickedness and I am not going to remember it anymore."

Someone once said, "You know when the Bible says God forgives your sins as far as the east from the west, how far is that? It is between one hand and another on the cross, that is how far the east is from the west. Between those two hands, all of the sin of mankind was forgiven." If you have never had a ministry and you decided, "Lord I would like to have a ministry", you could spend the next two years going back and making things right with the people that you need to ask for forgiveness and be reconciled with. The ministry of reconciliation is one of the greatest ministries you could ever have. God blesses it, God helps you do it, and God restores things. Even if it took you two years to do it, you could do it.

I want you to think of three painful memories in your life. I want you to be brave, I want you to be open, and I want you to be specific. Write them down. Then I want you to ask yourself, "Was any of it my fault? Was all of it their fault? Could it have been prevented?" Then I want you to begin the forgiveness process in these three painful memories. You may need to have a box of Kleenex right there by you because remembering it will be so painful. You may have more than three painful memories, you may have 10. Now is the time to write them all down. Maybe you should even talk to someone you trust. You can say, "I am going to tell you about something that happened to me and I want you to pray with me because I want to be rid of this. I want you to listen and pray with me." The hardest thing is to realize that when you forgive you are going to let God handle what happens to them. Sometimes, especially when it is sexual abuse in a family, it can cause alienation to deal with it. You have to accept that. Just remember, Jesus is there with you. He wants to set you free. He is going to walk you through this, just you and Him, right there when you are writing this down. Think about it and ask Him how to deal with it. "Help me Lord." What do people normally do with the things that I am talking about, these deep hurts and deep wounds that have caused such unforgiveness? Why have you not dealt with it before? People tend to deny that it happened, or they tend to bury it. "That did not happen." "I just decided on my own I am never going to think about it again. I am just burying it." That does not do any good either. Some people avoid it or ignore it, "I don't want to talk about it. It's there but I am going to play like it is not there." Sometimes people use humor to avoid the truth. Perhaps you think about it and get depressed, or maybe you give answers that you wish were the truth but they are not the truth about it. Whatever it is, just say, "Jesus I have never gone through this with You. I want to go through this with You." There is one thing true of every person, the pain will never go away until you deal with it properly. It will always be there. It will affect everything you do whether you think it does or not. You will drag it with you everywhere you go. You can move to a new town to get away and you drag it there with you. You will not have real peace, real joy or real victory in your life until God and you deal with it. God does have a destiny for you but he does not want these things in your past stopping you or holding you back. A lady that I really trusted called me and she said, "Betty, I know you have dealt with guilt, but have you ever dealt with shame?" I said, "Are they different?" She said, "Oh yes, they are different. You need to learn how to deal with shame. Otherwise, every time you stand up and proclaim the name of Jesus and stand up for Jesus, the devil will say, 'You remember that. You remember that.' It will hold you back. So deal with it Betty. Get some books on shame and read them. Frances Frangipane has a real good book on it."

Even though you say you are okay in dealing with these things you have written down, reality says you are not. Why? Because you cannot quit thinking about it. Maybe you have sleeplessness, maybe you have deep thoughts about it, or maybe you have headaches. You might have bad, recurring dreams, or a sadness that you cannot identify why you are sad all the time. Maybe your anger overwhelms you, or your bitterness and unhappiness overwhelms you. If you will take part in this and let God walk through this with you, it will stop. A lot of times, your present emotional problems have roots in your emotional past and God wants you to be free. You have scars. You think, "I got over that. I have the scar to show it." God says, "No it is not healed underneath. Let's do it one more time and let's get rid of it for good." You will not even have a scar because God can take your scars away. Jesus has the scars. You do not need to have them anymore. Sometimes, to avoid these things I have had you write down, you will manipulate things or people to avoid the pain. It is time to get honest and deal with it. It is time to admit it, burying it will not heal it. Do not kid yourself. Some of you have pain from being in wars. Things were done to you that were unspeakable. Burying it does not heal it. I am going to give you some steps with these things you have written down. The bigger the hurt, the bigger the devastation and, therefore, the more important it is to deal with it.

I want to talk to you about what forgiveness is not. Sometimes when you are walking through forgiving

I want to talk to you about what forgiveness is not. Sometimes when you are walking through forgiving these deep things that you are thinking about, you think, "What about their part, what about if they do not change?" I got this from Ron Hutchcraft Ministries, I saw it on line and I thought it was great.

First, forgiveness is not an emotion. It is a choice. Doesn't that set you free? You can walk free from your past just knowing that. It is a choice. I choose to forgive them, I choose to do it. I am a human being and I can choose. I choose to forgive.

Forgiveness is not looking for repayment. It is not saying, "You have to pay me back for what you did to me." You do not have to look for that. You do not even have to wait for your anger to subside. It might not come until after you forgive. In the middle of that anger just say, "I choose to forgive." It might be just gritting your teeth and doing it. Initially forgiveness is not about the person who wronged you. It is about you and how you took it. What if God did it like you have been doing it? What if God said, "I will forgive you. I don't want to but I will. It's all your fault." It is really not about that person initially. It is about how you dealt with it.

Forgiveness does not require them to apologize or be remorseful. If you have to wait for people to apologize, you might as well give it up. They are not ever going to do it. If you wait for them to be remorseful, they are not ever going to do it. What about the pedophile I talked about? I do not think he has ever been remorseful. I can forgive him anyway because God gives me the power to do it. Besides that, it unties God's hands and He can work in the lives of those people in new ways because you decided, "I don't have to wait until you apologize. I don't have to wait until you feel bad about what you did."

Another thing forgiveness is not is that they do not have to be aware they hurt you. Did you know there are hurts you are carrying around with you right now that the other person does not know about? If you went to the other person, they would say, "I don't even remember what you are talking about." You think, "What do you mean you don't remember? I have suffered with it for three years. What are you talking about? Of course you should remember it." But, they do not. What are you going to do then? You still have to forgive them. It makes a big difference in your decision to go forward if you forgive. If they do not apologize, if they do not feel remorseful, or if they do not remember it, it does not stop you from going forward. You can go forward. It does not mean you will forget it completely. It just means the pain will be gone. I have heard people say, "If you don't forget it, you really haven't forgiven." I do not agree with that. Some things are going to be there forever, but the pain is gone. Jesus has touched it. You do not have what you had before when you think of it. It is like, "Yes it happened but I forgave them," and you are free.

Forgiveness is not doing it once and for all and that is it. You may have to do it over and over every time you think about it, like I have had to do. There are other things that I have forgiven and it is over. I do not even want to deal with it. It does not mean you have to stay in relationship with them. Sometimes people wrong you and you feel you still need to be friends with them. No, you do not. That is not a sign of forgiveness. What if they are in your family? What if you are married to them? What do you do then? You set boundaries. Some people will continue to wrong others all of their lives. God does not want them to be like that but they can be. You have to learn how to set a boundary and say, "You can't go over this boundary. I love you and I forgive you but you can't do this to me anymore. I will not allow it. I think too much of myself. God thinks too much of me. You can't talk to me like that ever again. I will walk out of the room." You have to learn to set boundaries. What happens when you set those boundaries? It makes people angry. They get so angry because you are not playing your part anymore in this deal. It does not matter. You do not have to stay in relationship with them.

What else is forgiveness? It does not mean they got away with it. It does not mean that you are condoning what they did and you are agreeing with it. The Bible says, "Vengeance is Mine. I will repay." God is saying, "You don't repay, I will take care of it." God does it to heal the person. If you took care of it, you might be doing it to hurt them. They hurt you and you might want to hurt them back. God says, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." Let Him do it.

Another thing that forgiveness is not is excusing their sin. You do not have to excuse it. "They didn't know." You do not have to excuse it. Call it what it is and move on from there. God wants you to walk in freedom.

It is not wrong to call out to God and cry out for justice. If you were genuinely wronged and it was bad, cry out for justice. Ask God for justice. God is a just God. He has perfect justice for it. Forgiveness is not wanting them to suffer. We do not want that.

Look at the things you have written down.

First, bring up the issue. "Here is what happened Lord. I know you know it, but I am going over it." Do it out loud if you can. Deal with it honestly, with humility, depending on God. Here is the key. Go back and think how it made you feel, think about all the pain and hurt. "It made me feel like this. I felt this, I thought this. I wanted to do this." If you need to scream, scream into a pillow where no one hears you. I know some of you have deep, deep, serious pain, unforgiveable pain, but God is going to help you. Express your emotions one more time, as openly as you can, and say, "God this is how I feel. I wanted them to die. I wanted You to hurt them. I wanted You to do something bad to them." Be that honest and open with God.

Second, take responsibility for your attitudes and your responses. Just say, "Lord I thought this, and I did this and that was wrong and I am sorry. But, I want to settle the account with you God. If these people never know, then they never know. Between you and me God, we are settling it today. I want it over today." Remember, if you have someone you really trust, a pastor, a mentor or another very strong Christian, you can have them walk through it with you. You might ask, "What if the person is dead?" You can have someone sit in for that person and they can pretend to be that person. You can say, "I just want to tell you how I felt. I felt this, and I felt this." It is very important. Then say, "I forgive myself and I forgive them. Please take the hurt away God." You may have to do that over and over. Set those boundaries.

They do not get off the hook. Forgiving yourself is exactly the same. You take the same steps.

Sometimes you cannot forgive yourself. You are going to have to accept the work of Jesus Christ. He died for all sins, even yours. You are going to have to forgive yourself. You are going to make mistakes. We are all sinners. Be forgiving. Forgive yourself. Choose to forgive yourself.

Peter said, "How many times do I forgive," and Jesus said, "I tell you not seven times, but seventy-seven times." God said, "If you will forgive, I will forgive you."