

A Deeper Walk with God

Embracing a Spirit of Forgiveness

Rough Transcript

Patrick Morley

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Good morning men. Please turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 17 verse 1. Christianity is the most inclusive religion in the world, which is ironic because it's often accused of being the most exclusive religion in the world because we make an exclusive claim that it depends on faith in Jesus Christ. But actually, it is the most inclusive religion in the world because all other religions are based on performance. All other religions are based on performance. You have to do something to make God happy or continue to do some things to make God happy. You have to basically perform. All religions except Christianity are performance oriented. You have to do something to make God happy or avoid his wrath.

Whereas in Christianity, Christianity as opposed to being performance based is grace based. The idea is that you can't do anything to make God happy enough to accept you. Rather, he accepts you in spite of those things by grace through faith and the confession of our sins. He forgives our sins. There is forgiveness based on grace rather than forgiveness based on your ability to maintain by your performance some kind of an exterior standard.

What we're going to talk about this morning is right in the wheelhouse of this grace based gospel or this grace based faith that we have. Right at the core of this is the idea of forgiveness. We're going to talk about that today, forgiveness.

Before we get started, we want to do a couple of shout outs, and the first one goes to our Alaska area director for Men in the Mirror, Rob Hunner. He's in Wasilla. Does anybody know what else is from Wasilla? Sarah Palin is from Wasilla. Yep.

Then the shout out today goes to **Man in the Mirror**, the Man in the Mirror group in Tyler, Texas. Ray Koon is the leader. These men had been meeting for many years on Tuesdays at 6:30 AM at Lanes Chapel United Methodist Church. They asked and I'm going to oblige and today give a special shout out to Pastor Bob Green who is retiring after 40 years in ministry and has been a long time partner at Man in the Mirror. Thank you, Bob. Would you join me in giving a very warm and rousing Man in the Mirror welcome to Rob Hunner, to Man in the Mirror and to Bob Green? One, two, three. Hoo-rah. Thank you men for being part of this, and again, Bob, congratulations on 40 years of service. That's pretty cool. It's pretty cool these guys would love you enough to do that.

THE PROBLEM: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DON'T FORGIVE?

All right, so **Embracing a Spirit of Forgiveness** is today's message. The problem, what happens when we don't forgive? I'm thinking of one man and one woman, but I could also think of many other men and women who have been through the same thing. But a man decided that he didn't like his wife anymore. He didn't love her anymore, and so he got a divorce, and he did some bad things before he got the

divorce, some things that he should not have done. Ever since that divorce, he has not been able to get rid of the sense of guilt and shame that he has for how he treated his wife both when they were together and then by divorcing her. He just can't get by the guilt and the shame. How do you do that? How do you get by the guilt and the shame?

She on the other hand was taken advantage of, betrayed at the deepest level, abandoned, and so she has these incredible feelings of sadness. How do you get by that? Sometimes people have anger about the abuses that they endure. How do you get by that?

That's a scenario from marriage, and there's probably not a marriage in here who can at least relate to some of this. I was walking up the ... We had our children coming to the house last Christmas, so my wife had been upstairs. We have a two story house. She'd been upstairs doing some work. She asked me if I'd carry a laundry basket upstairs and I did, and I went up there and I immediately started shivering. I said, "What in the world?" I looked at the thermostat, and the thermostat's on like 60 degrees. I said, "Patsy, what's going on here? The thermostat's on 60 degrees." She said, "Yeah, I know. I wanted to make sure it was cool enough when they got here." I said, "This is crazy." This is what it means. This is what it means to be married. We all have things that are going on in the marriages. Some are misdemeanors, right, but others are felonies.

Then there is the father-son or the father-daughter situation, the father-daughters scenario where the father, for whatever reason, has been neglectful. Now often, like it was not until later in life that I realized the reason my dad was not in my life as much as I wished he had been is that he was busy working extra hard to be able to provide for his family, so I gave him a little bit of a bad report. I've corrected that narrative. A lot of us need to fix the narrative we have about our dad. But nevertheless, a father neglecting his son and then him ending up feeling this sense of shame, but the son or the daughter just can't bring themselves to forgive dad for the mistakes that the dad has made. Some of you can relate to this scenario too.

In our text today, we begin to see what happens when we don't forgive, but I also want to bring to your attention that this message, this idea of forgiveness, as I've already said, it's really at the very heart of the gospel. I'm going to read to you from, what is this text, Acts 26. You don't need to look this up, but this is the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus.

He's giving his account of that to King Agrippa and he says, "I saw a light from heaven," and he fell to the ground. They all fell to the ground, and he heard Jesus say, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads." Then he asked, "Who are you, Lord?" and he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and stand on your feet. I've appeared to you to appoint you as a servant." Might just think about yourself when we're talking about this. "I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God so that you may be happy, healthy, and wealthy."

The purpose of the gospel, the reason we've been rescued, what God is sending us to, what God wants to use us to do is to help people open their eyes and turn from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God so that they may receive the forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. This is the agenda of Jesus.

Elsewhere when Jesus healed a man who was paralyzed, actually what he said was he said to the man paralyzed laying on the mat, "Your sins are forgiven," and everybody was upset. He said, "Well, just so you'll know that I have the authority to forgive sins," he said, "Take up your mat and walk." A lot of people think that taking up the mat and walking is the big deal. No, the big deal is the forgiveness of sins. The thing that lasts forever is the forgiveness of sins. The thing that lasts for an inch is the picking up your mat and walking. Just to keep those things in the right perspective.

Now, given all of this, what are we supposed to do when we are sinned against, and might I say also when we sin, and what happens when we withhold that which we should do? Okay, so in Luke chapter 17 verse 1, Jesus said to his disciples, "Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come." Don't be that guy. Okay, that's the message. "It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble." Elsewhere, little ones, those are the Christians. Mikros is the actual word, the Greek word there.

"So watch yourselves. If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them." Call them out. "And if they repent, if they ask for forgiveness, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying, 'I repent,' you really should give it serious consideration."

You've got a coworker. Like at Man in the Mirror, we're operating. We are so busy, we are growing so rapidly, we have no extra margin. There are no extra minutes. When somebody asks somebody to do something, it pushes them beyond the limits. And so sometimes there's tension in that. There can be you can realize that you've hurt somebody's feelings or either way.

The scripture says though that if that person comes back to you, and by the way we'll see also even if they don't, then you should forgive them. In fact, it says you must forgive them. You do not have the power to withhold forgiveness. Let me restate that. You do have the power to withhold forgiveness. You do not have the authority to withhold forgiveness from anybody who asks. No matter how often they ask, you do not have the authority to withhold. If your wife commits adultery seven times a day and comes back to you saying, "I repent," you must forgive them.

Now, is Jesus really saying if somebody does something seven times a day? That is hyperbole. He's just trying to make the point using hyperbole. Hyperbole is overstating the case to make a point. It's not really necessarily that somebody's going to do something seven times a day, but whenever they do, you have to forgive them.

Now, the apostles, they're thinking about this and they say, "Man, some of the people, these Romans, what they're doing, I don't know." They say in verse 5, "The apostle said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith.'" Increase our faith. It takes faith. It takes more faith. It takes a lot of faith to be able to forgive people for some of the things that they do.

We know the toxicity of unforgiveness, because we watch it play out right now in our national politics. We see the toxicity of unforgiveness. What happens then is that fellowship with God is broken. Fellowship with God is broken.

We see this in the other verse that we'll look at today, and that's Matthew chapter 6 verse 12. Matthew chapter 6 verse 12. This is part of the Lord's Prayer, the Our Father. We won't start at the beginning, but let's begin at verse 12. Jesus is asked how, by the disciples, "How should we pray?" He says, "When you pray, pray like this. And forgive us our debts. Forgive us our trespasses. Forgive us our sins." We ask God to forgive our sins, "As we also have forgiven our debtors. As we also have forgiven those who have trespassed against us. As we also have forgiven those who have sinned against us." That woman, that addled son that I have, that drunken father that I have, "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors." This is the heart, part of the heart of the gospel is the whole forgiveness tract.

Then down in verse 14, "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." Do you see what happens when you don't forgive? Fellowship with God is broken. When you're walking around angry at somebody, resentful of somebody, bitter at somebody, they've wronged you, you're unwilling to forgive them, fellowship with God is broken. You have put a ceiling, you have put an artificial ceiling on your relationship with God.

How do we solve this problem? We solve this problem by becoming men who forgive easily by faith. The Big Idea today is this: **I want to be known for the ease with which I forgive and seek forgiveness.** I want to be known for the ease with which I forgive and seek forgiveness. I don't want to be that guy who everybody's tiptoeing around. I don't want to be that guy who holds a grudge. I don't want to be that guy who holds something that somebody has done over them so that I can have power over them, so that I can manipulate them, so I can guilt them, so I can shame them. I don't want to be that guy, because that is not the gospel of Jesus. The gospel of Jesus is the forgiveness of sins and then a sanctified life, as we read earlier.

The big idea today is an application of all these verses. Okay, so what do we do with these verses? What do we do with this teaching? The application is I want to be known, I want to be known for the ease with which I forgive and seek forgiveness.

All right. Next up, this solution, forgiving by faith. We saw the disciples, they asked that God would, Jesus would it give them more faith to do that. The answer is to forgive people. How do we forgive somebody? We don't forgive them because of performance. We talked about that in the open. It's not that you get your act together and then I will forgive you. It's that I forgive you because I love you, and then the next thing that happens is dependent on their response to that.

You have a child who is into drugs or experimenting with drugs. You don't say, "If you will get off of the drugs, then I will forgive you." You say, "I forgive you, and now let's talk about how we can help you with the behavior." Now, if they respond to the forgiveness and change the behavior, then you go one direction. But if they reject your forgiveness and discussion about the needed correction in the behavior, then you have to go a different direction. Just because you forgive them doesn't mean that you don't have to still deal with the behavior. Obviously all the details of that are beyond the scope of what we're going to talk about today, because there could be drugs, there could be verbal abuse, emotional, even physical abuse. There could be mental illness involved. There could be rebellion. There could be sexual immorality.

At Man in the Mirror, we've been around for a long time and we have a lot of people, so we've had two sexually immoral relationships occur at the office. "It's a Christian ministry. You're kidding me." We've had two affairs at our office, and the immediate thing that happened was that we extended forgiveness. "Let him who is among you without sin be the one to cast the first stone." We forgave them and we fired them all immediately. We love you, we forgive you, but you're fired. We can't have that kind of behavior in a ministry. Protecting the reputation of the ministry is first. I know that to this day, one of the women who was caught in this immoral relationship still can't accept that forgiveness, still is riddled with shame and guilt. I don't see her that often, but every time I see her, she's like the letter with the scarlet A. She drops her head. She initially tries to avoid eye contact because of not being able to receive the forgiveness.

If they repent, then you won back the relationship. If they don't repent, you need to deal with the behavior, but you still love them unconditionally and forgive them by faith, by faith. Bill Bright, I've told this story before, Bill Bright was the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ and that's now CRU. Early in his career, he had six executives in the ministry who all came to his office one day united as one man and demanded that he resign from the ministry. These are all of the people that he had poured into and that he had trusted, and they had gotten together behind his back and formed this cabal to overthrow his leadership and oust him from his own ministry. He said, "Let me think about it, and I'll get back with you tomorrow morning."

The next morning, he assembled the group and he said, "All of you are fired. You need to turn in your resignation immediately, and you're fired." Can you imagine the bitterness of heart that would be possible to take hold in someone who had had everybody that he had trusted and ... Would you ever trust anyone again?

He has a big teaching on this, but I asked him one day, Doctor Bright. I said ... This was before I knew he had a big teaching on it. I had just heard the story. I said, "How did you recover from that?" He said, "It was easy. I forgave them." I said, "Well, but how did you do that?" He said, "That was easy. I forgave them by faith. Because God has forgiven me, I can forgive others by faith."

THE SOLUTION: FORGIVING BY FAITH

Men, that's the message or one of the messages here for you today. The solution is forgiving by faith. I want to be known for the ease with which I forgive and seek forgiveness, and how do we do that? We do it by faith. We love because he first loved us. We can forgive because he first forgave us. Forgiveness can be the hallmark of your Christian witness or a hallmark of your Christian witness by being known for the ease with which you're able to forgive, and then also to seek forgiveness when you have done wrong, not holding on to the pride of the Pharisees.

YOU CAN LEAVE HERE TODAY 100% CLEAN

Then finally, you can leave here today 100% clean. 100% clean. There was a man who was a part of a non-affiliated Pentecostal church and he was studying to be a pastor. The senior man in the church got involved in an immoral relationship and fell from grace, and so this man, he walked. He said, "If this is what Christianity is about, I'm done," and he walked. He walked away from God for 12 years. For 12 years.

Some of the other people who also had felt that they'd been sinned against, who also had been betrayed, found it in our hearts to forgive the senior pastor when he came to a place of seeking it. Not that he still had the position. He lost the position.

Then after 12 years, he decided to forgive the pastor himself. I met him two years later and he said this. "I forgave him and my life changed. I forgave him and my life changed." He had lived with a bitterness about Christianity, about God he walked away from God, about this man. He had been a prisoner of this immorality, this sin if you will, for a dozen years. Then he finally brought himself to do what the others had done early on, and he said, "I forgave him and it changed my life."

What I'm going to ask you to do today is to make two lists. You're going to do this in your discussion time. It's the third question. Leaders, you're going to give your guys five minutes to make these two lists. One list is a list of all the people who have sinned against you. How many of you need more than five minutes for that? The second list is probably the one that's going to take a spiral notebook, but second list, you're going to make a list of all the people that you have sinned against.

Then you're going to follow the instructions there. The leader will lead you in a prayer of forgiveness for all of the sins that have been committed against you, and you're going to rip that little piece of paper up, and you're going to put it behind, by faith. Then you're going to pray over the sins, ask forgiveness for the sins that you have committed against others, and you're going to keep that list. Insofar as it is possible, some of those people may be dead or so Philistine in nature that you can't even talk to them, but the people that you have sinned against, you are going to insofar as it's up to you, you are going to go to them and ask their forgiveness, because the Big Idea today is this. I want to be known. I'm a Christian, I'm a follower of Jesus, and **I want to be known for the ease with which I forgive and seek forgiveness.** Who's with me? Are you with me?

All right, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this message of forgiveness, which is so close to the heart of the gospel. Lord, we know that even though we are the most inclusive religion in the world, probably one of the things, well certainly, certainly one of the things, and probably or possibly the single biggest impediment is the lack of a spirit of forgiveness that we have where we just make it look like a performance based religion instead of a grace based religion. Lord, help us to be men who are known for the ease with which we forgive and seek forgiveness. We ask this and your powerful name and for your glory alone, Jesus Christ. Amen.

