

When People Wound

Rich Nathan

August 13 & 14, 2016

Mended

Matthew 18:21-35

Just a year ago this June in Charleston, S.C., a young man named Dylann Roof sat through a Bible study, where he as a white man was welcomed in warmly in a circle of African-American church members, including the pastor. He sat through a Bible study for about an hour when he stood up and began screaming racist things while he shot and killed nine of the Bible study participants. He told one woman, "I'm not going to kill you because I want you to go and tell the world what I did." He said he was going to start a race war.

This particular Emmanuel AME church had a long and glorious history going back 200 years. It's the oldest historically Black congregation south of Baltimore. It's called Mother Emmanuel by many people. And you know what happened. During Dylann Roof's first court appearance, one-by-one, those who chose to speak at his bond hearing did not turn to anger, they did not curse him. Instead, while he just sat there showing no emotion, the relatives of people who had been murdered by this racist offered Dylann Roof forgiveness.

Nadine Collier, the daughter of 70-year old Ethel Lance, who was murdered by Dylann Roof, said to the murderer at this hearing as her voice was breaking and weeping:

"You took something very precious from me. I will never talk to her again. I will never, ever hold her again. But I forgive you. God have mercy on your soul. You hurt me. You hurt a lot of people, but I forgive you."

A woman named Bethane Middleton-Brown whose sister was murdered, told Roof, "For me, I am a work in progress and I acknowledge that I'm very angry. But we have no room for hate. We have to forgive. I pray God on your soul."

These were folks who were taught well by their pastor. Even though their pastor was murdered, they continued to live out his teaching that if Christianity is about anything it is about forgiveness. You cannot hope to call yourself a Christian unless you are willing to forgive. We live in the age of mass murder.

Ten years ago this October, a killer entered a one-room school house in Lancaster, PA. He murdered 10 young Amish girls, ages 6-13, before taking his own life.

The killer, Charles Roberts, was tormented over the death of his own daughter who died years before, 20 minutes after her birth. He blamed God for his infant's death and he became more and more bitter towards those with children. He decided that he was going to pay God back. In his own warped thinking, he decided to even the score by causing other parents to lose their daughters.

On the afternoon of the shooting, a grandfather of one of the murdered girls expressed forgiveness towards the killer. That same day, the day of the killing, Amish neighbors visited the Roberts family offering them comfort. They said, "We know that you are suffering and we care about you. One family of a murdered child invited the Roberts family to their daughter's funeral. And at Charles Roberts' burial, the murderer's burial, Amish outnumbered non-Amish in attendance.

Aren't these stories amazing? Aren't these stories inspiring? We all love stories of forgiveness when someone else does the forgiving. It's when we have to do the forgiving that things get a little more dicey.

We all love forgiveness in the abstract. We do think that holding grudges and eating yourself up inside with bitterness is a bad way to live. Healthy people do think that letting go of past hurts and past wounds is the best way to live. We all love forgiveness in the abstract. The problem is when we have to forgive in this particular case. We have to forgive this particular ex-spouse, this particular sibling, this particular person. When we have to let go of this particular hurt. Then forgiveness is not so easy at all.

Forgiveness by others? Sign me up! Forgiveness in the abstract? I'll vote for that every day! But forgiveness by me? In this particular case? With this particular person? Not so fast! You need to understand what she said or what he did or how hurtful it was and how much pain it caused. You don't understand what a rotten person he is. She's a horrible human being.

Or we say something like this: "You know, if it had just been done to me I think I could forgive. I could let it go. But it was done to someone I love. It was done to my child. It was done to my spouse. It was done to my little sister. Watching someone I love suffer, that's what makes this particular offense so unforgiveable." You know, we can all manufacture a million reasons why it's ok for us regarding this particular person or this particular offense to not forgive some person or some group.

Last week, I started a series titled, "Mended". There are so many ways that in this broken and sinful world we get wounded. We can be wounded by a church. Last week I talked about that. If you weren't here, you just might want to go online and listen to the message on our website. In this broken and sinful world, we can be wounded by failed dreams and dashed hopes. In this broken and sinful world, we can hurt ourselves by our own foolish choices. But today I want to talk about a common way that we

experience wounding and how God wishes to mend us through the practice of forgiveness. I've called today's talk "When People Wound".

Let's Pray

Matthew 18:21-35

21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"

22 Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

23 "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold[b] was brought to him. 25 Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

26 "At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' 27 The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

28 "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins.[c] He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

29 "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.'

30 "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

32 "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' 34 In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

35 "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Now, today, if you are outlining this talk, I'm going to offer you what I'll call the five M's. M as in Michael Phelps. The five M's of forgiveness. We'll be talking about:

The measure of forgiveness

The meaning of forgiveness

The myths of forgiveness
The method of forgiveness
The motive of forgiveness

Let's look first at the
The measure of forgiveness

I want to read to you again

Matthew 18:21-22

21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"

22 Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. [in many translations this says seventy times seven]

Peter asked the question, how many times? And before Jesus could answer, Peter said, "seven times" which seems incredibly generous. Seven is a divine number in the Bible, so forgiving seven times would be seen as pretty extreme. How many times do I forgive my teenager's lies, my spouse's overspending, my mother's insensitivity, and my father's put-downs? Three times? Five times? Seven times? Ten times?

The problem with counting the number of times for forgiving is that you are still counting. And so what you are saying by a number – 3-5-7-10, is that I am just waiting for the time when I can get revenge, because forgiveness has a limit. It is not infinite. Yes, this Christian forgiveness thing is a nice ideal, but in the real world, when people really offend, we need to move to move on to something a little more realistic than forgiveness.

The problem that a lot of people have when they read this passage about 70 times 7 is they say, "I guess what that means is that I've just got to allow myself to continue to be abused. He has to hit me in the head 490 times." "My mother can call me every single day and harangue me about my weight or my past failures or my child raising or whatever, and I just have to keep saying ok. I'll pick up the phone the next day and listen to her scream at me."

70 x 7? I guess that means that my roommate can keep stealing from me and I have to overlook it. My 23-year old can lie around on the sofa and not work. My problem, Jesus, is that this call to forgive 70 x 7 seems like a free pass to people to keep abusing me.

In a few minutes, I'll talk about some of the myths, some of the errors we have about what forgiveness is and what it isn't. But for now, I want to make one simple point:

Jesus is saying we can limit a person's behavior, but we can never limit our forgiveness.

We can set boundaries around people, but we don't set boundaries around forgiveness. In other words, it's totally appropriate to say to mom who calls you every day and harangues you, "Mom, I love you, but I will not continue to verbally abused by you. If you insist on yelling at me I'm not going to pick up the phone and take your calls. Will you stop yelling at me?" Jesus is saying you don't have to keep being abused by Mom, but you must forgive her for everything.

You must forgive your abusive husband, but you in no way have to allow the abuse to continue. If what's required is a restraining order or a separation in order to set a boundary around your husband or boyfriend then do it! We may limit a person's behavior, we can't limit forgiveness. We set boundaries around a person, we can't set boundaries around forgiveness.

Jesus says that forgiveness needs to be infinite. Let me make one other point before we move on. Sometimes the seventy seven times for forgiveness, or the seventy times seven, sometimes with really big things it is not that the person has done seventy seven different wrongs to us, or seventy times seven different wrongs to us. Sometimes the wrong is one huge thing – your spouse's infidelity; a rape; an incident of molestation of you or one of your children.

C.S. Lewis, my favorite Christian author, said:

To forgive for the moment is not that difficult, but to go on forgiving, to forgive the same offense again and again every time it re-emerges in your memory there is the real tussle.

Have you ever tried to really forgive someone and you thought you had? But then the memory comes up again and you find yourself just as angry, just as offended, just as outraged. What do you do then?

C.S. Lewis knew this one. He was sent off to a boarding school like many young English boys at the beginning of the 20th century. And, at this boarding school there was a drunken headmaster who used to go into the boys' dormitory at night, drag boys out of their beds and beat them. C.S. Lewis said in a letter, written when he was in his 50's, 40 years after the beatings by this headmaster. Lewis wrote to a friend and said:

I finally feel like I've really forgiven this person for what they've done.

Sometimes, the 70 x 7 is not forgiving for 490 separate events. Sometimes it's like peeling an onion and there's 70 x 7 layers, especially about really big hurts and really horrible offenses. We have to get on this journey of forgiveness – left foot, right foot, left foot. Peeling back layer after layer of hurt 490 times until it's finally done.

Jesus taught us in the Lord's Prayer to pray:
Father, forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.

When Jesus hung on a cross he said:
Father, forgive them.

In his first resurrection appearance, Jesus said:
If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven.

In the Apostles' Creed, we are taught to confess:
I believe in the forgiveness of sins.

If Christianity is about anything, it is about forgiveness.

I talked about the measure of forgiveness, here's the second thing:

The meaning of forgiveness

What does it mean to forgive? If you look at the word forgiveness, in the Old Testament which was written in Hebrew or the New Testament which was written in Greek, the word "forgive" is related to other words which meant "to release or let go or to set free". A major part of what we are doing when we forgive is to let go. To let go of the past. To let go of the offense. To let go of the hurt. To release. To release the offender. To release the anger. To release my desire to get even.

Forgiveness in the Bible also means "to cancel a debt". Instead of looking at somebody who has offended us and say "You owe me, and I'm going to hold on to you until you pay me back every last cent". To forgive in the Bible means to tear up the IOU. To cancel the debt. To erase the account. Forgiveness in the Bible is a wonderfully rich and wonderfully full concept. It means to let go. It means to release. It means to tear up the debt.

Another picture, especially in the Old Testament, of forgiveness is to "carry away". In the Old Testament there was a ritual that used to be done on the holiest day on the Jewish calendar. The day was Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. If you are taking notes, you might want to jot down Leviticus 16 where this ritual is described. In the Old Testament, one day was set aside for the entire Nation of Israel to have their sins completely forgiven. In order to portray this forgiveness, a priest would lay his hands on the head of a goat symbolically transferring all of the sins of the nation onto the head of the goat. Then the goat, which in the King James Version was called the scapegoat – that's where we get that word from – all of the sins of the people were put on the head

of the goat and then the goat would be chased out into the wilderness, far away from people. Symbolically carrying people's sins away from them.

Today, those who want to be forgiven by God come to the cross where Jesus was crucified. When you ask God to forgive you by virtue of Jesus' death on the cross, what you are doing is you are taking your sins – like that Old Testament priest you aren't putting them on the head of a goat – you are putting those sins on the head of Jesus. Jesus carries them away from you. He separates you from your sins so that you are forgiven. Your debt is paid. Your IOU before God is torn up. You're released. You're set free. We talked about the measure of forgiveness which is infinite, the meaning of forgiveness. Now, let's look at the third M of forgiveness.

The myths of forgiveness

Let me tell you a true story. About 20 years ago, there was an exceptionally famous worship leader and Christian song writer, his songs were sung all across America. But it was discovered that this famous Christian worship leader was seducing women in various cities across the country including the wives of several of his band members. We read Jesus' words – we're supposed to forgive 70 x 7. Forgiveness is not limited. Does forgiving this worship leader mean that he ought to be brought back up on the stage and permitted to lead worship the following week? Or the next month? Should his wife have said: go ahead, keep traveling around the country? Staying in hotels with other women on the worship team?

There are women all over the world who have been told over the years by a pastor in their church or by other Christians to forgive their abusing husbands who have regularly and repeatedly punched them or kicked them or violently abused them. There have been over the years countless conversations involving a pastor and a church member in which the pastor says, "It is your Christian duty to forgive your husband for all the years of bruising violence and you need to go back to him." So, they've gone back and been abused all over again.

There are some myths about forgiveness which have tragically caused people to think that what God wanted them to do was to be a punching bag for an abuser. To be a doormat for some insensitive person to wipe their feet on. To be a sucker for every single addicted family member and every obvious con artist. Forgiveness doesn't mean that we immediately go back to the way things were before the offense. Forgiveness doesn't mean that we immediately rehire an embezzling accountant. Or give an addict access to our medicine chest or our credit cards. Or ask a wife to go back to their physically abusive husband. We can forgive, indeed we must forgive according to Jesus, if Christianity is about anything it is about forgiveness. Infinite, unlimited forgiveness.

It may be years. It may be never before a person is trusted again when someone else's money or their marriage or their ministry. It's a myth that forgiveness means that there's no consequence at all for someone else's sin.

Some people think I don't want to forgive this person because to forgive means that I'm saying that there is no consequence for what he or she did. They just get off scott-free. In the Bible we read the story of David's sin with Bathsheba. King David committed adultery with his neighbor Bathsheba. To cover it up, King David had her husband, Uriah, murdered. But then he sought the Lord's forgiveness. In 2 Samuel 12:13, we read these words:

2 Samuel 12:13

Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan replied, "The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die."

In other words, David, you are forgiven. Does that mean there are no consequences, no scars, no justice? Here is what we read in 2 Samuel 12:14,

2 Samuel 12:14

But because by doing this you have shown utter contempt for the Lord, the son born to you will die."

God always gives when we ask, but he may impose disciplinary consequences for sin. The consequences may be an STD, or unplanned pregnancy. The consequence may be getting fired from our jobs, losing trust in a marriage, distance from a friend we love, or crushing debt. The consequence may be that you submit to drug testing every week for a year, or you go to a sexual addict's group, or an anger management group. Theologians sometimes call consequences for our forgiven sins "disciplinary consequences." They are related to the sin and they reflect the displeasure of God for sin, but their aim is not condemnation. Disciplinary consequences are not designed to settle accounts. Forgiveness eliminates the need to settle accounts.

You see, friends, there are two places, and only two places, in this world that accounts can finally be settled. There are only two places in this world that you can have perfect justice and the scales can be perfectly balanced. One is a place called hell. Every pain we cause will come back on our heads in hell. And when a person lives their lives in unrepentant sin and never seeks forgiveness from God, that person's sins will be met with perfect justice in hell. The only other place that we get perfect justice is at the cross. At the cross God meted out exactly the punishment that is due our sin – no more and no less. The perfect amount of wrath was poured out on the Son of God as the substitute for our sin. Forgiveness does not deny justice. But, friends, you can only have perfect justice in hell or at the cross.

What forgiveness denies is your attempt to get even, which is impossible in this life. Forgiveness means no matter how hard we try can never exactly even the scales.

There are so many movies in which a protagonist decides “I’m going to even the scales”. *The Godfather*. In one of the last brutal scenes in the movie, every single person who ever did anything against the Corleone family is paid back. Gunned down in an elevator. Shot in a car. Clemenza says, “Leave the gun. Take the Cannolis.”

Recently, *The Revenant* with Leonardo DiCaprio - Leo tracks down the men who betrayed him to exact his pound of flesh.

Forgiveness doesn’t deny consequences. God sometimes imposes disciplinary consequences in order to communicate to us that he doesn’t take sin lightly. In order to reform us, in order to humble us, in order to get us off the path of self-destruction. But forgiveness does deny vengeance. And forgiveness does deny that instinct to get even because there is no getting even in this world.

Here’s the second myth: forgiveness doesn’t necessarily mean that we reconcile with the offender.

Awhile back, a young adult in our congregation wrote to me and told me a bit of her life story. Her mother wanted to abort her when she was pregnant. She finally decided to have her. But Dad was away in the military. She actually only saw her dad a couple of times. Mom sadly was involved with drugs, alcohol, and a variety of men who moved in and out of their home. Many of the men were also drug abusers and addicted alcohol. So in front of the children, mom and her boyfriends would get into violent fights. Some of the boyfriends would literally strangle mom in front of the kids.

One boyfriend, who eventually married mom, was the worst. And when this young woman was just a child, he came into her room at night and began to fondle her sexually. She said she was absolutely petrified. She just froze and tried to pretend that it wasn’t happening.

She told mom about the abuse, but her abusive stepfather denied it all. And then in private, he threatened her. The abuse kept happening. So in high school this young woman turned to all of the teenage escapes to deal with her pain – alcohol, drugs, and boys.

Now, as a young woman, she’s come to Christ. How does she forgive all of these different people, and all of the different hurts she suffered? How does she forgive her dad for leaving her? How does she forgive her mom for bringing different men into her life, including an abuser? Mom, for her drug and alcohol abuse? How does she forgive the stepfather’s sexual abuse? And in particular, how do you forgive these individuals if

they never acknowledge their wrong, if they never repent, if they never say they are sorry, if they always defend themselves, always deny any wrong doing, turn the tables? Of if they don't want to have anything to do with us? How do you forgive where there's been no owning up, or perhaps the person has died and can't own up?

I like what Lewis Smedes writes in a very important book titled *The Art of Forgiving*:

Forgiving happens inside the person who does it. Forgiving happens inside our minds and our hearts. When we forgive, we rediscover the frail, failed bruised humanity of the person we forgive. And we give up our fantasy of revenge. We treat the boulder as a fellow human being and wish him well. All of this can happen without giving the matter of restoring the relationship more than a second thought. Though we welcome the person who hurt us back inside the orbit of people we try to care about, we do not necessarily welcome him back into our special circle of friends and family. We can weep at her funeral and feel a genuine sadness at her leaving. We can even be happy about the prospect of meeting her in heaven. Reunion is about something else.

Reunion, a totally restored relationship or as the Bible calls "reconciliation," requires the other person to acknowledge their wrongdoing and to repent. And if it is necessary, they need to make reparations. As Bishop Desmond Tutu, the Nobel Prize winning leader from South Africa said concerning the white apartheid regime: We can forgive the victims of injustice and oppression. We must always be ready to forgive. But can we come together in peace? Those who have wronged us must be ready to make what amends they can. If I've stolen your pen, I can't really be contrite when I say: Please forgive me, if at the same time I keep your pen. If I'm truly repentant I will demonstrate this by returning your pen. Then real reconciliation, which is always costly, will happen.

There is a difference, friends, between forgiveness and reconciliation. Let me just list some of the things that Lewis Smedes says in his book, because I think they are so helpful.

- It takes one person to forgive; it takes two to be reunited.
- Forgiving happens inside the wounded person; reunion happens in a relationship between people.
- We can forgive a person who never says he is sorry; we cannot be truly reunited unless he is honestly sorry.
- We can forgive even if we do not trust the person who wronged us once not to wrong us again; reunion can happen only if we can trust the person who wronged us not to wrong us again.
- Forgiving has no strings attached; reunion has several strings attached.

So, for example, conditions following adultery, a Christian spouse must forgive unconditionally, but can also say: For us to come back together, there are conditions.

We can't reunite apart from joint counseling. We can't reunite apart from radical honesty. We can't reunite apart from you being held accountable for your schedule, your free time, and your money. We can't reunite unless I have the passwords to your email and Facebook and phone. We can't reunite unless you leave your job where he or she still works.

I've been talking about the measure, the meaning, the myths of forgiveness. The fourth M is

The method of forgiveness

What do you actually do when you forgive someone? You know, I've talked with people who I would consider to be mature Christians and they describe some hurt that they experienced in the past. I will say, "What did you do with that? That's horrible!" They say, "I forgive them." And then they go on and they describe the situation with some emotion. I've often said to people, "Slow down here. Tell me exactly what you did when you forgave. What exactly did you do?" And I discovered that even mature Christians don't understand the method of forgiveness. What exactly we need to do to forgive someone.

Forgiveness is not another way of saying that it's no big deal or I'm just trying to put this out of my mind. If it's no big deal then you probably don't really need to forgive. If you can put it out of your mind, put it out of your mind. Forgiveness is not another way of minimizing what happened or sweeping something under a rug. To forgive you have to be as honest with God as you have ever been. And the first you need to do is you need to label what this other person did as sin. The forgiver puts a label on the hurt.

We say, "Lord, my husband or wife, when they said that or when they did this, they sinned against me." We put a label on the hurt. We say this divorce, this addiction, this car accident from drunken driving, this slander, this horrible email, whatever it is that caused the hurt – it was sin. It was not just a mistake or a result of bad genes or a bad home life. First thing you want to do is label the thing you are forgiving as sin because only sin can be forgiven. Mistakes aren't forgiven really. They are understood as part of the human condition.

The second thing we need to do is we need to name the person responsible for the sin. We label the activity and we name the person. We say to God, "I was gossiped about and that was sin. And I was gossiped about by my good friend, Sarah. I was robbed of the credit that was due at my job and the person who stole the credit from me was my boss, Leon." Forgiveness pulls the cover back on sin. It exposes the sin before God and exposes the offender before God.

Here's the third thing, Jesus says in this text in Matthew 18

Matthew 18:35

³⁵ “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

Forgiveness is not some cheap thing. When we’ve been wounded or when someone we love has really been wounded, forgiveness is not words that we quickly speak, “Oh, I forgive you. I forgive you in the name of Jesus.” So often what I see in myself and in others who have talked with me. Is that the quick words of “I’ll forgive you” is really like cutting a dandelion down at the stem. Quick forgiveness is just the surface removal of the problem. It’s a “words only” forgiveness. If you haven’t taken the time to dig out the roots of this offense so that the weed grows back. Jesus says that you need to forgive from the heart. Down in our hearts we have all these thoughts of revenge. Down in our hearts we still have all this anger, all this hurt. We keep recalling it over and over again. What happens when we hear bad news about this person who hurt us? What happens when others criticize them?

Jesus says, “I’ve got a different way for you to live. It’s a kingdom way.” In this world, you’re going to be hurt. But you need to dig out the roots. Go all the way down in the heart. Tell God that what was done to you was sin. Name the person who did it. And then the third thing: tell God all the consequences that happened as a result of their sin. All the consequences. Lord, as a result of my mother’s neglect, I have spent years looking for love in all the wrong places. Here’s all the ripple effects, Lord, of my father’s abuse. At my spouse’s addiction. If you don’t name all the consequences, you’re not digging out all the roots.

Let me just say parenthetically, don’t ask for forgiveness too quickly. When someone begins to tell you how you hurt them, we have no right to ask for forgiveness until we’ve entirely heard and patiently listened to someone describe what we did to them. Very often, we cut a person off – a spouse, a friend – as they are trying to explain and we say, “Please forgive me.” And we leave that person completely unsatisfied, stewing in their frustration. We need to shut up and listen. That’s really hard because it’s painful to hear what it’s like to live with the likes of us.

We talked about the measure of forgiveness, the meaning of forgiveness, the myths of forgiveness, the method of forgiveness and I want to close with

Slide

The motive of forgiveness

We all need a push, a prod to let go of our right to avenge ourselves. We all need to let go of our anger, to let go of our hurt, to let go of our judgement before God. What is

the push? What's the prod that should cause everyone who claims to be a follower of Christ to forgive every other person and every other offense?

It is the realization that God has forgiven us a debt infinitely greater than any debt owed to us by the offender. In this particular story from Matthew 18, the first servant owed the king ten thousand talents. In Jesus' day, ten thousand talents would be an infinite sum. It was the money earned by a hundred million days of labor. When you consider that the entire tax bill to Rome by all of Palestine was 800 talents, ten thousand talents was more than all the money in circulation. On the other hand, the other servant owed a pittance. The nudge to forgive springs from the clear recognition that we have been forgiven much more by God our Father.

Forgiveness is passing on a drop of water from the ocean of forgiveness the Lord has given you. Has a person betrayed you? You have been a traitor to God more often and in worse ways than this person has. Has a person physically abused you? What do you believe your sins and my sins did to the Son of God? The Son of God had spikes pounded into his wrists and ankles, and a spear run through his side. The Son of God was crucified because of your sins and my sins. Has the person lied, cheated, stolen? What have you and I done? What is the list of our sins? This parable tells us that forgiveness does not first spring from us, but it comes from a higher source. It comes from our experience of forgiveness.

Let me ask you a question: Are you a person who has experienced the forgiveness of Jesus Christ? I don't mean that you believe that Christ died for your sins. That's important. I don't mean that you believe God is a forgiving God. That's also important. I mean have you ever personally experienced the forgiveness of your sins? Have you ever knelt before God, recognized the awfulness of your own sins, how much you have grieved God and been forgiven? Have you ever come before God and known that you've known that he receives you and welcomes you the way the Father welcomed the prodigal son in Jesus' story of the prodigal?

Friends, if you can't honestly say that I know what it feels like to experience forgiveness from God, then you will never be a good forgiver. You need to start there. Forget what has been done to you for a moment. Forget the hurt and anger you feel. Forget your rights for a moment. The first step for you is to go before God and experience his forgiveness, his acceptance, his restored favor on your life.

You say: Well, what if I don't forgive? I just don't want to let go of this abuse. I can't forgive that person for hurting someone I love. I don't want to let go of my hate.

Well, Jesus says in verse 34:

Matthew 18:34

In anger his master turned him over to the jailers until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.

If you don't forgive, you are imprisoning yourself in the world's worst jail. If you don't forgive, you will be tortured. You will be consumed by bitterness, anger, and hatred.

See, friends, forgiveness is not only a gift that we give to someone else. Forgiveness is always a gift, it's never something that someone else earns. Forgiveness is not something that someone else deserves – it's always a gift.

Forgiveness is also a gift that we give to ourselves. It's a gift of being let out of the prison of our own bitterness and our own grudge. It's a gift that we give to ourselves of finding freedom from our past, of being free from anger and hurt, of being able to breathe free – unchained, unshackled by what someone else did to us.

I'm going to lead us in communion in just a moment, but I can't talk about us forgiving other people without first talking about the forgiveness that Jesus offers to us. I know that there are some of you who are listening to me today who have never in a full and complete way turned to Jesus Christ and asked him to forgive all of your sins. You have never in a full and complete way took all of your sins and like that priest that I described earlier in the talk placed them on the head of Christ on the cross.

I'm going to invite you to do that now. In just a moment, I'm going to ask those of you that say "I don't know that I've ever fully and completely asked Jesus to forgive me for everything. All that I've said. All that I've done. All that I haven't said. All that I've left undone. But I want to today. I want to be forgiven." In a moment, I'm going to ask you to stand and pray with me.

COMMUNION

For those of you who say that there is someone, a particular person or a particular situation or series of things. I have a particular person who wounded me. I feel like I still need to forgive. I'm going to ask you today to step out from wherever you are and to take communion up front at the stage. What I want you to do during communion is I want you to picture this other person walking up with you. This person who offended you. This person who hurt you. This person who hurt your loved one. They are walking up with you. Jesus is standing here and he's offering us his body and blood. He's offering us his forgiveness. He says, "For those of you who have been hurt, those of you who have been offended, before you take communion, I want you to turn to that other person in your heart and share your communion with them. You share the forgiveness that I'm giving to you with them. Will you do that?"

When People Wound

Rich Nathan
August 13 & 14, 2016
Mended
Matthew 18:21-35

- I. The Measure of Forgiveness
- II. The Meaning of Forgiveness
- III. The Myths of Forgiveness
- IV. The Method of Forgiveness
- V. The Motive of Forgiveness