**VICTORIOUS LIFE BIBLE STUDY: FREEDOM IN FORGIVENESS BISHOP WILLIAM A. LEE, JR.**

Sunday we spoke about the emotional impact that comes when we have been wronged and the need to make a decision about forgiveness that must go beyond our feelings. That is important because before we can move toward forgiveness, we must acknowledge and understand what happens when we've been wounded because If the injury cuts deeply, the emotional devastation that we experience can be overwhelming, paralyzing, can impact us and cause us to react to our painful offenses in a variety of ways. Sometimes we deny the hurt and pretend it is not there. There are some people who are what they call stuffers who stuff the pain inside, and lie to themselves yet the pain continues to build until we blow up in rage over minor issues. Other times we retaliate. Because we hurt, we want to hurt the offender, possibly making him or her feel worse than we do. A common form of revenge is to speak against an offender to anyone who will listen. There are some who simply to wallow in pain as we remind ourselves again and again that we don't deserve such treatment. We justify our outrage and rehash the scenario, refusing to let go of it.These practices actually serve to make our pain and as long as we focus on the pain, we'll never take the first step toward letting go and moving on which is what forgiveness is all about. So, as we explore this subject and move toward engaging in and understanding Biblical Forgiveness let us examine again the definition for Biblical forgiveness and some steps to move us toward experience true freedom through forgiveness.

**A BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF FORGIVENESS**

The Greek word translated "forgive" conveys the idea that forgiveness is a release from some type of an obligation. When we forgive, we aren't saying what the other person did is acceptable. We simply release his or her obligation to us. Thus, we release ourselves of the hold unforgiveness has on our lives, which frees us from the bondage of pain. The definition of forgiveness is essentially the act of pardoning an offender. In the Bible, the Greek word translated “forgiveness” literally means “to let go”, as when a person does not demand payment for a debt. Luo- to loose, to let loose, relieve from, to set at Liberty, Aphesos- dismiss, to send forth or away. Charisomai- to show someone favor, be kind to, to pardon or remit a penalty. Jesus used this comparison in his parable of the unmerciful slave (Matthew 18:23-35) as well as when he taught his followers to pray “Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is in debt to us” (Luke 11:4). The Bible teaches that unselfish love is the basis for true forgiveness, since

**“it keeps no record of wrongs” (1 Corinthians 13:5)**.

**“If we really want to love, we must learn how to forgive.” —*Mother Teresa***

Forgiving others means letting go of resentment and giving up any claim to be compensated for the hurt or loss we have suffered.

**“Forgiveness does not change the past but it does enlarge the future.” —*Paul Lewis Boise***

**“Once a woman has forgiven her man, she must not reheat his sins for breakfast.” —*Marlene Dietrich, actress*.**

When one says I am sorry, because of our Christian understanding we are then constrained by the Gospel imperative to forgive. I have heard people say the FORGIVENESS IS FOR WIMPS OR THE WEAK, NO. Forgiveness is hard work Forgiveness is at the very heart of the gospel.

**Colossians 3:13 states, “Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”**

We were born sinners against God, but He loved us enough to send Christ, His Son to die for us. In the same way, we are commanded to forgive those who do wrong to us, not just those who are asking for forgiveness, or those who are first-time offenders or whose wrongs seem forgivable. Jesus famously told Peter in Matthew 18 to forgive someone “seventy times seven” times and he makes the sobering statement that **if we do not forgive others, our Father in Heaven will not forgive us (Matthew 6:15)**. The Bible states this in Hebrews 12:15,

**“See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it, many become defiled.”**

As we release unforgiveness and all the bitterness and anger that comes with it, we are freed to live and serve with real peace and joy and to grow in spiritual maturity. While we have established what Biblical forgiveness is we must also understand what it is not. Forgiveness was not a dismissal of suffering. Biblical forgiveness is not forgetting what happened or letting someone “off the hook.” Biblical forgiveness is not absolving the other person of any wrongdoing. Biblical forgiveness is not restoring trust or reconciliation (though that may come later).

II. Reasons to Forgive- Here are three main reasons to forgive:

1. Forgive for your own good.

As long as you refuse to let go of hurt, you've tied that other person to yourself. One person put it this way: "We're giving that person free rent inside our heads." Consider the cost of not forgiving: the energy and emotion you give to that hurt throughout the day or the sleep you lose. With unforgiveness, inner peace is impossible. When bitterness festers, the infection grows and damages our relationships with others. Forgiveness offers us freedom to move on so we can continue living.

2. Forgive because it pleases God.

Instead of asking, "Why should I forgive? It's his sin, not mine," realize obeying God's command to forgive frees you from your pain. Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgive us our sins in the same way we forgive others." He added,

**"For if you forgive people their wrongdoing, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well. But if you don't forgive people, your Father will not forgive your wrongdoing" (Matthew 6:14-15).**

It may take time and much soul searching before feeling ready to let go, but ultimately we forgive because holding onto unforgiveness isn't godly.

3. Forgive because you have experienced God's grace for your sins.

Your perception of God's grace shapes the way you treat others. Through Christ, we receive God's grace — forgiveness — which we don't deserve. No matter what you've done, God's grace wipes away every wrongdoing. If you grasp how little you deserve God's forgiveness, you'll be ready to release others.

Jesus taught this lesson when He visited Simon the Pharisee

**Luke 7:36-50**

**36 And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. 37 And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, 38 And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. 39 Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner. 40 And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. 41 There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. 42 And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? 43 Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. 44 And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. 45 Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. 46 My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. 47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. 48 And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. 49 And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? 50 And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.(Luke 7:36-50).**

The host didn't offer Him the common courtesy of having someone wash His feet. However, a prostitute washed His feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, kissed His feet, and poured perfume on them. The woman understood what Simon didn't. She knew how grossly she had sinned and how generously God had forgiven her. As long as we think we're morally superior to those who have wronged us, we'll have trouble letting go of pain. The Bible is clear:

**"There is no one righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10).**

Once we understand we truly are all sinners, we realize there isn't much difference between us and the one who caused the pain.

III. How to Forgive

Realizing your need to forgive is only the beginning of a long process. But it isn't a journey you have to walk alone. You can depend on God to walk alongside you.

1. Confront the hurt.

Even if the offense is small, don't ignore it or deny your pain. Deal with hurt actively. Otherwise, pain stays hidden deep within your soul, where bitterness can fester. In the church, too often we force smiles and deny our pain. Forgiveness begins with admitting, "I've been hurt, but I want to be free from this agony."

2. Ask God to heal your wounds.

Healing doesn't usually happen instantly. The deeper the wound, the harder it will be to release the offense. You may have to pray for extended periods.

**4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. (Isaiah 53:4-5)**

3. Allow yourself time to heal.

I liken the forgiveness process to grieving the death of a loved one. It takes time for grief to subside. Be kind to yourself. Don't push before you're ready.

4. Ask God to give you a clean heart.

Ask God to remove any desire for retaliation. Admit your weakness. Even though we tend to classify sins by size, in God's eyes sin is sin. The prayer of David after his adulterous affair makes the point that all sins are ultimately against God.

**"Against You — You alone — I have sinned and done this evil in Your sight" (Psalm 51:4).**

5. Accept that you no longer need the other person to be wrong.

Once you perceive God's grace in your life, you can acknowledge any level of culpability you own. That doesn't justify another's sin or cruelty. But it does remind us that, although our sins may be different, they are still rebellion against God. Once you can think objectively about your injury, ask, "What if God rewarded me according to my deeds?"

6. Pray for the person who hurt you.

Instead of crying out, "God, repay him for his sins," pray for divine blessings for your offender. The deeper the hurt, the more difficult this will be to pray. To refuse to pray this way is to set yourself up as judge with the right to decide what others deserve.

**27 “But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. 29 To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic[b] either. 30 Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. 31 And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. 32 “If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. 35 But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. 36 Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Luke 6:27-36**

7. Ask why this hurt so badly.

The answer may seem obvious: He committed adultery. She lied about me. But when you scrutinize your attitudes, you may see that you are partially responsible. Often we refuse to recognize any personal culpability if it helps us see ourselves as good and the one who caused pain as evil. We should in no way excuse or overlook an offense, but we should ask God to help us see if we bear any responsibility.

8. Let go of the offense.

Yes, someone hurt you, but the other person has ultimately sinned against God. This is His issue. Jesus, in the midst of His own physical torture, cried out to God,

**"Father, forgive them" (See Luke 23:34).**

To follow Jesus' example is not easy. Still, as children of God we must forgive to live in fellowship with other human beings.

9**. Recognize no one is perfect.**When we hate somebody, we tend to lose our perspective about that person. When we’re filled with resentment and bitterness and hurt, we tend to dehumanize the offender. We treat them like an animal.

But we’re all in the same boat. The Bible says,

**“Not a single person on earth is always good and never sins” (Ecclesiastes 7:20 NLT, second edition)**.

We’re all imperfect.

10**. Relinquish your right to get even.**This is the heart of forgiveness. The Bible says,

**“Never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God, for he has said that he will repay those who deserve it” (Romans 12:19a TLB).**

You deserve to retaliate, but you must commit not to do so. It’s not fair, but it’s healthy. This isn’t a one-time decision but a daily one that may even require moment-by-moment decisions.

11**. Refocus on God’s plan for your life.**You stop focusing on the hurt and the person who hurt you. Instead, you refocus on God’s purpose for your life, which is greater than any problem or pain you might be currently facing.