

OFFERING GRACE
Good News About Grace - Part 6 of 10
Matthew 10:8 (LB)
Rick Warren

"Give as freely as you have received!" Matt. 10:8 (LB)

FORGIVENESS QUIZ

- | | |
|--|-----|
| A person should not be forgiven until he asks for it. | T F |
| Forgiving includes minimizing the offense and the pain caused. | T F |
| Forgiveness includes restoring trust and reuniting a relationship. | T F |
| You haven't really forgiven until you've forgotten the offense. | T F |
| When I see someone hurt, it is my duty to forgive the offender. | T F |

I. WHAT FORGIVENESS IS *NOT*

1. It isn't _____.
2. It isn't _____ the seriousness of the offense.
3. It isn't _____ a relationship without changes.
4. It isn't _____ what happened.
5. It isn't _____ when I wasn't the one who was hurt.

II. WHAT IS GENUINE FORGIVENESS?

1. REMEMBERING _____

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you." Eph. 4:32 (NIV)

2. RELINQUISHING _____

"... *Never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God, for He has said that He will repay those who deserve it.*" Romans 12:19 (LB)

3. RESPONDING _____

"... *do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you.*" Luke 6:27-28 (NIV)

"*Love keeps no record of wrongs.*" 1 Cor. 13:5 (NIV)

4. REPEATING _____

"*Peter asked, 'Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?' 'No.' Jesus replied, 'seventy times seven!'"* Matt. 18:21-22 (NLT)

WHY OFFER GRACE TO OTHERS?

1. GOD IS GRACIOUS TO ME. Eph. 4:32

2. THE ALTERNATIVE IS BITTERNESS.

"*Be careful that none of you fails to respond to the grace which God gives, for if he does there can very easily spring up in him a bitter spirit which is not only bad in itself but can also poison the lives of many others.*" Heb. 12:15 (Ph)

3. GOD EXPECTS ME TO DO IT.

"*For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*" Matt. 6:15 (NIV)

OFFERING GRACE
Good News About Grace - Part 6 of 10
Matthew 10:8 (LB)
Rick Warren

Last week I said four words probably define grace better than any other phrase -- God is for us. God is not just with us. God is not just by us. If you've invited Christ into your life, He's not just in us, but the Bible says He's for us. And God has so many reasons to be against us because of our sin, but because of Jesus, God is for us.

We've been looking for six weeks at the grace of God, the Good news of God's grace. We've looked at Saving Grace, Sustaining Grace, Healing Grace, Liberating Grace. Today I want us to look at Offering Grace. The Bible says that God didn't just intend for you to receive it. He wants you to pass it on. If you have been blessed by God, He wants you to bless others. If you have been cared for by God, He wants you to care for others. If you've been forgiven by God, He wants you to forgive others.

Jesus said it like this in Matthew 10:8 "*Give as freely as you have received.*" Whatever you've been given by God you are to offer to others.

This morning I want us to think in particular about forgiveness because we've received that more than anything else. How do we give forgiveness to other people?

We live in a society today where this theme of forgiveness is frequently in the headlines. It was in the headlines a couple of weeks ago of the incident of Carla Faye Tucker, who was on death row ready to be killed. She asked for forgiveness. It's been in several other incidences -- the scandals in the White House, talking about forgiveness there. The crimes of Saddam Hussain, talking about forgiveness there. But there's a lot of shoddy thinking today about forgiveness, a lot of myths, a lot of misconceptions. When it comes to forgiveness, some people water it down. In fact, in our society, we're seeing an epidemic of this. It's cheap grace. It's an abusive grace. And it's making forgiveness apply to anything and everything so much that forgiveness means nothing. It's almost as if we're afraid that somebody somewhere might feel guilty for one second, so we just go around saying, Everybody's forgiven all the time anywhere, everywhere.

Today I want us to look at what is really forgiveness? What is it? Before we do that I want us to take a little test. Five questions, right or wrong, true or false. This is not a thing you're going to be graded on and I give you permission to cross out yours and put in the right answer. Write down, true or false, what you believe about these statements.

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| 1. A person should not be forgiven until he asks for it. | True or false. |
| 2. Forgiveness includes minimizing the offense and minimizing the pain cause. | True or false |
| 3. Forgiveness includes restoring trust and reuniting a relationship. | True or false. |
| 4. You haven't really forgiven until you've forgotten the offense. | True or false. |
| 5. When I see someone else hurt, it is my duty to forgive the offender. | True or false. |

OFFERING GRACE

Good News About Grace - Part 6 of 10

If you were to take the word of God and you were to particularly read through the Gospels and read what Jesus said about forgiveness, you would come to the conclusion that all five of these statements are false. We're going to look today at what forgiveness really is. But before we can look at that, we need to look at what it isn't. The Bible says there are five things that forgiveness is not.

1. Forgiveness is not conditional. In other words, based on some kind of condition. In fact, the Bible says the exact opposite. The Bible says that real forgiveness, genuine forgiveness is unconditional. It is not something you earn. It is not something you deserve. It is not something you buy or bargain for. It is not something you get as part of a bargain if you promise to never do it again. It is unconditional.

When you tell the person, "I will forgive you if..." that's not forgiveness. You're bargaining, not forgiving. Genuine forgiveness is unconditional. It's offered even if it's not asked for. When Jesus hung on the cross, He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." At that point, nobody had asked for forgiveness. Certainly nobody deserved it. Nobody had bargained or bartered for it. It was an unconditional offer of pardon. *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."* Genuine forgiveness is unconditional.

2. It isn't minimizing the seriousness of the offense. Real forgiveness is not minimizing the seriousness of the offense. It's not saying, "It's no big deal. It really didn't hurt. Don't worry about it. It didn't hurt me that bad." The truth is, if it's worth forgiving, it did hurt you. It did cause pain and you don't need to minimize it because that's not a part of forgiveness. Forgiveness is saying, "Yes, it did hurt. Yes, it did cause pain in my life. But I'm going to let it go. I'm not going to hold it against you."

Yesterday in the paper there was a story of a man who killed his father, his mother and his brother. If I were to go to that man and say, "I proclaim you forgiven! It's no big deal. It's not a big issue. It's wasn't such a bad thing." And I minimize it. That is not forgiveness. That's insanity! It was a big deal. So forgiving isn't saying it didn't hurt when it did or it's no big deal when it was a big deal.

You need to understand that there's a difference between being wronged and being wounded. Wounds are unintentional. Wrongs are intentional. You're wounded all the time by people accidentally. Do people say things that hurt you that they didn't mean to say? Sure. Do people do things that hurt you that they didn't mean to do? Sure. Those do not require forgiveness. What they require is acceptance, recognizing that we live in a fallen world, an imperfect environment, people are going to hurt you many times unintentionally.

Forgiveness needs to be reserved for the big stuff, for the serious things, for the things that are intentionally hurtful, people mean you harm -- that's what you reserve forgiveness for. Let's say you don't like the way I dress. And maybe the way I dress offends your fashion sensibilities. I don't need your forgiveness. I need your acceptance.

On the other hand if someone hurts you intentionally, you've been seriously wronged, that's what you need to forgive.

OFFERING GRACE

Good News About Grace - Part 6 of 10

Whenever you minimize a wrong and say, "It's no big deal!" you cheapen forgiveness. Reserve forgiveness for the serious things.

3. Forgiveness is not resuming a relationship without change. Forgiveness is not the same thing as reconciliation. They're two different issues. Forgiveness is not the same thing as rebuilding or restoring a relationship. Forgiveness is instant, but trust has to be rebuilt over time. There's a big difference between forgiving a person and trusting a person. Forgiveness simply takes care of the damage, it's letting the person off the hook. But it does not guarantee that the future relationship is going to be right. Those are other issues. It takes more than forgiveness for reconciliation. Three other things. If you want to have a restored relationship with someone, first comes forgiveness -- that's your part if you've been hurt. But on their part it takes three other things:

- 1) repentance, demonstrating genuine repentance
- 2) restitution where and when possible
- 3) rebuilding trust. Rebuilding trust takes time.

In a relationship that has been harmed or damaged, if you've been hurt, forgiveness is the part you do. But they have to show some other things to show that repentance and restoration has taken place.

For instance, if you have been in a relationship where you were married to an alcoholic, abusive spouse and they really hurt you repeatedly over and over, and that person comes home and says, "I'm sorry will you forgive me," you say, "Yes, I forgive you" because God commands you to forgive. Forgiveness is instant. But if they say, "Now, will you let me back in the house" you say, "That's a different issue. We need to have some progress here first. You need to get some counseling. Sign up for Celebrate Recovery. You need to develop a track record to show there's some genuine change."

While forgiveness is based on grace, trust is earned. Big difference. If somebody offends you over and over and repeatedly in the same way continues to hurt you, you are called by God to repeatedly forgive them over and over. But you are not obligated to instantly trust them and act like everything's fine and they can come home and things go on as they have in the past. It isn't resuming a relationship without change.

4. Real forgiveness is not forgetting what happened. Some of you have a hard time with this, a hard time forgiving because you think, "I can never forget it and if I forgive I'll have to start the relationship again." No, that's not true. Forgiveness is not forgetting what happened. I know you've heard this cliché because it's very popular in America -- forgive and forget. That's so sweet and nice! There's only one problem with that. You can't do it. It doesn't work. It's impossible for you to forget everything that's happened. The more painful something is, the less likely it is that you're going to forget it.

Think about the logic of it. It is impossible to try to forget something. "Have you forgotten it?" - "I'm trying!" The whole time you're trying, what are you focusing on? What you can't forget.

OFFERING GRACE

Good News About Grace - Part 6 of 10

You cannot forget something by trying to forget it. It doesn't work that way. The only way you forget something is by replacing it with something else.

Scientists have proven that your brain is like a giant warehouse filled with thousands and thousands of file cabinets and you never really forget anything. The more important an event is in your life, the more likely it is you're remember it. You may block some things out. And trauma may cause you to erase some recall of events but they're there. And if surgeons were able to take a probe and open up your brain and stimulate certain parts of your brain, they can bring back the colors, the memories, the smells, and everything that you had in that instant. You don't really forget anything. It's there.

Some of you think that's the ultimate of Christian maturity. When am I going to get to the point that I'm so grown up in Christ that I forget the painful things in my life? When am I going to be so mature that I forget the things I feel guilty over and the thing that other people have done to me? The truth is, you may never forget them.

But there's something better than forgetting. What? Remembering but not feeling the pain. Remember, but seeing how God worked in it anyway. Remembering, and seeing how God brought good out of bad, how you grew in character, how it made you sensitive to the hurts and needs of other people, how it changed the direction at a crucial point in your life, how things you have today would have not happened if it hadn't been for that event. There's something far better than forgetting. It's remembering and realizing the sovereign grace of God is working as in Romans 8:28 "... *all things together for good.*" That's even better. Because when I forget something, I don't thank God or praise God. When I remember something and I remember what God has done in spite of that, then I really thank God and I praise God.

So forgiveness is not forgetting, because you probably never will forget it.

5. Forgiveness isn't my right when I wasn't the one that was hurt. This is the exact opposite of what culture teaches, because everything in culture says run around forgiving everybody because we're afraid somebody might somewhere feel guilty. Let's get rid of the guilt as quickly as possible by just offering a blanket forgiveness. We offer forgiveness for things we didn't do to people we don't even know. Only the victim can pronounce forgiveness to the person who has offended them. If you weren't hurt, it's not your place to proclaim the forgiveness.

For instance, in December, remember the story of the fourteen year old boy who walked into a high school prayer meeting in Paducah, Kentucky and killed three teenage girls? Shot them dead. The next morning on that campus, the girls had not been buried, their bodies were not even cold yet, and some students had put up signs all around the campus telling the killer, "We forgive you, Mike." I know those kids meant well, and I know those kids probably thought they were doing the Christian thing, but it wasn't their right to forgive that man. Who had been offended the most? How do you think the parents felt about that? They hadn't even worked through their grief yet. Sure they were going to come to forgiveness but they hadn't worked through their grief yet. How about the younger brothers and sisters of those teenage girls who were killed? It wasn't the students' place to pardon somebody because they weren't the ones who had been sinned against.

OFFERING GRACE

Good News About Grace - Part 6 of 10

Recently in Washington D.C. a leader held up a picture of Timothy McVey and said, "I have forgiven this man and you need to too." The only problem was, he didn't have the right to do that. Timothy McVey had not offended him. It was the parents and the relatives of the people who were killed in the Oklahoma bomb explosion that have the place to offer forgiveness to that offender.

If I were to take all the war criminals of World War II, all the Nazis and say, "Hitler, Eichman, all you guys. You're all forgiven. I forgive you all." Is that short circuiting any thing? It's not my place to forgive those people. It's the people who had relatives killed in the holocaust.

If you had a daughter who was kidnapped, raped and killed and I, before you even had time to grieve about it, went to the person and said, "You're forgiven," somebody has short circuited the process.

If anybody could just forgive anybody there'd be no reason for jails. Somebody would say, "You're all forgiven so you don't need to serve any time." There's a big difference. Forgiveness is not my right if I'm not the one hurt.

Many people don't understand that forgiveness does not remove the consequences of sin. When Carla Faye Tucker who killed people with an ax, gave her life to Christ in prison and asked Jesus Christ to forgive her, I believe she was truly born again. And she even asked the people to forgive her who she had hurt through those murders. But that did not let her out of prison. There were still consequences.

When a woman takes drugs all her life and then she gets pregnant and has a baby and that baby's addicted to crack cocaine, the mother may say, "Dear Jesus, please forgive me for my sins," she is instantly forgiven but the baby is still a crack addict.

Or the person who goes out and says, "I'm going to go out and live life anyway I want to, go to bed with anybody I want to, live a totally promiscuous life," and then they come and find Christ and say, "Jesus Christ, will You please forgive me and cleanse me of all my immorality," instantly they are forgiven. But they still might carry a sexually transmitted disease. They still might die of AIDS.

A person who leaves his wife/husband and children and has an affair and breaks up a marriage, and then later comes and says, "God, please forgive me. I know that was stupid. It was selfish. I shouldn't have done it. It was wrong." They are instantly forgiven by Jesus Christ, but that does not remove the scars that come from breaking up a home -- scars on the children, scars on both spouses, and all the others. There are consequences.

Real forgiveness is not some cheap term you just throw out and instantly everybody feels better. It is reserved for serious sins and it is reserved for the person of whom they were committed against.

That's not real forgiveness.

OFFERING GRACE

Good News About Grace - Part 6 of 10

WHAT IS REAL FORGIVENESS? The Bible says real forgiveness is four things.

1. REMEMBERING HOW MUCH I'VE BEEN FORGIVEN.

Remembering how much I've already been forgiven, how much grace I've received from Christ. Ephesians 4:32 *"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you."* Circle "in Christ". You're not forgiven because you earned it. You're not forgiven because you deserved it. You're not forgiven because you've promised never to sin again. You're forgiven because you've put your faith in Christ. This is the starting point for genuine forgiveness. If you don't feel forgiven you don't want to forgive anybody else. You don't want them to feel it, that's for sure. If you're hard on yourself, you're going to be hard on others. But the more grace you receive from God the more gracious you're going to be to others. The more forgiven you feel by God, the more forgiving you're going to tend to be toward others.

Jesus said this. One day a street walker came to Jesus and in front of a bunch of other leaders, took a very expensive alabaster box of perfume and she broke it and washed Jesus' feet with this very expensive perfume. They only wore sandals in those days. The religious leaders were incensed by this. They said, First, look who's doing this -- this woman of ill repute. And number two, she could have taken that box, sold the perfume for money and given the money to the poor and it would have been a whole lot better. Jesus rebuked the religious leaders. He said, "Lighten up! She has been forgiven much so she's giving the most love. She'll be remembered from this day forward because of her actions." It was an act of worship. Because she felt so graced by Christ, she was being gracious. She was being gracious herself. It starts with remembering how much I've been forgiven. All of us have been forgiven a lot.

2. RELINQUISHING MY RIGHT TO GET EVEN

That's the heart of genuine forgiveness -- relinquishing my right to get even. Romans 12:19 says *"Never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God for He has said that He will repay those who deserve it."* Notice He says don't try to get even, don't try to retaliate, don't seek revenge. Leave that up to God.

You say, "If I forgive them that means I give up all my right to get even." That's exactly what forgiveness is. You give up your right to get even. You absorb the pain yourself without having to retaliate. "But that's unfair!" Who said forgiveness is fair? There's a word for fairness. It's called justice. Justice is fair. Forgiveness is grace. You don't deserve forgiveness. You deserve justice. Aren't you glad God doesn't give you everything you deserve? None of us would be here if that were true. We always want justice in everybody else's life. But we don't want it in our own. God is gracious to us and He wants us to be gracious to others. So you say you give up your right to get even. Why?

It says *"Leave that to God for He has said that He will repay those who deserve it."* Life is not fair but one day God's going to settle the score. One day God is going to close the books. He's going to balance the ledger. He's going to even the odds. He's going to right the wrongs that we see. Sometimes you do see justice in this world but there's a lot of times you don't see justice.

OFFERING GRACE

Good News About Grace - Part 6 of 10

God is the God of justice and He's going to even the score one day. He says, "I'm going to even the score so leave it in My hands." Who can get better justice, you or God? Who can do a better job? Who can do a better job for divvying out payment for justice do. He says, "Let Me handle it. Let Me be the person to do that. You just relax and in the meantime let Me fill you with My grace and let Me put your heart at peace." When you're holding onto a hurt, you're only hurting yourself.

So you relinquish the right to get even.

3. RESPONDING TO EVIL WITH GOOD

Genuine forgiveness is responding to evil with good. Luke 6 *"Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you and pray for those who mistreat you."* How can you tell when you've really released somebody? How can you tell when you've genuinely forgiven them? You can pray for God to bless them. When you come to the point when you can actually pray, "Bless that person who hurt me," you'll know forgiveness is complete in your heart. When you can look at their hurt and not just your own.

Hurt people hurt people. We hurt other people because we're hurting ourselves. If somebody hurts you, it's most likely they're hurting on the inside. When you have genuinely forgiven a person, you can look past the ways that they've hurt you and see how they're hurting and how that hurt is part of the reason they've chosen to hurt you. Out of their hurt, they begin to hurt others. When you can look at their hurt, you know you've genuinely forgiven them. When you can pray for God to bless them, when you can do good to those that hate you, when you can bless those who curse you, you're responding to evil with good.

You say, "How could I ever do that? That's impossible. I couldn't do that to that person who's hurt me." You can't unless you do one thing. Allow the love of God to penetrate every fiber of your life. Only the love of God could cause you to do something like that. 1 Corinthians 13:5 *"Love keeps no record of wrongs."*

A guy was having a big argument with his wife. The next morning he went to the office and said, "Last night my wife got historical!" His friend said, "Don't you mean hysterical?" "No, historical. She told me everything I've ever done wrong!"

Do you ever do that? I do. The Bible says when I do it, I'm being hateful. I'm not doing it in love. *"Love keeps no record of wrongs."* That doesn't mean you forget the wrongs. It just means you don't use them as ammunition. It means you don't pull them out and use them to retaliate. What most of us like to do is forgive a hurt but we want to hold onto it too and stockpile it. Later on if we do something wrong and get accused and they say "You did this," then we can say, "But you did this!" The Bible says when you do that you're being hateful. Because love keeps no record of wrongs.

OFFERING GRACE

Good News About Grace - Part 6 of 10

There's a fourth thing that's a part of genuine forgiveness. It's not just remembering how much I've been forgiven and relinquishing my right to get even and responding to evil with good but also...

4. REPEATING THE PROCESS AS LONG AS NECESSARY

You do these things over and over. Forgiveness is not a one shot event. How long do you have to keep forgiving a person? You do it as long as the feeling of revenge keeps coming back. Peter asked that question of Jesus. *"Peter asked, 'Lord, how often should I forgive somebody who sins against me? Seven times?'"* Peter's thinking he's being really magnanimous here. The Jewish law said you had to forgive a person three times. He doubles it and throws one in for good measure. Jesus says, "Not quite. How about seventy times seven."

The point is -- for infinity. For as long as it takes. Until you let it go. You have to keep forgiving that person until the pain stops and the desire to get revenge goes away. You know you can come to the service or you can pray in a quiet time and say, "Dear Jesus, I know this bitterness is bad for me. I know I need to forgive them. Lord, I forgive that person," and five minutes later you want to kill them again. You have to say it again. When the memory comes back, you say it again. Again and again. You just keep doing it until the pain goes away. If they really hurt you it's going to take more than once. Because the memory is going to keep coming back. You have to repeat the process as long as necessary. It's got to be continual. It's a process.

You say, "I've forgiven them. Why do I still hurt?" Because it hasn't happened yet. You've got to keep forgiving them. Every time you hurt you go back over in your mind and say, "God, I forgive them again," until you know you've released them. I need to tell you, it is not always advisable, it is not always practical, it is not even always possible, to go to your offender and tell them you forgive them. There could be numerous reasons. Times may have changed. They may not even remember the event. Or they may never knew it happened. Maybe they've remarried. They may be dead. There are many reasons why sometimes you cannot go back to a person and ask their forgiveness in person.

What do you do? One thing you can do is use the technique of the empty chair. You imagine that offender sitting down in that empty chair and then you tell them how it felt. "This is why I've hated you all these years. This is why I resent you. This is why I felt hurt." Pour out your heart to that chair. Then you say, "Because of Jesus Christ and because of His grace in my own life, I'm letting you go. I'm setting you free. I'm releasing you. I'm not going to bring it up again. I'm not going to hold it against you. Not because you deserve it [because they don't. Forgiveness is grace] I'm doing it because Jesus says to do it and I'm letting it go." Or maybe you need to write a letter and you need to pour out in that letter "This is how I've hurt all these years. And this is how it's been in my life. This is what has bothered me all these months, but I'm letting it go. I want you to know that I forgive you." Then maybe you don't mail that letter.

OFFERING GRACE

Good News About Grace - Part 6 of 10

Some people you do need to go directly to. But sometimes it's not the best thing. You might get a good mature Christian to advise you whether you ought to go directly to them or write a letter that you never send.

That sounds pretty simple but it certainly isn't easy. Genuine forgiveness is never easy.

I have no doubt that in a crowd this size a lot of you are carrying some deep wounds. You're carrying some pain that you've carried for months, maybe even years. Yet when you think about that person who hurt you, through betrayal or rejection or something else, it still is as fresh as if it happened this morning. The pain is still there. You still hurt. And you're still filled with resentment.

What do you do? How are you going to get on with your life?

You say, "Why? Why in the world should I forgive that person who hurt me so much? You have no idea how much they hurt me." I don't. You're right. I don't. "Why in the world should I offer grace to that person?"

You ought to do it for three reasons, that's why.

1. I need to be gracious to others, to forgive others who've hurt me because God has been gracious to me. He is gracious on a moment by moment basis. If you can't forgive, you need to pause a minute and realize how much God has forgiven you. You will never have to forgive anyone else more than Jesus Christ has already forgiven you. Not a chance. You will never have to forgive anyone more than God has already forgiven you. Maybe what you need to do is stop for a minute and consider that you haven't always gotten what you deserved either. God has been gracious with you. And the Bible says because we've been forgiven by Christ we're compelled to forgive those who hurt us.

2. Because the alternative is bitterness. We know that one doesn't work. We've talked a lot about the futility of bitterness here at Saddleback. Scientists tell us that the most unhealthy emotion there is, is the emotion of resentment. It always hurts you more than anybody else. It's like taking cancer or fire into your heart. It's going to eat you up.

You always hurt yourself more with bitterness, more than you do the other person. While you're stewing, while you're fretting, while you're resenting, while you're thinking of retaliation, revenge, while you are rehearsing the pain over and over in your mind, they go on their merry way totally oblivious. They've dropped it. You're not hurting anybody but yourself with your resentment. The Bible says that in the book of Job. *"You're only hurting yourself with your anger."*

Resentment will not change the past, no matter how much you resent it won't change the past. And resentment will not solve the problem right now. It is incapable of solving any problems. Resentment doesn't even make you feel better. In fact, it makes you feel worse. It robs you of joy. It allow that person in your past to continue to hurt you now and that's dumb. Because they

OFFERING GRACE

Good News About Grace - Part 6 of 10

can't hurt you any more unless you allow them to by rehearsing the memory over and over. Resentment doesn't work. Bitterness doesn't work.

The Bible says in Hebrews 12 *"Be careful that none of you fails to respond to the grace which God gives for if he does there can very easily spring up in him a bitter spirit which is not only bad in itself but can also poison the lives of many others."* Like your children. Like your husband or your wife and others. Let it go.

3. God expects you to do it. Matthew 6:15 Jesus said this, *"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."* I don't know how to make it any clearer than the way Jesus said it right there. Forgiveness is a two way street. Do not burn the bridge that you've got to walk across to get into heaven. Jesus says we cannot receive what we're unwilling to give. You say, "I could never forgive that person" then I hope you never sin. Because you're going to need forgiveness to get into heaven. "I just don't feel like doing it." Do it anyway. Because it's the right thing to do.

The fact is you're going to be hurt in life. That's an established fact. The only question is, What are you going to do with those hurts? If you hold on to that hurt and let it build in your life, you will end up being a gnarled, shriveled up, bitter, hateful person. Your heart is going to grow hard and you're going to die bitter and lonely. Cause nobody wants to be around a bitter person.

Something else happens. It's an amazing thing that bitterness does to us. If you don't release that person through forgiveness, if you don't release them, you're going to start to resemble them. Because that's what bitterness does to you. "I'm never going to be like" and you fill in the blank "my dad, my mother, my brother, my sister, my ex spouse. "I'm never going to be like...." and who are you focusing on the whole time you say that? The Bible teaches that what we focus on we move toward and what we move toward, we become. What you resist, persists. You've got to let it go for your own sake.

You say, "But you don't understand. I could never forgive that person. I could never do that. You don't know how much they've hurt me." I don't know that. God does. "I could never forgive that person." That's why you need Jesus. You can't manufacture enough love in your life to handle all the ways you're going to be hurt. You are going to be hurt in life and you don't have enough love to overpower that on your own. You need Jesus Christ. And you need His love in your life or you're going to die a bitter person. You need Him to fill you with love, not every year, but every moment of the day.

The reason why some of you have a hard time forgiving, is because you don't feel forgiven. Let's start with a prayer today.

Prayer:

I want to pray a prayer for forgiveness and I'd like you to follow me. It's a prayer of liberation, a prayer of freedom, a prayer that can change your life. Some of you say, "I've

OFFERING GRACE

Good News About Grace - Part 6 of 10

forgiven that person in the past. Why do I still hurt?" You've got to keep forgiving them until the pain goes away.

Would you pray this prayer in your heart? "Dear Jesus Christ, You know I've been hurt by others. You know that my resentment has made me act in ways that have been unreasonable and unhelpful and unhealthy. I need Your power to release and forgive those who've hurt me so I can stop letting them control me. Would You please replace my hurt with the peace of Jesus Christ? God, I realize that I've hurt a lot of other people with my habits and my bad decisions and my hang-ups. Would You please forgive me for the way I've hurt others? Help me to make a list of those I've harmed and in the right way at the right time to humbly seek to make amends. Jesus Christ, I want to refocus my life on You. I want to face the future courageously with love and peace in my heart. Would You replace my resentment with Your love and replace my love with Your peace, my bitterness with Your grace? Thank You for Your graciousness to me. Thank You for forgiving me for the things that I've done wrong."

If you've never invited Christ into your life, why don't you ask Him right now. Say, "Jesus Christ, would You please come into my life and fill me with Your love and guide me from this day forward. I put my trust in You. In Your name I pray. Amen."