

“FORGIVE EVERYONE WHO IS TRYING TO WRECK YOUR LIFE”

by Rom A. Pegram (10/9/16)

Dr. Erwin Lutzer tells the story of a young woman who got married but found that she could not relate to her husband. As a child, her stepfather had abused her for a number of years. That experience made it difficult for her to experience any kind of physical love. A molested child may not like to be touched, even though the thing that they need the most is to be touched appropriately ... and to be embraced with genuine love...

But this young woman was transferring all of the distaste and hatred for her stepfather toward her husband because of the depths of her shame and bitterness.

She came to a pastor, and he pointed her to Luke 6. He said, “What does the Bible say you should do to your enemies?” She looked at V. 27 and said, “Love them, do good, bless them, and pray for them.”

Many people in this world have enemies of one sort or another. Some know they're enemies; others may not. Nevertheless, one of the reasons we have bad days in this life of ours is because of what *someone* has done or is doing that we are affected by. And the woman who went to the pastor and was pointed to Luke 6:27 found the formula for being set free from those who have tried or are trying to wreck our lives! It's called *forgiveness*.

Our scripture lesson for today speaks of this wonderful tool that all disciples should have in their survival kit. Listen to these words from a conversation between Jesus and God on that first Good Friday (Luke 23:32-34a, TEV)...

Two other men, both of them criminals, were also led out to be put to death with Jesus.
³³When they came to the place called "The Skull," they crucified Jesus there, and the two criminals, one on his right and the other on his left. ³⁴Jesus said, "Forgive them, Father! They don't know what they are doing."

So, what was that a reaction to—Jesus' words from Luke 23:34? You have to understand thoroughly what Jesus had been through in the past 24 hours or so to really understand the weight of these words ...

- He'd just finished what *he* knew to be the last supper with his friends ...
- He had to break up an argument about 'who was going to be the greatest' that was terribly out of line ... considering the events about to happen ...
- He spent an evening in agonizing prayer, asking God if there wasn't some way to do what he'd been called to do in a different way ...
- He was betrayed by one of his own and arrested ... like a common criminal ...
- Even Peter—though he said he never would—denied knowing the friend he said he loved not once, but three times ...
- Jesus was made fun of—mocked—and beaten ...
- He was made to go before his accusers, the Sanhedrin and he was framed ...

- Then he went through a mockery of a trial with no chance of justice being served, yet he refused to stand up for himself; he had to go to the Cross and he knew it; Jesus had to be the final sacrifice...
- Finally, Jesus went through the worst humiliation that any human being could ever suffer—being treated like a common criminal in public ... in a town where everyone knew you ... in front of your family and friends ...

Folks, Jesus had a very bad day. And yet, in spite of all of this—a bad day like we will never go through, he had the courage and the love in his heart to say, “Forgive them, Father! They don’t know what they are doing.”

Forgiveness is a major ingredient in getting through our bad days. Why? ‘Because forgiveness is what *fre*es us from our bad days. Without forgiveness, we’re bound to those who would wreck our days ... or our lives. Without forgiveness, we’re captives ... slaves to the sin of others. Jesus could have chosen that route. But, instead, he chose freedom ... through forgiveness. How can we do that in our lives? How can we forgive those who seem to want to wreck our lives ... intentionally or unintentionally? Here’s what Jesus teaches us. First, we need to ...

UNDERSTAND THAT IGNORANCE IS BEHIND THE SIN THAT CAUSES ‘BAD DAYS.’ Jesus’ words in our scripture for today are probably the most descriptive truth about all human sin—lovelessness, rebellion, hurt, hate, anger, violence, and a thousand other evils that befall the human race. *Even when sin is calculated, planned thoroughly, conceived carefully, and executed efficiently ... no one really understands the depth or dimension of sin’s destructiveness or the degree of its horrible damage to people. In a very real sense, every sin is a sin of ignorance...*

Jesus knew that. And he wants us to learn that truth about human sin. To learn the grace of forgiveness—to grasp hold of the will to forgive anyone and everyone who is trying to wreck your life right now—you need to find a starting point. And, Jesus gives us that starting point: “They don’t know what they are doing.”

The fact is, we don’t usually feel that way when we’re experiencing the actions of others against us. We tend to see things from the viewpoint of *our* experience. When bad things or bad days happen, we tend to think that it’s because whoever did the wrong knew exactly what they were doing and didn’t really seem to care either...

Jane and I will be married 39 years next June. That’s a huge milestone in our marriage and in our lives. But, in all honesty, today’s topic reminds me of our first few years of marriage, but let me preface what I’m going to say with this: A great deal of success in marriage, I’m convinced, has to do with how well we (men and women) realize the differences between genders and are willing to accept and work with those differences...

For instance ... for several years I believe Jane thought that I would literally stay up at night thinking of ways to irritate her (when all I was actually doing was being a *man*). I

don't remember the specific time, but I do know that there came a time in our marriage (and I think this happens in all marriages) when she finally broke down and asked me the question: "Rom, do you just lay awake at night thinking of ways to test me—to make my life miserable?" 'My answer? "No. It just comes naturally!"

Folks, the first step toward forgiveness (whether it's a spouse involved or a *real* enemy) is to realize the truth that comes from Jesus' words on the cross. When it comes to sin and the way it affects the lives of others (including ours), *people have no clue as to the seriousness of their actions!* They're ignorant about what they're really doing!

NEXT, MAKE SURE THAT YOU DON'T JUST FORGIVE PARTWAY. I believe it's safe to say that many relationships that are broken down, hurt, or suffering are in the shape they're in because someone has not been willing to forgive—fully. Maybe they've been willing to forgive ... but not forget—in other words, not forgive *all* the way...

Henry Ward Beecher once said: "I can forgive, but I cannot forget," which is just another way of saying, "I cannot forgive."

It strikes me that Mr. Beecher has something here ... because Jesus' kind of forgiving is the kind that no longer *holds anything against* others! Jesus' Good Friday example to us is that we need to forgive *all* the way ... to the point where love rules and the cause of our bad days are forgotten...

Also, remember what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "If you forgive others the wrongs they have done to you, your Father in heaven will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive the wrongs you have done" (Matthew 6:14-15, TEV). Forgiving or not forgiving has consequences, doesn't it? Jesus wants us to be clear about that...

Jesus' example of forgiving the *worst* people in his life—those who were trying to wreck his life—is our example to forgive *all those* in our lives who may be trying to wreck our lives! *Forgive others* – those who we wouldn't consider an 'enemy,' but those who seem to irritate us unnecessarily in our lives! "Forgive them, Father! They don't know what they are doing."

Forgive your enemies – those who seem to be deliberately trying to wreck your life ... calculated ... scheming ... intentional harm... "Forgive them, Father! They don't know what they are doing."

Forgive yourself – which is sometimes the hardest kind of forgiveness to realize... Too often, we don't feel like we *deserve* forgiveness so we're not willing to forgive ourselves for mistakes we've made; we can be held captive by circumstance or memory just because we're not willing to let go of it and forgive ourselves. Too often, we try to *reason* forgiveness out ... but we can't, so we won't forgive ourselves because it doesn't make sense. But what would Jesus say? "Forgive me, Father! I didn't know what I was doing."

Folks, we have to realize the ignorance behind the cause of our 'bad days' ... and then forgive *all* the way—even ourselves, if that's what's needed! If we don't, we'll never realize the freedom that comes from the grace of forgiveness—the freedom that Jesus experienced personally, even on the worst day of his life ...

“Love them, do good, bless them, and pray for them.” Luke 6:27. That's what true forgiveness is supposed to look like...

The pastor told the woman, “That's what you have to do about your step-father. Until you release all of the feelings of bitterness and you are free in your relationship with *him*—the one who has caused your 'bad day,' you will never be free to love others, including your husband.”

Every fiber of her being revolted against this advice. She thought to herself, “Why should I forgive him? Why should I love *him* when all of those awful things were done to me?”

Yet, this young woman needed help. She needed to be free from the chains that had made her a slave to her emotions all of these years. So, she decided to apply Luke 6:27 to *her* life ...

- She decided to bake her step-father a birthday cake...
- Rather than speaking evil of him (which had been her habit), she decided to speak well of him ... one step at a time...

Upon further reflection, she realized there were many good things she could say about him. In spite of the horrible sin against her, the fact was ... in many other ways he was a good father. She began to think about *those* ways & speak well of him rather than evil. She decided she would *pray* for him three times a day—that God would bless him, and that's what she did ...

Several weeks went by as she continued to obey the scriptures and forgive the man who'd so severely wronged her. Later she had the opportunity to tell her pastor that she saw her stepfather leave a supermarket and walk across the parking lot with a bag of groceries in his arms. For the first time in all those years, there were actually feelings of love toward him rather than hate. She said that she wasn't quite there ... yet, but she *almost* felt like she could go and put her arms around him. Then, she made the crucial statement that was the *real* result of this forgiveness: “Now, after all these years, I'm finally free to love my husband.”

The most remarkable thing about that true story is the evidence it holds of the sheer power that lies within a disciple's learning of the Master's overwhelming, unlimited grace of forgiveness. Forgiving others is the key to living in the liberty of the freeing forgiveness Jesus has given us ... and it's the first step toward living through a bad day, not to mention opening the door to new days unimagined!

Folks, don't hold back! Learn what the freedom of a life of forgiveness is all about! No, it's not the world's way ... but it's God's gift to us—his way of getting through our 'bad days'...