

“How Can I Forgive Others?”
by Rom A. Pegram (4/10/16)

Today, folks, we’re continuing in our series FORGIVENESS: THE REAL ‘F’ WORD... And today, specifically, we’re talking about ‘How Can We Forgive Others?’ And as we get into that, let me ask you another question...

How many of you recognize ‘The Lord’s Prayer’ when you hear it? Pretty familiar, isn’t it? It’s found a couple of times in scripture—Matthew 6 and also Luke 11. You know how it goes; don’t say it out loud, but say it in your mind, as you follow along with me, would you? And this is *our* version of Luke 11:1-4a—*expanded*...

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name. (What does it mean to be ‘hallowed’? Anyone know?)
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory, forever. Amen.

You have heard this before, many times I’m sure. But, in light of today’s topic, did you catch that phrase right there in the middle of the prayer? It’s the one that says, “...forgive us our sins, *as we forgive those who sin against us.*” That’s Luke 11:4, if you’re interested—‘...as we forgive those who sin against us.’ Now, why is that so hard?

It’s one thing to ask God to forgive us; we talked about that on Easter Sunday (The Prodigal Son). Last week we talked about forgiving ourselves, because sometimes—even though God has forgiven us—we still have a hard time forgiving ourselves. Then today, we’re going to be talking about one of the most difficult issues of forgiveness—one that many, many people struggle with—and that’s ‘how do you forgive others?’ As we just heard in the Lord’s Prayer, *just as God has forgiven us, we must also then forgive others*—just like that! It’s tough though, isn’t it? It’s hard to do sometimes... And one of the reasons it’s hard to do, I believe, is that too many people misunderstand what forgiving others really is. So, let me begin with what it’s NOT...

Forgiving others is not:

- *Justifying their actions*... It’s simply you coming to a place of letting go; it has more to do with YOU than with THEM...
- *Trusting the passage of time*... The passage of time doesn’t always make things better, contrary to what some say. Forgiving others is not the ‘time heals all wounds’ scenario (which doesn’t really exist anyway)...

- *Denying that you are hurt...* In no way is forgiveness denying the pain you've experienced...
- *Confronting them personally...* In many cases, this might be dangerous; so, forgiving others is not about *personal confrontation*...

Forgiving others is not about any of these. So, what does it mean to really forgive others? How can we forgive others, just as God's forgiven us? I'm happy you asked, because the Bible lays out for us—very clearly, I might add—a process we can walk through to find real freedom in forgiving others. Are you interested? If so, here's the biblical process for forgiving others... First:

REMEMBER HOW MUCH I'VE BEEN FORGIVEN. The first step to finding freedom in forgiving others is to realize just how much God has forgiven you ... and what that means!

Do you remember the story from a couple weeks ago—on Easter Sunday? If you weren't with us, you perhaps remember the story of the Prodigal Son. That's what we talked about. And if you remember how we ended up that time in God's word, we basically said that *we are all prodigals*—those who turn our backs on God, from time to time, away from God's very best (only to settle for less)! You see, the story of the Prodigal Son is *my* story; the story of the Prodigal Son is *your* story! We are the Prodigal Sons & Daughters who've turned our back on our loving Heavenly Father. We've chosen, all too often most likely, to go our own way. And we've enjoyed the life we chose ... for a season. Then, when we decided to return home, God welcomed us back. And God forgives us—not just partially, but completely. BUT, because we're human beings, we need to be reminded over and over and over again ... about how much we've been in need of forgiveness ... and how much God has forgiven over the years. Do you see what I'm saying? We are the Prodigals, aren't we?

Isaiah 1:18 (NLT) is a great reminder of God's complete forgiveness: "Come now, let's settle this," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool."

You see, before we can go further in our understanding of how to forgive others, we must first understand—completely—how much God has forgiven us! As someone once said, "Only forgiven people can forgive others!" And that's true of us, too... So, two things I want to ask you at this point: 1) Do you know how much God has forgiven you? And then 2) have you already thought of someone, today, that you need to forgive? We need to bring those two things together today ... and this might help:

Jesus tells a story in Matthew 18 that's commonly called 'The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant.' It's a story of a king who is owed a lot of money and then decides to call in the people who were in debt to him and make them pay. Jesus says that one debtor owed 'millions' to the king, so the king demanded that he, his wife, his children, and all his belongings be sold to pay the debt. Naturally, he pleaded for mercy. So the king, with an

incredibly merciful heart, actually released the man and totally forgave his debt. Then, what happens?

The man goes right out, confronts someone who owes him a thousand dollars, and has him thrown in jail (debtor's prison) until the debt can be paid. The king finds out about this and calls the man in before him and here's how the story ends (Matt. 18:32-35, NLT):

Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt. ³⁵ "That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart."

Folks, it's so important to understand just how much we've been forgiven! And, then, as scripture says ... forgive others in the same way! But, how do we do that? That's the next step...

RELEASE THE PERSON ENTIRELY. If you have someone in mind, today, that you need to forgive ... this is the second step that needs to take place! Release them entirely ... BUT, what does that mean?

Releasing someone entirely means ... to set them free! It means no longer holding on to bitterness or resentment. It means to stop playing the tapes of the incident over and over and over again in your head. It means to fully let go!

It also means to drop the GRUDGE! That'll only hurt you. How's the ol' saying go? *Holding a grudge is like drinking poison and hoping the other person gets sick!* You have to let go of the GRUDGE ... and that means *releasing the person who's offended you entirely!*

As I said before, it's not about a confrontation either. To release a person doesn't mean you have to confront them personally, repair your relationship, or even reconcile. You don't even have to be in conversation with that person to release them. You simply have to choose to release them—to let them go...

Forgiveness, folks, is a choice... It's not an emotion; it's a decision. And you need to decide to forgive ... and release the other person entirely—totally set them free ... from YOU! You'll be the 'captive' if you don't; and maybe you already know that... (If you want some creative ways to 'release the person entirely,' let me know.) After you've taken the big step of 'releasing,' you then need to move to this:

RECOGNIZE GOD'S PURPOSE IN THE PROCESS. This has to be step #3, folks! It has to work in this order or it'll lead to confusion; let me explain...

Some of us have tried to reorganize God's steps in this process, but it just doesn't work! We've said things like 'God, if you'll just show me your purpose for this pain in my life,

I'll then be able to forgive and let the other person go.' But, God's ways don't work like that, do they? No, God would say 'You have to release them first; once you take that 'step of faith' then I will show you my big picture—my overall purpose for what you're going through.' When we hold grudges, for instance, we've put a wedge between us and God ... and God can't speak to us clearly at that point. Once we're obedient to release those who've offended us, then the path between God and us is clear and we can hear God's purposes without obstruction. He can show us the reason for our pain...

That's the way God works! So, release or regurgitate; the choice is yours ... and it's always a choice! Romans 8:28 (NLT), just to remind you, tells us: "And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them." This verse is very important for understanding God's purpose in the process; and don't miss the word *everything*... (Additionally, check out the story of Joseph in Genesis 47-50.) Finally, scripture tells us to do this:

RE-ESTABLISH THE RELATIONSHIP (AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE). Steps 1-3 are mandatory; Step 4 is conditional...

Romans 12:18 (NJB) is a great translation for this and it reads: "*As much as possible* [italics mine], and to the utmost of your ability, be at peace with everyone." If you can re-establish the relationship, that's great. But, there are times when you should *not* re-establish the relationship:

- If it's going to lead to additional personal harm...
- If there's less than 25% chance of restoration...
- If the other person is unaware they've harmed you (awkward!)...
- And finally ... if you're expecting an apology...

Let Romans 12:21 (NLT) be your guide: "Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good." What did that say? Evil for evil? No... Do good, as often as you can. Let that be your guide with those who've offended you... And then, here's step 5. Are you ready?

REPEAT THE PROCESS.

Folks, the bottom line today is ... YOU HAVE A CHOICE!

- On one side of the equation, you can *go ahead and hold on to your grudges*... You can hold on to things like bitterness and revenge and let those consume your life. It's totally up to you...
- Or, on the other side of the equation, you can choose *forgiveness* (which is code for *freedom*)... If you learn to forgive and release others entirely, no longer will you be the captive, but you'll experience freedom like never before...

So, which will you choose? My challenge to you today is this: **Choose Forgiveness. Choose Freedom** ... and then you'll know the JOY of the life God wants for you!