

“Forgive Each Other”—Fully Connected (2 of 4)

In this message series we’re looking at what it takes for followers of Jesus Christ to become **“Fully Connected”** to each other.

Last week we began with this simple and yet beautiful truth: **“The health and maturity of your relationship with God is determined by the health and maturity of your relationship with the people God puts in your life.”**
(VERTICAL & HORIZONTAL)

Jesus’ greatest desire for us, his followers, was made clear in his prayer in John 17: *“I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.”*
John 17:20-21 (NLT)

Jesus’ desire for us as his followers is to be as connected as he is with the Father. Jesus wants us to achieve perfect unity, and that unity will send a message to the world.

But as we said last week, the church is often just as messed up as everyone else!

If you’re here and you’re not a Christian, you can relax a bit because the message we’re speaking through this series is directed to those who claim to follow Jesus Christ. So you’re off the hook. BUT I think that even though these messages don’t directly apply to you—the principle is still the same. In fact, I think our world would be a lot better off if we all lived this way—whether or not you’re a Christian.

However, for those of us who are followers of Jesus Christ, our Heavenly Father calls us to live under a standard that we are to unto others, not as they’ve done unto us, nor are we to do unto others as we think they deserve, BUT, we are to do unto others as has been done unto us by God.

We have been invited into this incredible relationship whereby God has shown us incredible, undeserved **LOVE**. Simply said, **“We love because he first loved us.”** And if we struggle with showing that kind of love, then we’ve simply forgotten the love that was shown to us by God.

With that thought in mind, today we turn our attention to another key element of being **“Fully Connected”** to each other as the Church, and that’s forgiveness. We are called to **“Forgive Each Other”** just as God has forgiven us.

If you have your Bible with you please turn to Matthew 18:21-35 (p. 749 in your Chair Bible)

“Then Peter came to him and asked, ‘Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?’”
(Jesus had just finished telling his disciples what to do if a believer sins against you and he outlined a process in the preceding verses. Peter knew human nature and how many times people need forgiveness—often for the same offense. He understood the human tendency to commit a sin, be forgiven, and then before long commit the same sin again. Proverbs—“As a dog returns...)

The heart of Peter’s question was this: *“Does forgiveness have a limit?”* Granted that a person who commits an offense and repents should be forgiven and restored a few times. But what if he continually falls into sin, over and over again? *“How many times do I have to forgive?”*

Peter might have even thought that he was being generous when he suggested a measure of “seven times.” Seven times, is more than twice that prescribed by Jewish tradition. Jewish tradition at the time of Christ was to forgive someone three times. Peter probably thought Jesus would be impressed with the generous suggestion of up to seven times. But Jesus was not impressed. In fact, Jesus blew through Peter’s answer with this statement...)

“No, not seven times,’ Jesus replied, ‘but seventy times seven!’” (Peter was thinking in the limited terms of judgement. After all, judgement keeps count; grace does not. With that in mind, Jesus answered, *“not seven times, but seventy times seven!”* (And by the way, for those of you who are doing the math right now, Jesus is not saying, “Stop at 490 times!”)

Jesus is just giving a number that shows that, for all practical purposes, there should be no end to the forgiveness. Why? Because that is how God forgives. In a parallel passage in Luke 17 Jesus tells His disciples, *“Even if that person wrongs you seven times a day and each time turns again and asks forgiveness, you must forgive.”* Luke 17:4 (NLT) When you come to understand the depths of God’s forgiveness in your life, you will be able to extend that same forgiveness to anyone who sins

against you.

To further explain the nature and extent that we are to forgive, Jesus tells Peter a story:

“Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. He couldn’t pay, so his master ordered that he be sold—along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned—to pay the debt.”

“But the man fell down before his master and begged him, ‘Please, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.’ Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt.”

“But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment.”

“His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it,’ he pleaded. But his creditor wouldn’t wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full.”

“When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. 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. Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’ Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt.”

“That’s what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart.”

Matthew 18:21-35 (NLT)

Again, Jesus is simply saying this: *“You can’t have a healthy relationship with me, if you don’t have a healthy relationship with those around you.”* It’s both the **Vertical** and the **Horizontal**.

The apostle Paul wrote about God’s forgiveness of our greatest debt of sin in Titus 3:3-7.

“Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled and became slaves to many lusts and pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy, and we hated each other.

“But—‘When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. Because of his grace he declared us righteous and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.’” Titus 3:3-7 (NLT) Forgiveness doesn’t make sense unless you are a forgiven person! That is Jesus’ point in the story. We, who have been graciously, totally, and permanently forgiven by God for our sins against him are to act like the spiritual children that we have become by reflecting the love and compassion of their heavenly Father. We are to *“be kind and compassionate to each another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave us.”*

Christians should be the most forgiving people! When we are not forgiving people, we are living in direct opposition to our new life in Jesus Christ.

Paul sums it up so well in Colossians 3:13, *“Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. (ILLUS: K.C. EGR) Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.”* Colossians 3:13 (NLT) The Apostle Paul would have made a horrible counselor! If you sat down in his chair and told him of all of the anger in your life because of what other people have done to you, and then he looked over to you and said, *“Great story, now go and forgive those people.”* You’d want your \$100 back! *“How rude! Just forgive? What about what they took from me?!?!? It can’t be that easy! How do you expect me to forgive them? You don’t understand what they did to me!!!*

Forgiveness is when we decide

It’s not something that happens because we feel like it, forgiveness is a decision.

that someone doesn’t owe us anymore.

What does that person owe you? “What do you mean?” When someone sins against us, they is something that is taken away from you. *It may be something tangible or intangible. For example:*

If your mom or dad left home, they stole from you the opportunity to grow up with both parents in the home. And every day you feel that loss.

If a person abused you when you were a child, they stole from you your innocence, and the opportunity to grow up as a whole person.

If a person slandered you and gossiped against you, they stole from you your reputation, and the ability to walk in peace with other people.

Forgiveness is a decision to cancel that debt. You don't wait for the person to come to you or to even own up to it—you simply make the decision to forgive.

Forgiveness is when you say to the person, *"You don't owe me anymore. I'm canceling your debt."*

Forgiveness is when you give the gift of canceling debts. The habit of our lives should be to dispense forgiveness: **(ILLUS: "Here's some forgiveness...")**

I realize that this doesn't come easy, because after all, they really do owe you.

But we forgive because he forgave! Forgiveness doesn't make sense unless you are a forgiven person! The degree to which you understand the significance of your forgiveness, is the degree to which you will be freed up to forgive the people who have hurt you.

"But, James, you don't understand what that person did to me." I realize that, but God knows and he says, *"Do you really think that you understand what your sin has done? Forgive them."*

When you begin to understand the significance of what Christ did for you on the cross you begin to realize how deeply your sin affected God. At the cross all of us lost our excuse to not forgive. We had a debt we couldn't pay, and he paid it by giving us Jesus Christ on a cross.

Action Steps:

- 1. Identify who you are angry with. (Who hurt you?)**
- 2. Determine what they owe you. (What did they take from you?)**
- 3. Decide to cancel the debt. (Just forgive. Let them go.)**

(ILLUS: TELL MY STORY—LAKE HAZEL TO COUNSELING CLASS)

We are no longer to do unto others as they've done unto us. We're to do unto others as our Heavenly Father has done unto us.

Now some of you may struggle with this because you're mad at a person who hasn't even sinned against you. It's fairly common for people to come to me and talk about forgiving another person and when the whole story comes out, they don't actually have anything to forgive. Why? Because the offense wasn't against them. It was somebody else's offense.

When someone sins against us and then we decide to share it with other people, those people feel the right to take up the offended person's offense. It's called, *"Taking up somebody's offense"* and it's wrong. **(ILLUS: Pastor and wife)**

Don't take up someone else's offense

"Any story sounds true until someone sets the record straight." Proverbs 18:17 (NLT) If you only hear one side of the story, you don't have the full story. And yet, you've chosen to take up an offense that isn't yours. AND, you don't really know if you have the full story because you haven't done the hard work to find out.

If someone comes to you and tells you about an offense against them, you need to stop them and remind them that the offense is between them and the other person. Any more than that is gossip—and gossip is a sin that divides friendships.

We don't forgive because people deserve to be forgiven, we forgive because God forgave us!!!

THIS WEEK MAKE A LIST AND LET IT GO. Cancel all of the debts. Decide that they don't owe you anymore.

Let's Pray: *We forgive because you forgave... May we walk in forgiveness...*