

Theme: Seven Simple Truths about LIFE
“Six of Life’s Most Important Words”

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber

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Scripture: Matthew 5:23-24 and Colossians 3:13

23 “So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, 24 leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.

13 Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

VIDEO Seven Simple Rules Week 2 Sermon Starter

SLIDE Six of Life’s Most Important Words

Today we continue in a series of sermons on the simple truths that helpless through life. These are seven essential truths that we are looking at and if we fail to get these we will find that life is much harder. Life is more difficult and we end up with less joy and more pain when we miss these lessons because they are so important. They are all rooted and grounded in Scripture and the teachings of Jesus. They are all lessons that we kind of already know, but we somehow tend to forget and we find them difficult to live out even though we know them. The theme for this series of sermons comes from the game of Life that many of us have played at some point in our lives. As you move around the game board you are meant to learn lessons and Milton Bradley developed this game in 1863 to teach people about life as they had fun. We have been asking ourselves about the simple truths for us as followers of Jesus and what those lessons might be that we should learn as we move through life.

As we continue I want to invite you to pull out of your bulletin your Game card which you have each week. These are meant to be our Meditation Moments and Message Notes for this series of sermons. At the top you find a Scripture memory verse we want to encourage you to memorize each day the week. You will find some questions for discussion and then some encouragement for how to use those each day this week. There are then Scripture passages listed for each day the week along with a few questions and we encourage you to spend some

time each day reflecting on those. Finally, at the bottom of each week's game card you will find a prayer for the week that we hope you will use each day as you grow deeper in the simple truth that we talked about during that week. On the backside you will find a place for you to take notes and I believe that each week the Holy Spirit has a word for each one of us and I encourage you to write down anything you feel nudged about so you can take it with you into the week ahead.

We began last week by focusing on something that most of us learned when we were little children, even if we were not Christians. We reminded ourselves of the Golden rule which says that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

Today we are going to focus our attention on six simple words. These are two sets of three words that should readily flow from our lips. These are words that we should be saying on a regular basis and yet so often we forget to say them or we can find the strength to use them. My guess is that you might even know which words we are talking about today because I have mentioned them before in several sermons. I want to see if you can guess what the first three are and I will give you a few hints.

The first hint comes from a study that looked at couples whose marriages ended in divorce and compared those to marriages that last a lifetime. What they found is that those couples who remained married used these three words more than twice as often as those whose marriages ended in divorce. In case you are still not certain about those first three words let me give you another hint.

Several years ago the University of Michigan Healthcare System instructed their physicians to say these three words to all of their patients in certain situations. When doctors began to use these three words regularly with their patients the number of letters of intent to sue for malpractice reduced by 50% and the legal fees declined from \$3 million a year to \$1 million a year. This happened just because they taught doctors to say these three simple words. Have you figured out what they are yet?

SLIDE I

SLIDE I Am

SLIDE I Am Sorry

I am sorry. Those three words are huge and they are simple words. I would argue that if you are going to succeed in life and have any joy these three words

need to flow from your mouth on a regular basis. I am sorry. Paul Meyer, founder of Success Motivation Inc. has done many studies of successful people and here's what he found. One of the most important success factors was the willingness to admit that we are wrong. Successful people regularly admit that they are wrong and they apologize on a frequent basis for those mistakes.

The Bible regularly teaches us that we need to reconcile with our brothers and sisters when we are in conflict. We find this idea is meant to apply not just to our neighbors or people that we know but also with God. The entire Old Testament which is the Hebrew Bible is focused on how we reconcile with God. It is the story of people pushing God away and doing things that hurt God and wound God's heart and God urging them to reconcile with him and the first step is always admitting you were wrong and learning to apologize. The Hebrew Bible also has story after story of people who are at odds and how it is they are trying to learn to reconcile with each other.

One of the basic principles in Scripture is that before we ask God to forgive us of our shortcomings and broken places, we're supposed to ask for forgiveness from those that we have hurt or offended. The big idea is that before you ask for forgiveness from a God that for most of us is unseen, we must learn to ask for forgiveness from those that we can actually see and interact with in the world. We first asked for forgiveness from others before we go to God and that is a principle that God describes to us and gives to us in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, in both teaching from the prophet and Jesus and in stories that we find of the faithful.

In the time of the New Testament what we find is that people are trying to circumvent this principle. They would offend or hurt other people and then they would go and ask for God's forgiveness, but they wouldn't ask the person they had offended for forgiveness. In the Sermon on the Mount, which is the major body of Jesus' teachings in the book of Matthew, Jesus let people know that life doesn't work this way. He gives them this word in Matthew five.

SLIDE 23 "So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, 24 leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.

Let me remind you that the gifts they were offering or animal and grain sacrifices which they brought to the Temple in Jerusalem. There were fellowship offerings and Thanksgiving offerings as well as offerings of atonement which

expressed a desire to be reconciled with God and asked for forgiveness. Jesus says that before you bring that offering of atonement or you're asking for forgiveness, while you were in the midst of worship, stop and leave it there and go and be reconciled. Then you can come back and worship within open-heart. The commandment and invitation is for us to be regularly apologizing to other people. Remember that our understanding of sin within the Methodist tradition is that it is separation between us and God and between us and each other. The idea is meant that we are to build a bridge between ourselves and others first whenever it is possible and the willingness to apologize is what begins to repairer that sin and brokenness that is causing separation between us and each other.

Once again it is interesting to note the context in which Jesus gives this principle. Just before this here is what Jesus says in Matthew five about anger.

**SLIDE 21 “You have heard that our ancestors were told, ‘You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.’
22 But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell.**

Jesus is making it clear that when we are angry and when there is division between us and others we literally create our own judgment and our own prison and our own living hell. Jesus then shifts to the idea of worship and how when we bring these things with us and to worship, there is a separation between us and God because of our separation between us and others.

Here is what I have found in my life. Many times during the week I might do things that cause hurts or paying for other people without even realizing it. I don't even notice how my actions might be hurting others and this can happen for a lot of different reasons. But when we come to worship we are supposed to open ourselves up to the work of the Holy Spirit and the spirit pricks our hearts and we are meant to remember. We find ourselves remembering about someone that we have hurt or some action that we have done and we are meant to make note of that and recognize it and make a commitment to do something about it because it is keeping us from God and from each other.

As I was preparing this sermon this week I became aware of a couple of people that I need to apologize to myself. As I was spending my own time in personal prayer and worship on several evenings this week I became aware of some things I needed to make right. My guess is that during worship today this

will happen for each of you, that you will think of people who come to your mind and you need to ask them for forgiveness for one reason or another. This is what happens for us as we worship and as we open ourselves up to work of the Holy Spirit and that's a good thing because we going to realize were carrying this stuff with us. Some of you have been carrying something with you for way too long and it's time to let go and we begin by learning to say, "I am sorry."

Let me give you an image of what this looks like. When we hurt somebody else, such as when we wound them with our words or where their actions, we give them baggage that they are going to carry around with them and it will weigh them down like this backpack. Inside the backpack we give them something like these rocks. If I have hurts a person with my words or actions that is backpack filled with rocks begins to weigh down their heart. She might become angry or bitter or upset. I've given these things to someone and they begin to carry them around and they might find it hard to pray because of their feelings. They might find it hard to look at you because they are upset. They're struggling and carrying this weight with them and I have placed it on them because of those things that have wronged her.

What I find however is that I also begin carrying my own baggage around. Every time I look at that person I feel bad and I don't feel very good. I don't like having a person who's mad at me but I also don't want to apologize yet so I carry the bitterness with me in my own bag of rocks. When it comes time for me to pray I am really feeling the weight and I'm not sure how I can pray. How can I pray when I realize God might not be happy with me for what I did to her? I'm struggling with my prayer life and I am beginning to carry these things around like this bag of rocks.

I'm going to try and pretend like I don't have this bag of rocks around my heart. I try to go on with my life is normal but I could feel these 50 pounds of rocks hanging off my arm. I can't move quite as fast as I used to move. I can't enjoy life is much because it seems like everything is harder as I carry this baggage around my heart. I know I hurt somebody and I haven't tried to make it right.

I feel like most of my sermons are for me before they are for you. I usually take my daughter to school most days and this last week was the first week of middle school for her. We were all a bit anxious in our house and Vika really wanted to be on time for school so we worked hard each night to get ready and then each morning to get up in time to get to school on time. We all get a little more tired and we forget to do everything the night before and we wake up a

little bit later. We get to Thursday, which is the day I normally wrap up my sermon, and I knew it was going to be a busy morning because both secretaries in the office had to be out for family issues and we still had to wrap up some bulletin stuff for weekend worship. We forgot to get lunch ready the night before and we all were sleepy and so we got up a bit later than usual and we find ourselves running around the house trying to find clean clothes and appropriate things to put in our lunch and of course try to have some breakfast. My daughter is asking me what time it is while she stands in the middle of the kitchen with four clocks in different parts of the kitchen!

"Do you know what time it is? Are we going to be late? Will there be traffic coming down Florida Road? Will I get in trouble if I'm late the first week?" Amidst all the questions and chaos I'm about ready to blow a gasket and of course we get behind the school bus coming down the hill! I think I only raise my voice wants and it turned out we were on time for everything. I even got to the office in time to take care of everything and then finish up my sermon on saying you're sorry and asking for forgiveness.

I know some of you are really disappointed to hear that your pastor would act this way and if you need a perfect pastor that you will need to find a different church because your pastor is a real loser sometimes. I'm preparing this sermon and I can feel that weight around my heart because I was not very nice to my daughter as we got ready for school and work that morning. I couldn't wait to see my daughter that afternoon to tell her, "I'm really sorry that I acted that way. I'm sorry I raised my voice with you."

She told me that she was sorry and we hugged and we kissed and we told each other that we loved each other. You know what? That's life. That's how it works. We get stressed and we say and do things because we rub each other the wrong way. We sometimes hurt each other and then we come back and we say, "I am sorry." We reconnect and that is how life works in a world full of humans who are not perfect.

Sometimes it's hard to apologize. One of the shows we watch when I was a kid was *Happy Days* with the character on it played Henry Winkler, "The Fonz." He was so cool he couldn't apologize.

VIDEO Happy Days Clip 1

SLIDE I was wrong

He just couldn't get the words out. He could say, "I was wrong. I am sorry."

Why couldn't he get the word out? He was too cool for it. Maybe he thought it was a sign of weakness. Maybe his ego was too big or maybe his ego was too fragile and he was afraid to admit that he was wrong because he already suffer from low self-esteem and it just felt like one more sign that he was a failure in life. Maybe his lawyer advised him not to say that he was wrong and he was sorry because it would be bad and the court room if he was ever taken to court. There are lots of reasons we might not be able to say that we are wrong and we are sorry.

One reason we sometimes fail to say this is because we are still irritated or we don't think we were wrong. "I'm not can say I'm sorry until you say that you're sorry." We feel justified in what we've done and we hold onto it until the other person budes first. If we don't mind carrying the 35 pounds of stone around our heart then we can do that forever and never get to apologizing for anything. Do you think this is a very effective way to live your life?

SLIDE How do we apologize?

Let's say you do want to apologize. How do you go about it? Does it work when you roll your eyes and say, "Sorry"? There is always the non-apology, apology, "I'm sorry that you feel that way. I hope you get over it."

SLIDE The Five Languages of Apology (Graphic)

Gary Chapman, who wrote the book, *The Five Love Languages*, that we talked about last week, wrote another book with Jennifer Thomas called, *The Five Languages of Apology*. They mention in their book 5 things that are included in a great apology. My guess is that you know these already but I thought I would mention to you today because it might be good to hear again.

SLIDE Heartfelt Regret (use book graphic to the right on next 5 slides)

The first one is heartfelt regret. We say we are sorry and really mean it and it's conveyed by the look in our eyes and our body posture. It's communicated in our tone of voice when we say with feeling, "I am sorry."

SLIDE Accepting Responsibility

The second languages accepting responsibility by saying, "I was wrong in this area. I take responsibility for this part of our conflict because I was wrong."

SLIDE Making Restitution

The third language is making restitution. What can I do to make it right? I'm

sorry and I was wrong and now what can I do to make this right with you?

SLIDE Genuine Repentance

The fourth language of apology is genuine repentance. To repent means to go in a different direction. It literally means to turn around from the direction that you have been going. Genuine repentance means I am going to try to not do that thing again that hurt. I'm sorry. I was wrong and I regret it. This is my part in what happened and what can I do to make it right. I'm going to try and never do that again.

SLIDE Requesting Forgiveness

The final language of apology is requesting forgiveness. Would you forgive me?

Often, in order to apologize and really mean it, we have to see things through the eyes of the person that's been wounded. We sometimes might look at a situation and wonder, "Why are you upset about that? What's the big deal? Why does that upset you so much? "

We have to be willing to put ourselves in someone else's shoes and try to see what they are seeing. When it comes time to apologize, we sometimes could not have done anything differently, and in that case we can say something like, "I don't think I had any other choice, but I realize that this hurt you. I really care about you and I'm sorry that what I did hurt you. I would love to find a different way to have done this and I'm so sorry that my action caused the hurt. I want to try and make my actions right from this time forward."

Maybe you could not have done anything differently, but you can apologize for the impact and for the feelings of hurt that were caused. This might be able to help you look for a way forward. When we learn how to apologize like this, things really begin to change.

I was reading about one of the women patients involved in the University of Michigan Healthcare System study done on teaching doctors to say, "I am sorry." The doctor made a mistake on the operating table and she almost died. Afterwards, the lawyers contacted her about filing suit but before the lawyers had called her doctor had contacted her. He met with her in person and looked her in the eyes and told her, "I am so sorry for what happened. I can't even sleep at night thinking about what might've happened and how you nearly died and it would have been my fault. I'm glad things worked out so far in your recovery and I

want you to know that whatever we can do to make things better for you during this healing period, we want to do that. I will come to your house if you need me and I hope you can forgive me. I missed this thing during the operation and I can't tell you how bad I feel about that."

In the interviews that she did following surgery, she indicated that because her doctor called her and met with her to apologize, she chose not to file suit. She accepted his apology and saw it as sincere and not just someone trying to avoid a lawsuit.

I think about a young man in my youth group a number of years ago who forgot to show up for his job one day. The boss was angry and the young man got a warning. The young man came in late a second time and the boss was angry again and gave them another warning. One more time it happened in the young man was late for the job. The boss was very angry this time and this young man wrote a letter to his boss to apologize and then went out of his way to me personally with the boss and say, "I know I really blown it. I cannot tell you how sorry I am and I'm a do my very best never to have this happen again. You have every right to fire me, but would you please give me just one more chance?" The young man made no excuses but simply apologized. What you think the boss did? He gave him one more chance.

I think about a man I met with a number of years ago who bought a new car and he was so excited about this new car because he had never had one that was brand-new, right off the lot. While he was away on a business trip his wife took his new car out for a drive and what you think happened? She wrecked the car and because it was a new car with all kinds of airbags she was fine, but his car was not in very good shape. He was so angry and he criticized her driving and he criticized why she even used the car. He was not very nice to her. Then he decided to be a big man about it and he never brought it up again. She never brought it up again either, but over time, as months turned into years, he realized that she wasn't the same towards him as she was before. Something different happened in their relationship.

He wrestled for months and years as to why they were distant now when it used to be and then one day it dawned on him. He had never told her that he was sorry for how he treated her after the accident. He went back to her and said, "Honey, I was thinking about that time in the accident with the new car. My actions were totally inappropriate and unwarranted. I know I said some hurtful things and it was wrong of me to do that. I was the biggest jerk to you. I'm so

sorry. Would you please forgive me?"

She wept at his apology and offered him forgiveness and from that time forward their relationship was different and they became close again. She had been carrying this bag of rocks all those years and she didn't even realize it. He didn't understand it either, but the moment he apologized that bag of rocks could be left behind. They were lifted from her heart and from his. That's the power of an apology and genuine forgiveness.

Assuming that I have effectively apologized for what I did and how I hurt this other person that I have given this bag of rocks to, something begins to happen for them. They can begin to let go of the stones. The guilt and shame and the sense of alienation that we have for a while, we get to let go of that as well. We don't it to let go of all of it however because now it is in the other person's court. The other person has to decide if they are going to let go of their right to retribution. You see it takes both people involved in the apology and in forgiveness in order to let go of the weights that we carry around our neck.

The other person has to decide if they are going to actually forgive. Even if the other person doesn't forgive, we still have listed some of the weight off of the relationship. We feel better when we have acknowledged our part in causing hurt, but we each are still carrying around some weight until the other person decides to offer forgiveness. While I have asked for forgiveness and given an apology, there is still something weighing us down.

The next three words that every person needs to allow to flow freely from their lips are what?

SLIDE I

SLIDE I forgive

SLIDE I forgive you

For a host of reasons, sometimes it's hard to give those words to people. Check out this married couple.

VIDEO Please Forgive Me

Sometimes we tell someone we're sorry but our spouse isn't ready to offer forgiveness. Sometimes it's hard to forgive. Sometimes it takes time to offer forgiveness. For some people it can take as long as five or six years, depending on what happened and the depth of hurt.

There was a preacher whose sermon one week was on Forgiving Your Enemies. Toward the end of his sermon, he asked his congregation, "How many of you have forgiven their enemies?" About half held up their hands.

The preacher went on for a few more minutes and then repeated his question. This time about 80 percent held up their hands. He went on some more and now it was after lunch time and he repeated his question again. All raised their hand, except one small elderly lady.

"Mrs. Jones, are you not willing to forgive your enemies?" asked the preacher.

She replied, smiling sweetly, "I don't have any."

"Mrs. Jones that is very unusual. How old are you?" the preacher asked. Ninety-three," she replied.

"Oh Mrs. Jones, what a blessing and a lesson to us all you are. Would you please come down in front of this congregation and tell us all how a person can live ninety-three years and not have an enemy in the world."

The little sweetheart of a lady tottered down the aisle, faced the congregation, and said, "I outlived the old hags."

Sometimes it takes a while for us to finally let go of those feelings and offer forgiveness. Here is where I want to remind you of the words of the apostle Paul in Colossians 3. These are words that every couple should have memorized if they want the relationship to last more than about a week and half. These are essential words to make our relationships last. We don't remember these words in practice them then we will not have any relationship which will be sustainable. This is our memory verse for the week. Let's say these words together out loud that you see up on the video screen.

SLIDE *13 Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.*

Let's say those words one more time.

Why did Paul have to write these words? He had to write these words as instructions to the early Christians because we are regularly doing things which irritate each other. We are regularly saying things or doing things or failing to do things and we caused hurt. If we are unwilling to make allowances for each

other's faults and forgive each other, then everyone we bump into during the week will irritate us. We will begin to pick up all of these rocks that we had let go of and put them back in our bag because we just get irritated so easily. If you're going to take all these things into your heart and put them in your bag and carry them around, then even after a week you will be weighed down. Do you really want to carry all of these things with you like rocks or are you willing to forgive and let go of those things which irritate you? How easy it is for the bank to get really heavy once more with all those rocks.

I want to recognize that sometimes we can ask for forgiveness and people can give that to us and there are still consequences. Sometimes there is still jail time or a fine or a permanent loss, even though somebody has forgiven us. If you betray my confidence by telling someone something I shared with you in confidence, I will forgive you because I will always offer forgiveness. But I'm probably not going to trust you with that important thing in my life that I don't want shared with others. That's just the consequence which happens sometimes we make mistakes. If you are unfaithful to your spouse, by God's grace they may forgive you and you can have an even better marriage in the future than you had in the past. But if you have been unfaithful for a number of times they may say, "I forgive you, but I just can't live with you anymore. I can't keep opening up my heart to you anymore and having it be stomped on."

You might have an addiction and your significant other might forgive you for relapse once, but if you keep going back to that habit they may tell you, "I forgive you but I can't live this way anymore. I can't live with the uncertainty and the volatility. I need to go and live my life somewhere else." We can offer forgiveness but there are still sometimes consequences.

SLIDE How do you forgive someone who hasn't asked for forgiveness?

This is a great question that I get often as a pastor. There are several options in front of us when this happens. We can hold onto the grudge and bitterness forever and just keep adding rocks to our fact that we carry around. Some people may hurt us and they don't even know to ask for forgiveness. Some people have hurt us and they are no longer alive. We just keep adding rocks and we hold onto it forever because they never asked us for forgiveness.

The second thing that you can do is to just let it go. People will often do things to irritate you and they don't even realize it and at some point you have to decide if it's worth carrying around that thing or just letting it go. We recognize that life is too short to carry any more stuff in our bag that we need to.

Sometimes what someone has done to us is just too hard to let go. We also realize they may keep doing this thing and other hurt people. In those cases, when the person is a part of the body of Christ, Jesus gives us this advice in Matthew 18.

SLIDE ***15 "If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back."***

Notice that Jesus doesn't say that if another person in the church sins against you go and tell your whole small group about. It doesn't say to copy your complaint to your entire e-mail list. Jesus says to go to them when you are alone and have a conversation and explained to them higher struggling.

Let me suggest to you a way that we can do this. One way to NOT do this is to be accusatory and begin attacking them with your words. Usually the defenses go up and they have a hard time hearing that. What were to happen if you were to begin with something like this, "There is something that happened the other day and it is really been eating at me. I know you've may have not meant it this way, and you probably didn't mean to hurt me, but this thing is really bothering me and I wanted a chance to talk to you about it." This begins the conversation in a way that they might be able to really hear you and you can work towards reconciliation.

Let's say someone has apologized to you but you're having a hard time letting it go as you work through the process of forgiveness. I want to offer a couple of suggestions as to how you might work through this.

SLIDE **Prayer**

One way forward is to simply pray, "God, help me to move through this and to forgive so I can love them again. Bless this person who has hurt me."

This is the advice that comes from the apostle Paul and from Jesus and I have used it with some of you as we have prayed in my office and it works. It might take days or weeks or even months of prayer but it can lead to healing and restoration.

A number of years ago someone had done something to me that was really hurtful. It hurt deep and I felt betrayed. They didn't think they had done anything wrong and so there was this distance between us. I began to pray for that person and say, "God, you know how I feel. I don't want to feel this way. I don't like

feeling this way. I pray for them and that you would bless this person. Give me a heart of love towards them."

I prayed every day for months for that person. One day they came to worship and I finished praying at the end of my sermon and I looked up when I saw that person sitting in the congregation and to my surprise I loved them. Something changed. God changed my heart for them. As we wrap this up, I want to give you something I have shared with you before but I find really helpful. I heard this when I was doing youth ministry a number years ago and I want to give you these four "R"s that lead to forgiveness. If you ever struggle with forgiveness, I think these things will help.

SLIDE Remember our own faults and failures

When someone has talked about us behind our backs, we remember our own places of failing and falling short. We ask, "Have I ever done that to somebody else? Have I ever talked about somebody behind their back? Have I ever said anything that was hurtful?"

If someone betrayed your confidence you might ask, "Have I ever betrayed the confidence of someone else?" I know that I have done that when I have not been thinking in something slips out of my mouth before I can catch it.

When I find myself holding onto a grudge one of the things that I often do is remember all of the things I've done in my life which is not being good. I think about how God has forgiven me for all those things and that helps me begin to forgive others.

SLIDE Reframe the other person

The second thing we can do is reframe the other person. I'm not talking about excusing what they did or saying that what they did is okay. When you reframe however you begin to look at why they did what they did. I might ask, "What in their upbringing might have caused them to have done this thing? What is going on in their life right now that might have led them to react in this way or do this thing?" You try to see them in the best possible light by looking at what they may have been thinking.

I was in Denver this last year and went with my friends to a restaurant and the person who was serving us came to ask is what we want to drink. Everyone else got a soda or something and I asked for water. The waiter brought everyone there drink but me and then left. I assumed they would bring my water the next

time they came by. He walked by our table several more times and then a bus boy finally brought us our food. The waiter never checked to see how things were going like many waiters often do and then I flagged him down as he walked by. I actually had to grab him to get his attention. I asked if I could please have my water and he looked at me like I asked him to give me his firstborn child. He scoffed and he huffed and he puffed and then a few minutes later he brought the water and gave it to me. I said thanks and he then said, "Glad you're happy now."

My friends and I were all a bit taken aback and I said something smarty-pants to them like, "Sorry I asked him to do his job." I could tell as he walked off that he had a bit of a limp and I began to wonder how long he had been serving that day and what kind of injury caused him to limp. He had no doubt been on his feet most of the day and for all I knew this could be a second job. There may be a host of reasons why he reacted the way he did and it doesn't excuse his actions, but when he came by later I told him I was sorry for grabbing his arm and while he didn't act whole lot friendlier I felt better and I acted appropriately instead of inappropriately by seeing this person in the best possible light.

SLIDE Recognize the high cost of holding onto resentment

There is a physical and emotional and spiritual toll that resentment takes on our lives. If you go to the Mayo Clinic website you will find an entire page dedicated to what happens to people physiologically when they hold onto bitterness and resentment. Their research has shown that if you will let go of your resentment and your bitterness you will experience lower blood pressure, stress reduction, lower heart rate, lower risk of our call or substance abuse, fewer symptoms of depression, reduction in chronic pain and improved overall psychological well-being.

These are the benefits of letting go of our baggage. Part of what we begin to do is literally say, "I am not going to let this other person have this kind of control over my life and lead to my early death. By prayer and reframing and remembering, I am going to find a way to let go of my bitterness and resentment and learn to forgive. It's killing me and not them."

There is an old, wise saying that holding onto bitterness and resentment is like taking a poison pill and then hoping the other person dies. It just doesn't work.

SLIDE Redemptive blessings in our hurt

The final thing that we do is look for the redemptive blessing in our hurt and suffering. God promises to take the things which are hurtful and painful in our lives and bring something good from them. God gives us this promise through the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 61.

SLIDE *3 To all who mourn in Israel, he will give a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair. In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks that the Lord has planted for his own glory.*

I know the most formative experiences in my life were the ones which were the most painful to walk through. I had a young man in my youth group in Colorado Springs whose mother abandoned him when he was a child. His father was a drug addict and eventually ended up in foster care. He was eventually adopted by a family in our church and he was a remarkable young man who always had a smile on his face and was filled with joy. He friended me on Facebook several years ago and he is now a pediatric physician who serves underprivileged children. When I asked him how he could have such a positive attitude in life he told me, "All of those experiences made me who I am and I like the person I am today. I have a love for working with children that comes from the fact that I was abandoned as a child. I can understand these kids because I experienced tough things when I was a kid and I hope my story can give them hope. I am thankful for those experiences now, because it's helped bring me to where I am today."

When you can see the redemptive blessings in your suffering and hurt that someone else might have afflicted on you, you remember the words that Joseph said in Genesis 50 to his brothers who had sold him into slavery and beaten him and left him for dead. When they appeared before him, begging for food from this younger brother they had abandoned years ago here is what Joseph said.

SLIDE *19 But Joseph replied, "Don't be afraid of me. Am I God, that I can punish you? 20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. 21 No, don't be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children." So he reassured them by speaking kindly to them.*

We finally let go of the things we find something amazing and liberating. When I apologize to that person who I have harmed and that person except my apology, we find that we are both able to take the stones that have weighed

down our hearts and make it difficult sometimes to breathe and live, and were able to let them go. That is what happens when we forgive.

Here's my invitation we close. If we want to successfully navigate the game of life, it will require us to regularly say these six words.

SLIDE **"I am sorry"**
 "I forgive you"

I'm guessing that each one of us knows someone today to whom we need to apologize. My guess is that each one of us today has someone we have to work on forgiving. Today is the day and now is the time.

Let's pray...

SLIDE **Prayer**

While your heads are bowed and your eyes are closed, I invite you to think about those names of people who came to your mind and heart during this sermon. You might say something like this.

"God, please to ask for this person's forgiveness..."

If there is someone that you need to forgive, would you pray for that person and ask God to help you forgive so that you let go? You might simply say this.

"Lord, please help me to forgive this person. Help me to let go."

Oh God, we do pray that you would give us courage and strength to say, "I'm sorry," on a regular basis. We ask that you would help us, by your grace and mercy, to demonstrate grace and mercy to others. Help us to forgive and forgive us we pray, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Colossians 3:13

Scripture Memory Verse

Bear with each other and forgive grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. (TNIV)

Conversation Starter

Take a few minutes this week to discuss the questions below with family or friends.
How does this week's scripture memory verse apply when...

- Another person's error has cost you money?
- Your child has been treated unfairly?
- A family member is constantly harsh or impatient with you?
- A close friend is habitually late, taking you for granted?

Living the Life

The simple lessons in life are... simple. Our challenge is in changing them from lessons to habits. But when we study, reflect on, and memorize scripture, we do begin to change- that's fact! Use this guide as your personal tool. Spend 10 minutes each day doing these things:

- Read the day's scripture and consider the related questions.
 - Read aloud this week's scripture memory verse.
 - Talk with God using your own words or the suggested prayer below.
- Enjoy this time of personal & spiritual growth!

Scriptures for Reading & Reflection

Monday: Matthew 5:23-24

Our relationships with people affect our relationship with God. Is there a person you need to ask for forgiveness? How is this situation impacting your connection with God? Now read the story Jesus tells in Matthew 18:21-35. What is Jesus teaching you? Is there a person you need to forgive?

Tuesday: Psalm 51: 1-10

This psalm emphasizes that God is concerned not only with outward behavior, but with your inner thoughts and motives. Have you ever done the right thing for the wrong reason? How can you open yourself so that God can create a clean heart in you?

Wednesday: Psalm 32:1-5

Have you ever tried to hide something you did wrong (perhaps even from yourself)? How does honesty, even about what you've done wrong, bring freedom and peace that cannot come from concealment?

Thursday: Ephesians 4:31-5:2

From Paul's list of things to 'put away', which one do you find it most difficult to avoid? How can God's love and forgiveness in Jesus shape your attitudes toward others?

Friday: Psalm 19:12-14

What are some of the forces that can blind you to wrong actions and attitudes, making them seem acceptable? How can you incorporate the prayer in verse 14 into your daily life?

Saturday: Matthew 18: 21-35

How can we forgive, yet not encourage irresponsibility? How can you forgive someone from the distant past who hurt you deeply? What is the connection between forgiveness, health and wholeness? Based on this parable, is God's forgiveness of us limited or unlimited? Conditional or unconditional? Likewise, our forgiveness of others? Be sure to end your week with the prayer below...

Talking with God

Dear God, Help me to be more forgiving; make forgiveness come naturally for me. Help me to seek the forgiveness of others when I have wronged them, and help me to see when I have done wrong. Forgive me for my sins, Lord. Amen.