



Theme: 70 x 7 – The Road to Forgiveness
“When Forgiveness is Hard Part 1”

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber, January 28-29, 2023, at Summit Church, Durango

Weekly Memory Verse:

¹⁴ “If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you.” – Matthew 6:14

VIDEO Forgiveness Sermon Bumper

SLIDE “Forgiveness and Families”

So last week my wife shared the message with you on Agape Love and Forgiveness and talked about the time she and my daughter Vika broke my brand new used truck. Vika went to the dealer with me and named the truck, which I bought used, Blueberry, so I did have to buy it as you can't leave a Blueberry in the car lot! Yes, it has a brush guard on the front, but I did ask the dealer to remove it, but he convinced me that if was going to hit a dear or something, I would want that cattle guard, so we left it.

And yes, they did drive it to Denver a few months later and ran over a rock on Wolf Creek and damage the drive shaft so it was in the shop for several weeks. I really was relieved they were ok, and I was grateful they were not in my wife's smaller car with less clearance as that rock would have caused a crash. I thought I did a good job of

disguising being upset as I really was not that concerned about the truck. The funny part of that story is what happened when I called the insurance company to report what had happened and the agent asked if the rock was moving when my wife hit it. I asked Tami, but she was not sure as it happened so fast. I explained that it had to have moved at some point to get from the cliff on the side of the road to the middle of the road, but the agent insisted it was critical to put in the report that the rock was moving or stationary.

My wife couldn't really remember, so they listed it as stationary. That's important in the insurance world because since the rock was not moving, it was considered Tami's fault because she should have swerved on the slick, icy, snowy highway to avoid the rock. If the rock was moving, we were told it would be considered an "act of God," and so she would not be at fault! I felt a bit sorry for the woman as I explained to her the theological reasons why I don't think God hurls rocks at innocent drivers and wondered if we could just call it an act of nature. I needed forgiveness in that moment as I may have delivered a sermon to the unsuspecting agent.

Which brings us back to the idea of forgiveness, and why we all need forgiveness. I realize today is family weekend so I thought it would be fun for me to share a time when I was little and needed forgiveness. My dad was getting remarried to the woman who would become my stepmom Terry and since he was pilot and she was a flight attendant, they were able to fly us to Hawaii for the wedding.

GRAPHIC Dad, Terry, Jeff, Shari, and Grandma Huber

The other woman in the photo is my dad's mom, Grandma Huber. We all were together for the wedding, and then my Dad and Terry went off for their honeymoon while Shari and I stayed with grandma at the hotel with our new gifts, snorkel and mask sets. I had a nicer set with a black mask and blue snorkel, while my sister had the kid mask that was blue with a black snorkel. My sister, being the clever little girl she was,

tried to convince my grandma that the blue mask and blue snorkel went together so she stole my snorkel! Being the dutiful older brother, I took it back by force, and then she went and cried to my grandma. Shari and I got to arguing with each other, and grandma, who had a good Italian temper, exploded at us that neither of us would get to swim if we kept fighting, and then her false teeth came flying out of her mouth!

I screamed at Shari, “Look, you made Grandma’s teeth fall out!” We had no idea she had fake teeth, so the entire ordeal was very traumatic. I think we both ended up grounded in our room the rest of the day until we agreed to apologize to each other. Since we were both stubborn, I think that took at least a day before we agreed to say, “I’m sorry.”

Have you ever known you have needed to say I’m sorry, but not been able to because you were a bit proud, or it was just hard to say the words? Today I want to remind us why these words of Jesus in the Lord’s prayer are so important. Maybe you know them. Let’s say them together from Matthew’s gospel.

BIBLE

**¹² and forgive us our sins,
as we have forgiven those who sin against us.**

GRAPHIC Sin Hamartia is Missing the Mark

I want to remind us that sin is a word that simply describes how we miss the mark sometimes, like when we know we need to ask for forgiveness and say, “I’m sorry,” or offer forgiveness when someone has done something we don’t like. Haven’t we all done things we wish we had not done or said things we wish we had not said? When those things happen, we call that sin. Jesus would go on and say these words.

BIBLE

¹⁴ “If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly

Father will forgive you.

Jesus understood what when we don't forgive, bad things can happen in just about every area of our life. If we are unwilling to offer forgiveness or we don't know how, it affects our spiritual life, our relationship with others, and our relationship with God. The idea is that if we don't do this then our relationship with God gets out of balance. We also know that withholding forgiveness affects our physical well-being. There have been numerous studies which have made the correlation between holding onto bitterness and anger and hate and hurt and what it does to our bodies. It increases our stress levels, and it sends more chemicals into the body from the brain than are supposed to be generated. The fight or flight mechanism gets triggered in our brain and it leads to higher blood pressure and cardiovascular problems along with muscular tension and a variety of other symptoms that are not good for our bodies. We can develop depression and anxiety which are physical manifestations of an unwillingness to forgive. This saying that I have reminded you of before is very true.

SLIDE When I am unwilling to forgive it is like drinking poison and hoping the other person gets sick or dies.

We inflict pain upon ourselves when we are unwilling to learn how to let go, which is a good reason, if nothing else, to talk about forgiveness and how we forgive others when we've been hurt. I thought we might do something fun since this is family weekend to learn about forgiveness. I want to read you this book called, *"Rising Above the Storm Clouds: What It's Like to Forgive,"* by Robert Enright, who wrote the book we are reading with this series of messages, and Kathryn Kunz Finney, who did the artwork. So, if you want, kids and parents you can come down front and sit with me while I read the story. We'll also put the pictures up on the screen for all of us to see better. You also are welcome to stay in your seats if you like.

GRAPHICS 1 to 22b (the a and b graphics with the same number should

go side by side on the slide if possible.)

Let's end by remembering a few things about what we have learned forgiveness is, and what it is not. Many people who do things that hurt us aren't even aware of what they did. They are not going to even think about asking for forgiveness which means we need to find the capacity to let go.

SLIDE Forgiveness is letting go of the right to get even.

There are lots of ways to begin to do this but one of the best I've heard is to begin to RAP. RAP is an acronym for three things.

SLIDE R - Remember what we all make mistakes.

(Build slides to spell RAP)

I find that when I'm struggling with forgiveness it's usually because I have forgotten that I'm not perfect. When I feel that someone has offended me it really helps to pause and ask myself, "How many times have I done that my life?" You might even make a list of the five things that you do that irritate other people and carry it around with you in your pocket for a while. If you are unsure of what those things are, then ask your spouse or your friends or your kids or your parents because I can guarantee you, they will give you the list. It's harder to be irritated with somebody else when we are aware of our own shortcomings and how we irritate others.

SLIDE A - Assume the best of the other person.

We remember that we are not perfect and then we assume the best about other people. She probably had a tough day. Maybe he was in a hurry to get home because his kids were sick. If we assume the best rather than assuming the worst, then we attribute to them the best possible motives for what they've done to us and it's much easier to let things go.

SLIDE P - Pray for them.

Jesus is constantly inviting his disciples to pray for those with whom they struggle. He encourages us in the Lord's Prayer to pray for others. We can pray to let go of those little things that we are holding onto, and we pray to bless them, even those who have wronged us, because it changes our hearts.

When we pray for others, we find ourselves letting go of animosity and bitterness. When it comes to the bigger things that we often hold against others, I would encourage you to add an "S" to the RAP. We will talk more about this next week, but remembering this truth is helpful.

SLIDE S - Seek to understand the other person.

When we recognize what shaped other people, and why they do what they do, it is sometimes much easier to let go of things and realize that is just the way they are. The truth is that we must grow in all these things because they don't come naturally. We must work to cultivate this attitude of grace and mercy towards other people, which is what Jesus calls us to do as we grow in our faith. This is why Jesus tells us that our willingness to offer forgiveness is wrapped up inextricably with our relationship with God. This is what it means to become the presence of Jesus Christ in the world.

SLIDE Forgiveness is a choice of the forgiver.

We can't force a friend or child or parent to forgive. Forgiveness doesn't mean we have to be around a bully or someone who has hurt us or makes us feel unsafe.

Now let's remember a few things that FORGIVENESS is NOT:

SLIDE Forgiveness is not weakness, but strength!

Jesus was forgiving and very strong.

SLIDE Forgiveness doesn't excuse what happened to us.

If we forgive someone does that mean that we are saying that

what they did which was wrong is okay? Most of us know the answer to that one intuitively, but we still need to ask the question. The answer to that question is simply, “No.” When we forgive, we are simply letting go of the right to retribution or getting even. It doesn’t mean we approve of the behavior or that we let the behavior continue if it is harming us. It is about us setting aside the weight we have been carrying in our lives, but it does not mean we are saying what they did was okay. It was not okay, AND we are not going to allow it to continue to destroy us and cause even more hurt. We must learn to not hold it against them forever, or it just sits in our soul and begins to rot.

SLIDE Forgiveness doesn’t mean there are no consequences.

I think we probably know the answer to this question as well which is again, “No.” One of the ways that we talk about helping our children to learn is to experience natural consequences. If our child decides not to study for a test, they may get a bad grade. We can forgive them for that, but they still will have to deal with the bad grade, and the teacher, and the consequences that might affect further education. Consequences are important for us to realize that there are boundaries in life. Consequences are often part of our own or the other person’s redemption.

The goal in the end is not punishment or consequences, but redemption and restoration of the relationship. We want character to be built and something to be learned from those broken places in those times of sin where we find ourselves separated from God or from each other. The idea is that we would live our lives differently because of what we’ve experienced, and consequences can help restore the relationship and bring us back.

SLIDE Forgiveness is not forgetting.

We often say things like “forgive and forget,” but that is not very helpful. We can remember in a new way and offer forgiveness so we can live differently moving forward.

SLIDE We can forgive even if the other person doesn't ask for forgiveness or think they did anything wrong.

Sometimes they don't know they did something wrong, and sometimes that may not have done anything wrong that others would see as wrong, but we just felt hurt. But maybe they did the wrong thing and even knew it and then never once acknowledged it or said they were sorry.

SLIDE Anger is a good emotion and often comes before forgiveness.

Anger is often a critical part of moving to genuine forgiveness. Anger is a God given emotion and it's perfectly acceptable. The real issue is what we DO with the anger. Do we handle it in a constructive way, understanding the anger often leads to friction, and friction leads to traction, and traction means you are going somewhere? Or do we get stuck in the anger and let it consume us. I would suggest that we MUST get angry at some point in the process to move forward to genuine forgiveness.

I thought it would be fun to see another example of forgiveness from rabbits in this film many of you have seen. Notice people are angry because some not so nice things have happened as Peter and the man have been waging a war over the garden.

VIDEO Peter Rabbit forgiving

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9fEMKGFr-Sk&ab_channel=Movieclips (00:14 to end 02:36)

Let's remember today that Jesus invites us to forgive others because it's good for us and good for our relationship with God. Forgiveness doesn't always make things magically better, but it does help us not carry around being angry or hurt. Can you think of one place in your life where you might need to ask for or offer forgiveness

SLIDE Prayer

January 28-29 Order

1. Ely welcomes people and says, **“Today we are going to wrestle with how we can find forgiveness when it’s hard to forgive someone for what happened to us.”**
2. Two Songs
3. Ely welcomes and invites people to greet each other, however we are comfortable and be seated.
4. Announcement Video
 - a. QR Code for New People
 - b. Forgiveness books
5. Sermon
6. Communion
7. Prayer
8. Two Songs
9. Prayer and Lord’s Prayer
10. Offering SLIDE and Focus (Summit Kids)
11. Care Ministers (If any are present)
12. Prayers and Closing Thoughts
 - i. Prayer focus January is for leaders
 - ii. Books in the back
13. Closing Prayer