



Theme: 70 x 7 – The Road to Forgiveness


“Learning to Forgive Yourself to Develop the Heart of Forgiveness”


Weekly Memory Verse:

***¹ Oh, what joy for those
whose disobedience is forgiven,
whose sin is put out of sight!*** – Psalm 32:1

*For this series of sermons, we invite you to read the book, **8 Keys to Forgiveness** by Robert Enright. We encourage you to pick up a copy from the church for \$15, or download one, and **read chapters 7 and 8 this week.** The readings below will complement this chapter.*

Meditation Moments for Monday, February 13 – Read Colossians 3:12-14 and 1 John 1:8-9. Jesus, the King who reigned from a cross, strikingly prayed for those who crucified him, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing,” in Luke 23:34. His followers live forgiven and forgiving because Jesus is the lord of their lives. As scholar N. T. Wright put it in his commentary, *Luke for Everyone*, “Have you ever tried to let Christ’s peace, Christ’s word, Christ’s name be the reality around which you order your life? If you have, you’ll know it’s not easy. It takes serious prayer and real moral effort... King Jesus is to be the decider in all your deliberations... whatever you do or say must be able to stand having these words written above it: ‘In the name of the Lord Jesus’.”

 John knew we often like to fool ourselves: “If we claim, ‘We don’t have any sin,’ we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” Are you ignoring any God-given inner convictions that you need to face some issue honestly? If so, talk seriously with God about it. When have you been honest about a flaw or struggle, and found that it opened you to the freedom John described: “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from everything we’ve done wrong”?


 “As the Lord forgave you, so also forgive each other.” Sound simple? C. S. Lewis learned that it isn’t, which is why he wrote, “I find that when I think I am asking God to forgive me... I am asking Him not to forgive me but to excuse me... Real forgiveness means looking steadily at the sin that is left over without any excuse, after all allowances... that [real forgiveness] we can always have from God if we ask for it.” How have you learned to recognize the difference


(Meditation Moments –February 11-12, 2023 – For more, go to www.summitdurango.org)

between saying, “It was no big deal” and truly forgiving the part of any action that had no good excuse?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, give me clarity about my strengths and about my failings. And give me clarity, too, about my daily need for your forgiving, empowering grace to nurture and grow me. Amen.*


Tuesday, February 14 – Read Psalm 130:1-8. This psalmist knew the awful sense of despair that comes when we realize we’ve completely failed to be the good person we want to be. He described it as crying out to God “from the depths,” pleading for God’s mercy. But it was not a hopeless cry. The psalm repeated (for emphasis) the image of watchmen waiting in the darkness for the first gleam of morning light. That was how eagerly the psalmist waited for God’s mercy—and he trusted that God’s forgiveness was just as dependable as each day’s dawn.


 Verse 3 said, “If you kept track of sins, Lord—my Lord, who would stand a chance?” Have you ever pictured God as meticulously keeping track of all your sins? Compare Psalm 103:10, 12: “He doesn’t deal with us according to our sin... As far as east is from west—that’s how far God has removed our sin from us.” What do these poetic images tell you about how profoundly God longs to forgive you?

 Verse 7 said, “Faithful love is with the Lord...great redemption is with our God!” Have you ever received or given “partial” forgiveness (which is the best we broken humans can do at times), the sort that never lets the other person forget they blew it, and holds a small grievance in reserve? What does it mean to you that God offers “great redemption” for all your brokenness?

Prayer: *Like the psalmist, “I hope, Lord.” At all the times when I realize that I cannot count on my own good intentions, I’m so grateful that I can count on your forgiving love. Amen.*

Wednesday, February 15 – Read Isaiah 55:1-9. Forgiveness is not first and foremost a human impulse, a sociological way to get along. Living surrounded by cultures in which “revenge” was the dominant way of handling failures and conflicts, the prophet Isaiah pointed out that forgiveness is not “natural” to us at all. But, he added, God is “generous with forgiveness” precisely because God’s ways are higher than ours.


 The Bible’s teaching about forgiveness always starts with the fact that all of us, in our brokenness, do things that hurt others, ourselves and God. We need forgiveness. How clearly do you sense that, in relation to God and to others, you are, in Isaiah’s imagery, “thirsty” and have “no money”? From whom, besides God, do you need forgiveness?


 Whether in global politics, business and legal settings, or even in family or community disputes, people sometimes view forgiveness as a sign of “weakness.” How do you react inwardly when Isaiah says God’s mercy and pardon are a “higher” way than the usual human response? Think about a time when someone forgave you. Did it make you think less or more of the person who forgave you?

Prayer: *Lord of all, in the face of wrong, I too often want to “get even.” Thank you that your ways are higher than mine and that you are generous with forgiveness. Amen.*

Thursday, February 16 – Read 2 Corinthians 7:8-11. After a time of tension, the apostle Paul told Christians in Corinth that “godly sadness,” which led to positive change, was not like, “sorrow under the influence of the world,” which left people stuck in guilt feelings that led to death. Christian counselor Bruce Narramore wrote about the difference Paul described: “Guilt feelings are punitive.


Constructive sorrow is loving. In psychological guilt we take the initiative to punish ourselves. In constructive sorrow we respond because God has taken the initiative to love us first.”


 What positive results did Paul list as coming from “godly sorrow” in verses 9 and 10, results that move beyond feeling guilty or sad? In what ways do those steps lead toward positive outcomes, toward genuine change for the better? When have you seen this process operate in your life or the life of someone close to you?

 “Sorrow under the influence of the world,” (today we might call it “psychological guilt”) means punishing ourselves by hanging onto feelings of guilt and shame. How can these feelings keep us from taking positive steps toward healing? When might we need the spiritual discipline of counseling to help us recognize and live beyond that destructive kind of sorrow? In what ways, physical and spiritual, was Paul right in saying that this kind of sorrow brings death?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I’m sorry for the times when I fail you and hurt myself and others. Guide me in making that sorrow a godly sorrow that produces genuine change, not just misery and continued guilt. Amen.*


Friday, February 17 – Read Psalm 32:1-7 and Luke 18:9-14. Asking God or others for forgiveness, and accepting it, starts with being honest. Often our first challenge is to be honest with ourselves. Most of us are experts at rationalizing even our biggest failings. But we repeatedly see in the lives of public figures that even if we know we’ve missed the mark, we think we can hide that from others, even from God. The psalmist wrote that keeping silent, trying to hide the truth, drained him of energy and life.

 Forgiveness really is a choice. We can continue to carry the burden of our mistakes and broken places, or we can allow God to take it from us and set us free. This is why God came in the person of Jesus and what God wants for us. The process begins with acknowledgment and sorrow. Do you find it hard to acknowledge to yourself, others, or God that certain things you did were wrong? How can you open your heart to allow God to give you the courage to be honest?

 How do you see yourself at your deepest level in relation to most others—as “less than” or “more than”? How can Jesus’ image of God’s forgiveness and love for the outcast tax collector help you see more clearly how God values you? How can God’s love and grace help you maintain a healthy sense of spiritual need without sinking into a sense of contempt, either for others or for yourself?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, show mercy to me, a sinner. Forgive me and grow me beyond both the sin of contempt for others and the sin of self-contempt. Let me live in the atmosphere of your forgiving grace. Amen.*

Saturday, February 18 – Read John 3:14-21. More than any other world religion, Christianity teaches, preaches, and seeks to shout forgiveness. Yes, some of our preachers dwell too long on guilt. That is unfortunate, for a Christianity obsessed with guilt is no Christianity. Christianity is a faith whose central focus is not guilt, but grace, redemption, healing, forgiveness, and mercy. John said that, though too many people think Christianity is about condemnation, Jesus did not come to judge the world. When we internalize that truth, it frees us to let go of our condemning attitude toward ourselves and others.

 How do you understand the meaning of the words, “God so loved the world...God didn’t send his Son into the world to judge the world”? In what ways have you been able to make God’s forgiveness, not an abstract “church” idea, but a transforming, freeing personal reality in your

life? What is one specific relationship in which you will begin or deepen the process of moving more fully into the freedom of a forgiven, forgiving life in the weeks ahead?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you knew the brokenness, shallowness, and ugliness of our world much more clearly than I do. Yet you came not to judge, but to save, to offer me grace. Help me grow daily in my ability to do the same. Amen.*