

Fil-Am Community Church

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Life's Healing Choices Part 6

“THE RELATIONSHIP CHOICE”

“Happy are those who are merciful to others” (Matthew 5:7)

“Happy are those who work for peace.” (Matthew 5:9)

We're continuing our series on “Life's Healing Choices”. For the past five weeks, we've looked at the different choices we make to help us deal with our hurts, habits and hang-ups. Our goal in this series is to find freedom from the many things that prevent us from enjoying life today.

This morning, we're going to talk about “The Relationship Choice”. We're going to talk about something that can make or break our relationships: forgiveness. And there are two verses from the Beatitudes or the Sermon on the Mount that is connected with this. “Happy are those who are merciful to others” (Matthew 5:7) and “Happy are those who work for peace.” (Matthew 5:9)

I like what C.S. Lewis says about forgiveness. He says, “Forgiveness is a lovely thought until there's someone to forgive.” Isn't that true? We like to talk about forgiveness, we like to counsel, to advice others to forgive but when we find ourselves in a situation wherein we have to practice what we preach, we hesitate, don't we? Suddenly, forgiveness is not such a lovely thought anymore.

You see, forgiveness, as many of us know, is easier said than done. Many of us struggle with it. I read the story of two sisters who never spoke to each other for many, many years because of a simple misunderstanding that happened when they were still teen-agers. And to think that they went to the same church. One sister sat

on one side of the pew and the other on the opposite side. They were active in church but never joined a ministry in which the other one was serving already. Can we relate to that? We may call ourselves Christians but deep inside we have an unforgiving heart.

I want you to please turn to your Bibles and open it to Matthew 18:23-35. This is a parable narrated by Jesus Christ to his disciples.

So, this is a parable on forgiveness that Jesus taught. Jesus never told stories just to entertain. There's always truths, insights, purposes behind His parables.

The question I like us to answer this morning is "Why must I learn to forgive?" There are three reasons. The first reason is that ...

1. I have been forgiven by God.

I need to forgive you when you hurt me because I have been forgiven by God. In this story this guy piles up this amazing debt and he's forgiven by the king. But that is nothing compared to the debt that I owe God. I have amassed quite a debt of what I owe Him. If God gave me what I deserved I wouldn't be alive today. Neither would you. We are hopelessly in debt to God. The Bible says "*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" We are all in debt. There is no way I could repay God for all the things I have done wrong in my life. But because God has chosen to, out of love, He has said, "Ok, Rolly, we'll wipe the slate clean. You are forgiven." That's called grace. Just like an etch-a-sketch. Turn it upside down, shake it, and the slate is clean. So, everything you've ever done wrong can be forgiven and forgotten. That's called God's grace.

Romans 8:1 says "*There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.*" In short, you're completely forgiven.

Here's the clincher. Whatever God has done for me, He expects me to do for other people. If you were the guy in this story and you had just been forgiven millions of dollars in debt, don't you think you would be ecstatic with joy? Don't you think you might treat other people a little bit differently? Of course you would. If you just had millions of dollars in debt wiped out you'd probably go out and say, I'll be a little gracious to others.

You'd expect that this is the way the servant would react. But that's not at all the way this guy reacted. In verse 28 *“But when that servant went out, [who had just been forgiven]he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denari he grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay me back what you owe me,’ he demanded.*

His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me and I’ll pay you back.’ [The same thing the first guy had said to the king.] But he refused. Instead he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay his debt.”

This guy's been forgiven millions of dollars and he finds a guy who owes him seventeen bucks. He starts choking this guy and going “Pay up! Pay up!” It's really humorous because in ancient Roman law you could legally choke somebody who owes you money. Honest. You could go up and try to squeeze it out of them. So he starts choking this guy. Strangling him. Mind you, he only owes him seventeen bucks. The guy says, “Please be patient with me.” But is he going to be fair with him? No. He throws him into prison.

Why in the world would someone do that? Because he has an unforgiving heart. The king had said “you're forgiven” but it didn't change him a bit.

Here's the point. Many of you are believers. You've accepted Jesus Christ into your life. You've accepted His salvation. But really down deep you don't really believe what grace means. Particularly about one or two incidents in your

life that keep coming back and haunting you and you go, "I know I'm saved but God hasn't forgiven me of this. I don't think he has forgiven me of that."

Kind of like a Christian friend of mine who committed the sin of impropriety. She had an affair with a married man and eventually got pregnant by him. She asked God's forgiveness, of course. After giving birth, she left her daughter with her mom and left the Philippines and went to New Zealand to look for a job.

She waited and waited but she found no job. After months of getting no job, she cried out to God and asked for forgiveness again for her past. She thought God was still angry with her because of that. But God assured her of his forgiveness because the next day, she received a call and eventually got hired by one company.

Some of us think that when things go wrong, God is punishing us. So in your mind you're thinking, "I'll make it up to You, Lord. I'll be in church everyday. I'll get involved in a ministry. I'll give my money. I'll do good things. I'll be nice, etc. etc." And all along you're trying to pass rules and regulations and rituals to make amends for something you still don't feel forgiven about. You're haunted by that.

That's what happened with this guy. He didn't understand God's grace so he's harsh. He grabs the guy and demands from him. He begins to choke. He's squeezing him.

On the other hand when you remember how much God has forgiven you you're going to be a little bit gentler on other people. When you realize you're a trophy of God's grace and there's no way you can ever repay all that He's done for you then you're going to be more open, more generous, more forgiving.

When we feel unforgiven we tend to be unforgiving. We don't want anybody else to get off the hook because we don't feel we are.

What's the key? Ephesians 4:32 *"Be kind and compassionate to one another forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you."*

The first key to learning how to forgive people on a continual basis is just to realize how much God forgives me every day. I just need to remember that every day I walk in the forgiveness of God.

There's a couple other reasons we get from this story. The second reason why I need to learn to forgive is because

2. Resentment makes me miserable.

Resentment always hurts me more than it does the other person. I lock myself up in a prison of bitterness. I hold grudges around me that keep anybody else from getting close. I tend to torture myself with my own emotions. Have you ever done that? Tortured yourself with your own emotions? Sure you have.

You've done it with worry, you've done it with guilt, you've done it with fear and you've done it with bitterness.

In this story the king is horrified when he hears about this guy he's just forgiven millions of dollars, goes out and strangles a guy for seventeen bucks. So, he's livid with anger. In verse 33 he says to the servant "*Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servants just as I had on you?*". And the next thing he did, he "*turned him over to the jailers to be tortured.*"

The word "jailer" there in Greek literally means "tormentors." Torturers.

These are the guys that stretch you out on a rack and do all kinds of things to you. So, this guy had a little of his own medicine. He was tortured because he was unforgiving.

What is Jesus talking about here in this story? Is He giving us a picture of hell? Of course He is. Yes it's a picture of hell. But there's more to it than that. He's talking about the hell on earth that you create when you refuse to forgive people. Because as I said, unforgiveness always hurts you. When you hold a

grudge, you're the only one affected. The other person is not aware of it. They may even be totally oblivious to it. They've gone on with their lives but you keep mulling it over and over in your mind making yourself miserable. Torturing yourself.

Someone said, "Unforgiveness is like drinking poison and hoping the other person dies". Truth is, you kill yourself slowly with bitterness in your heart. It can ruin you emotionally, spiritually as well as physically.

In fact, doctors say about sixty percent of all the people in hospitals today could go home today if we could teach them how to deal with guilt and bitterness. Guilt comes from what we do to others. Bitterness comes from what others do to us. If we could learn how to deal with both of those a lot of our illnesses and ailments would clear up overnight. Resentment makes me miserable.

Job 21:23, Good News, *"Some men stay happy until the day they die. Others have no happiness at all. They live and die with bitter hearts."* They torture themselves.

Let me ask you this morning. What bitter memory is making you miserable? What resentment are you holding onto? I just mention it and it starts coming up in your mind. It just comes up and it's still there. That hidden hurt that keeps gnawing and gnawing and gnawing away at your peace of mind, you have to let it go. All it does is hurt you.

Job 5:2 (Good News) *"To worry yourself to death with resentment would be a foolish, senseless thing to do."* In short, it's not worth it.

When we fail to forgive other people God doesn't have to lock us up in a jail. We do it to ourselves. We say things like, "Never again will I let another man hurt me.... Never again will I speak to that person...I'll never get close to that person again". We start building walls and we don't let people get close to us because

we're afraid we're going to be hurt. When we build those walls who are we walling inside? Ourselves. It's a self-imposed prison.

How do I break out of that prison? There's one key. It is the key of the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. I accept God's forgiveness and I offer it to others. I accept God's forgiveness for my guilt and I offer forgiveness to others for my resentment. That is the only key that will unlock the door of the jail so you can begin to live the kind of life that God meant for you to live all along.

I need to learn to forgive because God has forgiven me. And because resentment makes me miserable. And because

3. I'll need more forgiveness in the future.

Verse 35 *"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."* Look at that verse!

He's saying, however I treat other people that's the way I'm going to be treated by God. If you don't forgive others how can you expect God to forgive you?

A man came to John Wesley one day and he said, "That man has hurt me so much I will never forgive him." Wesley said, "Then I hope you never sin." Forgiveness is a two way street.

If you refuse to forgive those people who've hurt you in your life you are burning the bridge that you have to walk across in order to get to heaven.

The Bible says very clearly in this place and many other places: We cannot expect to receive what we are unwilling to give. I need to learn to forgive because I'm going to need more forgiveness in the future.

Again, the verse says, *"This is how your heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your hearts."* He's not talking here about lip service. You can say, "I forgive you," and not mean it. Isn't that true? Sure. We

do it all the time. Somebody hurts your feelings or does something to you, you say, "I forgive you!" But underneath you're going, "I'm never going to forget that. In fact, I'm going to get even for it." You're not at all forgiving. Just because you say you forgive doesn't mean you've done it. It says you've got to forgive from the heart. That means not just intellectually. It means you've got to do it emotionally.

Have you ever said this? "I'll forgive it but I'll never forget it!" Then you haven't really forgiven. Because genuine forgiveness lets it go. Genuine forgiveness doesn't hold it over their head. Genuine forgiveness cuts the strings. It's dead. It's gone. It's buried. I don't keep resurrecting it and digging it up again.

What this parable is teaching is that forgiveness is to be a way of life if I claim to be a believer. It is to be continual, it is to be ongoing, because I have been forgiven continually and ongoing. Look at the two verses prior to the parable we read.

Matthew 18:21-22, *"Then Peter came to him and asked, 'Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?'"* Peter thought he was being magnanimous. But Jesus answers him,

"No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven!" Jesus is saying, in effect, keep on forgiving.

But you say, "But Pastor Rolly I don't want to forgive that person because they'll just go away scot free if I do that. That's not fair." Is forgiveness fair? Of course it isn't fair. But whoever said life was fair? Is it fair that you just be scott-free forgiven by God? No. That's not fair. That's called grace. It's because of God's grace that you've been forgiven. He didn't need to send his son Jesus to die for you on the cross. That's the supreme sacrifice. Are you willing to extend to this to someone? He's not even asking you to die for that person. All you need is to forgive.

I read the story of a woman who went to her pastor's office. She began to pour out her story. She'd been in bed for nine weeks. Hadn't been out of bed for nine weeks because of depression. She was an emotional basket case. She began to pour out her story. She told about multiple marriages and how that in the marriage she was in right now she had had an affair, got pregnant and secretly had an abortion and not told her husband about it at all. The guilt was killing her. She sat there with tears coming down her face telling her pastor about her depression. He began to explain to her how she could be forgiven.

How that Jesus Christ said I will wipe the slate clean. We'll start all over like the etch-a-sketch turned upside down and shaken. It's all over. You can be born again. That means a fresh start in life. The Pastor told her how she could be forgiven by the grace of God.

She looked up at him with tears coming down and said, "I could be forgiven?" And he said, "Of course you can. God stakes His word on it."

She said, "But it just doesn't seem right. It's not fair. Somebody's got to pay for my sins." And he said, "You're right. Somebody has. His name is Jesus Christ."

Two thousand years ago He came to earth and lived a perfect life and went around healing and loving people and preaching about God's kingdom and one day He walked up the hill and allowed Himself to be hung on a cross. He stretched out His arms and said, I love you this much. And He said, "I will take all the sin of the world. Every bad, evil thing I will take the penalty for."

You don't have to pay for your sin twice. Either you let Jesus Christ pay for them or you can pay for them. But somebody has already paid for all your sins. You either accept it or you reject it.

What I'm saying is forgiveness is free. But it is not cheap. It is the most expensive thing there is. It cost Jesus Christ His life. It cost God His Son to pay

for your forgiveness. Forgiveness, when it happens between people occurs when the person who has been wounded, when the person who has been hurt, when the person who has been abused or rejected, voluntarily decides to accept the pain. To absorb the hurt at great cost. Only then could forgiveness occur.

You say, why in the world would anybody do that? Because I've been already forgiven by God, because resentment makes me miserable and because I'm going to need more forgiveness from God in the future.

In this story the debt of this man was paid for by a king. But in your case it was paid for by the King of kings. Jesus Christ. You need to accept it then you need to offer it to others. As I said, enjoy it and then employ it.

Perhaps, you've heard of the late Corrie Ten Boom. Her life story was made into a movie titled "The Hiding Place" which is the same title as her autobiography.

Corrie was a dutch lady whose family offered refuge in their house to some Jews during World War II. Eventually, this was discovered by the Nazis and sent her and her family to a concentration camp. Her father died in the camp while her sister was raped and died as well in the camp. Due to a mistake, she was released. When the war was over she began traveling and speaking, sharing her Savior and the vision that He had given her. And then one day, something happened, something that shook her to the very core of her being. In her book, this is what she says.

"It was at a church service in Munich that I saw him, the former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbruck. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there, the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsy's pain-blanced face.

He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. "How grateful I am for your message Fraulein," he said. "To think, as you say, He has washed my sins away!"

His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to the people in Bloemendall the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side. Even as the angry vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man: was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him.

I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me your forgiveness.

As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.

And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that this world's healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself."

So, folks, who do you need to forgive? Is it your mate, a sister or brother, a relative, a co-worker, a schoolmate, or even someone in church? Do you have bitterness or resentment against anyone? Jesus says you just forgive. And forgive whatever the offense may be. And leave it to Jesus to give you the peace that passes understanding.