

# Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, October 3, 2012 – First Baptist Church Buda  
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

**STRENGTHENING YOUR GRIP**  
**“Strengthening Your Grip on Forgiveness”**  
*Ephesians 4:31-5:2, Matthew 5:23-24, Matthew 18:21-35*

*“We are never more Christlike than when we are forgiving” –Dr. Charles Swindoll.*

Remember it was some of Jesus final words from a cross that expressed it this way... while looking into the eyes of his crucifiers and knowing that it was our sin that put Him on that cross He cried out, *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”* (Luke 23:34) It isn't an overstatement to claim that Jesus was all about our forgiveness... our finding it and our extending it to others. So perhaps to say, “We are never more Christ-like than when we are forgiving” is an accurate claim and an outstanding pursuit for our lives as believers who desire to be like Him.

Listen close to the Apostle Paul's words in (READ) *Ephesians 4:31-5:2, “<sup>4:31</sup> Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. <sup>32</sup> Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. <sup>5:1</sup> Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children <sup>2</sup> and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”* Let me ask you what do you think he is saying? What is he calling us to do? He is definitely calling as genuine believer in Jesus Christ to strengthen our grip on forgiveness!

While a great goal and ambition to be “forgiving,” let's face it, it's not always easy is it. Why, in your opinion is it often so hard to forgive? Take a few moments and reflect on why we sometimes have such a hard time forgiving. Record your thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Some reasons that “forgiveness” may be so hard for us

1. **Human behavior/nature** - Some people are just “hard-wired” to retaliate or get even, rather than forgive, when they have been hurt by another person. Our very human nature, which is self-protective and self-preserving, and could also be called our flesh and our sinful nature often controls our reaction to things. Forgiveness doesn't come easily or naturally to our flesh, that is why we need to be “new creatures” in the way we live each day and have the mind of Christ being conformed to His image.

2. **Pride and/or self-esteem** - Our pride or self-esteem gets injured and we can't let things go. They may gnaw at us and eat away any ability we have to get past our injured ego and forgive.
3. **Crushed dreams and expectations** - Our expectations or dreams are disappointed and get changed and affected and it's hard to get over. Often our dreams and expectations are such a part of who we are and provided the bigger picture for our lives. Having those dreams and ideals shattered can be devastating and extremely hard to get over, and forgiveness can seem like an impossibility.
4. **Losing something valuable to us** – When we lose something very valuable to us or have something taken away from us unjustly, suddenly or without cause it can be equally devastating and very difficult to get over. We can almost convince ourselves that that person responsible doesn't deserve forgiveness. We want recompense for the damages, not a gracious giving of forgiveness. *A couple of example here may be helpful: (1) For example we lose a loved one because of someone's carelessness and irresponsibility (drunk driver); (2) Another example might be we lose a mate/spouse because of their unfaithfulness and we refuse to forgive them... remember when we refuse to forgive we are giving that person power over us.*
5. **Automatic thoughts and beliefs** - Automatic thoughts or beliefs impede us from forgiving others. We tell ourselves, "I won't forgive because he/she never accepts responsibility for what he/she does" or "I would be a hypocrite if I forgave because I do not feel like forgiving" or "Forgiving is only for weak people". In other words our own personal thoughts and belief seek to justify and rationalize why we don't or shouldn't forgive.
6. **Explanations for behavior** - When someone hurts us or lets us down we tend to assign internal causes for behavior to others. We argue that it is based on personality or character traits. We tell ourselves, "he's just so forgetful or careless" or "she doesn't appreciate me" or "she did that purposefully". We judge them harshly.

#### **What is wrong with these reasons for "not forgiving":**

1. **They fail to take into account our own sin nature and need for forgiveness.** – We too aren't perfect and yet we desire to be forgiven when we fail or mess up.
2. **They fail to take in to account the effects of and unforgiving spirit on their life** – Remember that bitterness and resentment are like a cancer that eats away at you, and like we said before, "When we fail to forgive another person something they have done against us, we give them power over us."
3. **They fail to take into account the unconditional love and forgiveness of Sovereign God** – God is in control of our circumstances. He sees! He knows! Even our mistreatment doesn't escape His eye and He will take care of it and us... let Him!

### **I. GETTING A GRIP ON GOD'S GREAT FORGIVENESS OF US**

No one has ever been more offended by more people than God. Yet no one exercises forgiveness more readily and thoroughly than He. The psalmist David wrote, *"As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us"* (Ps. 103:12). This same Lord expects His servants to exercise forgiveness toward others. When they are offended, He desires that they harbor no grudge or seek any sort of retaliation. And when they are the offenders, he wants them to make amends and seek reconciliation. Granted, many times this is

difficult instruction to obey. But as we will see, to do less will eventually lead to a torturous existence filled with bitterness, anger and guilt.

The practical side of forgiveness is made possible by the theological foundation which undergirds it – specifically, God’s forgiveness of us through the substitutionary death of His Son, Jesus Christ. Because we have willfully violated God’s perfect standard of righteousness, we have come under His just wrath. Our sin against God has produced a moral debt that we could not possibly repay by our own efforts. But through God’s grace, repayment was met by Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross. With this He made it possible for God to cancel our debt (Colossians 2:13-14). However, the only way we can receive the benefits of beginning with a fresh ledge is to place our full trust in the sufficiency of Christ’s death to repay our debt. Then, and only then, will we, in turn, have the necessary foundation and motivation to forgive others of their offences against us.

## II. GETTING A GRIP ON THE NECESSITY OF OUR FORGIVENESS OF OTHERS

On the vertical side, forgiveness flows only from God to man. Horizontally, forgiveness should occur between man and man. On this level we see ourselves in one of two positions regarding forgiveness: (1) either as the offender... the one needing to be forgiven (*I’m the one who mess up and must seek someone else’s forgiveness*), or (2) as the offended... the one who has wronged and needs to extend forgiveness (*I must be willing to forgive another who has wronged me or deeply offended/hurt me*). We will look at a couple of passages that help to strengthen our grip on forgiveness from both perspectives... and in a very practical way

**A. WHEN WE ARE THE OFFENDER... the one needing to be forgiven (Matthew 5:23-24)** – The text from Jesus’ well-known Sermon on the Mount succinctly gives the procedure we should follow when we have offended another person. Look at it with me... it reads, **“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”** (Mt. 5:23-24) The procedure Jesus offers here is clear. It has four steps:

### **4 Steps When We Are The Offender (*When we need to seek the forgiveness of another*)**

**Step 1: Leave what you are doing** – Under the Mosaic Law, a worshiper brought animals as a sacrifice to be slain on an altar before God. This act provided him or her with cleansing of sin and a way of open access to God. With the sacrificial death of Christ, however, the payment for sins has been made once for all. Now Christians can come to the Lord in prayer without bringing any other sacrifice for their sins. Jesus’ point is that when we come to our Father in worship and suddenly remember that we have offended another person, then we are to stop worshipping. We have other business we must attend to first. Just as God has gone to great lengths to make us right with Him by forgiving us through the sacrificial death of His Son, Jesus Christ... we are to not take lightly His forgiveness of us by hypocritically seeking to worship Him when we have an unforgiving spirit looming over our heads either because we have wronged

another or are unwilling to forgive another. We must stop and go make things right for the sake of God's forgiveness of us.

**Step 2: Go back the way you came** – The second step is to seek out that person we have wronged. The idea here is to go your way and find the person who you have sinned against or wronged. Seek them out! Retrace your steps, so to speak, and correct them! Do you get it?

**Step 3: Be reconciled** – When we find the person we have hurt, we need to be reconciled to him or her. That is, we who offend are commanded to initiate a process that will result in a positive change in the relationship between ourselves and the one we have wounded. This requires that we confess the wrong, express our grief over it, and seek their forgiveness.

**Step 4: Then come back and rightly worship God** – When the first three steps have been accomplished, we are then free to return to worship the God who is full of forgiveness, rich in mercy and grace to us.

## **PROBLEMS... PROBLEMS... PROBLEMS...**

The problems with seeking forgiveness from those we have hurt, wounded or offended can be many... not to mention it could get you beat up! Here are 4 problems you may encounter along the way:

### **4 Problems You May Encounter When Seeking Forgiveness from Another:**

1. **The problem of refusal...“What if he or she refuses to forgive me?”** – If this occurs, recall these words of wisdom from Proverbs 16:7, “When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.” You're responsible to do what is right in a humble, loving way. You are not responsible for their reaction or response to your efforts to seek their forgiveness. You are only responsible to try. It may take time, but God will honor your efforts. (Ex. Mike Doubrava)
2. **The problem of escalation...“What if the situation only gets worst?”** – The person you have offended may have built up a great deal of bitterness toward you. So when you go to them and try to make amends, you may discover their bitterness as well as expose their guilt. This can easily lead to worse feelings and an even less favorable situation. Don't judge the situation or the person, just realize the depth of hurt and the effects it can have on a person's life. Once again remember that you are not responsible for the other person's response or reaction to your efforts to seek forgiveness. Don't allow this possibility to deter you from seeking reconciliation. God can work in a circumstance like this. However, many times it does take longer for the healing process to occur. So go and perhaps be prepared for the worst, but don't fail to go?
3. **The problem of neglect... “What if I confess my offense to God only?”** – Then you would be contradicting Jesus' command to go first to the person you offended, then second to the source of forgiveness, our gracious Lord. If you want God to forgive you of your sin against another person, then you must first go to the person and attempt to make things right between yourselves. Nothing else will do? And anything less is really a cop out!

4. **The problem of lost opportunity... “What if the person I offended died before I could seek reconciliation?”** – Since you can’t contact a dead person, find another individual whom you can trust and honestly tell them about your offense against the now deceased person. Then pray with this confidant for the forgiveness you need from the our all-good Lord.

- B. WHEN WE ARE THE OFFENDED... the one needing to forgive another (Matthew 18:21-35)** – Just as there will be times when we have hurt someone else, so there will be occasions when someone will wrong us. In this section of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus instructs us regarding our responsibility when we are the offended... wronged, and at the same time He gives some practical help on how to strengthen our grip and understanding of what this forgiveness extended toward others is to look like:

**4 Pictures of Extending Forgiveness Toward Those Who Wrong Us:**

1. **It is to be extended endlessly... without boundaries (v.22)** – One of the disciples, Peter, came to Jesus and asked Him if he should forgive sevenfold a person who sinned against him. Jesus answered Peter, *“I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”* In other words, when we are wronged, we’re to forgive our offender as unlimited number to times. Just as God’s forgiveness toward us has no boundaries, so should our forgiveness of each other be boundless. Isn’t that the kind of forgiveness we have been shown through Jesus Christ. Listen again to *Ephesians 4:32, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”* Isn’t this endless and boundless kind of forgiveness what Paul had in mind!
2. **It is to be extended with our own forgiveness in mind (vv..23-27)** – Jesus graphically portrayed His teaching through the parable revealed in these verses. He spoke of a wealthy king “who wished to settle accounts with his slaves” (v.23b). One of his slaves owed him ten thousand talents. Since a talent was probably worth a measure of gold between fifty-eight and eighty pounds, we can see that the slave was indebted to the king for several million dollars. But because the slave could not repay the debt, the king commanded that he and his wife, children, and possessions all be sold in order to recover as much of the debt as possible. The slave humbled himself before the king and begged to be granted more time to repay the money owed. The slave’s entreaty moved the king to compassion, so he released him and “forgave the debt” (v.27). Do you remember the song,

He paid a debt He did not owe  
I owed a debt I could not pay  
I needed someone to wash my sins away

And now I sing a brand new song  
Amazing grace all day long  
Christ Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay

What is that about? The great debt that was paid for the forgiveness of our sins.  
We have been forgiven must, therefore we are to forgive much!

- 3. It is to be extended unconditionally... not expecting anything in return (vv.28-30)** – Later on in Jesus’ story the same slave who had received the pardon for his great debt, encountered a second slave who owed him one hundred denarii, which is about sixteen to twenty dollars in today’s currency and in Jesus’ day equaled an average day’s wages. This slave was also unable to repay his debt and begged for more time to come up with the deficit funds. But the slave who had been forgiven of such a huge debt refused to forgive this fellow slave for his much smaller one. Indeed, he threw the second slave in jail “until he should pay back what was owed” (v.30). In other words he was extended forgiveness, but he was unwilling to extend forgiveness to others. He accepted the forgiveness conditionally... on the condition that he was free so he could collect against those who wronged Him. We are to show the same unconditional love and forgiveness toward others that we have been shown from God... our Master. And just as God’s forgiveness of us cost us nothing, it was free and unearned... so the forgiveness we offer toward others is to be without a catch clause... free and unconditionally offered... not strings attached, just forgiveness.
- 4. It is to be extended with a fearful reverence for our God (vv.31-35)** – When the king learned what had transpired, he summoned his slave, rebuked him, and gave him over to the torturers. Negatively speaking, our failure to be genuinely merciful toward others will result in God allowing our own bitterness and resentment to poison us inside. However, since very negative presupposes a positive, when we do completely forgive those who wrong us, God will free us from our feelings of torment, misery, and unrest. The choice is ours. If any of us got what we deserved, we would all be in trouble! Show reverence for the great God of forgiveness, mercy and pardon toward you.

Two reasons to forgive others emerge from this story.

**Reasons to Forgive:**

- (1) To refuse to forgive is hypocritical** – Just as our divine King has demonstrated maximum compassion toward us, even when we were still rebelling against Him, so we need to do the same toward others. To do otherwise make us hypocrites.
- (2) To refuse to forgive inflicts inner torment upon us** – At the end of the parable, the kind handed the slave over to the “torturers.” This word in the Greek biblical text means “plague” or “torment.” Elsewhere in Scripture it’s used in its verb form to speak of a person suffering “great pain” (Mt. 8:6) and to describe the misery of a man pleading for relief in hell (Lk.16:23-24). The use of this word in the last line of the parable makes its closing message quite clear... when we refuse to forgive those who offend us, we will suffer the consequences of torturous thoughts, feelings of misery, and agonizing unrest within. It could well be describing the very real physical effects that an unforgiving spirit has on our body... the gnawing guilt that causes ulcers, the bitterness and inner anger that can cause stress, high blood pressure and a strain

on the human heart, the seed of the disease of resentment that could indeed be the seed of other diseases to the immune system. Wow!

## I. HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

There are two directives you need to remember in order to really strengthen your grip on forgiveness:

### 2 Directives For Genuine Forgiveness:

1. **Focus full on God's forgiving of you** – This will help you to humbly acknowledge any way that you have wronged another and seek his or her forgiveness, but it will also enable you to freely forgive others who may have wronged you recognizing God great extension of forgiveness toward you.
2. **Deal directly and honestly with any resentment you currently hold against anyone** – Remember the injurious consequences to your physical as well as spiritual wellbeing that result when you are unwilling to forgive others. Also, keep in mind that anytime you are unwilling to forgive another person you give them power over your own life.

**Q. DEAR BILLY GRAHAM:** I know we're supposed to forgive people who've hurt us, but why should we? It doesn't change them in any way, so why bother? They're probably just going to hurt us all over again the next time they get an opportunity. — F. M.

How would you respond to this person?

**A. DEAR F.M.:** One reason we ought to forgive those who've hurt us is simply because God commands us to do so. Jesus warned, *"If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins"* (Matthew 6:15).

But why does God command us to forgive others — even if they don't deserve it or even want it? One reason is because of what an unforgiving spirit does to us. Think of it a moment: If someone hurts you, what happens to your attitude toward them? You know the answer: You'll be filled with anger and bitterness, and you may even try to strike back and hurt them in some way. And these feelings will stay in your heart as long as you fail to forgive that person. In fact, they'll become like a poison in your soul, robbing you of your joy and turning you into someone who is sour and bitter and angry at life. The Bible warns, *"See to it ... that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many"* (Hebrews 12:15).

But it doesn't need to be this way — not if we begin to see the other person through the eyes of Jesus. He loves them in spite of their failures — and so should we. Don't let bitterness crowd out your joy, but ask God to help you forgive others just as he has forgiven you — freely and fully. Then ask him to help you show Christ's love to them, and to bring them to himself