

DID JESUS SAY THAT?

“Do I need to forgive everyone?”

Scripture: Matthew 5:21-26; 18:21-22

Delivered during the COVID-19 crisis via Livestream at Central Baptist Church on July 26, 2020,
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(SLIDE 1) INTRODUCTION:

Good morning everyone. Thank you for joining us online. We are so glad you are with us. My name is Steve, and I am one of the pastors here at Central.

Today, we are on Part 3 of the series “Did Jesus say that?” and I would like to focus on the question, “**do I need to forgive everyone?**” What if someone hurts you over and over? Is there a limit to our forgiveness? **Does Jesus say that?**

STORY: How long can you hold on for? When I was younger, I was learning to water ski. I remember my dad saying, “Son, when you fall, let go of the rope!” I responded with, “Dad, of course, I will... why wouldn’t I?”

I remember the first time I got up on two skies! It felt like I was floating and lighter than air. As I got better, the boat driver who was a family friend would go faster and faster. I learned to gradually to go back and forth out of the wake that was created by the boat! **And then I fell.** For some reason, I didn’t let go of the rope. At that moment, my body was being dragged by the rope that was attached to the boat. I was taking on water, and I couldn’t breathe. My arms started to strain and weaken. Eventually, because I was improperly holding on so tightly, the rope left a wound on my arm. Finally, I let go and didn’t know why I held on so long.

Just like in the story, we have all been wounded by other people, and we can hold on to it too long to the hurt. Some of you may also have been wounded or hurt by others on purpose or by accident. At some time, your hurt may have occurred in friendship, family, and work relationships or serving together in a church or ministry. This happens when someone misjudges you, rejects you, mistreats you, and says unkind words that wound us.

There are times we are all going to get mistreated and hurt. Without forgiveness, we get into this cycle of unresolved tension that leads to relational separation with both God and others. The problem is that we can hold on to hurt for too long!

So, the question is, what does Jesus really say about forgiveness? To help us address this question, I want to focus on three things:

1. Question #1 - DO WE NEED TO FORGIVE EVERYONE?
2. Question #2 - CAN FORGIVENESS WAIT?
3. Question #3 – CAN WE LIMIT OUR FORGIVENESS?

As you are going to see, as a follower of Christ, we need to initiate forgiveness as part of living out the gospel.

(SLIDE 2) Question #1 - DO WE NEED TO FORGIVE EVERYONE?

First, let's look at what forgiveness is not!

(SLIDE 3) a) What forgiveness is not?

(SLIDE 4) (include subheadings)

Here are some misconceptions of forgiveness:

“It is NOT Condoning the Behavior. Once we understand that the act of forgiving does not compromise our moral standard by condoning the offense, we are in a position to forgive even the worst of sins. To forgive is not saying, "What you did is okay." It is saying, "The consequences of your behavior belong to God, not to me." When we forgive, we transfer the person from our system of justice to God's. To forgive is to recognize that the wrong done against us is a debt of sin, and all sin is against God. Therefore, in forgiving, we transfer the debt from our ledger of accounts to God's, leaving all recompense in his hands.

It is NOT Forgetting What Happened. It would be foolish to erase from mind some of the wrongs done to us. If we were to do so, we would never learn from our experiences and would walk right back into the same or a similar situation, only to face the same disappointments. What can eventually be forgotten are the raw emotions associated with the event. When we forgive, the terrible memories and feelings gradually diminish.

For example, what if **someone took one of my daughter's life. I will likely think about the incident every day for the rest of my life—even if the murderer repents and is forgiven.** Yes, we should have a forgiving, merciful, loving, non-vengeful attitude. But that is not the same as never again thinking about the incident.

It is NOT Restoring Trust in the Person.

It is NOT Agreeing to Reconcile.¹

(SLIDE 5) b) What forgiveness is?

Forgiveness is the process by which a person is released from the consequences of the offence. In the Bible, the Greek word translated “forgiveness” literally means “to let go,” as when a person does not demand payment for a debt.

Back to the question: DO WE NEED TO FORGIVE EVERYONE?

(SLIDE 6) Look with me at Matthew 5:21, which says, *“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’”*

Jesus is saying, **in God’s court, anger and unforgiveness are judged like murder.** It’s a caution to a person who continues to be angry with someone else. Why? In anger we tear and wound other people. In the process, we even wound ourselves down. Our words are the currency of relationship that can build up or tear down each person.

The question is when this happens, when someone is angry? WHO IS RESPONSIBLE TO FIX IT?

(SLIDE 7) Let keep reading, Matthew 5:22 *22 But I say to you that **everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council**”*

Notice in Verse 22 it says, **everyone who is angry with someone else is responsible.**

- We are responsible for pursuing reconciliation if we committed the offense that hurt someone.

(SLIDE 7) Look with me at Luke 17:3, which says, *“³ Pay attention to yourselves! **If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him...**”*

- We are responsible for pursuing reconciliation if we see someone sin.

¹ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/forgiveness-the-very-essence-of-our-faith-11639431.html>

In other words, all the people involved in relational situations where there is anger or hurt are responsible to make it right.

This brings up another question:

**WHAT IF SOMEONE SINS AGAINST YOU AND THE PERSON DOESN'T REPENT?
DO YOU NEED TO FORGIVE THEM?**

Luke 17:3, which says, “**3 Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him...**”

It seems to me that Jesus is saying that we don't have to forgive without repentance. Right? No. We need to remember to use the entire Bible before jumping to conclusion like this.

(SLIDE 9) Look at what **Mark 11:25** says, “**And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him.**” This does not say “forgive the person if they repent” but rather “forgive them right there—as you are praying.”

Jesus is calling us here both to practice forgiveness and correction. Because the gospel calls us to speak the truth and to never give up on trying to reconcile. **Jesus lays out a sequence of steps that are to be followed so that both repentance and forgiveness can happen.**

(TITLE SLIDE 10) Here is the process laid out in **Mathew 18:15-17** which says, “**15 If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.**”

Paul says in Romans 12:14-21, “**If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.**” We cannot make others be at peace with us, but we can work for their repentance and refrain from taking revenge.

However, most people just bypass the process and hope the problem goes away.

ILLUSTRATION:

Many years ago, in a leadership transition at my old church we got a new chairman of the board. After the Lead Pastor retired, this new board chairman started

attacking my youth ministry and family behind my back. I could tell that something was wrong because of how he treated me. He started spreading false things about my ministry to his friends at the church. I felt bullied! When I was greeting people, I started getting strange looks from all the people that interacted with him. His gossip affected the entire church. The good news is that God protected me from his schemes and gave me insight into the situation. As a result, I invited the entire church board to come to a youth night see for themselves what was happening, and they did. The facts got corrected. As a result, the board chairman was asked to step down. But he never repented, so there was no reconciliation. He just ghosted our community and went to another church. Years later, I found out he did the same thing at his next church. But the damage didn't stop there, I also really struggled to forgive him.

APPLICATION:

Someone said, "Everyone wants a Biblical community, but nobody wants to forgive!" **Unforgiveness kills genuine community. It separates close friends. It divides families. It splits churches. And it keeps people from experiencing authentic Biblical community.** This raises a question for all of us. Is there any unforgiveness in our own lives that is affecting our relationship to God and is this unforgiveness keeping us from experiencing authentic Christlike community?

In summary, we have been commanded in scripture to forgive everyone who has hurt us. For those who have been hurt deeply, this may be very difficult to do. This forgiveness does not mean we will necessarily forget the offence, but it does involve letting it go, and turning over to God. This forgiveness releases us from the prison of unforgiveness.

To answer the question, DO WE NEED TO FORGIVE EVERYONE? The answer is yes!

As you can see, **as a follower of Christ, we are responsible to initiate forgiveness as part of living out the gospel.**

Secondly, we need to forgive others before we can genuinely worship God.

(SLIDE 11) Question #2 - CAN FORGIVENESS WAIT?

(SLIDE 12) Look with me at Matthew 5:23 and 24, which says, "²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,

24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

Notice in verse 24, it says, "**Leave your gift**" is a sharp command; there is something more urgent than completing the act of sacrifice. The worshiper is to leave the sacrifice right there, **in front of the altar, and go. Why does Jesus say this? Jesus is exposing our true motives for worship**, which become a trite and meaningless when we are holding sin in our hearts. **Exercising forgiveness is more significant than your gifts.** This is what Jesus is saying, "it's wrong to value **perceptions over responsibility.**" When we value how others perceive us over transparency or responsibility, we start to put on a show to hide what is really going on in our heart. It is something that should be dealt with quickly.

(SLIDE 13 both verses) Look with me at Matthew 5:25, which says, "*Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison.*"

(SLIDE 14) In Hebrews 12:15, it says, "*See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.*"

(TITLE SLIDE 15)

ILLUSTRATION:

Many years ago, my little brother lived with us for his first year of college. Those of you who know Megan and I well we keep a clean space. We asked him to do two simple things like his own laundry and dishes. Eventually, every time he came out of his room a waft of stink would follow. Well, my little brother must have been from a different family. After a while, the smell started to make its way into the rest of the house. When I went into his room there were crusty dirty dishes for weeks all around and a layer of clothes. So, I had to lay down the hammer. It got to the point of if you don't clean your room by the weekend you will be moving out because we can't stand the smell. Well, when he cleaned his room, he invited me in, and it still smelled. However, he masked the smell with air freshener. Which is no better. I also noticed that his bedspread looked

lumpy. When I started walking over to it, he looked concerned. I lifted it up and underneath it was all the dirty dishes.

APPLICATION:

This is what unforgiveness looks like when we just cover it up and pretend that we have done the hard work. The condition of our heart starts to show itself through the cover.

When gathering, we can strategically sit where you don't have to interact with a certain person. We can raise our hands in worship. We can pray really elegant words when others are listening. We can put money in the offering plate. Throw in an amen. What Jesus is saying, is that this is wrong! Why, because you are holding a grudge against with someone else. There is a war going on in your heart. But everything that we are doing is trying to cover up what is really going on in your heart.

We can't fully worship when we are bitter as our resentment disrupts genuine worship. God recognizes our false worship when he sees it. And He is asking us to examine our own hearts as we come to worship Him. Your heart becomes focused on getting even or destroying the person who hurt us, not on how great God is. I know people who have started to blame God for their sour state. An unfair loss of a loved one, when swindled out of money, when a boss passes you over for a promotion you really deserved, or when your husband walks off and leaves you for another woman. How can we worship?

Is there someone in your life that you need to forgive and reconcile with? How long has it been? How long have you been holding on to a hurt and not letting it go or laying it down at the cross? Jesus is saying that being reconciled with others who hurt you or you have hurt is more important than putting your money in the offering plate. Have you done that, or is there something nawing at your heart? If you want to experience the freedom from this sin or offence, Jesus may be asking you to make it right with this person. Or maybe He is asking you to lay it down at His feet...to bury the hatchet. Sometimes wounds can be very deep and it may be helpful to talk to someone. I know any of the pastoral staff would be glad to talk to you.

To answer the question, "Can forgiveness wait?" The answer is no, as we can't worship God well if we are holding a grudge or harboring bitterness and

hating someone else as we worship God. We must forgive others if we are going to worship God well.

Lastly, **should we limit our forgiveness?**

(SLIDE 16) Question #3 - SHOULD WE LIMIT OUR FORGIVENESS?

In other words, what do we do when someone continues to hurt us over and over again?

(SLIDE 17) *Look with me at Matthew 18:21-22 says, “²¹ Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” ²² Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.”*

(TITLE SLIDE 18)

CONTEXT:

When Peter asked Jesus how often he should forgive, Jesus gave a flustering answer. When Jesus told Peter, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times” he does not mean that we only need to forgive until the seventy-eighth time. He is saying that we should never stop forgiving...we should not be keeping a record of wrongs. Then Jesus told this story.² This doesn’t mean that you let someone hurt you over and over. At times you need to put up boundaries. However, **Jesus is saying forgiveness is as much for us as the other person!**

But notice that Peter is asking the right question. Peter realized that it was right to forgive. He was trying. But do we even try?

Jesus is giving a warning to those who hold fast to an unforgiving spirit as you could lose heaven, and gain hell. Why, because if you have not forgiven, you have not deeply understood the gospel.

Jesus is saying **that we must forgive without limits because we have been forgiven by God without limits.**

ILLUSTRATION:

² Boice, J. M. (2001). [*The Gospel of Matthew*](#) (p. 394). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

(SLIDE 19) Jim Henry says, “We create the “FILING CABINET OF YOUR MIND.” In bitterness, you focus on what that “horrible person” has done to you. You make a filing cabinet with their name on it, saying, “Rotten Things This Person Has Done To Me.” Now this is a big filing cabinet, and every time that person does even the smallest thing that hurts or bothers you, you file it in with the rest of the hurts. Usually we have more than one filing cabinet.

(SLIDE 20) Reconciliation means emptying the filing cabinet for good. The Bible pushes us to being loving even when you don’t like the person. There are harder people to love... Can I get an amen? We are always called to forgive; however, forgiveness should not be seen as a remedy to another’s character. Forgiveness will not fix the other person. But we are called to love and work on ourselves.”

(TITLE SLIDE 21) APPLICATION:

Can you think of anyone who, in the last week or month or year, you have consciously forgiven for the same offense as many as seven times? Or do you keep a file of wrongs? Sustained unforgiveness makes you spiritually ill and holds you captive... like a virus that impairs regular function. Unforgiveness impairs our relationship with God. When we leave it undealt with, unwanted damage and captivity occurs. It can keep us focused on a personal battle and not on advancing the gospel.

DOES JESUS LIMIT OUR FORGIVENESS? No, but broken people break those around them. Broken people need Jesus! Are you giving them Jesus or the cold shoulder?

(SLIDE 22) Matthew 6:14-15 says, “14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

(SLIDE 23) Ephesians 4:30-32 which says, “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

(SLIDE 24) Tim Keller says, “if someone wrongs you, really wrongs you, what should you do? God says, our King says, you must forgive. It’s a rule. It’s a

law. You must forgive. You must no longer hold the person liable. You must forgive from the heart. It's all through the Bible. What if you don't? If you don't, you're taking your life in your own hands. You're being your own master, your own lord, as it were.

(SLIDE 25) You're actually making yourself the judge of this person, sitting in the judgment seat, and what's going to happen? If you're really angry at them, bad things will happen. Disintegration. It won't be good for you psychologically. There will be fear and anger. It won't be good for you in your relationships if you stay angry at this person.

(SLIDE 26) You'll tend to generalize your anger toward other people like that person. It'll hurt your relationships. It'll distort your relationships. It might even hurt your body. It might even create some kind of breakdown. Anger is very bad for your body. What's going on? It's a miniature version of what happened in Genesis. It's a miniature version of what happens all the time.

(SLIDE 27) What does it mean, then, when Jesus Christ comes and says, "The kingdom of God has come"? What it means is when we enter back under his lordship, we start to heal. Things start to come together. However, there's something very important to see. Notice he says, "The kingdom of God has come near."³

(SLIDE 28) WHY IS FORGIVENESS SO HARD?

- a. **Because the hurt or wound was devastating or even life-altering.**
 - Grieve the loss. In a sense, have a funeral to say goodbye to whatever happened in the past.
- b. **Because we tell ourselves we will forgive when they stop doing wrong.**
- c. **Because we are also broken people who forget what Jesus did for us.**
- d. **Because we are prone to hold on to our hurt and bitterness as we want to see the other person pay for what they did. Those are just some of the reasons.**

³ Keller, T. J. (2015). [Called to the Kingdom](#). In *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive, 2014–2015* (Mk 1:14–34). New York: Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

In conclusion, forgiveness is God's work, it's God's call to come back to Him, it's His invitation to restore the friendship and peace between God and man. But forgiveness means that we are covering an offense with love.

So, what are the steps of forgiveness?

(SLIDE 29) Steps of forgiveness.

1. Decide – You will not forgive if you base your decision on feelings. Choose to give it to God. Don't let the devil have a stronghold and poison you with bitter thoughts. Make a decision to forgive, and God will heal your wounded emotions in time (see Matthew 6:12-14).

2. Depend – You cannot reconcile and forgive without the Spirit of God working in your heart. It's too hard to do on your own. If you are truly willing, God will enable you, but you must humble yourself and cry out to Him for help.

3. Obey – God's Word tells us several things we're to do concerning forgiving our enemies.

- We must forgive as Christ forgave.

- We must forgive quickly before we can genuinely worship God.

God has given us the ministry of reconciliation. As we have been reconciled to God through Christ, as a result, Jesus gives us the power to no longer see one another from the world's viewpoint.

(TITLE SLIDE 30) ILLUSTRATION:

Corrie ten Boom, who protected Jewish people in her home and was caught, tells a story of not being able to forgive a wrong that had been done to her while she was in a German concentration camp during WW2.

She says, **"I had forgiven the person, but I kept rehashing the incident and couldn't sleep."** Finally, she cried out to God for help in putting the problem to rest. **God's help came in the form of a kind pastor, Corrie wrote, "to whom I confessed my failure after two sleepless weeks."** He responded with, **"Up in the church tower,"** he said, nodding out the window, **"is a bell which is rung by pulling on a rope. But you know what? When you let go of the rope, the bell keeps**

on swinging. First ding, then dong. Slower and slower until there's a final dong and it stops. I believe the same thing is true of forgiveness. When we forgive, we take our hand off the rope. But if we've been tugging at our grievances for a long time, we mustn't be surprised if the old angry thoughts keep coming for a while. They're just the ding-dongs of the old bell slowing down."

And so, it proved to be. There were a few more midnight reverberations, a couple of dings when the subject came up in my conversations, but the force -- which was my willingness in the matter -- had gone out of them. They came less and less often and at the last stopped altogether: we can trust God not only above our emotions, but also above our thoughts."

CONCLUSION:

- What are you holding on to? You may need to make a list and grieve.
- Then take that list of offences, hurts, actions, words, and destroy it.
- Why? Because God wants you to give it to him and to release you from it so you can find healing in him. This is how you forgive others.

Worship Team.