

06/06/10 – The Freedom of Forgiveness – The Journey into Freedom

FREEDOM

Colossians 3:13-14 (NIV) Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Galatians 5:1 (GWT) Christ has freed us so that we may enjoy the benefits of freedom. Therefore, be firm in this freedom, and don't become slaves again.

Romans 6:17-18 (MsgB) But thank God you've started listening to a new master, one whose commands set you free to live openly in his freedom!

Romans 7:6 (MsgB) But now that we're no longer shackled to that domineering mate of sin... we're free to live a new life in the freedom of God.

QUESTIONS:

Do you have a clear vision of the freedom God has in mind for you? Is it something you crave, or are you comfortable the way things are?

JOURNEY

Forgiveness is free, but it is not cheap. It is costly and hard!

Jay Pathak: The process of forgiveness is excruciatingly painful... It is difficult to develop a lifestyle of forgiveness, to be a person who is completely released and continually releases. We are way beyond just being nice religious people with religious answers when we learn how to be truly forgiving folk... Many of us have forgiven in a cheap religious way, but we haven't actually been liberated. We've maybe prayed a prayer or said something out loud, "I forgive you", but forgiveness has not captured us, we've not released someone else or been released.

Colossians 3:13-14 (NLT) Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

Psalms 34:22 (MsgB) God pays for each slave's freedom; no one who runs to him loses out.

QUESTIONS:

Are you aware of areas in your life where you're holding on to a grudge or an injustice? If so, are you willing to engage in the process of forgiveness?

Recommended reading: RT Kendall – Total Forgiveness

20/06/10 –The Freedom of Forgiveness – A Father’s Story

from Luke 15:11-24

FORGIVENESS IS SCANDALOUS

Luke 15:12 (NLT) The younger son told his father, 'I want my share of your estate now before you die.'

John H. (a convicted murderer): Christians are the only people I know that you can kill their son, and they'll make you a part of their family. I don't know the Man Upstairs, but He sure is hounding me.

QUESTION: Do we recognize how scandalous forgiveness is? Do we realize how radical the gospel of grace is, for both us personally, and the world?

FORGIVENESS IS COSTLY

Luke 15: 22-23 (NLT) his father said to the servants, 'Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening.'

William Barclay: There is one eternal principal which will be valid as long as the world lasts. The principle is -- Forgiveness is a costly thing. Human forgiveness is costly... Forgiveness is the most costly thing in the world.

QUESTION: Do we recognize how costly forgiveness is? Do we realize how much it cost God to forgive us?

FORGIVENESS PRECEDES REPENTANCE

Luke 15:20 (NLT) And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.

Brennan Manning: The gospel of grace announces that forgiveness precedes repentance. The sinner is accepted before he pleads for mercy.

Romans 5:8 (NIV) God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

QUESTION: Do we await repentance of a person before granting forgiveness?

FORGIVENESS BRINGS FREEDOM

Luke 15:24 (NLT) 'We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.' So the party began.

Galatians 6:1 (MsgB) If someone falls into sin, forgivingly restore him, saving your critical comments for yourself. You might be needing forgiveness before the day is out.

Romans 5:20 (MsgB) sin doesn't have a chance in competition with the aggressive forgiveness we call grace. When it's sin versus grace, grace wins hands down.

Recommended reading: RT Kendall – Total Forgiveness (available at our Welcome Desk for £7)

27/06/10 – Freedom of Forgiveness – Releasing the Burden

Psalm 38:4 (NIV) My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear.

Luke 11:46 (NIV) Jesus replied, "...woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them."

Psalm 81:6-7 (NIV) God says, "I removed the burden from their shoulders; their hands were set free from the basket. In your distress you called and I rescued you"

Zephaniah 3:18 (MsgB) I, your God, will get rid of your sorrows for you. You've carried those burdens long enough.

Galatians 5:1 (NIV) It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV) Jesus said: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest... for my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Rob Bell: When I forgive somebody and I set them free, it's like I'm really setting myself free.

Isaiah 28:12 (MsgB) God said before, "This is the time and place to rest... This is the place to lay down your burden."

Rob Bell: May you forgive as you've been forgiven. May you give to others what's been given to you. May you set someone free and find out that it was you. May you do it today, because you might not have the chance tomorrow."

11/07/10 – The Freedom of Forgiveness – Forgiven, so Forgiving

from Luke 7:36-48

Colossians 3:13-14 (NIV) Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Matthew 18:32-33 (NLT) "I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?"

Luke 7:47 (NLT) "I tell you, her sins - and they are many - have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love."

1 Timothy 1:5 (NIV) Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - of whom I am the worst.

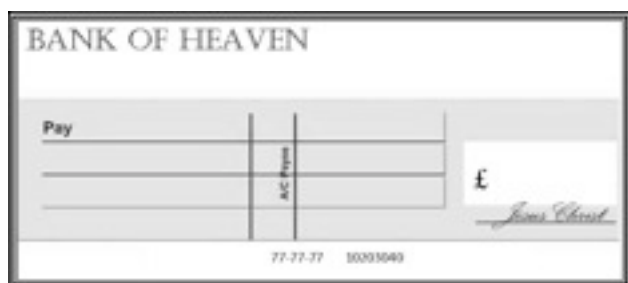
Hebrews 10:21-22 (NLT) let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.

Karl Menninger (famed psychiatrist): If I could convince the patients in psychiatric hospitals that their sins were forgiven, 75 percent of them could walk out the next day!

Luke 7:48 (NLT) Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven."

CH Spurgeon: A promise from God may be compared to a cheque payable to order. It is given to the believer with the view of bestowing upon him some good thing. It is not meant that he should read it over comfortably, and then have done with it. No, he is to treat the promise as a reality, as a man treats a cheque. He is to take the promise, personally receiving it as true. He is by faith to accept it as his own...This done, he must believingly present the promise to the Lord, as a man presents a cheque at the counter of the Bank. He must plead it by prayer, expecting to have it fulfilled.

QUESTION: If you can't let go of guilt, what would it cost to cancel your guilt? If you can't let go of a debt, what would it cost to cancel that debt? Would it cost your reputation, or pride, or money, ...?



18/07/10 – The Freedom of Forgiveness – Steps to Freedom

from Luke 6:27-38

1. DECIDE you want to forgive that person.

Luke 6:37 Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

2. DISCUSS the scenario with a leader or counsellor, to get perspective

Luke 6:31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Luke 6:37 Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.

3. PRAY for the person you want to forgive

Luke 6:28 pray for those who mistreat you.

Luke 6:28 (Msg) respond with the energies of prayer for that person.

4. BLESS the person you desire to forgive

Luke 6:28 do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you

Luke 6:35 do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back.. and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.

5. RISK forgiving, even if it means possibly being hurt again

Luke 6:28 If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic.

Luke 6:32-34 If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even `sinners' love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even `sinners' do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even `sinners' lend to `sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full.

6. RECONCILE – seek to restore the relationship

Luke 6:29 (MsgB) If someone grabs your shirt, gift wrap your best coat and make a present of it.

Luke 6:35-36 lend to them without expecting to get anything back... Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

25/07/10 – The Freedom of Forgiveness – Stories of Forgiveness

St. Francis of Assisi: O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be understood, as to understand.

Proverbs 18:17 (NIV) The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him.

Stephen Covey: Seek first to understand then to be understood.

Traditional Proverb: Never judge another person until you have walked a mile in their shoes.

QUESTIONS:

- When someone has wronged you, how might it help to see things from their point of view?
- Can you think of an instance when this helped you to forgive someone?

Romans 12: 20-21 (Msg) Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or if he's thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness. Don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good.

Luke 23:33-34 (NIV) When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals--one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Acts 7:59- 8:1 (NIV) While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.

Both Jesus and Stephen were murdered by people who didn't understand the implications of what they were doing – they thought they were doing God's will. Both Jesus and Stephen were immediately willing to forgive these people.

QUESTIONS:

- What do you think enabled Jesus and Stephen to be so willing to forgive?
- What impact might their attitude have had upon those who were sinning against them?

EXERCISE:

- Think of a situation where you're holding onto unforgiveness (anger, bitterness, hurt).
- Identify what, at the heart of the matter, is the central wrong that has been done to you (injustice, injury, sin).
- Putting yourself in the other person's shoes, can you identify what may have motivated their actions?
- Can you identify any positive intentions for their actions? (i.e. they were seeking something good for themselves/another, whether appropriate/justified or not)
- If the situation happened to someone else and you were objectively looking at it, what would your perspective be?
- In your situation, how would an objective third party (e.g. God) view the situation? Would they be understanding of both parties?
- Considering these things, are you able to forgive more easily? (Release the debt, put the matter into God's hands).