

TO BE IN RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD WE MUST FORGIVE OTHERS

Matthew 5:21–26

Steven Edelman

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²¹ “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ 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; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire. 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.** ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

Good morning, I want to welcome you to Central this morning. My name is pastor Steve Edelman and I am the Associate Pastor here at the church. We just finished a series on our new church vision called “Renew” and we are looking forward to what God is going to do through our church in the city of Victoria.

As a church we want to move forward with “Renewing the community with the Gospel,” I believe one of the road blocks isn’t just resources, it’s a lack of forgiveness. Change can be a breeding ground for conflict. Without forgiveness we get into this cycle of unhealthy conflict that leads to relational fractures with both God and each other. Divorce is a result of fractured marriage. Many of us have been hurt in friendships, family and work relationships at some point. Unforgiveness

is the source of unresolved tension that keeps most conflicts going.

Today we want to look at three things:

- 1. Why we must forgive.**
- 2. What happens when we don't forgive.**
- 3. How we forgive.**

What would it take to harden your heart? What circumstances? What injustice? What hurtful words? What form of abuse or treatment leaves you bitter and jaded? If you don't deal with your bitterness you are merely putting on an empty performance for God.

My heart has been hardened at a previous church because another leader was talking behind my back. He started to paint a negative picture of my ministry to rest of the board. Right out making false accusations to hurt me and turn others against me. My heart was angry. My heart was poisoned by the actions of another. I struggled to worship God because of my state. More on this later.

We all have faced conflicts with family, co-workers or friends that have hurt us. Have we not? We, in turn, are left with relational damage in which we struggle to work through. The problem is that unresolved disputes put up **a wall** that keeps God's people from working together or create a toxic environment in which people are working against each other. If we want to move forward and honor God, we need to make

every effort to reconcile with each other before we worship. First, we must forgive others before we can worship God genuinely.

1. We must forgive others before we can genuinely worship God.

Jesus gives us two illustrations to demonstrate the importance of forgiveness. The first illustration is a believer who comes to worship God but has not dealt with their hardened heart and Jesus is calling him out. This is part of a sermon that Jesus gave on the sermon on the mount. Jesus saw the crowds and he began to teach. He addresses things like, how we should treat others, what it means to be the salt and light and how our words can bring damage.

Look with me at verse 21. *“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’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 council¹”*

Murder deserves judgment - We all agree with that.

An angry person deserves judgment - Depends on why they are angry.

Someone who insults someone else deserves judgment - Now we are all in trouble because you have probably insulted someone... maybe just a few minutes ago. Jesus is saying that our words used as a weapon

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Mt 5:21–22). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

bring death. Words are the currency of relationship that can build up or tear down each person. These are harsh words, careless words, untrue words and words that cut the other person down.

WILL GIVE EXAMPLES: These are the words that come out when you are in a fight!

Look with me at verse 23. It says, *“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.”*

What does this look like? Maybe we should stop and rewind our service, to the moment just before we took the offering and before you gave your offering... you did a self-check! Are holding on to a grudge? Before you give your offering, go and make things right with those that have hurt you. Jesus is addressing the tendency to be **externally obedient** without calling attention to the **inner obedience** from the heart. He is saying that we need to deal with our heart issues, rather than pretend that everything is alright. The only way that you are going to be in right relationship with God is if you reconcile with your brother or sister. Maybe we need a reconciliation room at the church.

Verse 25 says *“Come to terms quickly with your accuser”* Jesus’ listeners therefore urgently need to deal decisively with sin.

Of course, we cannot guarantee that another person will agree to be reconciled with us, but we should **make every effort** “as far as it

depends on” us (Rom 12:18). How many of our churches would or should be temporarily emptied if these commands were taken seriously? But Jesus remains concerned that we still offer correct worship. The **Christian sacrifice** is first of all one of **trusting in Christ**, but **true discipleship** will lead to reconciliation with fellow believers. Jesus is going against what our feelings want to do when we are upset.

Exercising forgiveness is more significant than your gifts.

Verse 24. *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**. Leave the white envelope and go. The interruption of worship emphasizes the overriding importance of reconciliation. By using an OT example, Jesus is demonstrating that he knows how the Old Testament Law works and there is a fatal flaw in the process. Going through all the motions and mechanics of rules doesn’t connect you with God when there are unresolved sin issues in your life. Especially in the area of forgiveness. (Rats eating the internal parts of the car illustration)

Jesus is exposing our true motives for worship which become a ritual when we are holding sin in our heart. Jesus wants us to be in right relationship with Him before we worship Him because it’s taking away from meaningful worship. If we want to honor God in that, we can’t be holding a grudge or harboring bitterness and hating someone else as we worship God. We must forgive others if we are going to be able to

worship God well.

Who is responsible? Verse 22 says that everyone is responsible.

Jesus lays out who is responsible for reconciliation:

1. We are responsible for what others hold against us when we have sinned against them.
2. We are responsible for pursuing reconciliation if wronged against.

But you alone cannot accomplish reconciliation.

In other words, YOU ARE BOTH RESPONSIBLE to make it right.

Jesus is telling us that 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. The act looks like: I come to church and strategically sit where I don't have to interact with a certain person. I raise my hands in worship. I can pray really elegant words when others are listening. I can put money in the offering plate. Throw in an amen. This is wrong!!! But I am holding a grudge against with someone else that is. There is a war going on in my heart. But everything that you are doing is trying to cover up what is really going on in your heart. God recognizes your false worship when he sees it. Do you?

ILLUSTRATION - A big zit and trying to cover it up and it's

obvious to everyone else that you are trying to cover it up. The condition of our heart starts to show itself through the cover.

Is there someone in your life that you need to reconcile with? Maybe they are in the room. How long has it been? How long have you been holding on to a hurt and need to let it go? Jesus is saying that reconciliation with people in this room is more important than putting your money in the offering plate. It's a dangerous position to be full of anger! You can't worship when you are bitter because

OUR RESENTMENT DISRUPTS GENUINE WORSHIP. 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?

Anais Nin says, *"I often see how you sob over what you destroy, how you want to stop and just worship; and you do stop, and then a moment later you are at it again with a knife, like a surgeon."*

How do we bring ourselves back into deeper and richer worship? Forgiveness according to Jesus. Put down the knife and leave justice to Jesus.

Romans 12:19 says, *"Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says*

the Lord.”

Jesus is the one who will deal with their character.

FINISH THE FIRST STORY!

This is why reconciliation is harder than donation!

If we were given a choice between reconciliation and giving money, we would give money every time!

Are you willing to humble yourself and start the conversation before your offering next Sunday? To be in right relationship with God we must get right with others.

As we have seen, we are responsible for reconciliation before we come to worship God each week. This is why we need to deal with our internal state. We must forgive others before we can worship God with an honest heart.

Secondly, we must forgive others quickly before damage occurs.

2. We must forgive others quickly before damage occurs.

Jesus is speaking to the danger of not forgiving others. Look with me at verse 25. *“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.”*

Matthew 5:25–26 Jesus’ second illustration emphasizes the **urgency of reconciliation** with an example of an **out-of-court settlement before**

there are consequences. When different disputes go to court, they get dragged out and consume resources, personnel and time. It drags out the pain of the dispute. It keeps getting worse. **Bitterness is the seed of hell that keeps growing. It doesn't stop unless you cut it off.** It may only start as a little seed of hurt, but then it grows and festers into a very dangerous thing. The illustration is showing us that we need to make every effort to stop it before it involves others.

In verse 21-22 the text is also referring to the spiritual goal of avoiding God's wrath on Judgment Day by quickly forgiving and making the wrongs right to **avoid a spiritual prison.** We know that we can be freed from this spiritual prison by what Jesus did on the cross.

Verse 26 says, "you will never get out until you have paid the last penny." This is a warning – deal with it kind of situation.

Notice the words **"you will never get out!"** without payment. I want to quickly talk about how unforgiveness can get a damaging grip on us, first spiritually, second physically, and third relationally.

a) **Spiritual Damage**

To not forgive is wrong. 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.

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.” Unforgiveness, disconnects and ruins our spiritual connection with God. It holds us captive or hostage to darkness.

Paul Trip identifies the - Five Dark "Benefits" of Unforgiveness. He describes the dark spiritual strongholds as:

- 1) ***Debt is power.*** There is power in having something to hold over another's head. There is power in using a person's weakness and failure against him or her. In moments when we want our own way, we pull out some wrong against us as our relational trump card.
- 2) ***Debt is identity.*** Holding onto another's sin, weakness, and failure makes us feel superior to them. It allows us to believe that we are more righteous and mature than they are. We fall into the pattern of getting our sense of self not by the comfort and call of the gospel but by comparing ourselves to another. This pattern plays into the self-righteousness that is the struggle of every sinner.
- 3) ***Debt is entitlement.*** Because of all the other person's wrongs against us, he or she owes us. Carrying these wrongs makes us feel deserving and therefore comfortable with being self-focused and demanding. “After all I have had to endure in relationship with you, don't I deserve . . . ?”
- 4) ***Debt is weaponry.*** The sins and failures that another has done against us become like a loaded gun that we carry around. It is

very tempting to pull them out and use them when we are angry.

When someone has hurt us in some way, it is very tempting to hurt them back by throwing in their face just how evil and immature they are.

5) ***Debt puts us in God's position.*** It is the one place that we must never be, but it is also a position that all of us have put ourselves in. We are not the judge of others. We are not the one who should dispense consequences for other's sin. It is not our job to make sure they feel the appropriate amount of guilt for what they have done. But it is very tempting to ascend to God's throne and to make ourselves judge.

As we have seen, unforgiveness damages our relationship with God and keeps us captive.

b) **Physical Damage**

Failure to take advantage of the opportunity of reconciliation means that **one must bear the penalty of being unreconciled**. A lack of forgiveness harms our physical health. This penalty is not just spiritual.

Chuck Swindoll says, "Misunderstanding can breed deep bitterness. When you forgive, it doesn't mean you agree with what happened. Yes, forgiveness means to forget. Bitterness deposits dangerous germs in our memory banks. Forgiveness erases bitterness."

They cannot coexist”

There are a number of studies on the health benefits of forgiveness, the effects manifesting in our physiological, emotional and mental health.

In his book "None of These Diseases," S. I. McMillan says, "Anger, unhandled, will show itself in at least 50 diseases."

According to multiple studies there are:

5 Health Benefits of Forgiveness

- a) Lowers stress levels
- b) Keeps your heart healthy
- c) Lowers pain
- d) Lowers blood pressure
- e) Extends life

Illustration: Palliative care... holding on, even though they are on the brink of death, to have a final conversation to make peace, make something right. After this contact, death was often swift.

We can withhold forgiveness because we are waiting for the other person to initiate. They may not even know what they did! And they may never ask! It's likely that they don't even know they have hurt us or how much pain you are carrying. Yet, bitterness affects our physical health. Letting go of our bitterness benefits us physically.

What about our relationships?

c) **Relational Damage**

Unforgiveness causes relational destruction. You can identify a damaged relationship when you see them moving from: frequent interaction to isolation, from love to the loss of love, from a closeness to toxic, friend to an adversary, coworker to enemy, unity to division, and stability to uncertainty. We see this all the time in marriages, families, friends, work and leadership. **I have seen fathers going years without talking to their son. Marriages that would have been saved if they could only learn to forgive each other.**

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.” Jim Henry

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.

Bryant H. McGill says, "There is no love without forgiveness, and there is no forgiveness without love."

God has called you to work with difficult people. What does that look like?

You need to stand up for yourself and say something. It's not going to be easy. But, forgive. In situation like abuse you need to put a stop to it or leave the relationship in order to protect yourself.

"A little girl was asked what forgiveness is... She gave a beautiful answer...

It is the fragrance that flowers give when they are crushed..." Unknown.
That is how you should respond!

A marriage fight example. Fighting for the sake of fighting. Keeping a list.

"A happy marriage is the union of two good forgivers." - Robert Quillen
Forgiveness is giving up the right to hurt the other with the past.

The truth is that giving forgiveness to those who have hurt us will benefit us more than it will benefit them. Extending forgiveness begins the process of freeing us from the soul-debilitating pain, anger and resentment we've been carrying for far too long." We need to forgive quickly to bring love back into the relationships that God has called us to.

As we have seen, we must forgive quickly before damage occurs

spiritually, physically and relationally.

Lastly, we must forgive others because Jesus forgave us.

3. We must forgive others because Jesus forgave us.

Verse 26 says, “Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.” Jesus is saying that a price needs to be paid to make things right. Jesus is the one who paid the price for eternity. It’s like we have been locked in a cage and he has thrown us the key. But are you going to use it? Jesus is saying quickly take steps of reconciliation so you can be free!

We need to do the hard thing of talking to someone face to face and saying the words I am sorry or you hurt me when you did this.

Paul says in **Ephesians 4:30-32** “*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.*”

Exercising forgiveness is a powerful testimony! It points to Jesus. It’s the gospel story active in our lives. Every time a Christian forgives... the gospel takes another step forward. **We no longer have to be a slave to the cycle of gossip, anger, and resentment.** Forgiveness softens a hard heart and brings you back to a place of genuine worship. When we deeply understand the forgiveness of Jesus we understand why

we need to forgive others. We are not meant to bear such a burden alone.

Go to Jesus because He suffered. Yes, suffering leaves a mark.

Why is it hard to forgive?

- a. We are numb to what Jesus did for us.
- b. We are prone to selfishness.

Forgiveness means that we are covering an offense with love. We issue the invitation in love and God does the reconciling.

So, this is God's work, God's call to come back to Him, God's invitation to restore the friendship and peace between God and man."

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. In [John 20:22-23](#) Jesus breathed on the disciples and said, "*Receive the Holy Spirit!*" and forgive others. Ask God to breathe the Holy Spirit on you so you can forgive those who've hurt you.

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.

Can you open your heart to the gospel?

Martin Luther King, Jr. says, *“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”*

As we close, are you holding on to a grudge? Can you let the light of Jesus shine in the darkness of your heart? Can you let go?

ROCK ILLUSTRATION – Drop the rock.

How do you know if you have forgiven someone?

1. You have **dropped the grudge** and the **right to get even**.
2. You would help them in a time of need.
3. You can think positive thoughts about them.
4. You are not rejoicing in their hardship.

I want to give you a moment to talk to God and ask Him to help you to let go. To change your heart and experience forgiveness. To also have the courage to initiate reconciliation.

VIDEO

In the words of Paul Trip, “Forgiveness is a much better way. The grace of our salvation is the ultimate argument for this truth. Forgiveness is the only way to live in an intimate, long-term relationship with another sinner. Forgiveness is the only way to negotiate through the weakness and failure that will daily mark your relationships. It is the only way to deal with hurt and disappointment. Forgiveness is the only way to have hope and confidence restored. It is the only way to protect your love and reinforce the unity that you have built. Forgiveness is the only way not to be kidnapped by the past. It is the only way to give your relationships the blessing of fresh starts and new beginnings.”

To completely let go of bitterness and find complete healing.

“When you forgive, you in no way change the past - but you sure do change the future.”

Bernard Meltzer