FORGIVENESS: A RADICAL WAY TO LIVE
The Power of Forgiveness
Colossians 3:1-17

Corrie Ten Boon video

There is power in forgiveness—power that comes from Jesus and impacts our lives so that we in turn can release his love and forgiveness to others. The Bible tells us to forgive others because we’ve been forgiven by God. And the Scripture also emphasizes the truth that the degree to which we forgive others impacts how God forgives us. Listen what these Scriptures have to say about forgiveness.

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:32

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. Mark 11:25

See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. Hebrews 12:15

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

Today's sermon is titled, “The Power of Forgiveness.” Here are a few examples that we've talked about throughout this series which highlight the power of forgiveness...

- **Amish response to Nickel Mines Tragedy**—In the face of unthinkable pain and the agony that accompanied the death of 5 grade school girls and the wounding of 5 others by a gunman, the Amish community extended forgiveness to the deceased gunman and to his widow and children. Our nation experienced the power of forgiveness through the Amish.

- **Joseph’s story**—In week 1 of this series we studied the story of Joseph and his brothers found in the Old Testament Book of Genesis. Out of jealousy, Joseph’s brothers sold him as a slave to a traveling band of merchants who took him to Egypt. 20 years later Joseph was the Prime Minister of Egypt. His brother experienced his forgiveness when they came to him to get food for their family in the midst of a severe famine. Joseph’s forgiveness released him from resentment and bitterness; it released his brothers from their shame and guilt; and, it allowed God’s purposes to be realized.

- **Personal story**—At the close of the 1st sermon on forgiveness a woman felt impressed to go to the altar to extend forgiveness to her sister, whom she had not spoken to in 10 months. It was a very emotional experience for her. Later that same night—out of the blue—her sister called her and they talked and began to rebuild their relationship. We can’t anticipate the power forgiveness has to bring healing to relationships.
There is power in forgiveness!

So far in this series we’ve talked about forgiveness as it relates to specific people and wrongs that have been done to us. We gravitate toward unforgiveness as a way of protecting ourselves or getting back at those who’ve hurt us, but instead unforgiveness harms us. Rick Bezet says unforgiveness is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to drop over dead. Jesus used a parable of man who was forgiven a debt he could never have repaid, yet this same man refused to forgive someone who owed him a much smaller amount. The unforgiving man was thrown into prison. We tend to think that holding a grudge negatively impacts the one who wronged us, but unforgiveness is a prison that keeps us in chains.

As our staff discussed the overarching ideas for this series and then as Doris and I worked on these messages, our prayer was that people would be released from the bondage of bitterness and resentment that accompanies unforgiveness, and we’ve seen people find freedom. But there’s another aspect of forgiveness which I want us to look at today which could probably best be called, “Forgiveness as a lifestyle.” We see this in the Lord’s Prayer when Jesus says, “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.” Speaking of the relationship between love and forgiveness, author Jan Karon says, “Love is an endless act of forgiveness.” Jan Karon

What does the statement, “Love is an endless act of forgiveness,” mean? Jesus seemed to be alluding to this when He told Peter he should forgive, not 7 times, but 77 times or 70x7 times. Forgiveness isn’t something we just do in isolated instances; it’s a way of living we embrace. Forgiveness is a way of living that impacts our relationships with our parents, our children, our spouse, our co-workers, our classmates, our neighbors, our ex-spouse, our boss and people—even annoying people—who regularly cross our path.

In the middle of the Apostle Paul’s letter to the 1st Century at Colossae he writes a section that in my New International translation of the Bible is titled, “Rules for Holy Living.” I’m not real fond of the editor’s title for this section, because it fails to emphasize the vital role of the Holy Spirit. I much prefer the title Eugene Peterson gives to this section of Scripture in his Bible Paraphrase called, The MESSAGE. Peterson’s title, “He is Your Life,” emphasizes that
holy or right living isn’t something any of us can do consistently on our own apart from the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

In his commentary on Colossians 3 Peterson fleshes out a helpful concept that I want to try and explain for us. He says that you and I stand on one corner of a triangle he calls the Resurrection Triangle. The first corner of the triangle is the resurrection of Jesus Christ that took place 2,000 years ago which we read about in John chapter 20 and in other Gospel accounts. Another corner of the triangle is recounted in Revelation chapter 20—it’s the promise of Jesus’ return for his Church and the resurrection of all of those who died and are in Christ. The 3rd corner of the triangle is the resurrection that is taking place inside of you and inside of me right now. The news of this resurrection—transformation in Jesus—is found throughout the Bible and it is Paul’s focus in Colossians chapter 3. We live in the valley between the mountain peaks of Jesus’ resurrection and the time when Jesus returns for his Church. Resurrection isn’t just what Jesus did 2,000 years ago, and it’s not just what will happen to us in the future. Resurrection is happening now as our lives are in the process of being transformed by Jesus. Eugene Peterson writes,

[Living Jesus’ resurrection life] doesn’t remove us from the sweat and tears of our humanity into some paradise where the gritty quality of our ordinary daily lives is left far behind us. We would like that. Sometimes we think this happens to other people. But it doesn’t. When people talk that way they aren’t telling the truth. When people talk as if being raised with Christ has removed them from doubt, pain, difficult responsibilities, and trying relationships, they are only fantasizing. Paul never did that. When he wrote about being raised with Christ, he was talking about a miracle. But the miracle isn’t that we’re delivered from our present circumstances; it’s that we’re transformed by them. Peterson

Jesus’ power living through us is the heart of the Gospel. It's Jesus’ resurrection power in us that is constantly in the process of transforming us to be more and more like Jesus. In 2 Peter chapter 1 verse 3 we read, “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness.” In Jesus we have everything we need to live a godly life. And the main way that this is worked out is in the muck and mire of difficult human relationships. I say “difficult” because relationships involve us and every one of us can be difficult.

You might be wondering how all of this relates to forgiveness. A lifestyle of forgiveness—being forgiven by God and then extending forgiveness to others—is the thread that runs through everything that Paul writes in this section in Colossians 3. Forgiveness isn’t
just forgiving others in intense situations. Forgiveness is embracing a lifestyle marked by Jesus’ love, grace and mercy—it’s a lifestyle of forgiveness. I’m going to read this from Peterson’s paraphrase, The MESSAGE, because I like the way he puts Biblical concepts into modern language. Sometimes we can get so familiar with the words of Scripture that they lose their power, or at times we tune out because the words sound so old-fashioned. I find that modern paraphrases can help us grasp the truth of the Scriptures in ways that sometimes escape us.

I want you to receive the Apostle Paul’s words in Colossians 3 as Jesus’ words to you. I’m going to read these words over us prayerfully and I ask you to receive them in whatever way you best can. The words will be on the screen so you can read along or you may want to close your eyes, get into a posture of prayer and receive these words audibly.

Colossians 3:1-17 selected The MESSAGE
So if you’re serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don’t shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that’s where the action is. See things from his perspective.

Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your real life—even though invisible to spectators—is with Christ in God. He is your life.

And that means killing off everything connected with that way of death: sexual promiscuity, impurity, lust, doing whatever you feel like whenever you feel like it, and grabbing whatever attracts your fancy. That’s a life shaped by things and feelings instead of by God.

Don’t lie to one another. You’re done with that old life. It’s like a filthy set of ill-fitting clothes you’ve stripped off and put in the fire. Now you’re dressed in a new wardrobe. Every item of your new way of life is custom-made by the Creator, with his label on it. All the old fashions are now obsolete. From now on everyone is defined by Christ, everyone is included in Christ.

So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It’s your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.

Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense. And sing, sing your hearts out to God! Let every detail in your lives—words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way.
There is Power in Forgiveness—power in forgiving someone who has wronged us and power in embracing a lifestyle of forgiveness. As we receive the Lord's Communion today I encourage you to embrace Jesus' forgiveness. If you're harboring resentment and bitterness surrounding a specific situation or toward a person who has wronged you, make the choice today to release that person or situation to Jesus and forgive. If you're struggling to allow love and forgiveness to mark your daily interactions with people, confess your struggle to Jesus and claim his resurrection power for your life. I encourage you to view this time of receiving Communion as your opportunity to commit yourself to embracing Jesus' forgiveness.

THE LORD’S PRAYER
‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins, as we also have forgiven those who sin against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’ AMEN