

Pastor April Manning

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Healthy Relationships in Hurting Times – Part 4

Matthew 18:21-35

1. It is not enough to say, “I’m sorry”.

2. Forgiveness in NOT selfish.

- *Ephesians 2:4-8; Matthew 6:12-15*

3. We are called to forgive.

- *Ephesians 4:31-32*

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Healthy Relationships in Hurting Times – Part 4

Forgiveness

Matthew 18:21-35

Good morning. Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ. My name is Pastor April, and if we haven't met before, or if you're unsure of what I do around here, let me offer this brief explanation. I have the privilege of shepherding and discipling our young adults and overseeing our Guest Services ministry. I'm also a first-time mom to my almost 9-month-old Phoebe and a wife to Pastor Dan. It's always a treat to stand before you all and share with you what God has laid upon my heart.

Today we end our series we've been working through – Healthy Relationships in Hurting Times – focused on how to navigate relationships, especially when relationships are strained, as God's set apart, holy people; seeking to identify ways that will make for healthier, stronger relationships with one another and with God.

Over the past several weeks, we heard from different voices among our pastoral staff: Pastor Dan shared how acceptance and shared values and goals play a crucial role in relationships; Pastor Casey helped us navigate conflict in relationships; and last week Pastor Jason shared about honesty, vulnerability, and selflessness in relationships. All of these elements are so crucial to healthy relationships, and if you missed any of these sermons, I'd encourage you to go to our website -- westvalleychurch.com and listen to any of the sermons you missed. Just click on the sermon tab and you'll be able to find all the sermons from this series.

If you thought we might end the series with a message that puts everything together nicely, wrapped with a bow, I'm sorry to say you'll be disappointed.

Relationships are messy. Relationships take work. Relationships are so vastly different, that it's impossible to give you the five action steps to achieve healthy relationships, though that doesn't mean we shy away from talking about them. What we can offer, and what our pastoral staff has been called to do, is to preach the good news of Christ, to remind us of our dependence on God in relationships, and to look to Scripture to see how God has called us to navigate relationships in hurting, messy, times.

So today, we will be zeroing in on one of the parables from Jesus that talks about navigating...are you ready for it? Forgiveness and reconciliation.

Our message today comes from the Gospel of Matthew Chapter Eighteen, Verses Twenty-One through Thirty-Five. As we prepare to receive God's word this morning, would you please stand in honor of the reading of the Word?

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

"At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt, and let him go.

"But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

"His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.'

"But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

"Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart." (Matthew 18:21-35)

This is the word of the Lord. Praise to you Lord Christ. Thanks for standing you may be seated.

Not sure if you noticed, but typically at the end of our Scripture reading during service, either Pastor Mike or the pastor preaching will say, "Thanks be to God," or something of the like. Today, as we read from the Gospel of Matthew and heard the words of Jesus, I said, "Praise to you Lord Christ." That's an appropriate response, but if we take in all that we heard from the passage today, it doesn't really seem like it lends itself to thanking Jesus for those words, especially his words at the end. Jesus was talking about what happens when we don't forgive. Jesus says God will treat us in the same way the king treated the servant

at the end, which was pretty terrible. That's some hard truths to swallow! Praising God for those words just doesn't seem to fit. So let me break this parable down for us and help us see why praising God for giving us this message is fitting.

When we look to the passage, we see a servant who owes a TON of money to the king. Commentators have noted that this servant owed an impossible amount of money. Ten thousand bags of gold translated to "*the annual revenue of a wealthy Roman province or to six million day wages for a laborer.*"¹ That's a large sum of money. It would be impossible to pay it back by working the rest of his life for the king.

At first the king orders for the servant to pay it all back by selling all that the servant had, including his family. Upon hearing this, the slave falls to his knees and asks the king to be patient with him and he will pay back everything.

In the Greek translation of the New Testament, the word patient can mean a few things: it can mean to delay, to endure, or to be long-suffering.² I tend to like the word endure for this context, as it communicates the servant is asking the king to take the perspective of the servant, to put himself in the servant's shoes, and to endure his hardship with him.

The king then takes pity on him, forgives the servant of his debt, and lets the servant go.

In this exchange, we see that there was a relationship between the king and the servant. The servant didn't just come before the king and say, "I'm sorry." The servant asked – invited – the king to endure with him, to work through this issue with him, and what we learn here is that...

1. It is not enough to say, "I'm sorry."

When we have wronged someone, we need to say we're sorry but also ask to be forgiven. We need to ask the person to endure with us so we may work to achieve reconciliation.

Our goal as Christians is not to apologize and move on.
Our goal as Christians is to try to seek reconciliation.

Let me say that again. Our goal as Christians is not to apologize and move on. Our goal as Christians is to try to seek reconciliation.

¹ NBBC, Matthew, 286.

² "to delay, to endure" is found in Swanson, James. *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997; "long suffering" is found in Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, and Roderick McKenzie. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

Our goal is to be in relationship with one another, as we are in relationship with the triune God; the essence, the perfect image, of what it looks like to be in relationship with another, as the Father, Son and Spirit are in relationship with each other.

If at all possible, we are to seek restored relationship, and it is through forgiveness, asking the other to forgive us, to reconcile with us, that we can achieve that.

Now, this doesn't mean that when we ask the other to forgive us, that person will forgive us right away (more on that to come), nor does it mean that when forgiveness is granted, the other person trusts us 100% again. We have to work to gain that trust back. Forgiveness is the process or act of letting go of angry or resentful feelings towards someone.³ It does not mean the person we've wronged trusts us 100% again, though this can be the case, nor does it mean they approve of what we did. Forgiveness is a gift of grace we receive, and we should be thankful and humbled when forgiveness is offered, and with the grace and help of God, go and sin no more.

Looking back to the parable, we see that after the servant asks for the king to endure with him, to be patient with him in the repayment of his debt, we see a king who is very gracious and merciful towards his servant. Remember, this servant owed an amount that was insurmountable and despite how hard the servant tried, would never be able to pay it back. Therefore, when the king forgives the servant of his debt, it is a very gracious and generous act on the king's part and leads us to see that...

2. Forgiveness is NOT selfish.

The king in the story displayed selflessness by forgiving the servant of his debt and letting the servant go. The king could have been greedy and took all the servant's possessions and family as slaves for himself, but the king chose not to act in that way. The king chose to endure with the servant and forgive him of his debt.

Does this sound like someone we know already or someone we've heard about? Someone who forgives us of our debt that we could never pay back? Hopefully we're all thinking of the same person...Jesus?

Yes! Jesus! The apostle Paul reminds us in Colossians chapter two...

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. (Colossians 2:13-14)

³ Soanes, Catherine, and Angus Stevenson, eds. *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

This is the good news of the gospel my friends. Christ has done for us what the king did for the servant, even though we were not deserving and would never be able to pay back our sin, our debt, despite how hard we tried. But while we were dead in our sins and in our trespasses, Christ humbled himself and selflessly took up our sin and died to it once and for all upon the cross, forgiving us our debt and enabling us to be in right relationship with God once again through him when we repent, ask to be forgiven, and ask Christ to rule and reign in our hearts.

What grace. What forgiveness.

As we live this new life that is free of debt in Christ, (key phrase here – *in Christ*), we are called to go and do likewise, forgiving others as we have been forgiven. Jesus teaches us this important fact about forgiveness as he teaches us how to pray. In his prayer, he prays...

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. (Matthew 6: 12-13)

I don't think what follows after praying to be forgiven that we flippantly pray "and lead us not into temptation." That's a very strategic move on Jesus' part.

If you have been joining us for the Foundations of Christianity class on Wednesday nights at 6:30pm, this will be a refresher for you, but for those of you who haven't joined us, we've been going through subjects of what we believe, and a few weeks ago went over who Jesus is. We were reminded that Jesus was not just fully divine, but Jesus was also fully human. Jesus took on human flesh and became one of us.

Jesus experienced temptation by the evil one before he began his ministry and overcame that temptation. But Jesus knew it would be hard for us to overcome that temptation to turn from sin and live according to the righteousness of God. So when we pray for God to forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, it is fitting that what follows is to not be led into temptation and to be delivered from the evil one.

When we look back to the parable and follow the servant out of the presence of the king and into the streets again, we see this played out. We see the servant succumbing to the temptation of selfishness, of greed. We don't see the same grace and forgiveness offered to his fellow servant that the king offered to him. Instead we see selfishness arise as the servant demands his fellow servant pay back what he owes and throws him in jail until he is able to pay back his debt in full.

When the king hears what the servant had done, the king throws the servant in jail and treats him harshly. Jesus ends the parable stating that unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart, this is how God will treat you.

Not only does Jesus state this truth at the end of the parable, but we see it concluding the Lord's prayer. Jesus says...

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Matthew 6: 14-15)

What a hard truth to swallow. But what a beautiful image of what forgiveness looks like for those who repent and follow the way of the Lord.

While we've worked our way through the parable, I've deliberately not touched on the opening conversation between Peter and Jesus, because in that conversation is such an important message about forgiveness that I really want us to take away today.

In the opening scene, we find Peter questioning Jesus about how many times he is to forgive his brother or sister when he/she sins against him. Peter is looking at forgiveness as a dutiful, lawful action, but Jesus answers with a matter of the heart, upside-down kingdom perspective that subverts an Old Testament story about a man named Lamech who was a relative of Cain and proudly proclaimed after killing a man for wounding him that if Cain was avenged seven times, Lamech would be avenged seventy-seven times.⁴ Jesus however flips the script on seeking vengeance and replaces it with forgiveness and says, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

For Jesus, there is a limitlessness of forgiveness that we are to offer, and that has been seen in what the king offered to the servant – forgiving him of an insurmountable debt. There isn't a cap on Jesus' forgiveness that he offers, and neither should we have a cap if our hearts have truly been transformed by Christ.

In this we see that...

3. We are called to forgive.

Despite what someone has done to us, or how greatly someone is indebted to us, we are called to forgive. Again, this doesn't mean we trust that person again or condone their behavior; forgiveness is not only for those who have sinned, but forgiveness is just as much for those who have been wronged.

The Apostle Paul reminds us in Ephesians chapter four that we are to...

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Ephesians 4:31-32)

Forgiveness is so critical not only because we are to be imitators of Christ and pattern our lives after Christ, but because it enables us who have been wronged to start letting go of any bitterness or resentment that can slowly take root in our hearts if we do not forgive.

⁴ Genesis 4:24.

While the number of times Jesus said we are to forgive was to show we are to forgive unendingly, it also shows that forgiveness can take time for us to reach a point where we can entirely forgive someone.

Sometimes it just isn't possible to ask someone to forgive us, and sometimes we won't be asked to forgive someone for a wrong they have done to us for various reasons. Sometimes the person in the wrong doesn't realize they did something wrong, sometimes the person moved or isn't alive for us to forgive or seek forgiveness from, and this is probably the hardest of all when seeking forgiveness, because forgiveness seems impossible if we can never receive it or ask it of another person.

I really struggled with this aspect of forgiveness, and I still do. I'm a work in progress. But through studying the scriptures and going through the Grief Support Group, what I've learned is that despite whether we can ever see the person who wronged us, or see the person we have tension with...

Forgiveness is not contingent upon whether someone asks us to forgive.
Forgiveness is something we are called to do.

So, the dilemma is: "How are we to forgive if we are never going to see that person again or if that person doesn't ever know that they hurt us in some way, and we don't necessarily want to bring up what they did and cause all types of strife and unnecessary conflict?"

In these instances, forgiveness can be really difficult, but I encourage you to practice saying I forgive you for this. I forgive you for this.... As we practice saying that over and over and over and over again, maybe seven times, maybe seventy seven times, maybe more, and as that becomes the language we practice, it soon becomes a part of who we are, a part of our language, a part of our heart, and it starts to take away some of that bitterness, some of that anger, that hurt, and starts to renew our hearts and help us heal.

One thing I think the unforgiving servant missed in this whole parable is the weight of his forgiveness. I don't want us to miss that either. Do you understand just how much you have been forgiven? Don't take that lightly. Christ took our place upon the cross, died to our sin so that we didn't have to and so we could be made right again with God. What grace. What love. What forgiveness. May we remember to repent of our wrongs, to ask for forgiveness, to not be selfish with forgiveness and live into the call to extend that grace, love, and forgiveness to others and yes, even to ourselves.

Let me pray for us.

As we go out from this place today, may we revel in knowing God's grace, love, and forgiveness, praising, and thanking God for all that God has done for us and extending that same grace, love, and forgiveness to others and to ourselves. Would you please stand as I offer this blessing over you today?

As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. (Colossians 3:12-13,15)

Go in peace and in unity of the Spirit.