

## What Forgiveness Does

### Opening Prayer

*Leader* The Lord be with you.

*People* And also with you.

*Leader* Let us pray.

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

### Remembering the Message (Read 2 Corinthians 2, focusing on v. 5-11. In addition, read aloud The Message translation, v. 5-8.

Now, regarding the one who started all this—the person in question who caused all this pain - I want you to know that I am not the one injured in this as much as, with a few exceptions, all of you. So I don't want to come down too hard. What the majority of you agreed to as punishment is punishment enough. Now is the time to forgive this man and help him back on his feet. If all you do is pour on the guilt, you could very well drown him in it. My counsel now is to pour on the love.

#### A. What's going on?

We're not sure exactly what has happened to occasion Paul's note here, whether it is in response to the man mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5 or to another person who has been criticizing Paul and his ministry and causing division in the church. Regardless, Paul is saying enough. The man has suffered enough—enough of the shame, enough of the guilt. It is time to forgive, to welcome him back into the fellowship and to overwhelm him with love.

#### B. Intellectually, we know how important forgiveness is:

- a. Unforgiveness interferes with worship (Matthew 5:23-24)
- b. Unforgiveness counteracts the commands of Jesus (Matthew 18:21-22)
- c. Unforgiveness blocks our own forgiveness from God (Luke 11:1-4)
- d. Unforgiveness dishonors the Lord and his words (Father, forgive...Luke 23:34)
- e. If you do not practice forgiveness...if you do not repent of unforgiveness you are cutting yourself off from the fullness and wholeness of what God has to offer.

#### C. Forgiving can be hard to do

Some have suffered greatly—abuse, slander, theft, betrayal, abandonment. We may hold grudges. We may be bitter and angry. We often replay an endless loop of tapes in our heads for the ways we could get revenge. But a spirit of unforgiveness poisons our own souls. Fr. David told stories of the poison of unforgiveness and the power of forgiveness. The first was a story of two Vietnam vets standing at the memorial in DC; One said, "Have you ever forgiven your captors for holding you in prison?" The other replied, "Not a chance...what they did to me is unforgiveable," to which the first one answered, "Then, my brother, you are still in prison!" **When we release someone through forgiveness we are set free as well.** Fr. David then shared two powerful stories of forgiveness and reconciliation cited in the book *As We Forgive* by

Catherine Claire Larson. The book tells the story of the national effort to achieve reconciliation between the Hutus (perpetrators) and Tutsis (victims) after the genocide in Rwanda in which nearly 1 million people were killed within 100 days. The accounts of brutal butchering and murder go way beyond what most of us can fathom. We see the ugliness of the human heart and the hatred and betrayal that lies within. **We can also see the unimaginable beauty and power of those three little words: “I forgive you.”**

**D. Paul gives another reason for forgiving (see v. 11)**

Unforgiveness creates a spiritual poison that Satan serves up as a cocktail every day. The first story in the Bible about unforgiveness bears this out. Read Genesis 4:1-8. Cain resents Abel and seethes with anger, jealousy, bitterness, and rage. The Lord sees Cain’s heart toward his brother and intervenes to exhort Cain to master the sin of unforgiveness and bitterness crouching at his door. Cain holds on to unforgiveness and kills his brother. He recognizes that he will be hidden from the presence of the LORD. A proverb says this: “If you are going on a journey of revenge, first dig two graves.”

**E. Our response**

We don't know if the Christians in Corinth forgave the man, whoever he was...for the Sin, whatever it was. But 2000 years later we can receive the words Paul has written. We can change the way we see our adversaries. We can release those whom we have had in our clutches of bitterness and unforgiveness for weeks, years, even decades. We can let forgiveness flow and be released from the poison of unforgiveness in our hearts. We can speak words that our Savior spoke on the cross: “Father, forgive them...”

**Going Deeper**

1. Take a look at the following scripture passages: Matthew 18:21-35, Luke 15:11-24, and Genesis 50:15-21. What are some take-aways from these passages on forgiveness?
2. Read again 2 Corinthians 2:5-11. Is there any reason why forgiveness might be withheld for a period of time? Explain your answer.
3. How have you experienced God's forgiveness in your life? How have you experienced the forgiveness of others? (In small group discussion, feel free to share as much or as little as you are comfortable with in the context of your group.)

4. Ask God to reveal someone whom you have sinned against. How will you seek forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration of relationship?
  
5. Are there ways in your life in which Satan has succeeded in carrying out his scheme to keep you from enjoying the fullness and enjoying and worshipping God through the poison of unforgiveness? If so, what are they? (Consider the ideas listed in points B. and C. under Remembering the Message)
  
6. Many, if not all of us, have experienced the bitterness that comes from a spirit of unforgiveness. Who are the people whom you need to release, those you need to get right with before you get right with God? Prayerfully ask God to bring to mind one or two people you need to forgive and write out a prayer of forgiveness.

What are the ways you can show forgiveness and “overwhelm them with love”?

### Closing Prayer

Father, we are all sinners in need of forgiveness. The things we have done...the things done to us...remind us daily of our need to be forgiven and to forgive. Jesus spoke words of forgiveness from the cross and we are called to forgive others. We know that it is not a natural occurrence. We know that if we are called to forgive...or called to ask for forgiveness ..that your Holy Spirit must go before us and must penetrate our hearts to release us from the poison of grudges....resentments....blame ....bitterness, and unforgiveness. Move in our hearts today. Create a room of grace and forgiveness, of peace and confidence....and then help us to unlock and open the door. Your Son died for us. We are fully forgiven and set free. Help us to fully forgive others and set them free to your care. In Christ's Name...Amen.

*In your anger do not sin; Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold....And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 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 4:26-27,30-32*