

West Valley Presbyterian Church
Forgiveness in Marriage
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A young man and woman were in love, and were going to be married, but they met with an untimely death and they ended up in heaven. And they said to God, Do you think we could get married up here since we never got to do it on earth. And God said sure, but you need to wait a little while.

So they waited five years...and came back to God and said we've been waiting five years...can we please be married? And God said just a little longer.

Well, finally after five more years they were married. But they realized after they were married that they had made a terrible mistake. So they went back to God and said, "We need to get a divorce. It just isn't working." And God looked at them and said – You have got to be kidding...you are just going to have to wait. It took ten years to get a pastor up here...just think how long it's going to take to get a lawyer!

Well, today we are talking about marriage. Paul writes in the scripture we read today to "clothe yourselves," with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience."

Compassion: *The act of putting yourself in your partners shoes, or feeling what he or she is feeling*

Kindness: *Performing the thoughtful acts that bless and encourage your partner, with no expectation of something in return*

Humility: *Respecting your partner as a human being and seeking to put his or her needs before your own.*

Meekness: *Gentleness...as in Proverbs 15:15 which says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath."*

Patience: *Endurance and longsuffering; a willingness to bear with unpleasantness*

If every one of us lived up to Paul's prescription, our marriages or intimate relationships would be amazingly harmonious and blessed and we would never need forgiveness. However most of us struggle with these things on a daily basis. That's why we need forgiveness, especially in our marriages.

And for all of you who are not married...or used to be and are divorced or widowed...the principles I am talking about this morning can be applied to any close relationship. But we need to talk about marriage today because many are struggling with it...

I find it odd that our culture so idealizes marriage in the sense that we celebrate it, look forward to it, romanticize about it, spend more and more money on receptions and ceremonies each year – this year the average wedding cost 30,000 - and 2.3 million people get married every year - and then approximately 1 out of 2 marriages end in divorce.

That's because falling in love is the easy part, right? For most us staying in love for a lifetime is hard work.

The truth as we said, and Paul knew it to, you can't live with someone for very long, without hurting them. In marriage especially both spouses will hurt one another. There is no way around it.

We talked about sin last week as MISSING THE MARK. Last week we talked about missing the mark with God. And as a result of that, (a kind of domino effect), we then miss the mark with one another and we do things, say things, become things we shouldn't. Sin is inevitable when we are in a relationship with someone. We will fail. Both parties will fall short.

However, and this is the message of the morning although SIN IS INEVITABLE...grace is always available.

ALTHOUGH SIN IS INEVITABLE, GRACE IS AVAILABLE

And that grace is packed into that little word...forgiveness. If you want to stay married, you have to learn to forgive.

Marriage is almost a workshop for learning how to forgive. God puts us in this intense relationship with someone, and we've got to learn to love them, even on the hard days.

In order to love them we are compelled to learn to forgive them as much as they are compelled to learn to forgive us when we do wrong. We also need to learn to say six words to each other on a regular basis in the marriage relationship and those six little words are extremely powerful. Those six little words are "I am sorry", "I forgive you."

We are going to talk about what all this means in a minute but before that I want you to take a look at this clip that illustrates the very real power of forgiveness in marriage...

VIDEO CLIP

Wow! Two people recognizing that they could forgive each other kept that family intact.

(And I need to say as caveat here, if you are being physically/emotionally abused by a spouse this is not a message advocating for you to stay in the relationship. You need to seek help immediately and there are many resources available to you to get out and to a safe place)

But for most of us in a marriage relationship or other close relationship for us to offer grace...we need to learn to forgive.

How do you know when you have forgiven someone? Someone once said to me "I can't ever forget what she did to me". Jesus never coined the phrase "forgive and forget". That isn't in scripture. That's a Hallmark card.

Jesus said, "Bless those who persecute you. Pray for those who treat you wrong." And then he said, "Forgive, 70 X 7" ...in other words...keep at it...don't stop...So then...

How do you know you have forgiven someone?

You know you have forgiven when you can remember the incident but not relive the feelings.

From a more theological perspective...using more spiritual language we might put it this way...

You know you have forgiven someone when you are able to bless the incident.

What do I mean by that? Well...

It is easy to bless the good things in life, but when I remember the times I have been hurt and am able to see the blessing that came from it, I know I have been healed.

It is in the blessing that the pain we've experienced from the other person becomes a gift.

Next week we are going to be talking about Joseph and the magnificent way he forgave his family after his brothers tried to kill him. This was a huge long process...and it didn't happen overnight. But in the end Joseph's famous phrase in that story is this: "**You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.**"

Joseph blessed the murderous intent of his brothers, saying God even redeemed that. Did something good, with what you did wrong. So let's be reconciled. I don't hold it against you because God took it and used it for his purposes.

That's message of the cross too.

In other words, I am not trapped by your evil intent toward me. I am not bound by what you did to hurt me. What defines me is not how you are treating me, but how good God is.

Forgiveness is a huge leap of faith, because we are saying when we forgive that we believe that God is able to take the worst that someone can do to us, and turn it for good. Use it for his purposes, when we surrender it to him. And with that kind of an outlook we can forgive anything in JESUS NAME.

When we hold onto resentment, and bitterness, and we don't give it up trusting God to take it from us, we let all that anger fester inside.

Someone once said that

"Not forgiving someone is like letting that person live rent free in your head." ...or as someone else said, "not letting circling planes land..."

When one spouse refuses to [forgive](#) the other, not only is the marriage in trouble, but the unforgiving spouse will be unhealthy both emotionally and physically.

According to a 2004 article by [Jordana Lewis and Jerry Adler](#) of *Newsweek*, research on being unforgiving shows that holding a grudge can lead to "increased blood pressure and hormonal changes -- linked to cardiovascular disease, immune suppression and, possibly, impaired neurological function."

Its easy to say...forgive. Its hard to put into practice. And we can't forgive unless we ask the Holy Spirit to take over for us and give us the power to let go of our grievances, grudges, and resentments.

I still remember the classic story of Corrie Ten Boom who had been in a concentration camp in WWII and was out and about giving talks on forgiveness. After one such talk a man came up to her and held out his hand. And he said, "Freuline, what a wonderful talk. It is such a relief to know that we are all forgiven in Jesus."

Well Corrie looks at him and at once recognizes this man as the guard who had tortured her sister Betsy who had died in the camp, and she cannot raise her hand to shake his..

So she prays, "Holy Spirit, I am not able to shake this mans hand. Help me do what I cannot do." You see, with that prayer she had the willingness to forgive, even though she felt powerless at the moment to do it on her own.

But that mild surrender was enough, because as she is praying she feels a warmth and an electric current type sensation running through her arm and she says she felt her arm being lifted and her hand placed into the mans hand. “Yes,” she is then able to say as she shakes his hand. “We are all forgiven in Jesus name.”

So we need the Holy Spirit. God is gracious...God is a forgiving God. We are not. We need his power to do what we cannot do on our own, especially in our marriages.

And once you begin to practice forgiveness, live it, breathe it, actually enjoy it, you will find that forgiveness friends is the most powerful force in the world.

It opens doors, it calms anxious hearts, it reverses evil, it changes lives; it is a statement to the powers of darkness that evil will not have the last word!

.As David Dupleissis said long ago “We have been given no authority by Jesus to judge...we have only been given the authority to forgive.” And it takes a lifetime friends to learn how to do it, and do it well. And marriage is a great arena in which to practice this.

So I am going to get real practical here...and in the next few minutes I can't begin to plummet in a deeper way all of the ramifications of this.

But here's some very practical steps for you that you can try to help strengthen your marriage...and this comes from.....Rick Blackman who is a Christian Clinical Psychologist and has worked with couples for years...

And this very practical suggestion for forgiveness he has put into an acronym...and the acronym is CRAFT....

And I am going to go through each of these letters fairly quickly. CRAFT is a way to forge forgiveness between a couple when the top has blown off – one spouse is mad at the other; one person has done something that has hurt the other;

One interesting thing that Blackman notes is that when couples marry they are actually more similar at the beginning when they are first married, than they are after they have been together for 5, 10, 20 years. Essentially after marriage each person continues to develop and his research showed that for most couples after about 20 years, they disagree about 50-60% of the time.

He said the worst couple he ever worked with disagreed 85% of the time about everything. But they are still together because they still

love each other and they do practice the **C-R-A-F-T**...even though they have lots of disagreements along the way...so here it is....

When you have a disagreement start with C.

C = Conversation.

Get conversational. Many times in the heat of a fight we are not rational. There is a thinking part of our brain and a reactive part of our brain.

I know that sometimes when Tim and I have disagreed I have simply reacted in one of two ways...FIGHT OR FLIGHT. Sometimes, on occasion, I wanted to simply shut down, or take a walk and leave. Flight.

And then at other times I have just wanted to engage in all out verbal assault which is a FIGHT. And at those times I am not using the thinking part of my brain. I am using the reactive part that kicks in for survival purposes and I say things I do not mean; and its when that – “FIGHT OR FLIGHT” trigger kicks in that I am not myself.

Blackman calls this part of the brain our “bird brain” because they have found that birds actually do very little thinking. They are pretty though...I like their wings...the way they move their little heads...but generally they simply react to the environment around them.

So sometimes we need a few moments where we take a break from each other, and move from our bird brain and allow our cortex...the thinking part of our brain...to begin to work again.

Proverbs 29:11 states “**A rebel shouts in anger; a wise man holds his temper in and cools it.**”

Ever realize that there is a commandment in scripture that says “Cool it”. There is. When we have cooled it...

Then it is time to engage in conversation. What kind of a conversation?

That's the R

R= Recall

Engage in a conversation recalling what happened that caused the issue to begin with in the first place. When you do this use James 1:19 as your guide which says, “**Let every man be quick to listen but slow to use his tongue, and slow to lose his temper. For man's temper is never the means of achieving God's true goodness.**”

So as we recall what happened together, I am going to listen to my spouse tell me his side of the story. I am going to do this with

compassion, humility, and meekness. Remember what those three things mean?

Compassion: *The act of putting yourself in your partners shoes, or feeling what he or she is feeling*

Humility: *Respecting your partner as a human being and seeking to put his or her needs before your own.*

Meekness: *Gentleness...as in Proverbs 15:1 which says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath."*

When I listen more than I speak, it creates a ramp that bridges the GAP that has been created between myself and my spouse. When it is my turn to speak, I am not defensive. I do not nullify my spouses view. I do not blame when I am in this place. Rather, I share my view of the situation in a way that demonstrates humility and meekness.

A is next.

A=Apologize

This is a beautiful mechanism for repair. There is an oops apology that is okay in certain situations. The oops apology is more like "oops" "I blew it". "I didn't mean to step on your toe, burn the dinner, interrupt you." "oops" is okay for small infractions.

But then there is the heartfelt apology that absolutely needs to happen for the larger things. This is where we own malicious intent. This is where we say and own that we intentionally did the wrong thing because we were scared, angry, wanted to get even...whatever. This where we say "I lied to you" or "I spent too much money" or and we admit that we intentionally blew it and it is a heartfelt apology. We talked about repentance last week and said that the word for repentance was "**metanoia**" – which means **a change in heart resulting in a change of behavior.**

The heartfelt apology is deep and sincere and comes with a desire and intent to change.

F is next

Can anyone guess what F stands for?

F=Forgiveness

This is where we forgive our spouse. And/or this is where our spouse forgives us.

When I say I forgive you to my spouse, what does that mean?

It means that I am going to the best of my ability to work through my hurt so that I will not seek to get even.

It means that I am committed to not using this incident in the future as ammunition – bringing up what you did to me at a later date so I can hurl it in your face.

It means that I am willing to start over and begin again with a clean slate, not letting what has happened in the past cloud over our relationship in the present or in the future.

Let me just say that for large infractions such as infidelity, this does not happen automatically. Therapy is definitely needed. Some marriages can recover from infidelity others cannot.

It's hard to repair trust when one partner has violated trust at the deepest level. Still, there are many stories of marriages that have survived...and if you are in that situation I just want to read to you one woman's account of her journey to forgive her husband...

"I thought at first that I should forgive him because it was the right and Christian thing to do, but at the same time I argued with myself that I should walk away because it hurt too much...There wasn't a moment when I could say "OK now I've forgiven him". Forgiving him was something that I had to decide to do daily and it got easier over time. I don't think that my forgiving him was necessarily only for his sake. I needed to forgive him for my sake as well because if I didn't my bitterness, hurt and anger would have stayed in control of my actions and emotions...one realization that helped was that even though the affair wasn't my fault, I was at fault for some of the problems with our relationship that were there all along."

Do you see why we need God to help us?

The power of the Holy Spirit pouring love into our hearts for people who don't deserve it anymore than we do?

Forgiveness goes against our human nature because we are sinful. And yet if we can learn how to love by learning to forgive....and practice it, its powerful to heal not just our marriages but for every relationship we engage in.

One of the most powerful exercises Blackman uses with couples who have been in conflict, and struggling, is to have them look each other in the eyes...and say to each other from the heart, "I forgive you."

A lot of wonderful stories have come from couples who done have that, and meant it sincerely. Try it.

Finally "T"

T = Transformation

When you live out forgiveness, things change. They do.

One man came to his pastor and said “I am living with a witch”...and went on and on describing this woman that was so difficult – his wife – whom he had lived with for 13 years and he was on the brink of getting a divorce.

And after he had talked for a long time about all of her flaws and outrageous behavior the pastor just looked at him and then said, “What if you forgave her”. And it caught the man off guard. At first he was mad, but then he got to thinking.

What if I just leaned into forgiveness a little more?

What if I didn't react in anger and judgment, but I reacted instead with mercy and understanding?

What if I didn't withdraw, but instead I decided to reach out? To learn how to connect with her in a meaningful way.

Could things change? Could our home life be transformed?

Well about three months later the wife – nicknamed the witch by her husband - was in the pastor's office.

What on earth did you do to my husband? She asked. He comes to talk to you and he's a different man. No matter what I do, he just loves me. Things are peaceful at home, and we want to start coming to church together. We want to work things through.”

Forgiveness – the most powerful force in the world. It transforms lives, it saves marriages, it is the very essence of God's heart and the message of the cross.

Practice it

Live By It

Trust It

To God Be The Glory