

# Setting things Straight

Pastor Morgan Murray

West Valley Church

Our texts this morning both come from Ephesians.

Paul's forgiveness doctrine in Ephesians:

Eph 1:7-8 (NIV)

7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

Paul's forgiveness ethic in Ephesians:

Eph 4:32 (NIV)

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

Theme: God's extravagant generosity to us in canceling our debts enables us to do likewise to one another.

Ephesians 1-3's "straight thinking" (doctrine or orthodoxy) leads to Eph 4-6's "straight action" (ethics or orthopraxy). Paul is resetting our thinking and our doing, like a doctor setting a broken bone.

I want to tell you a story about forgiveness. But first I want to ask you a question:

Have you ever heard of a Q Score? According to Wikipedia, The Q Score (popularly known as Q-Rating) is a measurement of the familiarity and appeal of a brand, celebrity, company, or entertainment product (e.g., television show) used in the United States. The higher the Q Score,

the more highly regarded the item or person is. As you would expect, it is measured using surveys.

I was very surprised to hear that there is one American Country Music singer/songwriter that is in the Top-10 globally. Not only that, this artist is almost number one when it comes to the least amount of negative comments made about her

Nobody, it seems, can think of anything bad to say about Dolly Parton.

I learned this while listening to a very entertaining podcast called *Dolly Parton's America*. The plug for this podcast reads, "In this intensely divided moment, one of the few things everyone still seems to agree on is Dolly Parton—but why? That simple question leads to a deeply personal, historical, and musical rethinking of one of America's great icons. Join us for a 9-episode journey into the Dollyverse. Hosted by Jad Abumrad."

<https://www.npr.org/podcasts/765024913/dolly-parton-s-america>

As I am hearing Abumrad talk about this Q Rating, I start getting curious. Why? Why is Dolly Parton of all people so incredibly popular and respected around the world? As the series progressed, all of my assumptions about Dolly Parton got blown up. Not only is a saavy businesswoman and a consummate artist, she is also an amazing Christian witness without ever being preachy.

Even though the whole series is dedicated to exploring the reasons for Dolly's popularity, for me the question got answered in the second episode. While Abumrad sets up the episode as "the story behind the greatest selling song by a female artist of all time," it was also an amazing story about the power of forgiveness.

Dolly got discovered on the Porter Wagoner Show. It was one of the most popular syndicated television shows of its time, and Porter was Country Music royalty. Dolly was a 21 year old starving artist who had moved to Nashville from the Appalachian Mountains in hopes of being a songwriter. When Porter called her to his office, she only had one record on the radio called "Dumb Blonde" and she figured he might want to use some of her songs for the show. Instead he surprised her by saying that the popular Norma Jean Beazler, - whom he had introduced as "Pretty Little Norma Jean" for the last six years - would be leaving the show. Porter offered Dolly Norma Jean's spot on the show and a contract for \$66K a year - more money she'd seen in her entire life.

At first, the live audiences for Wagoner's show were very unkind to Dolly, even booing her off the stage. She was nothing like Norma Jean with her "Minnie mouse voice" and blonde bombshell looks. But things changed after Wagoner did an entire show of duets with Dolly. Their duet style became a huge hit, and after the release of Dolly's rendition of "Mule Skinner Blues," Dolly's star was on the rise.

For a time, Porter and Dolly were at the very pinnacle of Country Music. But tensions between them grew as Dolly sought to develop her own career and do projects on her own. As is often the case for great songwriters, the breakdown in their relationship became the subject of a song. As Dolly describes it, she walked straight into Porter's office, sat down with her guitar, and sang "I Will Always Love You" for him. The song begins with the lyrics:

If I should stay  
I would only be in your way  
And so I'll go, but I know  
I'll think of you each step of the way  
And I will always love you  
I will always love you

When she was finished, through tears Porter said, "Well that's the best song you ever wrote."

"Well you inspired it."

He said, "Well I guess you can go, if I can produce the record."

"Ok, you can."

As Dolly fans know, this song would go on to be Number One on the Country Charts in 1974 and again in 1982. It stayed Number One for 14 weeks in 1992 when Whitney Houston recorded for soundtrack of *The Bodyguard*.

That would be a sweet place to end the story, but unfortunately that was not the end of the drama between Dolly and Porter.

Wagoner sued for Dolly for \$1 Million. Rather than fight it, she settled and paid it over time.

Then when he hit hard times in the late 80's and the IRS came after Wagoner for unpaid taxes, Dolly helped him out. She bought his publishing company from him, and then gave it right back so that his kids could have his catalog of songs.

Near the end of the podcast, as Jad Abumrad makes this observation. "I have a theory that one of the reasons you can have the crazy broad appeal that you have into so many communities that normally hate each other is because of those acts of forgiveness."

Dolly replied simply, "Forgiveness is all there is."

When we embrace forgiveness this way – not as something optional but as the only real path of love, healing, and wholeness, we have spirits that bless the world. If all Christians practiced true forgiveness, no one would have anything bad to say about us. Or our Lord.

## **Morgan Murray**

Transitional Pastor

West Valley Presbyterian Church

6191 Bollinger Road

Cupertino, CA 95014

408/252.1365 x111

wvpc.org