

## Forgiveness Lived Out Loud

The year was 1949.

33-year-old Billy Graham was unaware that he was on the brink of becoming the world renowned evangelist he became.

At that very time in his life he found himself filled with uncertainty over the truthfulness of God's word, the divinity of Jesus, and even over the existence of God.

Billy had close friend and fellow evangelist named Charles Templeton.

They had met in 1945 at a youth for Christ rally.

Templeton had founded a church that grew to well over 1200 in attendance.

American Magazine said Charles Templeton had "set a new standard for mass evangelism."

Billy Graham told his biographer that Templeton was, "one of the few men I have ever loved in my life."

However, by 1949 Templeton was in the process of defecting from the Christian faith and he was trying to take Billy Graham with him.

"Billy, you're fifty years out of date," Templeton argued. "People no longer accept the Bible as being inspired the way you do. Your faith is just too simple."

Billy Graham said, that if he wasn't doubtful, he was at least disturbed and began to wonder if maybe Templeton was right. Maybe the Bible wasn't true.

This was mere months before the great Los Angeles Crusade that would launch Billy Graham's ministry.

Templeton was trying to pull Billy Graham away from the faith, but God had put a woman named Henrietta Mears, a Sunday School teacher, in Billy's life who was fighting for Billy's faith in Christ.

Rather than argue Henrietta asked Billy to do two things. First take a notebook and write down every sin he had ever committed, even those he had already confessed. Second, she asked him to take that list, get alone with God and go through them again.

Billy did just that.

He made that list. He prayed through that list.

Billy describes a heavy-hearted walk in the moonlit San Bernardino Mountains where he said everything came to a climax.

Gripping his Bible, Graham dropped to his knees and confessed he couldn't answer some of the philosophical and psychological questions that Templeton was raising.

*"I was trying to be on the level with God, but something remained unspoken, until at last the Holy Spirit freed me to say it. 'Father, I am going to accept this as Your Word—by faith! I'm going to allow faith to go beyond my intellectual questions and doubts, and I will believe this to be Your inspired Word.'"*

Rising from his knees, tears in his eyes, Graham said he sensed the power of God as he hadn't felt it for months. *"Not all my questions were answered, but in my heart and mind, I knew a spiritual battle in my soul had been fought and won."*

There is a war being fought for your soul, your faith, and the soundness of your spiritual mind.

... and for many people the battlefield of that war lies in the area of forgiveness.

AND ... what makes forgiveness so complicated is that some of the people you have to forgive aren't your enemies at all.

... often, they are friends, family members, even people you respect and love.

BUT of course, some of the people you need to forgive are enemies.

In the past I've had some people in my life who not only opposed me, but who actively sought to destroy my reputation.

In the end it makes no difference if the person who has wronged you is friend or foe ... forgiveness is hard.

... forgiveness is hard because we don't really understand what it is ... or even how to do it.

So, I want to begin by giving you what I believe are the four steps of forgiveness.

***<sup>4</sup> Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me." And they came closer. And he said, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. (Gen. 45:4)***

The first thing is so obvious we miss it.

Joseph says, "*you sold me into Egypt.*"

## **1. You need to be specific about what it is that you are forgiving.**

You can't forgive something that didn't happen to you.

Forgiveness, like repentance needs to be specific in order to be effective.

David, after his great sin with Bathsheba and killing her husband Uriah ...

... David in his repentance to God in Psalm 51 says to God, "O Lord, against you and you only have I sinned."

... not against Bathsheba

... not against her husband Uriah ... but against God.

When you are forgiving someone don't complicate it with what you think that person has done to everyone else.

If you'll remember Simeon and Levi had killed all the men of the city of Shechem ... Joseph doesn't bring that up.

... "you sold me into Egypt."

Forgiveness is about what happened to you.

The second step of forgiveness is about damage.

... Look at what the brothers said.

***21 Then they said to one another, "Truly we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen; therefore, this distress has come upon us." (Gen. 42:21)***

Here we see some description of the depth of the wound they caused to Joseph when they threw him into a pit and sold him into slavery.

... he was in great distress begging for his life.

In forgiveness you not only need to be specific about what was done to you ... you need to be specific about the damages you've suffered.

## **2. Be honest about the damages you've suffered.**

You have to stop being in denial of your hurt.

Consider the man Job. He was a righteous and just man ... but still his children died, his crops were destroyed, his cattle were stolen, and he was struck with a terrible painful disease.

Well, Job's friends Elihu, Bildad, Zophar, and Eliphaz came to see Job and one by one they told Job that all of this was Job's fault.

... Job had sinned, and God was judging him ... that was there take.

Of course, the Bible tells us that this wasn't true ... in the first chapter God says that Job was blameless and upright...

Job tells his friends that they are wrong and that he isn't being judged for sin.

... the friends push back and tell Job that he is proud and presumptuous.

Look at Job's response:

***Then Job answered, <sup>2</sup> "I have heard many such things; Sorry comforters are you all. "Is there no limit to windy words? (Job 16:1-3)***

Not admitting the damages done to you isn't being strong ... it's living in denial.

In order to forgive you must also be honest.

... stop pretending it doesn't matter.

Being honest about the pain you have experienced is "healing" and it brings the comfort of God.

***<sup>18</sup> The LORD is near to the brokenhearted And saves those who are crushed in spirit. (Ps. 34:18)***

If you pay attention, you'll see that Joseph is aware ... not only of the obvious damages of being sold and being a slave ...

... but also, of the time he lost with his family, particularly his father and his brother Benjamin.

Sweeping something under the rug is not healthy ...

Joseph is being bitter or grinding axes ... he is just honestly reporting what happened.

Be specific about what was done to you ... be honest about the damage.

### **3. Being free must become more important than being right or vindicated.**

You will never see the need for forgiveness until the cost of unforgiveness becomes too a price too high to bear.

... and what is the price of unforgiveness?

*See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; (Heb. 12:15)*

The consequence of unforgiveness will always be bitterness.

The writer of Hebrews says that bitterness is like a root ... THAT IS AN EXCELLENT DESCRIPTION.

#### **You don't see roots from the surface**

Bitter people don't usually "look" bitter, more often than not they don't know themselves that they are bitter.

Sometimes the true cause of the bitterness has been buried for so long that you may not even recognize the cause for it, even if you know you have it.

#### **Roots grow bigger with time**

The bigger the roots of bitterness grow the greater the bondage becomes.

Bitterness, left unchecked, will saturate your thoughts, plague your mind, steal your joy, and leave you empty, fruitless, miserable, and lonely.

*One day, two men were walking through the countryside. They were on their way to another village to help bring in the crops. As they walked, they spied an old woman sitting at the edge of a river. She was upset because there was no bridge, and she could not get across on her own. The first man kindly offered, "We will carry you across if you would like." "Thank you," she said gratefully,*

*accepting their help. So the two men joined hands, lifted her between them and carried her across the river. When they got to the other side, they set her down, and she went on her way.*

*After they had walked another mile or so, the second man began to complain. "Look at my clothes," he said. "They are filthy from carrying that woman across the river. And my back still hurts from lifting her. I can feel it getting stiff." The first man just smiled and nodded his head.*

*A few more miles up the road, the second man griped again, "My back is hurting me so badly, and it is all because we had to carry that silly woman across the river! I cannot go any farther because of the pain." The first man looked down at his partner, now lying on the ground, moaning. "Have you wondered why I am not complaining?" he asked. "Your back hurts because you are still carrying the woman. But I set her down five miles ago."*

Unforgiveness is a prison. Bitterness will become shackles on your spirit and soul.

In order to forgive you must be **specific about** the wrong, **honest about the damage** and the desire for freedom has got to become greater than the desire for vengeance.

#### **4. To forgive you must be forgiven.**

You cannot give what you do not have.

The Apostle Paul commands us to *forgive even as God has forgiven us for Christ's sake.*

An unsaved person will never truly understand love or forgiveness because they have never experienced true love and forgiveness.

As I mentioned before, in the past I've had some people in my life who not only opposed me, but who actively sought to destroy my reputation.

I have had to learn how forgive them, and I was able to learn how to forgive because I myself have been forgiven ...

And in forgiving those who wronged me I've discovered this: **the deeper the cut, the greater the blessings that come** with forgiveness

... so why did I withhold it?

I'll tell you why ... because I thought by not forgiving them, I was punishing them.

... it was my private COWARDLY way I thought I was getting vengeance.

You have two choices when wronged: forgiveness or victimhood.

Joseph chose FORGIVENESS.

In the final chapter of Genesis, the old man Jacob dies and is buried and immediately Joseph's brothers began to worry that now their father has died Joseph will turn on them...

***<sup>15</sup> When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him!" <sup>16</sup> So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father charged before he died, saying, <sup>17</sup> 'Thus you shall say to Joseph, "Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong.'" And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.'" And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.<sup>18</sup> Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." <sup>19</sup> But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? <sup>20</sup> "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. <sup>21</sup> "So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." So, he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. (Gen. 50:15-21)***

Joseph was a conduit and the love and forgiveness he had for his brothers originated with God.

- Be specific about what you are forgiving
- Be honest about what you have suffered
- Become desperate to be free from the bitterness
- Embrace the forgiveness that Jesus offers you.

Let me end with this: How you can tell if you have forgiven.

In Genesis 45 we see in Joseph's behavior 6 characteristics of a forgiving person.

**If you have forgiven someone ...**

- a. You quit telling the **story**

*Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried, "Have everyone go out from me." (Gen. 45:1)*

Joseph not only did not tell anyone what his brothers had done; he ensured that no one else would know.

That is what true forgiveness looks like.

*The Psalmist writes: "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Ps. 103:12).*

Peter says in Acts 3:19 that our sins are "wiped out"

When the Lord forgives us our sins don't exist anymore—they are gone, gone, gone, gone!

If we have forgiven:

- b. No **apology** is needed

Nowhere do we see or hear Joseph's brothers asking forgiveness for what they have done.

First Corinthians 13:5, the same verse that says love "keeps no record of wrongs," also says that love "is not self-seeking."

- c. No **fear** in encounter

*<sup>4</sup> Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me." And they came closer. (Gen. 45:4)*

When you have truly forgiven someone, you don't dread seeing them.

Notice how Joseph calls them to come closer to him.

Sometimes I think the most attractive thing about Jesus as a man was His humility.

Jesus did not try to create an “aura of mystique”

... even the most common person could approach Him.

... we see that in Joseph who had ascended to the throne.

... if he wanted to Joseph could have kept his brothers at a distance.

He could have demanded that they praise him for his success; he could have made them fall at his feet in fear and reverence.

He could have reminded them of his dreams and their disbelief.

He could have even said one of the world’s most favorite phrases “I told you so.”

Joseph said to them “Come close to me.”

There was no fear or dread between them.

This is what forgiveness look like.

Paul said, “*For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father’*” (Rom. 8:15)

When you have forgiven there is

d. No **guilt** for them

***"Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. (Gen. 45:5)***

No one has forgotten what happened, but forgiveness erases all the guilt.

We love to punish people by making them feel guilty ... that isn't the behavior of forgiveness.

There is no **“holster”**

There is no **“vault”** of remembrances

Joseph wanted to set his brothers free.

... in fact, to ease their minds Joseph gives them an explanation for his suffering *“God sent me here.”*

He did not want them to blame or be angry with themselves; he wanted them to forgive themselves.

This is the next characteristic of forgiveness.

e. No **guilt** for you

Forgiveness is worthless to us emotionally if we can't forgive ourselves.

When you have been done wrong one of the natural responses is to try to find some explanation for it ...

... maybe they are a bad person

... perhaps they just had a bad day

... maybe I deserved it

Forgiveness is only complete when you are able to forgive yourself as well

**... not guilt for them and no guilt for you.**

f. Unrestrained **love**

*"Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, 'God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay.'<sup>10</sup> 'You shall live in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children and your flocks and your herds and all that you have.'<sup>11</sup> 'There I will also provide for you, for there are still five years of famine to come ... (Gen. 45:9-11)*

This is one of the most moving scenes in this story.

Joseph instructed his brothers to tell their father the truth—that he, Joseph, was alive and well and had become the prime minister of Egypt.

Joseph is telling them what to say and what not to say to their father.

There is nothing here about throwing Joseph in a pit or being sold into slavery.

You see, sin that is under the blood of our sovereign Redeemer does not need to be confessed to anyone but God.

Jesus will never blackmail you.

Jesus will never air your dirty laundry or tell you secrets

Jesus just wants to forgive you, bring you close, give you an eternal inheritance, and live with you forever.

This what true forgiveness looks like.