

Sermon Series: The Building Blocks of Healthy Relationships

Sermon Title: The Building Block of Forgiveness

Sermon Text: Ephesians 4:30-5:2

Sermon Summary: This study looks at four commitments we are to make in order to make forgiveness a building block of our relationships. The first commitment is to not grieve the Holy Spirit. The next three commitments flow from the first one. We must commit to get rid of things that would prevent us from forgiving others. The third commitment involves embracing the things that would help us forgive others. The last commitment is a decision to become like Jesus in the way we live our lives. There are complexities in living a life of forgiveness and some of these are discussed. This study defines what forgiveness is and what it is not. Forgiveness was costly to God and will be costly to us. Whatever the cost, it's worth it because of what it will do for your relationships with others and with God!

Full Sermon Notes

"I see His wounds, His hands, His feet, my Savior on that cursed tree!" When I think of what it took for Jesus to make a way for me to be forgiven, I have a hard time getting my mind wrapped around that kind of love! And when I'm tempted to not forgive someone who has wronged me, I'm reminded of how I wronged God in such an egregious way, and yet I was offered mercy and grace! Today's topic will not be an easy topic for some of us, but I can tell you it will be one of the most freeing messages you'll ever hear if you will take it to heart and apply it to your life! Let's pray and ask God to speak powerfully to our hearts today on the building block of forgiveness! Pray!

Our text today is five verses found in Ephesians chapter 4:30 - 5:2. Let's read our text...

Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Ephesians 4:31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Ephesians 5:1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children

Ephesians 5:2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

In order to have the building block of forgiveness in our relationships and not grieve the Holy Spirit, we must get rid of things that would prevent us from forgiving others, and embrace the things that would help us forgive others! We will look at four commitments in this text which we must make in order to have the building block of forgiveness in our relationships.

We talked briefly about forgiveness a few sermons back. I want to refresh your memory on what forgiveness means. Some dictionaries actually have a hard time with the concept of forgiveness. They will say things like...

"The act of forgiving, To pardon"

Do you remember when I did something unusual for a pastor and quoted the psychology department of The University of California at Berkeley? Here it is again...

"Psychologists generally define forgiveness as a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you, regardless of whether they actually deserve your forgiveness."

That's a good definition! Maybe somebody had been reading a little Scripture! And I like the part that says "whether they actually deserve your forgiveness!" I know I don't deserve the forgiveness Jesus gave me and still gives me when I mess up! How can I receive His forgiveness and not be willing to give forgiveness? God's Word makes it clear in our text that we are to...

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. .

Okay, I admit, more easily said than done! I want to remind you what forgiveness is not. And Kids I want you to listen to this because this is really important...

Forgiveness is not saying it's okay for another to hurt you.

Forgiveness is not saying what someone did to you is right.

Forgiveness is not taking the blame for a wrong done to you.

Forgiveness is not about denying the pain another has caused you.

Forgiveness is not the ability to completely forget what has been done.

Forgiveness does not mean you have to submit to or remain in an abusive relationship.

Kids, forgiveness is deciding you're not going to be mean back to people who are mean to you and that you want them to know the love of Jesus and change.

Now I must clarify something for the adults here. I do not in my counseling recommend divorce. Nor do others on our staff. However, there are times when a person simply cannot return to a home where their safety is at risk. When this happens in a marriage, it is always my prayer that the abusive party will awaken to the fact that their behavior must change! In fact, I tell couples who come to me for counseling that my goal is always reconciliation. I tell them if that is not their goal, they are going to be quite frustrated with me, because I'm going to drive both parties towards getting right with God and then getting their relationship with each other right.

However, if the offending party is not willing to accept responsibility for their wrongs and change their behavior, reconciliation becomes impossible. Forgiveness is not reconciliation.

Reconciliation only comes when the other person is willing to admit wrong and change. If that does not happen, you can forgive, but you can't be reconciled. Reconciliation is an active work on both sides of the fence with God facilitating the process.

Please note that I'm talking here about major situations. Sometimes we can, and should, let little things go. Sometimes people make mistakes. Sometimes they unintentionally offend or hurt. However, if it is intentional, the relationship is forever changed unless the person who did the wrong is willing to admit wrong and take steps to make amends.

An author of a best selling novel, put it like this,

"Forgiveness is about taking my hands off the throat of the person who wronged me."

God's Word puts it this way...

Romans 12:19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. (NIV)

So let's look at what we must do in order to have the power to forgive! Our first of four points is this...

1. In order to have the building block of forgiveness in our relationships we must make a commitment to not grieve the Holy Spirit!

Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Paul had stated earlier in his letter to the Ephesians this...

Ephesians 1:13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,
Ephesians 1:14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

And then he talked about how God desires unity within the Body of Christ when he was talking about Jewish and Gentile believers coming together as one.

Ephesians 2:14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,
Ephesians 2:15 by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace,
Ephesians 2:16 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.
Ephesians 2:17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.
Ephesians 2:18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

He goes on to say...

Ephesians 3:6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

It grieves God's Holy Spirit, and breaks His heart when we do not forgive one another! There was a lot of bad blood between the Jews and the Gentiles and even though the church had people from both sides who had accepted Jesus as their Savior, they were still holding on to those grudges and hurt feelings from the past wrongs. And you might ask the question, "But how in the world do you get to a place of being able to forgive someone who has hurt you or wronged you? Good question and Paul is about to give us some great wisdom in our text

2. In order to have the building block of forgiveness in our relationships we must make a commitment to get rid of things that would prevent forgiveness!

Ephesians 4:31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

The presence of any one of these things is an indicator that you have not been willing to forgive! More is never enough when you are nursing a grudge! Bitterness and hate are never satisfied! If you don't deal with bitterness and hate, they will deal with you and it will be a raw deal to be sure! If you have truly forgiven someone, then there is no reason to allow a single one of these things Paul mentioned to be a part of your life. Bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander and malice are all garbage. Take out the garbage! Get rid of these things! If you don't, they will become a putrid smell. These things will clutter your mind, your thoughts, and negatively affect every relationship you have, including your relationship with God! These things will prevent you from having a forgiving spirit! Let's just see what God's Word has to say about each of these...

Get rid of Bitterness because it is bitter!

Hebrews 12:15 See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

Living with bitterness is a bitter way to live! It is a sad way to live! Bitterness is unhealthy and does not accomplish anything positive! Bitterness is a terrible companion, but if you allow it into your life it will be a constant companion. It will go to sleep with you but won't help you sleep! It will wake up with you but it will not say good morning! It will walk by your side all day long but it will not be your friend! Bitterness grows bad things! James says...

James 3:14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.

James 3:15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

James 3:16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

Bitterness never encourages forgiveness! And then Paul mentions rage and anger.

Get rid of Rage and anger because they are maddening!

Proverbs 29:11 Fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end.

Proverbs 27:4 Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming...

Rage and anger will overwhelm you because if they are allowed to be a part of your life they will overcome you and all of your relationships will be affected! When we don't allow our anger to be controlled by The Holy Spirit of God, it turns to rage and rage takes control of every aspect of your life!

Proverbs 19:3 A person's own folly leads to their ruin, yet their heart rages against the LORD.

And the maddening thing about rage is that it is irrational and does irrational things and then blames the consequences on God! Rage and anger will not allow you to give forgiveness and will not allow you to receive forgiveness!

Get rid of brawling and slander because they are damaging!

Paul put it this way in Romans...

Romans 1:29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips,

Romans 1:30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents;

Romans 1:31 they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy.

When people allow themselves to be overtaken by a desire to brawl, fight, argue, and tear other people down with slander, they damage every relationship and are themselves damaged in the process! If you've got an argumentative, fighting, and slanderous spirit, cry out to God to remove that spirit before irreparable damage is done! People with this kind of spirit are not capable of giving forgiveness! And one last thing on Paul's list that we must commit to getting rid of if forgiveness is to be a building block of our relationships is something called malice.

Get rid of malice because it is intentional ill will!

In other words, malice is premeditated and calculated! When a person has malice in their heart against someone, it's no accident! Malice and forgiveness are like oil and water, they don't mix! Malice will burn a relationship to the ground! Get rid of it! The writer of proverbs says...

Proverbs 26:20 Without wood a fire goes out; without a gossip a quarrel dies down.

Proverbs 26:21 As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome person for kindling strife.

Proverbs 26:22 The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts.

Proverbs 26:23 Like a coating of silver dross on earthenware are fervent lips with an evil heart.

Paul reiterates his get rid of list in his letter to the Colossian people...

Colossians 3:8 But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.

Colossians 3:9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices

And this leads us to commitment #3...

3. In order to have the building block of forgiveness in our relationships we must make a commitment to embrace the things that encourage forgiveness!

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Okay, I know what some of you are thinking. You've got to be kidding? Be kind and compassionate, and forgiving? That's a little overboard, don't you think? Actually, no! Paul is giving us a path to freedom and not just freedom for the other person but freedom for you! Remember, unforgiveness and bitterness will hold you in bondage. Now if your attitude is; "okay I'll forgive, but I don't have to like it, and I'm never gonna forget it, or let them forget it, but since I'm supposed to, forgive I guess I will." If that's your attitude, then chances are you've still got your hands around their neck and if you could you would just finish them off. Now I know forgiveness is not easy and you must remember all the things forgiveness is not...

Forgiveness is not saying it's okay for another to hurt you.

Forgiveness is not saying what someone did to you is right.

Forgiveness is not taking the blame for a wrong done to you.

Forgiveness is not about denying the pain another has caused you.

Forgiveness is not the ability to completely forget what has been done.

Forgiveness does not mean you have to submit to or remain in an abusive relationship

However...

We must embrace kindness and compassion!

That's right! Being kind enough to realize that this person was created by God and God cares about their soul! They were made in the image of God but sin got a hold of them and corrupted

their heart, mind and soul. Kindness is about being kind enough to love the sinner while hating the sin. Kind enough to want to see a lost soul or a straying soul rescued from the throes of sin. You may not be the one to rescue them, especially if they are unrepentant of the hurt and pain they've caused you and they may do so again. So there's Godly wisdom in the way you forgive! Paul told the Colossians this...

Colossians 3:12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

And what's this compassion thing? First; for those who haven't repented and aren't sorry they've wronged you, you should have some compassion when you think about the fact that unless they repent and ask God for forgiveness they face terrible consequences. Jesus said...

... But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

Luke 13:5 (NIV)

There are eternal consequences for the person who refuses to repent of their sin and ask God to forgive them. And we should have the same kind of compassion for them that Jesus had for the people who nailed Him to the cross! He knew what awaited them if they refused to repent and turn from their wicked ways and it broke His heart to think about. That's why He prayed for their forgiveness! He had compassion even for the most vile of sinners in hopes they would repent. Some do and some never do. I know it's hard to have compassion on people who aren't repentant and to pray they will someday become repentant. Some years ago I had to preach the funeral for a dear friend of mine who had been murdered. Jay and Bronie knew her well. She loved Jesus so much and always wanted to help others. One of the hardest things I had to say at her funeral was something I knew Mrs. Juanita would have wanted me to say: Forgive! Of course those people needed to go to jail and pay for their crime. Justice needed to be done, but the compassion of Christ compelled me to pray for their souls and that they might truly repent and feel deep sorrow and remorse for what they had done and come to know Jesus as their Savior and Lord! I knew God wanted me to say that, but not only say it but believe it and live it. Sometimes I wonder what terrible things may lie in a person's past that would have turned their once innocent child's mind in such horrible directions?" When I think back on them as a little child, it helps me have compassion and to pray for their soul and to offer forgiveness.

Here's something to think about: if you're not kind enough to give the person a chance to repent, a chance to be sorry, a chance to make amends, if they are truly sorry, have repented and want forgiveness and you refuse, then you become the one preventing reconciliation and you haven't forgiven them. When a person realizes they've done wrong and have Godly sorrow, they are going to need your kindness, and compassion to move beyond the wrongs they've committed. If we continue to hold it over their heads what they've done, then the relationship will always be defined by the past wrongs and it will indicate we've been unwilling to forgive. And Paul is very clear that we must not only embrace kindness and compassion, but...

We must embrace forgiveness!

Why must we embrace forgiveness? Because we've been forgiven. Paul said in our text...

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

He put it this way to the Colossians...

Colossians 3:12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Colossians 3:13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

One of the biggest helps to me when it comes to giving forgiveness is realizing how much forgiveness I've been given. First and foremost by God, and by others I've hurt!

One of the most inspiring stories of forgiveness is found in God's Word in Luke 7:36ff...

Luke 7:36 When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.

Luke 7:37 A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume.

Luke 7:38 As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

Luke 7:39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

Luke 7:40 Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said.

Luke 7:41 "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.

Luke 7:42 Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

Luke 7:43 Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

Luke 7:44 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.

Luke 7:45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet.

Luke 7:46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.

Luke 7:47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little."

And the last commitment...

4. In order to have the building block of forgiveness in our relationships we must make a commitment to become like Jesus!

Ephesians 5:1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children

Ephesians 5:2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

God has forgiven you and you've become a new person. God is creating in you His image. An unforgiving spirit is not reflective of the image He desires to put in you.

When it comes to forgiveness, we must follow God's example!

How did God handle things when He had been terribly offended and wronged by others?
We have an example.

Luke 23:33 When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left.

Luke 23:34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

Luke 23:35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One."

Luke 23:36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar

Luke 23:37 and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."

Luke 23:38 There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Luke 23:39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

Luke 23:40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence?"

Luke 23:41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

Luke 23:42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Luke 23:43 Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

The very people who nailed Jesus to the Cross, He prays for. The ones who mocked Him, He prays for. The ones who beat Him, He prays for. The ones who drove the nails, He prayed for. And one of the very last things Christ does is forgive a criminal who repents.

Forgiveness is not cheap. It cost God dearly, it will cost you, but we must become like Jesus if forgiveness is to become a building block in our relationships. Whatever the cost, it's worth it because of what it will do for your relationships with others and with God! I've concluded that

forgiveness is giving my pain, my hurt and my desire for revenge to Jesus and letting Him take it to the Cross! Let's pray!