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- Today we want to begin by talking about **FORGIVING YOURSELF**
- How do you know if you have forgiven yourself?
- It's actually quite easy...
- If you feel guilty, blame yourself, and find that you cannot function normally, you probably haven't forgiven yourself
- The person who hasn't forgiven themselves is an unhappy person, and usually is unable to forgive others
- We've talked about how the majority of events in our lives are simply specks
- We've talked how the majority of our issues can be solved just by letting it go
- If you are having a hard time letting things go that others have done to you, then maybe you should look at whether or not you have let go what you have done
- Sometimes they are even connected and become this destructive cycle... You don't forgive someone else, so you feel shame that causes you to not forgive yourself, which causes you not to forgive others, which makes you feel guilty and not forgive yourself, and...
- The irony is that the degree to which we forgive others is often the degree to which we forgive ourselves, and the degree to which we set ourselves free will often be the degree to which we forgive others
- As an aside, that's why it is very tricky to hold two different standards
- People often say that they are tough on themselves and merciful on others
- Beware that your severe handling of yourself doesn't translate into an attitude that says, *"Well, I don't do things like that. They shouldn't either"*

- For example, Kellie and I kind of prided ourselves on being Virgins when we got married, and we discovered that we found it hard to accept our contemporaries that were getting pregnant outside of marriage
- It's hardest when it's something very personal
- If you struggle with keeping your tongue under control, and then someone lashes out at you, you might be inclined to think, "*I control myself, he should also.*"
- Now, what we are talking about today is kind of similar...
- Let's say it's something that you struggle with, and you fail at...
- If you don't forgive yourself then you will find it very hard to forgive someone else
- If you feel guilty, ashamed and unhappy with yourself for lashing out at someone with your tongue, then you probably aren't going to be very forgiving of the person who lashes out at you
- One of the first ways to begin forgiving yourself is to stop being angry with yourself
- Remember what Joseph told his Brethren:

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- Genesis 45:5
 - 5) And now **do not be distressed** or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.
- God doesn't want us to be angry with ourselves for our sins
- Often when people can't forgive themselves, they are, underneath it all, angry with themselves
- God can begin today to cause all that has happened in your life to fit into a pattern for good

- Begin today to forgive yourself!
- And don't feel guilty about doing so!
- There are two main kinds of guilt that most of struggle with:
 - 1) True Guilt
 - 2) Pseudo-Guilt
- True Guilt is a result of our sin against God
- Pseudo-Guilt is when there is no sin in our lives
- Sin that has been confessed to God is totally forgiven by Him, and any guilt that we feel after that is Pseudo-Guilt

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- Psalm 30:5
 - 5) For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.
- When we say, "I'm sorry", and mean it, that is enough for God
- There are also two kind of Pseudo-Guilt
 - 1) When sin has been forgiven
 - 2) When sin was never involved in the first place
- Although Pseudo-Guilt is false, it is very real in the sense that you feel extremely guilty
- I call it Pseudo-Guilt because when you think it through, there is no good reason for feeling guilty
- Take, for example, a person who is driving a car safely and below the speed limit when a child runs out in the street at the last second and is struck down and killed
- The guilt can be overwhelming, but there was no sin

- It doesn't need to be confessed to God, but you are racked with guilty feelings
- Another example of false guilt is missing out on a great opportunity
- You may have had an opportunity to buy a piece of property years ago for \$50,000, and now it's worth well over a million
- You may feel guilty about not making a good investment with your money, but it's not a sin
- The other kind of Pseudo-Guilt is when you have confessed your sins, and repented deeply, but you don't feel forgiven
- The gift that we all need to learn is to accept our forgiveness and leave the rest in God's hands
- Parents often feel guilty about not having spent enough time with their children
- If you feel that way, then you ask God to forgive you, and you move on in Faith
- To continue to feel guilty over something like that is not pleasing to God because He has already forgiven you
- God wants you to accept the forgiveness and let Him restore the years wasted
- There's a neat verse in Joel:

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- Joel 2:25

25) **I will restore to you the years** that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent among you.

- If you let yourself dwell on past failures you are giving in to Pseudo-Guilt
- You have to keep destroying the record of your wrongs every day
- At the end of the day, our unforgiveness of ourselves may be traceable to pride

- Humans want to feel in control, they want to feel that they are responsible for fixing their own problems
- Instinctively, we can't just leave it to God
- In our arrogance and self-righteousness, we can't bear the idea of God doing everything for us so graciously, so we think that we must help Him out a bit
- It's silly and kind of offensive
- *"God, I don't think that the sacrifice of your own son is probably enough for me, so I'm going to beat myself up over this for a while, and maybe that will help."*
- We have to let God be our God
- We have to accept the blood of Christ for what it does - Cleanse us of our sins
- We have to let the sacrifice our Lord made remove our guilt and satisfy God's justice
- Too often we feel sorry for ourselves and show it by not forgiving ourselves
- But not forgiving ourselves dishonors God
- It's like you are arguing with Him. He says, *"You are not guilty"*, and you say, *"Yes, I am!"*
- The sweet consequence of forgiving yourself is that you get to let go of the past, and it's effects upon the present
- We cast our sins onto God and let Him restore the years that the Locusts have destroyed
- We allow God to forgive us and work everything we have done out for good
- We find ourselves (almost miraculously) accepting ourselves just as we are, with all of our failures and all our potential for future mistakes - Because that is how God accepts us
- God knows you inside and out, and He still loves you

- Can you?
- If you can forgive yourself, then maybe you can begin to forgive your enemies
- One of the ironies of life is that it is sometimes harder to forgive those who are your friends, than it is to forgive your enemies
- When someone you have a relationship with hurts you, it's harder to forgive them than when someone who you didn't expect to treat you well hurts you
- Let's talk about Enemies
- If you have a real, genuine enemy - someone who is not a figment of your imagination - then you should consider yourself blessed
- Not everyone is blessed in this way, but if you are then you should consider yourself fortunate
- Your enemy, if you handle them correctly, could turn out to be the best thing that ever happened to you
- What is an enemy?
- An enemy is a person who wants to hurt you by saying something about you that calls your credibility or integrity into question
- An enemy is a person who rejoices at your downfall or lack of success
- An enemy would not pray that God bless you and prosper you
- An enemy sincerely hopes that God brings you down
- An enemy hates you, though they would never use that word... (They will use almost any other word, *"I just can't stand them"*, *"I loathe them"*, *"I despise them"*, *"They make me sick"*, *"I just can't stand the sight of them"*)
- Enemies will speak badly about you to your boss, keeping you from getting that raise or promotion
- Enemies will tell your friends about any indiscretions they might perceive in your life

- Enemies will go out of their way to keep you from succeeding or being admired
- What's worse, is when they are your Brothers and Sisters and they think that they are doing it for God

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- John 16:2

2) They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when **whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.**

- When you know that someone is obsessed with you, and is out to get you, then you are very blessed indeed
- This doesn't happen to everyone
- In fact, thankfully, it only happens to a very few
- Behind your enemy is the hand of God
- God has raised up your enemy just for you!
- Think of one of the greatest examples of an Enemy in the Bible
- Consider Saul's hatred of David
- Saul's pursuit of David was the best thing that could have happened to David at the time
- It was a vital part of David's preparation to become King
- God did David a special favor: He raised up Saul to keep David on his toes
- God brought Saul into David's life to teach him FORGIVENESS
- Saul was David's passport to a greater understanding of God

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- 1st Samuel 24:1-5

- 1) When Saul returned from following the Philistines, he was told, "Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi."
- 2) Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Wildgoats' Rocks.

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- 3) And he came to the sheepfolds by the way, where there was a cave, and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave.
- 4) And the men of David said to him, "Here is the day of which the LORD said to you, 'Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you.'" Then David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul's robe.

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- 5) And afterward **David's heart struck him**, because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe.
- That conscience that was stricken was developed because David had an Enemy
 - When you can totally forgive your enemy, then you have crossed over into the spiritual realm
 - When you can totally forgive your enemy, then you have learned what God wants you to
 - If you are like me, then you want God to bless you and shape you into a more spiritual person
 - You want God to intensify your usefulness and enrich your life with His work
 - If you can forgive a true enemy, then we're talking about the highest level of spirituality that exists
 - We are talking about the spiritual equivalent of climbing Mount Everest

- A true enemy is rare because God knows that very few people are actually at the level to be able to handle that
- If you truly do have an enemy, then you are blessed to be in a position where God feels you can handle a challenge of that magnitude
- Yet no one may ever know about what you did
- If your goal was to forgive and not have any ever find out what they did, it probably was just something between you, them, and God
- Yet this awesome task is within reach of any one of us
- You don't have to be next in line to be King to forgive your Enemy
- No special connections or position is required
- No particular cultural background is needed
- You don't have to have a University Degree or superior intelligence
- You and I can do something extremely rare... We can **Forgive an Enemy**
- Let's finish with a review of **HOW TO FORGIVE**
- Forgiveness is a **choice**
- We have determined that it is NOT something that comes naturally
- Forgiveness is something that we **choose** to do, and have to continue to do every day
- Let's review the **Seven Steps** we have discussed along this path to **Forgiveness**

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1) Make the deliberate and irrevocable choice not to tell anyone what they did

- As we've said before, you may need to tell someone for therapeutic reasons, but make sure that it is only to one person, and that one person agrees not to tell anyone else
- This is one of the hardest parts!
- When our motive is to hurt someone by telling on them than that is sin
- If we don't want to hurt them, then we will keep it to ourselves

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2) Be pleasant to them if you are around them

- Put them at ease
- Don't make them anxious or nervous to be around you
- Remember the demeanor of Joseph when he was around his Brethren

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3) Say something to free them from Guilt

- Guilt is painful
- We can easily punish people by sending them on a "guilt trip"
- Remember that God doesn't want you to feel guilty over the sins He has forgiven you, so you should follow the same example for those who you forgive
- "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"
- How do you want to be treated when you hurt someone?

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4) Let them feel good about themselves

- Yes, you heard me right...

- This person who has hurt you so badly, deserve the opportunity to feel good
- Not only does this mean never reminding them of their wrong and your hurt, but it also means helping them through any guilt that they might have
- If you have truly forgiven them, you should behave as though you don't even think that they did anything wrong!
- This is hard for all of us, but it must be done...
- Say whatever you can (as long as it's TRUE!) to give that person a sense of dignity

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5) Protect them from their greatest fear

- If you are aware of some deep, dark secret and fear that they have, they will probably know that you know
- If they can tell by your graciousness that their secret will never be revealed, they will be relieved
- If you know that they know that you know... Then tell them that you will never reveal it!
- If you don't know whether or not they know that you know... Keep your mouth shut!

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6) Keep forgiving - FOREVER

- There is no such thing as "*Forgiving and Forgetting*"
- You are going to be continually reminded by things they say and do about what they did to you
- Your job is to forgive them for that today, tomorrow, this year and next year...
- Forgiveness is a lifelong commitment

- The temptation of bitterness will emerge
- Make a commitment to forgive and remind yourself of that commitment every day

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7) Pray for them

- Probably the most important step
- If you can get yourself to the stage where you are honestly and sincerely praying for the betterment of those who have offended you, then you have forgiven them
- Not a perfunctory prayer, "*And please remember James*", but truly praying that God will forgive them, that they will feel the love of God's forgiveness, that they will forgive themselves, and that God will bless them so that they can move on from this
- This is something that you do quietly in your own closet
- You don't tell people, "*Guess what I did? I actually prayed for my unfaithful spouse to be blessed.*"
- Only God witnesses what you say... And whether or not you mean it
- There are some really helpful stages to consider when we talk about praying for those who have hurt us

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- Let's look at the **Five Stages in Praying for Your Enemies**

1) **DUTY** - The first level is strictly based on obedience - You pray for them that hurt you because you feel that you have to

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- 2) **DEBT** - You reach the second level when you are so conscious of what you have been forgiven that you cannot help but pray for those who have hurt you - You don't want God to NOT forgive you, so you forgive others

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- 3) **DESIRE** - You begin to pray for your enemies because it is what you really want

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- 4) **DELIGHT** - This is a step further - It is when you love doing it! You get joy from praying for and blessing your enemies

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- 5) **DURABILITY** - This means that you took on as a lifelong commitment becomes a lifestyle. The thought of turning back is out of the question. It has become a habit, and it no longer seems extraordinary.

- All of this is done in secret, behind closed doors
- You aren't allowed to be praised by people who say, "*Oh, isn't it lovely that you would pray for your enemy like that!*"
- Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you
- One of the consequences of praying for those who have hurt you is that you just **MIGHT** turn your **Enemy** into your **Friend!**

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- 2nd Corinthians 5:18-19

- 18) All this is from God, who **through Christ reconciled us to himself** and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;
- 19) that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

- God did just that to us!
- He changed us from being His Enemies to being His Friends
- He reconciled our relationship!
- You might just win your enemy over and reconcile your relationship by loving them and praying for them
- But, let's be honest... It might NOT happen either!
- Total Forgiveness does not always mean reconciliation
- But, a good rule of thumb to follow is, *"Treat your Enemy NOW in such a way that you will be glad you did should you become Friends"*
- Nothing pleases God more than seeing us loving and praying for our enemies
- Did you ever notice what happens to Job once he prays for his enemies?

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- Job 42:10

10) And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And **the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.**

- Let's all pursue forgiveness in our relationships with each other, and maybe God will bless us twice as much