

## Doing the Unthinkable

Reading: Ephesians 4:17-32

- Do you know that feeling you get when you lie in bed at night and you can't sleep?
- Everything seems to be closing in on you, and you are worrying about something, but you don't have any real idea of what it is
- You haven't eaten anything out of the ordinary
- You are quite sleepy
- But, there you lie, wide awake, wrestling with your thoughts
- This class started on one of those nights
- We had read Ephesians 4 that night...
- I don't know what it means to grieve the Holy Spirit, but it doesn't sound good
- I lay in bed thinking about those verses, and the admonition of what to do in order to avoid grieving the Holy Spirit...
- Put away all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander and Malice
- Be kind to one another
- Be tenderhearted
- And, forgive one another, as God in Christ forgave you
- That's when I realized why I wasn't sleeping...

- That is when I realized that I really hadn't properly forgiven someone, and they continued to haunt my thoughts
- I started thinking about Forgiving in general
- Do I even really know **HOW** to Forgive
- That's when I came to quite an uncomfortable conclusion...
- Basically, I realized that I am not naturally a very forgiving kind of person
- And, I'm afraid that maybe the same can be said of you...
- Now, let's explore that a little bit...
- I think that, thankfully, I haven't really had a lot of opportunity to practice True Forgiveness, and I don't imagine that you have had much either
- Probably, if your life is like mine, then we shouldn't really get offended that often
- Hopefully, at this point in our spiritual development, we've all come to the conclusion that people are often rude and uncaring
- Hopefully, we've got to the point where we've developed a bit of a thick skin, and we're able to allow 85% of what happens just slide off our back
- Put it down to the fact that that person had a bad day, or they were just in a bad mood, and they snapped and said something unkind
- Hopefully, you aren't going through life being constantly hurt by the sinful humanity of people around you, and having to spend all of your time in a constant state of Forgiveness
- But... If you're finding it hard to simply let something go, you might be needing to forgive someone
- It's most often the situations where you don't THINK that you need to forgive that trouble you the most

- It's often the situations where you literally haven't done ANYTHING WRONG that continue to haunt you
- There are often circumstances where you wouldn't automatically think that Forgiveness is called for
- But, think it through a little further... We are often most moved by something because at some deep inner level it has hurt us
- And when we are hurt, is when we need to look for an opportunity to forgive... Or, else that hurt will continue
- The really troubling thing I found out about myself, is that my fundamental personality is simply not that forgiving of other people's weaknesses and problems
- A natural byproduct of trying to hold myself to a high standard of behavior, has unwittingly caused me to hold others to that same standard
- If I can do it, then so can they!
- In my daily interactions with others, I found that I wasn't that forgiving of their actions
- Even though, those actions are the exact same kinds of things that in my own rude and uncaring way I have done to others
- When something has embedded itself in your core personality, it's hard to change
- It doesn't come to mind, it's not natural, it's not something that you even think about
- Forgiving had become Unthinkable
- This class is part of my continuing journey to change that
- Learning to do the Unthinkable

## **SLIDE**

- Learning to Forgive

- Forgiveness is hard for me, so I'm assuming it might be hard for some of you as well
- I'm assuming that like me it doesn't come very natural
- I'm assuming that like me you could use a little help
- That we all could Learn to Forgive
- I'm praying that the power of the Word of God working through a study of the Biblical concept of Forgiveness will help to begin to change my basic personality and shape me into a Servant with a closer resemblance to our Lord Jesus
- I'm praying that you find it beneficial as well...
- Psychologists agree that Forgiveness is healthy, and key to mental stability and happiness
- They describe three basic types of Forgiveness, and I'd like to talk a bit about these three:

### **SLIDE**

- 1) **Detached Forgiveness**
  - A reduction in negative feelings
  - No real reconciliation of the relationship

### **SLIDE**

- 2) **Limited Forgiveness**
  - A reduction in negative feelings
  - A partial reconciliation of the relationship

### **SLIDE**

- 3) **Total Forgiveness**
  - Total cessation of negative feelings
  - Full reconciliation of the relationship back to its previous state

- Now, at this point I think it's important that we clarify one thing right up front

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- I believe that there is a difference in the Biblical Concepts of **Forgiveness** and **Reconciliation**

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- Forgiveness is **Immediate**

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- Reconciliation takes **Time**
- The two are intricately connected in the Bible and in reality
- But, there is a distinct difference
- Forgiveness is a commandment, and is intended to be obeyed immediately
- You have to forgive quickly and continuously
- Forgiveness must be immediate
- Before the sun goes down
- Reconciliation is the goal of restoring the relationship back to where it was, or even better than where it was, and of course this is going to take some time
- Too often, people have this mixed up in their head, and that is why they say that they just can't forgive someone quite yet
- Well, you aren't expected to be best friends right away, but you are expected to forgive them

## **SLIDE**

- Take a look at these Types of Forgiveness
- I think of them more as stages in the process

- I would say, that it's quite common for us to go through all three of these stages of Forgiveness during the process of forgiving someone
- Now, I want to be clear, Total Forgiveness is our goal, and Total Forgiveness is the kind of Forgiveness that is taught in the Scriptures, and that is what we want to achieve in our relationships with each other
- The Reconciliation of the Relationship may take some time, but the Total Cessation of Negative Feelings needs to begin right away
- Not an annoying feeling of uneasiness every time their name is mentioned, or they enter the room
- We want to learn how to achieve Total Forgiveness
- In order to do so, one of the first things that we want to make sure we understand as we begin a study of Forgiveness is that Forgiveness is a clear commandment from our Lord

## **SLIDE**

- Colossians 3:12-13
  - 12) Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,
  - 13) bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, **so you also must forgive.**
- Forgiveness isn't just something nice to do
- Forgiveness isn't just polite
- Forgiveness isn't just something that makes you feel better
- Forgiveness isn't a suggestion for a healthier lifestyle
- Forgiveness is a Commandment from God
- Keep that concept very clear in your mind as you approach this topic

- This isn't one of those life improvement tips that you read about in a book
- This is a clear commandment from God
- Now, I want to start our discussion on Learning How to Forgive by talking about something that you might not expect...
- We're going to start our discussion by talking about **Vengeance**
- Whether we are aware of it or not, one of the main things that holds us back from forgiving is our innate desire for revenge
- We need to come to understand that it simply isn't our position to avenge ourselves
- Revenge is not our Job
- The more we drill that into our brains, and let it seep down into our hearts, the easier it's going to be to learn to forgive
- Vengeance is God's Job
- We're very familiar with all the verses in the Old Testament that talk about the vengeance of the Lord

## **SLIDE**

- Look what Paul told the Romans:
- Romans 12:17-19
  - 17) Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.
  - 18) If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.
  - 19) Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, **"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."**
- This is going to be a key concept for us to understand as we learn about Forgiveness: **God WILL Avenge ALL Wrongs**
- It's God's Job!

- And, He's very good at it!
- It's often so hard for us to "let it go" because you don't want the person to "get away with it" and you feel an honest yearning inside your heart for Justice
- Justice is the Lord's – He will avenge
- Let's begin our journey on this topic of Revenge:
- Have you ever known people who are tied up in their own knots of bitterness?
- Revenge doesn't always look like some scene from a Mafia movie... It is often simply a bitter, angry person who inside has thoughts of revenge.
- Do you not think that you have this problem?
- Ask yourself this question: "Would other people describe me as bitter?"
- Most of us have experienced times in our lives when we are pushed beyond our limits to forgive
- Sometimes you are just unable to draw yourself up to that level
- Sure, you might pretend it
- You might even try to convince yourself of it
- But, when it really comes down to it, you truly haven't forgiven them, and you are still bitter about what happened
- Total Forgiveness does not come until you have completely released the person from your anger and bitterness
- Until you completely release them, you will never be released from what they did to you
- Oftentimes, one of the first steps to beginning this journey of Forgiveness, is having a friend point out to you that you really are harboring anger over an old hurt



- Or, maybe you simply come to that conclusion on your own, as you lay in bed at night, unable to sleep, because you have this one person on your mind
- Release them
- Let it go
- Forgive them
- If you do find it within you to forgive, you may come to understand peace
- That yearning feeling in your heart for Revenge is the complete opposite of this feeling of Peace
- There is a certain type of peace that the Bible talks about
- A peace that comes into your heart when you forgive others and are right with God
- A genuine, all-encompassing peace
- What we need to come to see is that hanging on to our bitterness doesn't damage anyone but yourself
- When we are bitter, we delude ourselves into thinking that those who have hurt us are more likely to be punished as long as we are set on revenge
- I have given these classes before and had Brothers and Sisters come up to me and tell me that they have been harboring a grudge against another Brother or Sister for 20 years! One Brother even told me it had been 32 years since he had spoken to this particular Sister. His Sister-in-Christ, and his natural Sister. 32 Years!
- Why do we hold on to the pain for so long?
- We really want to see them suffer
- To see our enemies punished is the goal of all revenge and bitterness
- We are afraid to let go of those feelings, because we don't want them to "get away with it"

- We feel like if we keep the bitterness alive then they will pay for it one day
- We convince ourselves that it is up to US to keep the offense alive - For justice' sake
- But, remember what Paul told the Romans?

## **SLIDE**

- Romans 12:19

19) Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, **"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."**

- It simply isn't our job
- Our **ONLY** job is to "let them off the hook"
- Our **ONLY** job is to "let them get away with it"
- Our **ONLY** job is to forgive them
- We are to proceed forward with the clear and full understanding that we are not going to have anything to do with whether or not "what THEY did" will ever see the light of righteousness
- We have to move forward with the full assurance that GOD will set things right
- Instead of spending our time thinking about how they are going to fall, we need to forget about them all together
- To begin this journey to true forgiveness and the genuine, all-encompassing peace that comes with it, you have to commit to forgive those who hurt you... EVERY DAY!
- There is no such thing as "Forgive and Forget"!
- Your mind simply does not work that way
- You can make a conscious choice to Forgive

- But, you probably won't forget it
- You are going to have to remind yourself to forgive them over and over again, as circumstances bring up the hurt again
- You have to let them utterly off the hook with no repercussions or conditions at all
- We are talking about a Total Cessation of Negative Feelings!

### **SLIDE**

- If you are going to Learn to Forgive, you have to **Resign Yourself to 3 Things:**

#### **1) They **won't get caught** or brought to justice**

- You don't want them to be punished
- You want them to "get away with it"
- You don't want the Arranging Board to find out about it
- You don't want them brought to Justice
- That's not what Forgiveness is!
- We want God to Forgive us!
- We don't want God bringing us to Justice
- We should want the same thing for our Brother or Sister

### **SLIDE**

#### **2) **Nobody will ever know** what they did**

- Of course, there are some serious circumstances where it is important that the appropriate people know... But, these circumstances are rare

- We are talking here about the normal, everyday offenses that come upon as Brothers and Sisters
- You have to resign yourself to make sure that you don't Gossip, and talk about it to others
- You don't get to enjoy the pleasure of letting other people know what terrible thing this person has done to you, and how big of you it was to forgive them
- The rest of your Brothers and Sisters will never know about what that Brother or Sister did to you

## **SLIDE**

### **3) They will prosper and be blessed **as if they had done no wrong****

- The goal is that you want them to not suffer any consequences for what they have done to you
- You want to be able to pray for the best for them
- You actually want the best for them!
- You don't want them paying some price in their life for what they said or did to you – You want them to prosper
- These three points really are the key to the concept of Forgiveness
- If you fully grasp and take into your life these three simple concepts, then forgiving those around you will come easily
- Once you begin to allow yourself to start thinking this way - To actually believe the verse that says that "*Vengeance is the Lords*"- Then you can start to be free
- When you find yourself actually HOPING that they won't get found out
- HOPING that no one will ever know what they did
- HOPING that they will be blessed as if they had done no wrong

- THEN you will have achieved TOTAL FORGIVENESS
- THEN you will feel the peace that comes from living that way
- Today we are going to talk about forgiving when you don't want to...
- The real test of forgiveness
- We aren't taught Forgiveness in school
- Instead we are more familiar with concepts like the parent or well-intentioned Adult who told you to "Just stay away from them", "*Distance yourself from them*" or, maybe the not-so-well-intentioned person who told you to "*Teach them a lesson*"
- We probably didn't learn Real Forgiveness at home either... or even at Sunday School
- Someone may have been sharp with you and said something rude
- Someone may have been short with you and cheated you out of something that was rightly yours
- You were easily able to forgive them for their minor offenses against you...
- But's let talk about something really terrible
- Let's talk about the rare times when someone severely hurts you
- Can we all that forgiving those who have severely hurt us is difficult?
- Forgiving an unfaithful husband may seem impossible
- Forgiving an abusive parent may seem impossible
- Forgiving someone who molested your daughter may seem impossible
- There are all kinds of offenses that we find hard to forgive:
  - Being betrayed
  - Having someone angry at you
  - Someone acting careless or forgetful towards you

- Being cheated
  - Being overlooked
  - Offenses involving money
  - Offenses involving your children
- Each one of these offenses will react with a different person in a different way
  - I would think that it would be very hard to forgive someone who wants to – and actually succeeds at - killing you
  - And yet the example we have is, "*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do*"
  - The motivation to forgive often has a another benefit to us as well...
  - Consider a verse that we are very familiar with in the Lord's prayer:

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- Matthew 6:12
  - 12) ... forgive us our debts, **as we also have forgiven our debtors.**
- Christ also said,

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- Matthew 7:1
  - 1) **Judge not, that you be not judged.**
- A possible motive to keep in mind for not judging others is to not be judged yourself!
- Likewise, forgiving others will work towards your forgiveness
- But, more important than that is the affect that forgiveness will have on your life
- That peace that we talked about carries the idea of releasing your thoughts from everything that you carry when you carry a grudge

- Living a life of un-forgiveness can stultify your life and rob you of opportunity
- Let's look again at the verses that we read in Colossians 3

## **SLIDE**

- Colossians 3:12-13

- 12) Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,
- 13) bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, **so you also must forgive.**

- Forgive as the Lord forgave you
- How has the Lord forgiven you?
- Unequivocally and unconditionally
- He didn't say, "If you do this and this and this, **THEN** I'll forgive you"
- Before you were even born, Jesus died for your sins
- Your sins will never be held against you, and no one will ever know what you did
- That needs to be our goal in how we deal with forgiving our Brother's sins against us

## **SLIDE**

- Psalms 103:11-12

- 11) For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
- 12) **as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.**

- Sometimes we can't control ourselves, and we just have to unload our burden on someone

- If you do, make sure that you only do it to one person, and make sure that that person is not the kind of person who is going to tell others
- Make sure it's someone who can help you, and not hurt the other person...
- What we will come to understand in our classes is that Forgiveness is a **choice**
- Forgiveness is **NOT** something that comes naturally
- Forgiveness is something that we **choose** to do, and have to continue to choose to do every day
- We're going to discuss these steps in depth in the next several classes, but I'd like to introduce you to these 7 steps to Forgiveness

## **SLIDE**

- There are **7 Steps to Forgiveness**

### **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
- Or, if it is an extreme offense, you may need to tell the Arranging Board, or even the Police
- But, for the majority of the offenses against us, it's really just up to us to deal with it between them and us
- This is one of the hardest parts!
- We often really want to talk about it
- 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



## **SLIDE**

### **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
- You don't want bad vibes filling the air every time you two find yourselves in the same room

## **SLIDE**

### **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?

## **SLIDE**

### **4) Let them feel good about themselves**

- Yes, you heard me right...
- This person who has hurt you so badly, deserves 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

## **SLIDE**

### **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!

## **SLIDE**

### **6) Keep forgiving - FOREVER**

- Remember, 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

## **SLIDE**

### **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
- I have found that this is the hardest part of the process
- To honestly and truly pray for the betterment of someone who has hurt you is probably one of the hardest things that we are called to do
- Yet, I find this last step to be one of the most important steps, yet one of the hardest steps to actually pull off with honesty and integrity
- Honestly and truly praying for them
- Not just saying one or two nice platitudes once or twice in a prayer
- But, dedicating yourself to bringing them to God in prayer and putting His dramatic power to work in their life
- 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

- It doesn't happen all the time, but sometimes when you do this, you are blessed with being able to reconcile the relationship
- Because in the end, that really is the goal of God

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- 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 with 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

### **SLIDE**

- Next class we'll try to define exactly **What Forgiveness Is**, and what it **ISN'T**

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- Our Third Class will answer the question, "**How do I know when I've really forgiven someone?**"

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- Tomorrow morning, we'll look at the difficult subject of **Judging**

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- Our Exhortation will wrap everything up by talking about **Forgiving Ourselves**