



Aug.17 Forgiveness: Forgive and Forget

When I was pastoring the churches of Dent and Vergas, a handful of us would often meet after Fellowship time to play games. We'd play FastTrack, and the trash talk would begin to fly...but all in jest.

There was one Sunday after I had preached on forgiveness, there were quite a few remarks made in jest.

For example, when I got knocked off the board in Fasttrack, "Please forgive me!" Said very insincerely. Ha! Or "You have to forgive me!" Bunch of crazy loons, I tell ya! We had fun!

Seriously though, it just reminded me that forgiveness is a large topic, with many layers to it. And I am grateful God has led us at BUMC to press into this topic more deeply.

I know there is more work around forgiveness that I need to do. I am grateful for this season to process deeper.

But I wonder how this series is going for you? Are you finding ways, with God's help, to apply deeper forgiveness? I'm praying for all of us. And I hope you are praying for one another. Forgiving is not easy.

We've been focusing on how God's heart is generous and full of grace in forgiving. He doesn't wait for us to be perfect to extend forgiveness; He initiates it.

Understanding that we are deeply forgiven changes the way we see others. We realize we can forgive **because** we have been forgiven so much.

Now we are pivoting, moving deeper into this topic of forgiveness, learning about God's expectations for us in forgiving others. What is our responsibility from Scripture on forgiving?

Here is a very practical question to get things rolling. How often do I have to forgive someone? What is reasonable or fair in that regard? I have questions.

Like, what if they are unrepentant? Or purposefully annoying? Or clueless? What is a reasonable limit or realistic expectations for dispensing forgiveness on any given day?

Right after Covid, I found out I had kind of forgotten how to drive. I would stop at intersections without a stop light or stop sign. Oops! Roundabouts confused me and I would sometimes merge awkwardly...SORRY!

One time I drove to Fargo to get my car fixed, and as I merged on to the highway, I must not have zippered smoothly because a lady gave me an unfavorable piece of sign language. Seriously!?

These three examples of questionable driving are what Hamilton refers to as pebbles. They are small offenses. I like how Hamilton puts forgiveness into perspective.

He describes three different sizes of offenses we often have to forgive...first, there are pebble sized offenses, then...medium sized rock offenses, and finally huge boulder offenses.

Pebbles are mildly annoying oopses...medium sized rocks included things like a co-worker gossiping or slandering you, or a boss stealing your idea; with huge stones being offenses are having an affair, stealing, violence, and abuse.

These different sizes help us put forgiveness in perspective and help us apply appropriate wisdom in each case.

Every day we acquire pebbles. There are little things that annoy us...putting the toilet paper roll on wrong...the right way is toilet paper OVER, receiving inappropriate sign language, people coming late to a meeting every single time!

We acquire lots of pebbles every day. And if we are not careful, they can raise our blood pressure, influence our mood and the day's trajectory.

What are we to do? How often do we forgive those pebbly kind of hurts?

I love this slide.

I also love how the Apostle Peter had questions about forgiveness just like I do! Peter came to Jesus and asked, **“Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”**

You can tell Peter had done some thinking on this. Five sounds a bit cheap, but eight and maybe you are a just a pushover. Seven, seven is a good number.

Jesus knew full well that Peter was probably on his last straw with Andrew or John. Peter had probably counted six solid offenses by lunchtime, and the day wasn't half over!

Six or seven times in one day seems reasonable. Anything beyond that is pushing the limit. Wouldn't you agree, Jesus? Peter was seeking clarity while also making himself sound good..."See, I am willing to forgive up to seven times in one day."

When we hear Jesus' response, "**I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.**" That's bigger. But in truth, Jesus used an idiom, a saying used in that day, well known in that day that smashes Peter's limits.

For Jesus...it's not six or seven times, not seventy-seven times, not even 490 times in forgiving.

Jesus was teaching Peter...the number of times we are called upon to forgive is really infinite. The saying he used means there is no limit to the times we forgive. We forgive others as often as God forgives us.

Really?! That can't be right!? Doesn't it sound like the math is off on this one?

In truth, Jesus was asking us to say without end, "**You've wronged me and I could hold on to my frustration, hurt and anger and get revenge of some kind. But instead, I choose to let it go and not hold it against you any longer.**"

Come on! We are just talking the pebbly offenses, right?

Not to say pebbly offenses are easy to forgive. We know that if we can't offload the pebbles during the day with some people...in a few days, we can easily end up hauling around more gravel than a person can carry.

But Jesus never makes a distinction in the size of the forgiveness we need to offer.

So, somehow we need to find the capacity to forgive and let go. But how?

I like the three simple, but not easy, steps Hamilton offers in growing in forgiveness based on the acronym R.A.P.

Not this kind of rap, I have nothing against rap...but not this. This is what I mean.

Remember, assume, and pray.

Remember. Something that can be helpful is to remember our own shortcomings. When someone has offended you, stop and think about the times you have done the same thing. You can probably guess some of the easiest offenses for me to forgive involve driving.

When someone takes my parking space or slows down for no reason or swerves or drifts into my lane going around a corner.

I may feel a slight twinge of irritation. I might growl, “**Stay in your lane, please!**” But then I have to shrug it off because I have been known to do something similar myself.

It is easier to let go of your anger when you are conscious of your own flaws. That’s a good reminder, to REMEMBER our own weaknesses.

Assume. The second step in letting go of small offenses. Usually assuming is not a good tactic. We are instructed to not assume what another person is thinking or feeling. But in this case, assuming is good. Because we are to assume the BEST of the person who has slighted you.

We have no idea the day they are having, the week they just had or the week they are heading into. Everyone we meet is battling storms we can’t even imagine.

And so, we can assume they are doing the best they can in life. We can assume they are not being intentional or malicious. Life is hard.

I used to be a cashier in college. I know what it is like to stand for 8 hours on concrete. I know what it is like to have your legs ache so bad you could just scream.

And have customers yell and swear at me. And have customers ask for the manager with a smug look on their face even though their coupon has expired, because “**the customer is always right**”.

And yet, I still have to hit the pause button sometimes when I am waiting in line to pay for my groceries. I’m usually in a hurry. So, I’m ready to be irritated at any delay or grumpiness on their part.

But I need to think about what their day has been like to cause them to be grumpy and impatient. I’m pretty sure that’s not their preferred way of being. And I need to let it go.

And then we have our third step in letting go of little things. To employ the act of love Jesus told us to employ when someone hasn’t treated us well. We pray. Jesus told us to pray for them and to choose to love them.

To quote Proverbs in general, we are not to return evil for evil but to return evil with a blessing. And so, we begin to pray in the midst of the frustration.

Maybe something along these lines, “**Lord, you know what their day has been, what their week has been. You know their circumstance and you love them dearly. Please help me be a blessing to them, right now.**”

And then we offer a smile, let them know we are not irritated at the delay or their frustration, thank them sincerely for serving under such difficult circumstances.

All it takes is one person. It only takes one person to choose to disrupt the cycle of stress and frustration. One person to offer a smile, a compliment, use good manners. One person to offer kindness or a gentle word to turn away anger.

We become that one and we drop our pebbles. And sometimes it has a cascading ripple effect, helping other people let go of their pebbles.

Once you begin practicing the RAP method, it can almost become a game. You begin to anticipate the next pebble. How can the Lord use me in this? How does the Lord want to bless that person thru me today?

It also becomes a healthy way to stave off irritation that spikes the blood pressure. It becomes a much-welcomed way to minimize stress and bring warmth and kindness.

We find we can drop our pebbles and move on. We might even help others drop their pebbles and have a better day. When we RAP.

RAP...Remember your own shortcomings. Assume the best of the person who hurt you. Try to think of the struggles they are facing that brought them stress. And then Pray for them. Ask the Lord to use you to be a blessing in their lives.

Three simple, practical, helpful ways to manage those pebble-sized places we need to forgive that come up every day. Amen.

Time of Reflection:

1. **What “pebble-sized” offense have I been carrying today—or this week—that I need to lay down and let go of?** Ask God to help you release them and respond using the acronym RAP, remember, assume, pray.
2. **(utilizing our question from the morning as you walked in) Where do you sense God inviting you to forgive another person?** Is it a pebble – small, medium or large boulder? You can make an X and drop it off in the Offering Plate as it comes by OR you can keep it for your own reflection and processing with God.