

I. Intro

A. The title of this series is *Outrageous*, because we are focused on the some of the crazy things Jesus said about how to live. We took a break two weeks ago to dream about the church. During that message I thanked you for stepping up on the serving front. Thanks again. There are some really encouraging things going on on that front. During that message I also said we need to raise our game when it comes to reaching out, inviting people into a relationship with God. So let me keep that in front of you. I am praying for three different men who I am trying to invest in – love, serve, pray for with the goal that I will be able to invite them to take a next step with God.

B. There are four English words that share a common root.<sup>i</sup>

1. Wreath: a set of branches that have been twisted into a circle and usually sport some kind of bow.

2. Writhe: to twist in pain and agony. We usually “writhe in pain.”

3. Wraith: an old and uncommon word used to refer to the ghost of a person who had been wronged in life and became all twisted by their anger to such an extent that even in death they are unable to move. So they spend eternity doomed to relive this event. Wraiths supposedly haunt some area where something bad happened to them because they just cannot let go. They cannot forgive, so they are forced to keep reliving some event without any ability to affect a new outcome. So their future is completely and miserably wrapped up in the worst of their past.

a) In Tolkien’s epic novel, *The Lord of the Rings*, there are nine Ringwraiths, which he also called the Nazgul or the Dark Riders. They are these particularly eerie, suck-all-the-light-and-heat-out-of-the-room creatures that everyone wants to avoid.

4. The fourth word that has this same root is wrath – wreath, writhe, wraith and wrath. This is an older term that means anger, and it hints at the idea that if we carry this around inside us we are twisted like a wreath and stuck like a wraith.

C. I hope the point is clear here. We do not want that fate. Instead we want to follow Jesus’ teaching about outrageous forgiveness.

II. Today we go a bit further into what Jesus says about forgiveness. By way of quick review, last week I walked you through Luke 17:1-6.

A. In verse one I noted that: 1) there are lots of ways for us to get hurt in this world; and 2) we want to do our best to not hurt others – better to be pulled down to the bottom of the ocean because we are tied to a large rock than do that.

B. In verse three I pointed out that, according to Jesus, when people wrong us, we need to: 1) to guard our heart. We need to watch ourselves (not them) because we are in harm's way; and 2) we need to forgive them – even if they've done it before. In fact, we need to keep forgiving them over and over and over again.

C. In verse five I noted that the disciples thought this advice was too much, - too hard, too impractical, too naïve. In fact, it was crazy talk. “Jesus, this love your enemies, be good to those who hate you and bless those who curse you stuff is all well and good during Sunday School, but it just isn't practical in the real world.” And Jesus said, “I'm not kidding. You can do this.”

D. I then went after the first two of three critical questions.

1. The first question was: What – exactly – is forgiveness? – to which I said:

a) It is not forgetting, condoning or dismissing someone else's egregious behavior. It is not reconciliation – which may or may not be possible. Instead, forgiveness is the heartfelt, loving response towards another person who hurt you. It does not mean that what was done to you was no big deal or that they couldn't help it or are not responsible for it before God. It means we are making a decision to surrender our right to get even – to inflict at least as much pain on them as they have inflicted on us. It means leaving those matters to God. And it goes beyond that – over time – to the point where we wish them well.<sup>ii</sup>

2. The second question is: Why should I forgive? Here I gave five reasons.

a) We should forgive because we are commanded to by God (Mt. 6, Luke 17, Ephesians 4 and other places).

b) We should forgive because we have been forgiven by God and others. Consequently, it would be hypocrisy to do less. We cannot expect it by not offering it

c) Third, we should forgive because God links our forgiveness to the forgiveness we extend to others – I do not believe this refers to our eternal forgiveness, but it affects our relationship with God right now. (See Appendix 1)

d) Fourth, we should forgive because to not do so is personally destructive. It's drinking the poison and hoping someone else gets sick. In today's therapeutic culture this is the reason that gets all the ink. There is no concern about the moral order of the world or God's commands. It is just, "if you want to move on you need to give it up." After all, 'living well is the best revenge' and you need to forgive to live well. So I want to be clear, we forgive for more reasons than so we feel better. But, yes, forgiveness is a survival skill. You will be hurt and you are going to have to learn to leave the baggage of those hurts behind. If you hold onto that anger it will almost certainly go bad. Some of you think the 8<sup>th</sup> level of Dante's Hell is too good for the people who hurt you. Maintaining that attitude is shaping your soul in ways you do not want it shaped. It is taking energy you do not have to give.<sup>iii</sup>

e) And finally – the fifth reason to forgive – is because this is the only way the world works.<sup>iv</sup>

(1) Years ago I edited a collection of Christmas devotions from international Christian leaders. And for many of those writers, English was not their first language. In some cases it wasn't their second or third language. So the writing was a bit rough. I discovered that this was one of those projects that is going to take 10X the amount of time I expected it would. I got really scared to open their submissions and read them because I could tell right away how much work would be required. So I remember well opening up the submission of Nikola Galevski from Macedonia and being struck by his first line was, "I live on the Peninsula of Unforgiveness – the Balkans. Consequently, writing about hope, even at Christmas, is a challenge." I knew right away, this guy can write! And I have held on to that line. It says a lot.

(2) As faith wanes in the West many think we will have a culture where people are simply nice to one another because it's the right thing to do – that we are all going to join with John Lennon singing *Imagine* and selflessly embrace what it advocates. That's actually not the way it works. As Nietzsche noted, after the halo of Christian convictions wears, society becomes a me-first fight for power. There is no grace and kindness. Off and people will realize, all that matters is power. At a time when Enlightenment thinkers were claiming the 20<sup>th</sup> century would be wonderful as we shed religion and embraced science and reason, Nietzsche said, "you are being clueless idiots. The 20<sup>th</sup> century will be a blood bath." And he was right. There are challenges living in a broken world – even one where the church is trying to shape conduct. But a world in which people are trying to follow Jesus works a lot better than one where they are not.

E. So today we move on to question three. How – exactly – do I forgive someone, especially if I can't. I've tried but my heart will not let me. Most of the time my mind thinks the idea is crazy. Occasionally I see some validity to what Jesus is saying, or I want to defer to him and do what he says. But I can't. I was hurt too severely.

III. Let me start by explaining the parable that Jesus tells in verses 7-10.

A. Luke 17 opens with the disciples asking, "How many times do we need to forgive someone?" Jesus says, "Seventy times seven." In other words, there is no limit." They say, "No can do. You're going to have to increase our faith for that to happen." At which point Jesus replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.

1. In other words, I am not making that big of ask. This doesn't require that much faith – just a small amount will work.

B. We now pick up where we left off. Luke 17:7

1. **7 "Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? 8 Won't he rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? 9 Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? 10 So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"**

C. In this parable Jesus is providing the disciples with some perspective – he is framing forgiveness in a way that helps them see it from a different angle. That is what parables do. They invite us into a world in which we can hopefully learn something new about ourselves.

D. Here is what they would have heard. In short: you are a servant. What I am asking you to do is not something for which you get lots of extra credit. Let me explain why.

E. In the first century if you went into debt you typically went to prison. There was no bankruptcy court. If you owed and could not pay what you owed you went to prison – which by the way did not include three meals a day. Your family had to bring you food or you would likely starve. It was bad.

F. What might happen if you were fortunate is that the person you owed money to would allow you to work it off. In this case you became their servant.

1. These servants were not slaves like we had in American before the Civil War. For starters, their status was linked to their debt not the color of their skin. Secondly, Jubilee laws in the Old Testament were designed to help some of those who are in debt get out.<sup>vi</sup>

2. So, being a servant was not as bad or as ugly as what was in place in the United States back before Lincoln freed the slaves. But it wasn't good. You were not an employee. There was no HR department; you couldn't file a complaint with the EEOC or contact the union steward.

G. Armed with this information – having been reminded that we are servants (we are debtors to God) – let me read this again:

1. 7 “Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’? 8 Won't he rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’? 9 Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? 10 So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’”

H. What Jesus is saying to the disciples and whoever else was listening in (eventually us) is that:

1. We need to see ourselves as debtors who have been given a big break. We are not in prison as we might be. However, we need to do as we are instructed and that includes forgiving others. Indeed, this parable suggests that when we forgive others we are not doing something heroic. We are simply doing what we are instructed to do.

I. Additionally we need to realize the bigger context. If we chose not to forgive we are not acting like servants, we are acting like kings and queens. Servants are not supposed to act like Kings and Queens. And by the way, realize that the one coaching us on this is a king acting like a servant. He is more than modeling the behavior he is calling us to embrace.<sup>vii</sup>

IV. So the command is pretty clear. But – two quick things here before we walk through the specific steps we need to take. The command is clear however some of you are stuck.

A. First of all, for some of you this is understandable but for some of you this is not. Some of you have really been hurt. And some of you need to look around. In an effort to talk about this I made up the following spectrum. GRAPHIC HERE.. It ranges from Minor offenses at one end to Life-Altering Events (such as the death of a loved one) at the other. Between them are various data points: 1) someone does something to you that leads you to have a bad day; 2) someone does something to you that sets you back weeks or months or years.

1. And there are other variables affecting how we view this, besides how much we've been hurt: such as whether the person who hurt you did this to you on purpose or by accident; or whether the person is repentant or not – which I'll say something about in a moment.

2. My first point is to say, some of you have received life-altering wounds. You – or you child – has been hurt in a serious, life-altering way and you are saying, "I'm not sure I want to follow this advice. I get that.

3. Some of you are still harboring a grudge over someone because ten years ago you didn't get invited to a party or they cut you off in the parking lot. And I want to say, "Get a grip." I mean this in a loving way, but I mean it. You need to get out more and look around and see the level of pain that is out there and give up petty grievances.

B. Second thing before we dive in. It's worth noting that right now we live in a culture where our feelings are highly esteemed – where we are told that we need to be true to our heart.

1. I am not telling you that your feelings are wrong and need to be suppressed or ignored. But I am telling you that they need to be subjected to the wisdom of Jesus.

2. Some of you have said to me, "To forgive this person would be a lie because it's not what I feel in my heart." I get that, and while I cannot promise you a quick breakthrough, I can say that forgiveness is often granted and practiced before it is felt. So you need to take a step and do the right thing with the understanding that your emotions will eventually catch up.

V. So, how is forgiveness practiced? What do you do if you can't get there easily – and for that matter, what should you do anyway?

A. First, we need to refuse to caricature the wrong doer

1. We tend to demonize people we do not like. We make them all bad. It is easy to see people do this with Presidents. I first noticed this when I was in college and Reagan was president. I had some friends who hated Reagan and as a result they hated everything he said and did before he had said or done it because they'd reduced him down to a caricature. Since then I have watched people do this with every president: George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and President Obama. Some people are not only not willing to accept Obama's American citizenship, they do not believe he's human. He's just raw evil. One of the things we do to people we do not like is dehumanize them.

2. Often we do this by reducing them down to what they have done to us. If they have lied to us we say, "They are a liar." Whereas, if we get caught in a similar situation we say, "Well, perhaps I didn't disclose all of the information, but it was complicated. I am not a liar." We set it up as if we are a complex, multidimensional person while those we do not like are cartoon villains. We exclude them from humanity.

3. Miroslav Volf – an author and theologian who used to teach at Wheaton – was born in Croatia and so he spent much of his life living in the middle of the civil strife that has riddled that area. There has been lots of ugly war and ethnic strife and much of his writing and reflecting has been framed by that. In a book entitled, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace*, he explains that forgiveness flounders 'whenever we exclude our enemy from the family of humans and exclude ourselves from the community of sinners.' We allow ourselves to feel superior to them. We think, "I would never do that!" The truth is, not only would we, we probably have.<sup>viii</sup>

4. Step one: We need to stop demonizing the one who hurt us and realize that, as broken people ourselves, we share some similar traits with them.

B. Second: We need to ask God to do in us what we cannot do under our own strength.

1. The kind of heart transformation that we are after is not something we can simply will into place. Making a decision to move ahead – making a commitment to head down this path – is a decision I am going to ask you to make. It is part of it. And I think you ought to go public on this with a couple people who can help you navigate this and stay the course. But we need the Holy Spirit to do a work in our heart.

2. But we need God’s healing. We need divine help. Which is available!
3. The only prayer you may be able to pray at this point is, “Lord, I do not want to forgive this person. I really would rather that they suffer. If you want me to head down this path you are going to have to lead me step by step on this. Help me.”
4. Last week I called a friend who is a few years into this process with some people who seriously wounded him. Their accusations cost him his job and put his family in harm’s way. When this happened he felt like he had been set back in ways from which he would never fully recover. And he was very mad. And I heard him say, “I am not sure I can ever forgive them for this.” So I called to ask where he was at this point.
  - a) And he said that he was in a good place now. He was disappointed in his own response – surprised and a bit depressed at how hard it was for him to forgive. But he had gotten there.
  - b) He had made it a point to put them on his prayer list, but he said, there were days when I would come to their names and all I could do was stare at them. I couldn’t pray for them. “All I could say is, ‘Lord I am trying. But I need more help here.’”
  - c) It took a couple years to get to a point where he said, “Yes, I can ask God to bless them.”

C. Third: let go of the rope.<sup>ix</sup>

1. We need to inwardly surrender our right to repayment and stop letting ourselves relive the situation. This is not to say – please hear this – that we haven’t been wronged. I am assuming that you have been. I am not suggesting we diminish the wrong by moving on. This is not calling bad good. This is not saying it was no big deal or they couldn’t help it. It is recognizing that you suffered real loss. But it is deciding that as an act of your will you are moving on.
2. In my mind I think of this as “letting go of the rope,” which is language I learned in *The Hiding Place* by Corrie Ten Boom.
  - a) Corrie and her family lived in Amsterdam through World War II, where they were part of the resistance, hid Jews in their home, were eventually taken to prison where Corrie’s sister and father died.

b) After the war she was speaking about forgiveness when one of the guards who cruelly treated her sister – who Corrie – hated, came up to her (not knowing that she had been among those he had treated cruelly) and said that he was so glad to hear that God forgave him. And Corrie said that she could hardly breathe in his presence and wanted to attack him.

c) And then she talks about asking God to help her forgive and the metaphor she uses is that she had to learn to let go of the rope that was attached to a bell. And when she pulled the rope the bell went off and she seethed. And when she let go of the rope the bell kept ringing for quite a while, but slowly it began to dissipate. It rang less often and less loudly until eventually it was silent.

3. We need to pray and we need to let go of the rope.

D. In a moment I am going to turn things over to the campus pastors and we are going to enter into a time of silent reflection and you are going to have the chance to ask God to start working in your heart.

E. Before we go there let me quickly attend to a few of the questions that came my way. There are more in my notes on line and small group leaders are being given access to some powerful videos that can be shown in small groups. This is a big topic worthy of some more discussion.

VI. I can only address a few of the questions. I'll do three:

A. Do I only need to forgive someone if they have repented? In Luke 17 we are told that if someone repents and asks forgiveness then we should forgive them. What if they do not?

1. This is a bit complicated. The short answer is: forgiveness is not limited to those who repent. We need to forgive everyone who wrongs us. There are other passages – such as Mark 11:25 – that do not qualify forgiveness. However, someone's willingness to repent does shape what a relationship with them will look like going forward. Forgiveness can be quickly granted. Restoring trust and friendship are different matters. These are going to be shaped by repentance, and may take quite a bit of time to be restored.

B. My biggest problem is that I can't forgive myself. How do I do that?

1. Let me say three things here. First, this is a different sermon.

2. Second, some who are stuck here need to let go of the rope and memorize I John 1:9 and treat ongoing waves of shame as a spiritual attack and remind yourself of whose child you are.

3. Some who get stuck here – and who may think they are suffering from low self esteem – are actually suffering from high self-esteem. You think more highly of yourself than you should. You think, “I could never do that!” Oh yes you could. You did. Many today underestimate how broken they are and how deep sin runs. And so they (you) are surprised when sin pops up. Many think they are good people so there is a big gap between expectation and behavior and – AND – in this scenario there is a small Jesus. He didn’t have to do much to save me. We need a clearer understanding of ourselves and a bigger understanding of God and his grace.

C. Last question: What if I wronged someone? How do I ask for forgiveness?

1. The short answer is, you ask. You go to them and say, “I wronged you and I am here to ask you to forgive me.” Do not say something mealy like, “mistakes were made,” or “I’m sorry if you took offense at what happened.” You own it and say, “What I did was wrong. I want to apologize. Will you please forgive me.”

2. This is rare today because few are willing to take this position of humility. We want to keep the upper hand at all times.

VII. Men and women, this is hard work.

A. Forgiving someone is not our default response. It’s a very unnatural act. And justifiable anger is a pretty intoxicating emotion. Being righteously mad can be fun for a while.

B. But this is the right thing to do. So right now we are going to stop talking about forgiveness and I am going to give you a chance to forgive.

C. So even if you are thinking, “I just can’t believe that if you knew what happened to me:

1. If you knew the jerk who screwed up my life.

2. If you knew how my son’s life or my daughter’s life was ruined by this monster.

3. If you knew my boss or what my Mom did to me or the worthless loser who robbed me of my future. You’d tell me that I was right to be offended.

D. I want to say to even you, this is the right next step. I am assuming that you have a right to feel wronged. But: forgiving is what God tells us to do; forgiving is what Jesus modeled; forgiving is your path to freedom; forgiving is the only way the world works.

E. So I am going to turn things over to the campus pastors now and we are going to enter into a time of guided prayer.

### VIII. Campus Pastors

A. As is clear by now, this is not a simple topic. But God has given us a way forward. For some of you, forgiving the person who wronged you is not going to be that hard. For some of you this is going to be a process that will take some time. But it can start now. And it's the right thing to do. It is the way forward.

1. In Ephesians 4 we are told to “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.
2. Jesus goes even further than that. *In the Luke passage we have been looking at he tells us to keep on forgiving.*
3. Some of you think this is a bad idea or an impossible one. It is not. It is a good idea, it is possible and it's the right thing to do. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”

B. Here is the plan. I am going to lead us in a few minutes of guided prayer. I invite you to close your eyes and bow your head and to come more fully into the presence of God.

1. Heavenly Father, we come before you looking for a path forward – one full of greater peace and joy. One in which burdens are lifted and healing is begun.
2. You know our stories, every detail and understand our actions and thoughts better than we understand them ourselves. Meet with us now. Help us move forward.
3. For starters Lord we confess that we are guilty of many wrongs.
  - a) We have done the wrong thing or failed to do the right thing. We have turned our back on you and we have hurt others.
  - b) We are often blissfully unaware of the ways in which we have hurt other people. Forgive us for our many sins and help us see ourselves more clearly.
  - c) Help us be humble. Bring to light situations in which we need to go back and ask for forgiveness or make something right.
  - d) Holy Spirit lead us here. PAUSE

4. Heavenly Father, I want to pray for those who have been seriously wronged – who have been hurt in a life-altering way. Who deal with limitations and losses caused by someone else every day and whose heart is hiding in a shell – one of anger or protection. I want to pray for those who think that forgiving the one who wronged them is a bad idea or simply an impossibility. I want to pray for those who do not believe that they will never be able to do this. I want to pray for those who say, “I do not have the strength to do this.” Meet with them this morning.

a) *If you are in this camp let me encourage you to pray something like this, “Lord God, I cannot do this on my own right now. I do not want to forgive this person. You know what they did to me. I am justified in my anger. I want them to suffer for all the suffering they have caused me. I do not want them to be released. Lord God you know my heart and the dark places I go when I think about all of this. I need your help to move on.*

b) And so I yield myself to you. Help me trust you in all of this. Help me to trust you to right wrongs. Soften my heart. Guide me. Help me. Lead me. Do this in me. I am planting a flag today to forgive. Do this work in my heart. PAUSE

C. *Now I want to pray for those of us who have been wronged and who may be stuck, but have not fully realized that or who are perhaps just now seeing themselves and their situation with a bit more clarity.*

1. *If you are in this camp you realize this strikes you more as a decision to be made. It’s not completely unthinkable to you that you should forgive the person who wronged you. But in a new way you are aware that you have to make a decision to let go of the rope.*

2. *If you are here perhaps you are feeling a bit exposed as a hypocrite for the way you want and expect to be forgiven but are holding on to anger at others.*

3. *There may not be one big thing but lots of smaller things – perhaps you need to forgive your spouse or your Mom or Dad or a good friend.*

4. *If you are in this camp I encourage you to pray something like this:*

a) Heavenly Father, I am seeing things a bit differently this morning. The truth of your Word has found some dark spots in my heart. I need to bring all of this into the light. I want to obey your teaching here. And so I am making a decision to forgive Jeff or Amy or my Dad for what they did. Help me to fully let go of that rope and move on. Give me wisdom to know exactly what that should look like.

D. And Father I pray for all of us – that we would become more like Jesus; that we would see ourselves clearly; that we would see those who are hurting and reach out; that we would be quick to extend love and grace to those who hurt us; that we would find greater joy in you and be able to more easily weather the challenges that come our way.

1. Lord God, make us more like you.

IX. Announcements

X. Benediction

A. Every week I stand here and offer a benediction. In spite of what you might think, this is more than a signal that you can leave.

B. You are not being dismissed – you are being launched. Worship is not something we do for an hour on the weekend – our whole lives are to revolve around the glory of God.

C. The thinking behind this weekly meeting is that we gather to be encouraged, built up, to come more intentionally into the presence of God, to be re-aligned to his plan and be strengthened by being reminded of the Gospel. And then we head out as the church to advance the kingdom – to be part of the solution, to Proclaim the Good News and Engage in Good Works.

D. The benediction is to ask God to bless us as we head out. To be with you.

E. And while I am here, let me remind you – you are the church, and everyone wins when you take that assignment to heart. Please keep investing in your friends – love them, bless them, serve them, pray for them and look for the opportunity to invite them to take some kind of next step with God.

F. I've been hearing already about some of you who are and who have and who are surprised that God is using even you to help someone who you had no idea would be interested.

G. There is more serving to be done – more Engaging in Good Works. But we are highlighting the front part of our mission – telling others about a loving, gracious heavenly father who is waiting for them to turn to him.

H. Now let me send you out.

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<sup>i</sup> Thomas Ridley is the one who writes most powerfully about this. The Anglo-saxon root is *wriþan*.

<sup>ii</sup> In *Embodying Forgiveness*, Gregory Jones, offers this definition of forgiveness: “Forgiveness is not so much a word spoken, an action performed, or a feeling felt as it is an embodied way of life in an ever-deepening friendship with the triune God and with others. As such, a Christian account of forgiveness ought not to simply or even primarily be focused on an absolution of guilt; rather, it ought to be focused on

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the reconciliation of brokenness, the restoration of communion—with God, with one another, and with the whole Creation. Indeed, because of the pervasiveness of sin and evil, Christian forgiveness must be at once an expression of commitment to a way of life, the cruciform life of holiness in which we seek to "unlearn" sin and learn the ways of God, and a means of seeking reconciliation in the midst of particular sins, specific instances of brokenness." Among the other definitions that I have collected is this one: To no longer hold someone responsible for your hurt." In this, you acknowledge that the hurt is real, but also determine that you will look to God for help in moving on.

<sup>iii</sup> Tim Keller writes about Tippy Hedren, a "lovely blond actress who worked for Hitchcock." He came after her. In a recent NY Times Magazine piece in which she was interviewed, she said that he was very clear. If she would not sleep with him he would ruin her career. She didn't and he did. When the interviewer was asked if she hated him she said, "No. He ruined my career. He didn't ruin my life." For many they are the same thing. She was able to forgive and get past it b/c career was not her life.

<sup>iv</sup> I would add to this list if I had last week back. Among the things I would add is this: we forgave because Jesus modeled forgiveness.

<sup>v</sup> I would also point to the title of Desmond Tutu's book, *There is No Future Without Forgiveness* – which he wrote after the ugly years of apartheid in South Africa.

<sup>vi</sup> See Leviticus 25:8ff

<sup>vii</sup> We tend to write off our sin as small change stuff. What we are told is that Jesus had to suffer and die for us. Just a little bit of insight as to the Gospel itself should be enough for us to forgive.

<sup>viii</sup> There is much to add here: 1 ) In a different book, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, a professor of Ethics from Duke, (Stanley Hauerwas) approaches this same idea from a different angle, arguing that we need to shape our thinking so we see both those who have wronged us and ourselves in proper perspective. He writes: "Our first task is not to forgive, but to learn to be the forgiven. Too often to be ready to forgive is a way of exerting control over another. We fear accepting forgiveness from another because such a gift makes us powerless, and we fear the loss of control involved...Only by learning to accept God's forgiveness as we see it in the life and death of Jesus can we acquire the power that comes from learning to give up control." 2) Robert Lewis talks about this in one of the earliest Men's Fraternity Talks. His father was an unemployable alcoholic who was passed out during most of the significant events of Roberts life. In his thirties he realized that he was very angry at his father and hated him. A break through came when he realized: 1) that he had been wronged by his dad. What happened to him was bad and ugly and he had good reason to be angry; 2) his father wasn't a complete monster, he was a desperately broken person who had a miserable life because he couldn't control his drinking. At one point he was able to release the pain and anger and it changed his life. 3) Everett Worthington's REACH approach to forgiveness unfolds as follows: 1) Recall the hurt; 2) Empathize with the perpetrator; 3) Altruistic gift of forgiveness; 4) Commit publicly to forgive; and 5) Hold onto forgiveness. The point I am emphasizing here is E – empathize with the perpetrator – i.e., refuse to demonize the one who wronged you.

<sup>ix</sup> Dan Hamilton wrote a book on forgiveness. In it he walks through these three steps as it relates to forgiving a girl he was engaged to be married to. She broke up with him. He knew he could hurt her. And he knew that if he didn't, every time he saw her it would hurt. (It hurts to forgive. You give up the money. Relational generosity hurts. All generosity hurts. If you give enough of your money that it hurts then it hurts. And if you forgive it hurts.) Hamilton writes of all the payments he made to forgive her. "Every time I spoke well of her. Everytime I refused to bring up the past. Wood, nails and pain are the currency of forgiveness.