

## Tuesday

On his cocktail napkin, Bob wrote a simple question—“What do the scriptures say about forgiveness?” Yes, we all have our own perspective on forgiveness: who we should forgive, and what we *think* the bible says about it. Yet, what do these scriptures actually say? For two weeks, I journeyed through the bible to read about forgiveness by looking up the words ‘forgive, forgiven and forgiveness.’ It was quite the journey!

Today, I encourage you to go to a website like Biblegateway.com and search these words. You will find much reading! There is a clear call for the need for forgiveness. This call addresses our ‘sin’, or missteps in life, but also how we are to learn the gift of forgiving someone else.

In Matthew’s Gospel, he has Jesus starting his ministry with the Sermon on the Mount. In this sermon, he outlines what life in God’s Kingdom is like. In teaching us to pray, Jesus makes a clear statement in the ‘Lord’s Prayer’ about forgiveness—*...forgive us our debts/trespases/sin as we forgive our debtors/trespases/those who have sinned against us.* Each Sunday, we say these words as a reminder that we live in an economy of grace where we receive *and* give. If it is one way, then it is not God’s way!

The end of the Lord’s Prayer ends with an interesting statement-- *For if you forgive others their trespases, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespases* Matthew 6:14-15.

Is forgiveness conditional? What do you think? Tomorrow we dive deeper into this question.

## Wednesday

I often hear people say ‘I can never forgive that person for what they have done’ or ‘I can’t forgive and forget.’ The pain others cause us is real and lasting. Do you have any scars? Do you remember how you got it/them? How did you feel when they were fresh? What impact do they have now on you?

Just like a wound that leaves a perpetual scar, so too does the actions of others that have hurt us. The body can teach us much. If we don’t allow healing to come to an area of our body, the injury becomes infected. This infection, left untreated, can destroy, not only that affected area but, the whole body as well. Therefore, when you are injured, you take care of that place by treating it and ensuring a road to recovery happens.

The soul functions similarly. When we have been wounded by another, if we let that injury fester, it quickly can become an infection that affects the whole body. Forgiveness is the ointment of healing needed to bring back health. The scars often remain, but the toxicity of the injury is long gone. The thing about trite sayings, like ‘forgive and forget’, is that they are an impossible expectation. Instead, it should be ‘forgive and live.’ Read Psalm 103:1-5 and be refreshed with the Spirit who is always enabling us to forgive and live!

## Thursday

As Bob and I talked, he asked me what forgiveness’ purpose is. How would you respond?

Through a few conversations, we discerned that forgiveness’ goal is restoration. That is the deep call of scripture—not to get even, but to be restored. To be restored is to be made whole or right. When rifts come in relationships, often the only hurdle that can cultivate a future is forgiveness.

Proverbs 17:9 wisely says, *One who forgives an affront fosters friendship, but one who dwells on disputes will alienate a friend.* The act of forgiving is always an act of grace. It is saying that, the wholeness of our relationship is more important than getting even (also called retribution). It is declaring that, wholeness makes the world right, whereas living in a vindictive world perpetuates the brokenness of our world.

Unfortunately too many people read ‘An eye for an eye’ in the Old Testament and never see Jesus’ teaching on it (read Matthew 5:38-42). Gandhi wisely said that ‘An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.’ Desmond Tutu said, ‘Forgiveness says you are given another chance to make a new beginning.’ Jesus, in his life, teaching and dying, continued to teach us through word and action, that God is more interested in making us whole than punishing us! Thank God! May we strive to Embody Christ!

## Friday

Too often humanity can create caste systems of forgiveness. We create rules of who is worthy or not. We decisively determine degrees of sin/evil/wrong-doing and are quick to judge others. And yet...Jesus never asked us to do that! In fact, one of the great complaints about Jesus was his liberal use of forgiveness by those who saw themselves as the authorities on 'good/bad' and 'Godly/Sinner.'

Read Matthew 9:2-8. Jesus was a Jew who clearly knew the sacrificial codes for forgiveness. I'm sure Jesus would know to go to Leviticus to understand how to make sacrifice in order to get forgiveness. A priest would be involved, an animal or grain, and an invitation to be forgiven once these things were met.

Yet here he is...walking among us and forgiving. In fact, in his forgiving, healing is the byproduct! In an ancient world where the cause of paralysis was attributed to sin, forgiveness would be needed! Jesus doesn't tell this man to go get a bull or some grain. Instead, he invites him to be forgiven and walk anew.

Isn't that the way of forgiveness? When we receive it, we are healed from the pain and learn to walk anew. Perhaps if we learned the vitality of living, as forgiven AND forgiving people, we would see the healing of God's presence among us and within us! Is there someone in your life you need to forgive? It may take more than one time!

## Saturday

Bob had shared a story about a time where it took him years to forgive another person. Yes, he knew the scriptures, but deep within he couldn't let go of the pain and anger that another had caused. After all, the result was the death of his son. Through his story, I was able to see how we can all talk about forgiving but the act of forgiving is never quite so simple. It was in his studying Matthew 18 that he realized he must forgive this young man.

Read Matthew 18:21-22. How often shall we forgive? Seven is the number for completion, or perfection. Jesus is saying that we keep forgiving indefinitely until we can find the completion of forgiveness which always leads us to wholeness. Yet the passage that really hit him was the parable that follows in verses 23-35.

Bob decided that he would set his heart and soul to forgiving this young man. Each time he thought of his son, he forgave. On birthdays and holidays, he forgave. He forgave until he felt whole. And one day that young man came to Bob to ask for forgiveness. Bob simply wept as this young man explained what had happened, for he had long before forgiven this young man. The tears now were for this young man who couldn't forgive himself. And Bob the Mentor sat with him to pray and teach him the way of forgiveness, which ultimately led to a wholeness of relationship called friendship. May you be as bold and courageous!

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# The Freedom of Forgiveness

Devotional for the  
week of March 20, 2017

## Monday

Forgiveness: Perhaps no other word is so easy to grasp its meaning, yet is so hard to practice. Bob the Mentor reminded me that forgiveness is the great elixir of the soul. Forgiveness is a two-way street where we need forgiveness for our missteps, all the while being filled with grace to grant it to those who hurt us.

Is it any wonder that Jesus' first words from the cross are the words of forgiveness? After the betrayal, arrest, trial, whipping, a crown of thorns impaling his head, carrying a cross, and then being pinned with three nails: the first words that he utters are, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do!" (Luke 23:34).

Wow. For a minute, just think about the power of the contrast—a crowd mocking and torturing and a man speaking words of grace! When we are insulted, hurt, beat, or feel attacked, the normative response of humanity is to trade insult for insult, an eye for an eye, a jab with a jab. Instead, Jesus takes the blow of the worst of humanity and responds with the best of God's character—grace revealed through forgiveness. What lesson is there in Jesus' example on the cross for you? For our world?

