

Session 3 (The Christian, Conflict, and Working Towards Peace)

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[0 : 00] I was just handed a brand new book and I was told, why don't you give this away?

! All right, great. This, I'll just read off the cover, 500,000 copies sold. This for the last 30 plus years, let me just see when it actually came out, 91, 30 plus years has been kind of the staple resource within broader Christianity for conflict resolution, whether it's interpersonal or whether it's between organizations. It's Ken Sandy's book called The Peacemaker, a biblical guide to resolving personal conflict.

So there's so much help in this book. It'll do all the philosophical foundational stuff.

It will also do a lot of practical stuff. And when it's that long, it can do both. Let me say, how do I want to, how do I want to do this? I could just say who feels like they need this the most, but that would be more confession than anything.

All right, let's do this to the person whose birthday is closest to today. Oh, when's your birthday? February 14th.

[1 : 40] Okay, who's closer? March 9th. Oh, can somebody do the math for me on that? Yes. February 26th. Oh, no math needed. Can we beat February 26th?

Did you say February 14th? Yes. Oh, that's very sweet. Congratulations. Can you pass that? It's Valentine's Day. That's why it's sweet.

You have no idea how many heart-shaped cakes I need. I'm sure. After having given away a book, can I give you six other recommendations? You can jot them down. Unless they're included in your intro stuff.

I don't know that Todd asked me for book recommendations. I sent them to him. I don't know why he asked me if he was going to include them or not. But let me just give them to you. There is a reduced version of that book called Resolving Everyday Conflict.

That's by Ken Sandy. Then this author chose a different angle for the title.

[2 : 46] It's a very good book. But If You Bite and Devour One Another. That's language straight out of one of the epistles. But If You Bite and Devour One Another by Alexander Strauch.

S-T-R-A-U-C-H. That's going to be... Ken's books are going to be a bit more on the practitioner side. Like the practical. Alexander Strauch's is going to be a little more of a biblical handling of these things.

Both are valuable. Probably good side by side. A couple more contemporary books written in the last 10 years. Living Reconciled. By P. Brian Noble.

A good companion for that is Pursuing Peace. By Robert Jones.

And just two more. I don't recommend my book every time I speak. But I am going to recommend it here. Particularly... You know it focuses on marriage. But with these words.

[3 : 50] I've already referenced why it's relevant to this topic. That's by yours truly. And then I actually listed this in my list to Todd as a bonus book.

War of Words by Paul Tripp. War of Words. I'd say War of Words was certainly the first book I read on Christian communication that had a really formative impact on me in just my regular conversations.

So it's not so much a conflict resolution book as it is what is the essence and the substance of Christian communication. Very good.

Paul is a very engaging writer. Great storyteller. So those are some recommendations if you want to go to the next level in pursuing this or dive deeper into one element.

But let's jump into the issue of forgiveness. We've talked a lot about conflict. We've talked about our own hearts. Our own contributions to conflict.

[5 : 07] For conflict to kind of cross the finish line into resolution, you have to go through the gauntlet of forgiveness. This is essentially going to address how do we respond when we are actually wronged.

Okay, so I've titled it Why and How I Should Forgive. And it's a very creative title because the first half is going to focus on why. The second half is going to focus on how. Okay, let me tell you, if you do end up getting the book I wrote, the whole introduction tells this story in long form.

But let me tell you it in short form. I was a Christian. I felt like walking well with the Lord. I got saved when I was 19.

Met Gina. We started dating, I guess, when I was 22. And we were married towards the very end of being 24. I liked her.

And she liked me. I don't mean like like in the awkward love sense, but I actually enjoyed her as a person. Then we got married. And it went really bad really fast.

[6 : 19] Five days in, actually. We were on our honeymoon. And we had the worst conflict of our marriage. And I say that, I need to give you context.

Not the worst conflict we had had in our five days of marriage. But I told you we're celebrating 30 years. The worst conflict we've ever had in the 30 years of marriage. It was ugly.

And we both, while still on our honeymoon that night, really began despairing of the choice we made to get married. We muscled out the rest of the honeymoon.

And when we got back to home, we essentially spent a few months, three or four months, just sniping and arguing constantly.

Until neither of us could do that anymore. And we just stopped talking. Like, stopped talking to one another. Like, stopped talking to one another, just to be clear.

[7 : 24] And it was just silent. This cold war kind of ensued. That went on until about 18 months into the marriage, where we were told to go to a marriage conference for help.

And we both went to that first conference saying, man, I hope she's listening to this. I hope he's listening to this, right? Then, for some reason, God chose to act.

I don't think either of us did anything particularly Christianly. But he chose to act in just poor grace. And then everything we learned at that conference kind of came back and started to work on our own souls.

We both had this weeks of confession to one another, sweet times of sorrow for what happened between us.

And once grace was on the scene, we got to a place where we could actually forgive one another. What was needed... Well, let me finish, kind of put the period at the end of that sentence.

[8 : 34] It was then that we started both to have this real passion to help married couples. Because I was leading worship at my church through that whole time. And I was looking at a whole congregation of people that didn't look as happy as Gina and I looked.

And I know what Gina and I were like at home. And it just struck me, moved me, what's actually going on in these homes, in these people's lives, that you don't see on their face on Sunday mornings.

So we just pressed in, studied like crazy. That's when I read War of Words, by the way, to bring that full circle. And just started pressing into people's lives.

I read every counseling book I could get my hand on so that I could be useful to people back then. And the Lord has seen fit to keep me in counseling ever since. But I tell that story in this context for this reason.

The thing that was needed, there's a lot that was needed in the flood marriage at that point. Humility, awareness of enemy number one, two, and three.

[9 : 41] You know, all of that was needed in our marriage. But when you go high enough, what was really needed was the grace of God. It was needed. And then once grace was on the scene, the next step was very obvious to us.

But this whole message is geared to, in case it's not obvious to everybody, once grace is on the scene, the next step that was needed was forgiveness.

She was awful to me during those 18 months. And I was awful to her. We never would have gotten past it by just starting to communicate better, by just starting to read our Bibles better.

We needed to free one another from what we had done to one another. And that's where it stops being a marriage illustration. It just goes into regular relationships.

If you're going to get through an injustice to a place of either reconciliation, if that's what God has, or at least freedom from bitterness, there's going to have to be this bridge of forgiveness you cross.

[10 : 49] Now, I want to argue for you, the way I think the Bible does, not whether you should forgive.

We're told to forgive as the Lord has forgiven you, so also you should forgive. That's a very plain, straightforward sentence that there's no getting out of. That's the call. But why? We could just say, well, because God says so.

But God doesn't even stop there. He gives us reasons to forgive. Let's cover that before we look at how. And this is the territory that Gina and I had to discover 28 years ago.

Still have to go there now when we do sin against each other, because newsflash, we still do that. But this is the territory we'll all have to visit if we're going to get to a place of forgiving those who wrong us.

And it's going to be in Matthew 18. Nearly the entire chapter focuses on forgiveness. Jesus starts, I'm going to summarize the chapter.

[11 : 54] We're eventually going to the end of the chapter, the parable at the end. So I'm going to give a quick flyover to get us down to verse 21. He starts with the seriousness of sin, but he then quickly transitions to the seriousness of forgiveness.

And he has illustrations he gives there. There's the illustration of the lost sheep and the amount of celebrating that happens in heaven when one sheep who's lost, that's been found.

Heaven rejoices. He then goes on after that illustration to talk about what is often referred to as the church discipline portion of Matthew 18.

I've already told one of you during the break, I'm not a fan of that. I do think it's a good structure for church discipline. I'm not contesting that. I support that. But I don't know that church discipline was what was in mind at first.

Jesus is talking about forgiveness and about being wronged. And so when you get to that first step, if a brother sins against you, go to him in private and show him his fault.

[13 : 00] What's in view there? So you can check off the first box to kick him out of the church. No, it's to reconcile. It's to forgive. It's to see if that private conversation can resolve this issue.

If he doesn't listen to you, then kick him out of the church. No. If he doesn't listen to you, bring two or three others along with you. That's not just to get their testimony on your side.

It's to increase the severity of this issue so that this reconciliation, forgiveness really matters here. There needs to be that acknowledgement of sin for reconciliation to happen.

If that doesn't happen, let's expand it even further and tell it to the church. Again, that's not to shame the person, but that's to call them to a place of repentance.

Whether it's sin directly against God, it may not be a sin against anyone in particular, or a sin against another member of the church. It's to call them to repentance. And then in the absence of repentance, Jesus is holding out.

[14 : 06] Okay, that is doing your due diligence to contend for forgiveness and reconciliation. If that doesn't happen, then remove them from the church.

Okay, so I'm in support of that being the structure of our church discipline. I just think it has much broader application for relationships and forgiveness because that's what Jesus is talking about all along.

At the end of that church discipline section, I'm skipping over the portion where if two or three of you are gathering, you agree, whatever's bound in heaven is bound on earth, skip over to that.

The apostles clearly know the whole time Jesus is talking about forgiveness because we come to the actual passage we're going to look at. Peter's response when Jesus is done teaching, what question does he say?

You know, how should we practice this in our church polity? No, he doesn't say that. Again, it's a fine application, but that's not what he says. He says, Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him?

[15 : 07] This is verse 21. As many as seven times. So Peter's tracking. Jesus is talking about forgiveness this whole time. How often am I supposed to forgive a repeat offender?

Someone who keeps doing the same thing to me. And Peter's like, all right, let me give a ridiculous number so Jesus can say, yes, Peter, that's more than enough and Peter can look great, right?

As many as seven times. And Jesus gives him a crazier number. I do not say to you seven times, but 77 times.

Now just imagine, if they had that mind-blown emoji, it would have appeared over all their heads then, right? It's just like, what does that even mean? Like, how in the world, why would we forgive somebody 77 times?

And so Jesus doesn't wait for them to ask the why question. He says, I do not say to you seven times, but 77 times. And then he goes into why.

[16 : 16] Why am I saying that? And this is a good time to remind you of the qualifier I gave last time. I'm not intending you to draw a straight line from this to your relationship if that relationship has been grievously wrong.

Abuse situations. Unsafe situations. We want to take this teaching. It does apply. But we don't want to draw a straight line to by four o'clock, you're calling that person who did that to you.

I'm not saying that at all. Get counsel. There's wisdom in many counselors. But in the vast majority of our scenarios, we probably should consider what a straight line looks like here.

Okay? Jesus goes straight into the why. Okay? He starts to say, therefore, so he says not seven times, but 77 times.

Therefore, and then we're into the parable. So in your outlines, I'm going to know why should I forgive? Scene one, the king and the debtor. Let's just look at the first several verses of the parable.

[17 : 23] Therefore, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, he was brought to him, he, one was brought to him who owed him 10,000 talents.

Now that is a ridiculous amount of money. Nobody could ever pay that back. One wonders how he got that far into debt to the master in the first place, but I don't think that's the point.

The point is he owes a debt he can never repay. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold with his wife and children and all that he had and payment to be made.

Essentially, he is, he's defaulted on his loan and the master is saying, all right, let me see if I can get 10 cents on the dollar here. Let me sell him and his kids and all his assets.

I'll get out of it when I can. That's what he's doing there. So the servant fell on his knees imploring him, have patience with me and I will pay you everything.

[18 : 31] And out of pity for him, not because it was a great deal for the master, out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave the debt. The first half of what this guy says is really solid.

Have patience with me. It's a place of humility, isn't it? It's a place of saying, I can't pay this now, I'm pleading for mercy. The next thing he says is a little troublesome.

And I will pay you everything. Everybody knew he had no way of paying him any of that. Right? But somehow, he's saying, okay, listen, I can get myself out of this.

It's like a gambler whose debt is so grand, he just needs to go hit on that one big bet and pay it all back. Okay? I'll pay you everything. But the master doesn't say, okay, check back with me in 30 days.

He didn't negotiate. The master forgave. Have pity on me. He had pity. Be patient with me. He gave him patience.

[19 : 35] So, guys, we're not supposed to, right now, identify with the master. We're first, in the story, supposed to identify ourselves as this servant.

The servant who owes God an immeasurable debt. One we could never repay. That's us.

So, Peter says, as many as seven times, he's like, okay, okay, wait a second. Peter, you're going to be the servant in this case. Let's first visit how God has forgiven you.

Let's start there. He owes 10,000 talents and the master forgave them. Okay?

And that would be an incredible story. We could read that to our kids, tuck them in bed at night. But there is a part two to this story and it's the servant and his debtor. Okay, look at verse 28.

[20 : 37] But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. And seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, pay what you owe.

So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, have patience with me and I will pay you. He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.

Now, immeasurable debt owed to the master. I'm trying to remember what the study Bible says. Some of you may have it right in front of you with 10,000 denarii. It's like 200 years of work, something like that.

Yeah, it's like it's a seven something billion. Like, that's quite a debt. Like, you know, that's a problem. A hundred denarii, for basic purposes, denarii is a day's wage.

Okay? So this guy was owed just over three months of wages where he owed seven point something billion. Okay?

[21 : 45] But, so Jesus is using two extremes here in this story. The amount that I owed and the amount that's owed to me. The extremes. The second thing he does masterfully is this servant says the same thing that this guy said to the master.

Have patience with me and I will repay you. Now, the story would be glorious if he's like, hey, listen, in light of the immeasurable debt I've been forgiven.

It's my joy to forgive you the hundred denarii. Brother, go in peace. Your debts forgiven. But he throws this guy in prison.

Now, I don't know. You only surmise why that would be. Maybe he refused to receive the forgiveness from the master and didn't like that place of humility, of humiliation, of being in need of that much mercy.

And let me squeeze a hundred out of this guy. Let me squeeze a hundred out of this guy. Let me pay back what I can. Not living as a forgiven person, but living as a person who's still in debt. Maybe he's like, all right, well, I've been forgiven that.

[23 : 00] Let me stock up on more money so I don't go into debt. We don't know why he did this, but there's a clear incongruency here between how he's been treated and how he is treated.

And when he heard, even though he went after this guy to collect the debt, when he heard, have patience with me and I will pay you, it should have jarred him. It's like, oh, I've heard that before and I've benefited greatly from that.

That should have jarred him, but clearly it did not. He sends the guy to prison. There's a third part in this story. It comes with Jesus' application.

It stings a little bit, so buckle up. Here we go. The master executes justice. Verse 31, when his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed.

Why? They saw the incongruency. They saw it. And they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.

[24 : 10] And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you? And in anger, his master delivered him to the jailers until he should pay all his debt.

Now we have to be very careful. Parables, I'm just going real quick, you guys probably already know this. Parables are told with a main point in mind. We're not supposed to exegete parables the way we exegete epistles.

We shouldn't come to the end of this story and be like, well, if he was genuinely born again, did the master take away his salvation? That's not the point of this parable. The point of this parable, Jesus tells us, so also my father will do to every one of you, listen, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

Jesus gives us this long story to underscore a principle that forgiven people ought to be forgiving people.

forgiven people ought to be forgiving people. Why? Because being forgiven makes us nice?

[25 : 17] No. Because being forgiven should make us eternally grateful. We should be grateful, so overwhelmed with gratitude gratitude.

For the punishment of sin, we don't have to pay. For the consequences of sin, for the assurance we have once we're born again that even our ongoing sin, the places we continue to fall, don't jeopardize our standing before God because our standing before God is secured in the completed work of Jesus.

all judgment for our sin, past, present, and future has been poured out on Christ. So, this doesn't just make us forgiven, it gives us security.

And we enjoy an assurance of heaven as born-again believers because of the finished work of Christ. It is finished means something.

And so then, being forgiven and secured the way we are ought to then influence how we treat those who wrong us.

[26 : 27] What has been committed against us will never equate. We don't have any 10,000 denarii people who sin against us. And here's why.

There are certainly degrees of sin and there are some of us have certainly been sinned against more than others or in a more grievous way. There's heinous, awful sin.

But that sin is committed between two fallen people as opposed to our sin committed against a holy God. It's sin of another nature that creates the incredible debt that we owe God before our salvation.

And so, the image that we are given here is to forgive as your heavenly father has forgiven you.

And gang, this leads us to this place of gratitude. We need to cultivate gratitude. If you're not regularly overwhelmed with gratitude at the mercy you've received, I just want to encourage you, revisit the cross.

[27 : 36] Revisit the work, what the cross's implications are. Revisit the fact that before you were dead in your trespasses and sins, but God made you alive together with Christ.

Review the fact that when you were lost, the things of God are foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who have the Spirit, they are everlasting life.

Just review what you have in Christ and realize the only reason you have it, what do you have that you have not been given? And so if you've been given it, why do you act as though it belongs to you?

It's yours. Right? Everything we have, wisdom, intelligence, finances, soundness of mind, safety, whatever we have is a gift from God.

And so we live aware of that gift. We live in gratitude of those gifts and we treat others as someone who has been treated with great generosity ourselves.

[28 : 43] This parable is one of those places that holds out gratitude, that holds that out for us in striking terms. Now the question, once you've cultivated that gratitude, once you have it, how do you now forgive?

How do you walk through it? Let me draw some principles from the parable. I've just underscored a couple of them, but let me keep doing them. People sin.

Dogs bark, fish swim, people sin. That's how it works, okay? You're people, so you do it too, right? So we shouldn't be shocked in our lives when we're sinned against.

Now some particular sins are very shocking, but it shouldn't in the end be a shock. How could that person do that? We are all capable of the vilest of sin if it weren't for the staying grace of God.

We need to know that about ourselves so that we can respond properly to the sin that's committed around us and committed to us. So if you're going to thrive in relationships, you're going to have to bring this expectation that people sin.

[29 : 52] I've used marriage as an illustration. It's beautiful in this picture. You've got two sinners that are married and joined into one flesh. That's a beautiful picture, but it's also crowded for two sinners in one flesh.

They've got to work out all their sin in that one person that gets formed. In a household, when you're with people 24-7, kids, I don't know if any of you have kids, but you've all been a kid.

And so when people live together, their sin rubs off on one another, right? There's all this sin going all over the place. We just have to stop being surprised by it. So let me provide four points of application from this parable.

First, I just said keep yourself grateful. And I included here Ephesians 5-20, give thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I do love when the epistles use those awkward words like always and everything. Okay, give thanks always and everything. gratitude is a Christian virtue.

[30 : 59] It's not just this awesome app you download onto your Christian life. It's an actual core virtue that we need to cultivate, one of gratitude. Second, keep others' sin in perspective.

This is where the servant failed. He treated the guy who owed him 100 denarii in the same exact way that he was going to be treated for the 10,000 talents.

There was disproportion in the consequence because he allowed their debts to lose, the guy who owed him to lose perspective. How do we do that?

Why do we do that? Because when we're sinned against, we foster bitterness. And then what happens is the person who sinned against us now has to answer not only for what they did, but for what we did with what they did.

So if we fostered bitterness and hatred and we've lost sleep, and now they're accountable for all of that. And so we immediately begin to lose perspective on what people have done as though we could never do it.

[32 : 14] The fact that I could never do what that person did, just catch yourself there. it's almost never true.

So I'm not trying to diminish the hurt that comes with this, but I am trying to show you here in keeping others' sin in perspective that we have access to a gospel that's stronger than the effect of people's sin.

People's sin really does hurt us, but we have a gospel that's bigger and stronger than that, so that we don't have to relate to people according to their iniquities. After all, I'm sure you've already made the connection, God doesn't treat us according to our iniquities.

It's not that he sets aside justice, all of that actually matters, it does, but you'll never actually be able to pursue justice righteously if you don't deal with this first.

third. Walk through the steps of forgiveness. There are very important ingredients for forgiveness to be actualized.

[33 : 29] Okay, let me just lay out four of them, I could probably insert a few others. Acknowledge that you've been wronged. It doesn't really do us any good, even if we're trying to overlook an offense, it doesn't do us any good to say, oh, what they did wasn't wrong.

I'm sure it was. Maybe it's just a personality thing that's annoying you, that's different. But if the person's actually sinned, they've done a wrong, they've been wronged. They've done wrong, you've been wronged. So if you're going to actually get to a place of forgiveness, you have to acknowledge that you've been wronged.

And actual injustice has happened here. you are technically owed a debt. Second, allow their sin to remind you of your state as a sinner.

This is where this guy fell short. When you're struggling, if you can't overlook a sin and it's lingering in your soul, just take that next step of reminding yourself of how you've been treated as a sinner by God.

Let me tell you a story. When I was in the Pastors College for Sovereign Grace 2007 to 2008, and one of our teachers there, the class was Christian Holiness, I think is the title of the class, was taught by Jerry Bridges.

[34 : 59] Anybody here know Jerry Bridges? Sean Wu. They don't know him personally. No, no, no. But do you know who Jerry Bridges is? Sean Wu.

Okay, yeah. Okay, so trusting God, transforming grace, disciplines of grace, Sean. All right, well, listen, I'm going to tell you a story about Jerry Bridges that will be sweet.

After you read his books, it'll really be profound. Okay, so Jerry Bridges was teaching this class. He was 80 something at the time. And he came in on Thursday morning, red-eyed.

Irrespectable sins would be another one. Yeah, he was red-eyed, like he had been crying, or had a hangover, I assume he was crying. And so he was gathering himself, blotting his eyes, and somebody in the class just said, Dr.

Bridges, are you okay? And he said, well, let me tell you a story. I'm going to tell you what he said. He said, this morning in my devotions, which right there should humble everybody, because he's 80 something, still doing his devotions.

[36 : 14] This morning in my devotions, the Lord convicted me of a sin that I've been committing, I think, my whole Christian life. And he's just chosen today to be the day to convict me of it.

He has forbear with me for 60 years without ever pointing this out. How good is God?

He starts crying again, right? God acknowledged it was wrong when it was best for Jerry to deal with that. And in that moment, God was bringing attention to Jerry's sinful state.

Now, Jerry has, I've never known him personally, personally. I mean, I've been in his presence, we've talked, but he's a gracious man who treats others the way we're talking about.

But even at 84, I think he might have been, there are sins you're committing now that God's just not pointing out to you. He's bearing with them.

[37 : 25] Okay? You may be called to do that with somebody. When they grow in Christ more, they'll see this clearly.

I can bear with this now. And then there are those things that you can't, that have to be addressed, and we talked about addressing those earlier. But allow their sin to just remind you of your own sinful state.

then, next, embrace that Jesus bled for their injustice and for yours. I find it very, very helpful when I'm at odds with somebody to remind myself of two things, assuming they're a Christian.

Well, first, they're image bearers of God. Then, assuming they're a Christian, they're covered in the same blood that needed to cover me. I'm going to be spending eternity with this person.

These are just good reminders for us to embrace the Christian worldview of who they are, that Jesus bled for this sin that they've just committed against me, Christ died for.

[38 : 38] And then cast their sin into the sea of forgetfulness. Now, that's where God has put your sin. And he doesn't relate to you as that person who keeps failing and keeps offending.

He relates to you as one who is forgiven, freed from the weight of your sin. That's what Matthew 18 here is holding out for us. Now, God has the holy ability to cast things into the sea of forgetfulness, and we will struggle with that more.

Let me take an excursus here. When are we here till? Three? We have to be cleaned up by them, though, right? Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay, great. This is not an hour-long excursus, don't worry about it, it's just a minute.

I'm trying to see how many of these I can take. There's a distinction between having a posture of forgiveness and being able to be restored and forgiven.

there's a distinction there. One is needed for the other to occur, but there's a distinction there. There's this posture. I have, as far as that Romans 12, 18, as far as it depends on me, I'm living at peace.

[39 : 58] I'm standing ready to be reconciled to this person. It's what happened on the cross when Jesus said, forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do. The person was not asking for forgiveness.

It was Jesus' posture to release and forgive. But actual reconciliation doesn't happen until that forgiveness is transactional, where the person acknowledges their wrongdoing, asks for that forgiveness that you're already postured to grant.

Okay? The burden of forgiveness, the burden of reconciliation, does not rest on you alone. you can do everything that God has called you to do and still not achieve that because that depends on another person.

Does that make sense what I'm saying? It's important to think in those theological terms so that you don't carry some burden you ought not be carrying. But I don't want to so not carry that that you're not carrying any burden.

We are called to tend to our own soul and to engage in these things in this way. The last thing I want to highlight for you coming out of the parable, and it's an uncomfortable one to explore, but it's there.

[41 : 11] Don't put boundaries on your forgiveness. Essentially, when Jesus says 77 times, you can imagine Peter just going all wide-eyed and saying, what?

And Jesus just saying, no boundaries, Peter, no. No, you forgive and you forgive. Now, that doesn't mean we treat all sin the same. It doesn't mean we continue to allow others to treat us and disregard us.

What it does mean is that our forgiving posture toward that sin ought not have an expiration date. Okay?

So, I'm not trying to whitewash it all and make all sin the same. I'm not trying to somehow just make it look good on the outside and let all of this broken depravity happen in relationships.

I'm not saying that there's not a time for you to stand up and defend yourself and step into a better situation and get out from underneath this. all those things ought to be pursued.

[42 : 20] I said earlier, I forget if it was to a person or from here, a personal conversation or here, but the God of mercy and forgiveness is also the God of justice and judgment.

Those things matter, but we can't pursue justice and judgment in unrighteousness. We have to deal with this personal stuff first. So, having a posture of forgiveness positions us to best pursue righteousness and to pursue justice.

So, what of the chronic offender? Here's a few extreme examples. What of the repeat adulterer or a violent abuser? Ought we forgive them?

Okay, good question. Now, in the posture, the truest sense of the word, the person receiving that abuse, the person receiving that gross mistreatment, is most freed when they're most forgiving.

That does not mean, however, that you're to go back to that relationship. That does not mean you're to go back to that situation. This all needs wisdom and nuance. But we don't want to skirt ourselves out from the plain teaching of Scripture Scripture.

[43 : 41] Forgiveness is not enabling. It's not designed to be enablement. It's not overlooking heinous sin. It does not mean you stay in bad situations.

It doesn't mean you avoid the authorities. There are times where my direct counsel is call the police, have the person removed, and then we'll talk about any heart issues that exist.

this dangerous situation has to stop. I keep using these extreme examples so you're not hearing what I'm not saying. Okay?

It just means that our posture while doing wise and just things is to reflect the teaching of Scripture and release the person from the debt they owe. Why?

Because our debt has been released. That's the crux of the end of Matthew 18, the climax of the chapter. Now let me give you a few pitfalls, things that happen in our lives that work against a forgiving posture.

[44 : 48] First is isolation and alienation. This has made all the more possible in the last 15, 20 years as we have cell phones and social media and all of these things, FaceTime, these kinds of things, they're wonderful, but they're poor replacements for actual relationships.

So I'm not casting shade on all that stuff, but I am saying that we have to realize there are limitations to, you know, having 1,200 social media friends.

That's very different from having 12 real friends. We have to see the difference, the substantive difference there. Okay? And the former, that electronic community, allows you to cultivate and curate so you only see things on your social media feeds that you want to see, you block things you don't want to see, you block people you don't want to hear from, you only allow people you do want to hear from, and then it seems like everybody agrees with you.

That's simply because you've filtered out all the people who don't. right? We can curate that, and that's fine for the technology that it is, but when we think that's real relationship, when we think that's real community is when we get in trouble.

We are prone, when we see people that wrong us, we are prone to forget the good about them, the humanizing qualities that they have.

[46 : 25] we isolate, we alienate, and we only rehearse the wrongdoing. Okay, so when a situation develops into a conflict, consider that the debate in the comment section has outlived its usefulness, right?

If you're going back and forth on a comment section or texting or whatever, at some point, ring the phone, call and talk to the person.

I mean, my normal MO, I don't post a lot, but my normal MO in a texting conversation or messaging in some form conversation, if it starts to get contentious, my next text is, hey, I'm going to give you a call in about a minute.

And I just call them. We got to take it three-dimensional and get it out of the two-dimensional relationship. Okay, you want to see if you and that person that you're disagreeing with can get face-to-face.

Now you've got facial expression and body language, all that helps healthy communication. Isolation and alienation work against all healthy communication. Okay, so that's the first thing.

[47 : 33] And something that opposes forgiveness and grace. Second is narratives and closed loops. I've already talked about your social media closed loop.

But this is a caution. caution. All right, I'm hoping I don't step on landmines here. This is a caution in our lives just to be careful about the news sources that we get our news from, the circles of friends that we have.

If there's nobody in your circle of friends that disagrees with you on anything, when we surround ourselves with news that always agrees with the perspective we already have or friends who already agree with the perspective that we have, we're robbing ourselves of the whole story.

We're accepting our blind spots and we're just friends and with people who have all the same blind spots. So if the focus in a conflict is relational issues, just be careful that you don't surround yourself with people who already dislike that person.

You follow what I'm saying? Reach out to someone who you know will tell you the truth, even if it's hard for you to hear. We've got to love truth so much that we resist the temptation to curate our narratives and our community.

[48 : 57] The church is a great place to cut against this trend. Because Sean, from the whoever fills the pulpit, they're going to tell you truth. And if you're sitting live, there's at least social pressure to stay and listen to it.

If you're watching the streaming, did you stream your services? Okay, good for you. But if you're watching or listening to a message, you don't like what you hear, you just jump over to a podcast or you just shut it off.

That's a good time to use the restroom. But if you're in a church, it's awkward. And tomorrow when I'm preaching, I'm going to be watching you. It's awkward to just stand up and walk out, right?

The church is a great place to cut against your pre-fixed worldviews. And community, properly built in the church, is a great place to benefit from the differing grace given to one another.

All right, next. Caricatures of character. That's when we allow somebody to become nothing more than the wrong things that they've done. We two-dimensionalize an image-bearer of God, all the while considering ourselves in three-dimension.

[50 : 12] Now listen, this is a well-tested historical tactic. I won't give any specific examples. But different nations throughout the course of human history, two- dimensionalize the enemy.

With derogatory terms, calling attention just to things that are different and foreign. And when you can two-dimensionalize the enemy in a soldier's mind, he never has to think about pulling a trigger against a three-dimensional person.

It's a well-established tactic, training for military, that you two-dimensionalize the enemy to make them easier to kill. Now hopefully nobody here is looking to kill anything. But the point here is actually the same.

you can foment some pretty significant long-standing anger if you two-dimensionalize a person. But if you're willing to see, let's say, that community group leader who did this really awful thing to me, if you're willing to also see them as a loving husband and a loving father and a faithful worker and a member of the community, and you're willing to see them, yeah, they did this wrong to me, but look at that really nice thing they did.

Like, that has to three-dimensionalize people, and now it's just a whole lot harder to keep them in the prison of your bitterness if you allow them to be three-dimensional. What we do is we caricature people.

[51 : 40] And you know what a caricature is. It's a drawing that highlights particular features over and above other features, and it pictures a person out of proportion. It's like a funhouse mirror.

We want to make sure we are living in reality. And whatever person, whatever person in your political worldview that sits on or stands for the other side of the aisle, they're three-dimensional people.

We need to think of the people in our lives that are on our side and not as three-dimensional people and not consider them as caricatures. And then lastly here on this section, winning battles and losing wars.

We can sometimes take a 12-year relationship and over one disagreement throw the whole thing in the trash.

Now listen, there are those, I keep making these qualifiers, there are such grievous actions that perhaps that's even appropriate. But again, I keep saying we're not talking about those rare, we're talking about the more common things. We can take 10 years of church membership and because of one thing a pastor does, who, let me remind you, is also a sinner, because of one thing a pastor does, we'll leave our church family to go to another church.

[53 : 08] And I just want to say we ought not. We ought not take all of a relationship and throw it away over one battle. We try to win one battle and we spend so much equity on one battle that we actually end up losing in the end anyway.

Okay, that stands in opposition to a posture of peace. So what do we do? I've got those math equations you see there on the end, apply grace.

I call this the mercy equation. You'll see why. What we want to arrive at is a simple addition solution that is, you have an offender in a conflict and you have an offended in a conflict.

What can we add to those two givens that results in the sum of mercy? Okay, so let's, there's a first one where I fill in a blank there.

Offender plus offended plus anger. When you add anger to the mix, it doesn't end up in mercy. That's revenge.

[54 : 16] That's what Paul was warning us against doing where it says, you know, do not avenge yourselves. Vengeance is mine, says the Lord. Therefore, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. Okay, he's trying to get you to mercy and he's protecting you from doing that by making sure you don't add anger as a posture in this situation.

So, okay, next we have offender and offended. What if we add self-pity? That actually doesn't take us to mercy. That takes us to victimhood.

Now, your self-worth is determined by what's been committed against you. And that's a distinctly non-Christian worldview. Okay, so we don't, it's certainly appropriate to sorrow over what's been done to us.

If your definition of self-pity is that big, let me protect you there. But as a settled position of self-pity, you're now going to have to overcome the victimhood mentality you've just put yourself in.

Okay, so what do we add to offender and offended? We add grace. Grace for the sinner recognizes that, who they are, recognizes that even if they ask forgiveness right away, they're never going to be able to undo what was just done.

[55 : 34] There has to be a releasing for that relationship to move forward. They could try to pay you money. They could try to pay you back. Words don't get taken back.

Actions don't get taken back. Forgiveness gets asked, but only happens when it's granted. And that's what we've been working on this whole time. That's grace. When you add grace to the picture, you end up with mercy, which is the result of forgiveness.

Richard Sibb says it would be a good contest amongst Christians. One, to labor to give no offense, and the other, to labor to take none.

The best men are severe to themselves, tender over others. I want to break that down just a little bit, and then we'll end on that. The best men are severe to themselves.

Are you suspicious of what you bring to the table in conflict? Do you have an acknowledgement that you might be part of the problem?

[56 : 42] Not always, but are you always willing to ask that question? Okay? Then, tender over others. Am I willing to extend grace as one who's received?

Am I willing to extend mercy as one who has received? To extend forgiveness forgiveness? As the Lord has forgiven, so you also shall forgive. As the Lord has loved you, so you also should love others.

In the end, as a believer, we want to acknowledge that we are part genetically with the fall. We are part of a conflict-laden people.

And God has given us someone to deliver us from that. To remove the enmity between us and others by restoring us to God.

We have enemies of ourselves, of friendship with the world. Enemies of our distance from God that we can actually take hold of. And we can go to war over the devil who looks to draw us from God and create division.

[57 : 52] And we can be those who pursue a posture of peace, a posture of forgiveness. This, friends, in the place of difficulty, in the place of conflict, is what the Christian does when they move toward peace.

And I hope that has been helpful to you. I think we'll have time here for some questions. So I do want to field those questions. But let me thank you for your attention during these sessions, for your attentiveness.

And I'm eager to field some of these questions. Yeah, so thank you very much. Applause Applause Applause Thank you.