

Series: Fireproof Your Relationships
Title: *Forgiveness*
Text: Matthew 18:21-35
Key Word: Steps
Proposition: Everyone will find peace in their relationships by following these steps toward forgiveness.

Good morning everybody! We're in the midst of learning about *Fireproofing our Relationships*. Today, we will explore an essential key to any successful relationship and marriage. Great relationships are forged with loving forgiveness. Next Sunday, we will learn a better way to love. This morning, we'll discover the transforming power of forgiveness.

One of the hardest tasks we face is to forgive someone who has hurt us. Leo Buscalgia tells about one of his students who was jilted by her boyfriend. The young woman felt both hurt and rejected. In her confusion, she didn't understand her intense feelings to cause him harm in some way. It seems natural to want to hurt someone who has hurt us. Deep down, though she knew she had to forgive. She said, "I'm the one in pain, so I'm the one who's got to do something about it."

She had to forgive the young man for the intense pain severely limited her concentration. It stifled her ability to build new relationships. Finally, she realized that forgiveness would enable her to move on. She forgave. God healed her heart and set her free from her bitterness and hurt.

Forgiving is hard work. We want revenge. Sometimes we act as if the offender doesn't exist. Whether we've been hurt intentionally or accidentally it's difficult to forgive and to ask for forgiveness.

In the movie, “Fireproof” Caleb tries everything he knows and everything he has learned to restore his marriage. Caleb Holt knew he had to apologize. **Let’s watch.** *(Play the Session Five clip from your Fireproof Your Marriage DVD. Clip length = 5:17. SHOW CLIP.)* After his apology Catherine is confronted with a choice. The future of their marriage rested on how she would choose.

Matthew, a tax collector who followed Jesus, tells the story when Peter, another follower, asks Jesus a critical question. He asked, ***“Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?”*** Perhaps someone had done something to hurt Peter. Maybe Peter’s question was simply in response to Jesus’ teachings.

Seven seemed like a good number. Seven was regarded as the perfect number. The rabbis instructed people to forgive someone only three times. Peter was more generous. Surely, he had the right answer. It was twice as more as what the Jewish law required. Jesus surprised Peter and everyone else. ***“I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven.”*** A new standard is offered, no limit to forgiveness. We don’t reach a certain number, three or seven or seventy-seven. We can’t say, “I can’t forgive you anymore—I’ve reached my limit.” Jesus says that if you want to “Fireproof” your relationships, if you want hope, then forgiveness must be a way of life. Why? Why is forgiveness necessary?

First, it is necessary because we are forgiven by God. Jesus told a story about a king who settled accounts with his servants. There was a servant who

owed him about ten million dollars. He would never be able to pay it back. I suspect that Jesus wanted us to see that this debt would never be paid regardless of overtime pay or weekends worked, or second or third jobs. It was simply impossible.

In Biblical times, indebted servants and their families were thrown in prison. So the servant pleaded for mercy. *“The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.”* (Matt. 18:27) The servant was free. The only thing he owed was a big thank you. What a relief! He would not be sent to prison, his family would not be sold off as slaves. He was free. Thanks to the goodness of the king, he didn’t owe a cent.

We owe a debt to God that we too can never repay. We are bankrupt. More time or more dollars will not relieve the debt. We need a gift. The Lord God Almighty has provided us this gift. *“For while we were still weak, Christ died for the ungodly (the indebted)...so to prove God’s love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us...while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son.”* (Romans 5:6, 8, 10) God loves us so much that He paid our debt in full. Payment is not required.

Such forgiveness empowers us to forgive. We can’t give what we don’t possess. If you’re not assured of His forgiveness, you have nothing to pass on. A doctor performed a tracheotomy on a young girl. Her condition improved, but she

was still in critical condition. After the operation, she ordered the nurse, “When this tube clogs up, take it out immediately and clean it. Then come and get me.”

Within hours, the tube clogged. Instead of taking it out, the nurse panicked and ran for the doctor. By the time the doctor arrived the patient was dead. The doctor was furious. The next day she recommended that the nurses’ license be revoked. In tears the nurse pleaded for a second chance. The doctor though refused to change her mind. That night though, she was haunted by the nurse’s words. The next morning God reminded the doctor that she had been given a second chance. So the doctor told the nurse that she had reconsidered and offered the nurse a second chance. She became the chief of nursing at a large hospital.

Have you received a second chance? If you have, then I invite you to pass it forward. There is healing in forgiveness. *“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”* Colossians 3:18

Next, forgiveness gives us peace of mind. When we forgive those who hurt us, it is not just for their sake, it is for our peace of mind. Hatred, resentment, unforgiveness sours life. Frustration robs us of joy. This inner conflict strips away inner peace and stimulates various physical ailments.

Even with his debt forgiven, the servant still felt indebted. In some ways, he rejected the grace. So when he discovered that a co-worker owed him a few hundred dollars, he seized him by the throat and demand payment in full. His co-

worker couldn't pay up. So the servant had him thrown in prison, until the debt was paid in full.

Deeply disturbed by this, the other servants reported the servant's actions to the master. The king called him into his office and said, 'Look, I forgave everything you owed me, yet you treat your co-worker this way. So with righteous anger he had him thrown into prison until his debt was paid in full. Matt. 18:31f Unforgiveness sends us to the prison of resentment, where we're tortured by bitterness. It hurts us more than it does the offender because they are oblivious to the fact that we're still resenting the issue. What bitter memory robs us of peace and joy? What hurt is still tormenting you? Friends, it's time to let go and forgive, only then will you know God's peace.

Finally, forgiveness sets us free from evil oppression. The good news about forgiveness is that it keeps Satan from gaining a foothold into our relationships. Paul tells us this in 2 Corinthians 2, "*If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us.*" 2 Cor. 2:10, 11

So, how can I forgive? First, recognize that one must go. We have a choice. We can hold onto resentment or we can hold onto God's peace. Resentment and peace can not co-exist. They can't live in the same house. Divorce the one from the other. Let go of hatred and you will be on the way toward forgiveness.

Next, remember to treat others the way Christ has treated you. God has forgiven all your sins. He has wiped the slate clean. He remembers them no more. For the sake of Jesus, who shed His blood for you, forgive.

Next, resolve to live the way of life you will live. Some folks live a life of resentment and revenge. They choose to live in hostility house. On the other hand, others choose to live God's way, returning evil with good. Christ-followers have the Holy Spirit in them, empowering them to return evil with good. E. Stanley Jones wrote, "If you give out love to an undeserving person it will be a bright spot on his way to hell."

Next, release your hurt and anger to God and maybe to another worthy of your trust. Friends, honest, candid confession cleanses the soul. It gives us power over hurt, anger, and sin. Confession heals relationships. The bible says, "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" (1John 1:9) When there is a need to confront, confront. But when your purpose is to forgive, don't cast blame, bring up old issues, and try to score points, or set yourself up to win the next round. When you forgive, forgive. Jesus said, "*If your brother sins against you go and show him his fault, if he listens you have won your brother over.*" (Matthew 18:15) If you've harbored something and the other person doesn't know it, and they haven't done anything significant to hurt you, then release them to God alone.

Finally, recommit your life to the way of forgiving love. Begin to do good things for the person who has hurt you and the pain will go away.

Forgiveness will grow in your heart. Love will be restored. Rebuilding trust though will take time. We have to be worthy of trust. Our actions make us worthy of trust. Forgiveness is a gift given. It can not be earned. Trust can't be given. It must be earned.

So, when a repeat offender wants to be forgiven, grant forgiveness. Also talk with them about restoring the trust by changing their behavior or attitudes.

Friends, I believe you came here looking for hope. Forgiveness is that hope for relationships. I believe you want this hope. Will you give hope a try? You will be thankful that you did. (Move to Communion Table)

Our love dare challenge today is not a homework assignment. Today's challenge can be accomplished right here, right now. As we prepare to receive the bread and the cup, take your hands and form a fist. Ask God to reveal someone you need to forgive. It could be a parent, a spouse, a family member, a neighbor, or co-worker. This unforgiveness is what you're clutching right now. When you're ready, release it to God by opening your hands and say quietly out loud, "I forgive you." (1801) let's pray, *Almighty and merciful God, you have shown the depth of your mercy by sending your Son to pay our debt in full. Just as you have forgiven us through the broken body and shed blood of your Son, we too forgive those who have hurt us. Forgive the resentment and bitterness we have harbored*

to long. Thank you that by the stripes of your Son we are healed. Thank-you, God, for destroying the dividing wall of hostility and creating peace through Jesus your Son.

We remembered that on the night when Jesus was betrayed, he took the bread, gave thanks for it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me." We also remember that on the night of his arrest and trial he took the cup, gave thanks for it, and gave it to his disciples saying, "Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you would, in remembrance of me." Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be reconciled with others through the gift of forgiveness. We offer these prayers in the name of Jesus who taught us how to pray saying....