

Be the First – Forgive & Be Forgiven

By Bobby Schuller

When I was in college, I had literally no money. One time on a \$50 bet, which was more money than I'd ever seen in my life, my friends dared me to go to Walmart in only a towel and ask for shampoo, which I did for \$50. That's how little money I had. And while I was in college, there at Oral Roberts University, there was this restaurant across the street called Zito's and they had this amazing pasta. It was called Southwestern chicken pasta. It was just a big bowl of like sloppy, cheesy, spicy pasta with like tortilla chips and chicken in it, but I loved it. It was only \$8, which again was a ton of money back then, but it was like good enough that I could get pretty good eight thousand calorie meal in college.

So I remember one day I went and I got some, and I sat down and I'm all by myself and I ordered this pasta, and the guy said oh you picked a good day to order it. Today is.. I loved this pasta. You don't understand. I loved this pasta, and he said today is the last day we are serving this pasta. And I said why? And he said it's terrible. And I said you know what, I love this pasta and this pasta loves me. I'm going to order one for now and one for the road. So I ate my Southwestern chicken pasta, then I took the second one home.

Now I had a roommate Quinn who was also my best friend who always ate my food. And I told him not to all the time and he still would do it. And so this time I had this Southwestern chicken pasta, the last one in existence, I put it in the fridge so I could have it the next day when it doesn't exist anymore, and I put a big note on it – do not eat Bobby's Southwest chicken pasta, and I left and I went to school the next day. And I came back and I was like walking home like looking forward to it and I got there and the box was there, the note was there, but the pasta was not. He literally ate the pasta, and then put the box back.

Today we're talking about forgiveness. And we're in a series on what it means to bond deeply with others, and let me just say that in our relationships and our friendships with our spouses, our kids, good relationships consist of two people who are good at forgiving one another. We're just going to begin there. Look, doing life people are messed up and messy and make mistakes and we say things we shouldn't say, we have hormones, we get hungry. And I don't know about you, but I am not a nice person. There was one time I was like being curt with Hannah. She goes you need to eat Snickers. And I was like you're right, I do.

And we do things to one another that as we draw closer to each other, we hurt each other. It happens. There is no 100% smooth sailing relationship. Friends, it just does not exist. There are some marriages where people throw dishes and they have knockdown, drag out screaming fights, and there are others where they stonewall and they get

curt and passive aggressive and like don't take the trash out for a week, and things like that. People fight, though. They do. Everybody does it in a different way, but people fight, people argue. Roommates, best friends, spouses, parents, kids, everyone gets on everyone's nerves. Can I get an amen? Everyone gets on everyone's nerves. Everyone does stuff to others that hurts others.

And so we must become, if we want to grow in our relationships, we must become experts at reconciling, at being the bigger person, and especially at being first. Now if you're the reconciler, a lot of times its one person, that next time where it's just like really bad, you're like no, no! I'm not doing it this time. They have to talk to me. I am not doing it. I am not. And I want to just say that to have good relationships means eating crow, setting your pride aside, asking for forgiveness, being the first to forgive, and being overjoyed that you have someone in your life to forgive; that you have someone in your life that will forgive you. That you have someone in your life that is not walked out on you, and is willing to talk to you. And that's what it means to have friends, to have a spouse and to have a family: it means we forgive each other. Can I get an amen? We forgive. And so we can lay our pride aside and be the first.

Now there is this list of warriors when you read second Samuel, it talks about David's mighty warriors and they're all super cool. It's like reading Lord of the Rings. And my favorite one from this list is Eleazar, son of Dodai, the Ahohite who fought of the battle of Pas Dammim and

taunted the Philistines and slayed them many. So this guy in the story, it's true, he's guarding this pass and he's taunting Philistines to come fight him, and he's killed so many bad guys over the course of the day that once they're all dead, and they're all slain, and he's beaten and battered and victorious, like some barbarian or something, holding his sword, his fingers are frozen to his sword because he's been gripping it all day long and fighting with all his heart and everything he has, he can't like let go of the sword.

And this is a metaphor for many of us. That as we are fighting, and many of us have fought the good fight, we stay in fight mode when we don't need to. And many of us are tough people, but we're so used to gripping the sword that when the sword needs to be laid down, it feels unnatural. It hurts to let go. It's painful. It doesn't feel like this is the way my hand's supposed to be, and yet it is. And so much of becoming a disciple of Christ is moving from living life with clenched fists, and clenched teeth, and anger, and judgment, and justice, and instead letting go and becoming the kind of person that sometimes doesn't need to fight anymore; that can receive life of the open hand. You receive, you bless, you embrace, and that's where God wants to get us, and the only way we get there is when we forgive.

So unfreeze your fingers from the sword, and keep fighting the good fight, but don't let that fight spill into your relationships with your

friends and with your family. Lay your pride aside, your ego, and instead embrace compassion, love, mercy, forgiveness.

You see as believers, we receive the forgiveness that we dish out. And we receive the lack of forgiveness that we don't dish out. And this is so present in Jesus' teaching. Forgiveness, mercy, grace, reconciliation is on almost every page of the bible. Indeed, almost everybody when they talk about even becoming a Christian, the central word is forgiveness; the forgiveness of our sins and our reconciling to the Father.

So we don't often notice it, but this is right in probably the most important passage in the bible, the Lord's Prayer which every church, every denomination recite in almost every liturgy all the time. Some of you say the Lord's Prayer once a month, some of you say it once a day! And right there in the Lord's Prayer is the idea that we are forgiven as we forgive others. We say it all the time. I'll read it to you. Matthew chapter 6, it's at the tail end of the Lord's Prayer: "And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." That word "debts" can be offenses, sins, trespasses, things like that, so I want to hang there for a second. "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." Do you realize what you're saying? You're saying, Lord, forgive me in the same way I forgive others. Lord, I'm asking you. Forgive me to the same degree that I forgive other people. That's heavy, isn't it? As somebody said, uh oh. Yes! I'm with you. Totally. Totally. Forgive me to the same degree I forgive others.

“And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.” And the original Lord’s Prayer ends there. There is no Doxology in the bible, the part we add, I think it was from Henry the 8th. Is that right? I think it is, actually. Anyway. So he goes “deliver us from the evil one” and then he doubles down. Just absolute clarity: “For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” Plain as day.

Guys, it is so important that we forgive the sins of others because we have been forgiven of so much. And not only by God, but think about all the ways that your friends, family and others have overlooked. Man, if I had a list of all the times I hurt people because of some stupid thing I said when I was angry, or when I was hungry, or when I was late to Hannah or to my kids or to my parents or my friends, and I think about how gracious and merciful people have been through me in times when I was hurting or not feeling good, and I was wounding other people accidentally, and just getting messy, and I think about how people still love me and how in the midst of that, especially, God forgave all my sins, past, present, future; that every sin is covered in the cross of Jesus Christ, and that I’m called beloved. It’s not like I’m just forgiven, it’s like that you are chosen, you’re blessed, you’re called, that God has a destiny for you; that He’s going to do only great things for you; that He’s not hanging your past over your head and your mistakes. He just loves you;

that that should spurn into us just a deep, deep desire to forgive, to reconcile, to let go.

I want to digress a little bit. Everybody's offended today. It's getting worse and worse, and it's almost like being offended is some strong thing or something. I'm troubled that the more educated someone is, the more they seem to be offended. And I just think whether it's politics or in religion, there's so many people in the faith that are so offended by one another and always angry about every little thing. Being offended does not mean you're strong. Being offended does not mean you're smart. Being offended usually means you're insecure. And when it's a big thing, it makes sense, but so many of us just are like looking to be offended, and we should stop looking to be offended and instead, look to reconcile. Look to have mercy. Look to instruct, to have compassion, to understand our neighbor, to understand people that disagree with us, to follow people on Twitter we disagree with. Life is too good to spend even a second being offended. It's just too good. Enjoy your life. People are offensive, in general. That's just like a law. People are offensive. And some people definitely cross the line and that's true, but I don't know; don't be offended every day. If you're offended every day, it's too much. You get like once a month, okay?

Jesus tells this story. Peter's with Him. And Peter says, Lord, how many times do I have to forgive my neighbor? And then Peter says, how about seven times. Now for Peter, he's bragging, okay? It's not the first

time. Peter's the braggadocious leader of the bunch. But in Jesus' day, rabbis taught you forgive three times. That's the actual number. They pull it from Amos. If somebody hurts you three times, you have to forgive them each time, but the fourth time, you cut them off. You punish, you whatever. So it's three times. So here Peter says how about seven times? Really a holy number. And Jesus says to Peter, not seven times, seventy times seven. That's how many times. In other words, you never stop forgiving. And it's not in the text, but you could almost see Peter being like that's a lot. Like I got to just keep forgiving forever? Just forever. I just have to forgive everybody all the time forever.

And Jesus tells this story, He says once there was a servant, and he owed his king ten thousand talents. Now to put this in perspective, one talent is six thousand denarius. Ten thousand talents is six hundred thousand denarius. In today's terms, it's like millions and millions of dollars. The reason Jesus picks the number ten thousand is that's the largest number in Greek. The word is myriad. It's where we get the expression myriad from. It'd be like say google, which is the largest number in.. just by the way that's how Google got their name. It's the largest number in English is Google. It's a one with a hundred zeroes behind it.

So it's like me saying this guy owed him a bazillion, gazillion dollars. I mean just like more money than there is on earth. He owed him ten thousand talents. And the king, who is a just king, says to this man,

You owe me so much money that you and your whole family are going to prison. And he gets on his knees and he says king, forgive me, please. Just give me more time. I just need more time. And the king has mercy on him. He says I'm not going to give you more time I'm just going to forgive it altogether. That whole debt. That bazillions of dollars that you owe me, I'm just wiping it out. The slate is clean.

Now I don't know about you, but if I had a credit card.. some of you kind of do, but if I had a credit card with a bazillion dollars on it, and Visa just called me up and said you know what, man, we're just wiping it out. Or you bought a house, humungous mortgage and you got way in over your head and they're just like we're just going to wipe that out. You just own your house. I mean I think about, times that a million, how would you feel? I'd feel like a bazillion, mazillion Google dollars. I would feel good. And I would be having the best day of my life. I would be like Ebenezer Scrooge after he sees the three ghosts in the Christmas story, and he's like wishing everybody a happy Christmas and buying turkey's for poor kids; that would be me.

And this guy, instead, he finds someone who owes him, I think it's a hundred denarius, which is like three dollars. And he sees this guy and he says you owe me three dollars! And he begins to strangle him and scream at him, and he orders that the guards have this man, and he says please, just give me more time to pay you back your three bucks. I just need a little time. He says no! Have him thrown into prison. And the

king finds out and says this wicked servant. I forgave him of a million bazillion dollars, and he had his friend thrown into prison over three dollars. You throw him into prison until he pays back every single dollar.

Now Jesus says this is what will happen to the man who is forgiven that doesn't forgive his neighbor. I don't know about you, but I just don't want to mess around with it. I just don't want to mess around with it. I don't understand it completely theologically, but it is just important. Jesus has made it crystal clear that we forgive. That we forgive.

Forgiving is hard in general. Forgiving is really hard when the wound is really deep. Maybe you're here today and you still haven't forgiven that person who wounded you so deeply; who sued you. Who took your business away from you. Who fired you unjustly and ruined your life. Maybe you're here today and you had an abusive dad. You needed a loving dad. You needed a dad who was there for you that hugged you, that tucked you in at night. But he beat you, called you names. Maybe you had a drunk mom who was never there for you and you needed a nurturing, caring, loving, supportive mom. She just didn't care about you. And maybe you're here today, you have or had a violent spouse. Or maybe your kids have done something horrible to you, or your parents, or your brother or sister. They're addicted to drugs and alcohol and they just keep swindling your family and taking money and spending it on drugs, and these wounds are real and they really hurt.

And you ask Lord, should I forgive these people? And the answer is yes. Absolutely. Because you don't deserve to live another day with pain in your heart. You don't deserve to live another day with bitterness, holding a grudge, and the way that it robs your life of freedom and of joy.

Now a lot of times when we talk about forgiveness, we misunderstand what forgiveness really is. And we misunderstand a Christian idea of forgiveness. And before we say clearly what forgiveness is, I want to say what forgiveness is not. And if you want to know more about this, I stole this from my good friend Bill Gaultiere who's not only a believer and a Christian and he's a pastor to pastors, but he's also a PhD in psychology. And if you want to know more about this, you can go to [soulshepherding dot org](http://soulshepherding.org).

But this is what forgiveness is not. Number one: forgiveness is not excusing. It's not saying he did the best he could. In some ways he was a pretty good dad. It's not saying she was just having a bad day. When you forgive, you still feel the pain that was caused to you, and you call it what it was – evil, wrong, hurtful, wounding. Forgiving does not mean you excuse and just say they did the best they could.

Number two: forgiveness is not overlooking. It does not mean pretending as though it's not happening. It's not turning a blind eye and acting as though it doesn't hurt, it's not causing harm. Sometimes that's good. If it's a Facebook post, overlook it, all right? If somebody cuts you off on the freeway or cuts in front of you in line, just overlook that. That's

not a big deal. But the real deep, hurtful stuff, don't just overlook it. Don't turn a blind eye. It's hurting you. Acknowledge that.

So it's not excusing and it's not overlooking, and you know what it's also? Not forgetting. Sometimes we say forgive and forget? It's not forgetting. Sometimes forgetting the pain and the wounds of your past can actually cause them to go to an unconscious place that can continue to cause harm and more pain in your life. So you don't forget it, either. You remember it.

And sometimes forgiveness may not include reconciliation. Doesn't always include reconciliation. It has to happen if you want to reconcile, but there are absolutely times when you shouldn't reconcile with abusive people, harmful people.

And most importantly, and I think if I wanted you to hear anything today, it's this: forgiveness is not deserved. Though God asks us to forgive, the people we forgive don't deserve to be forgiven. In the same way, I didn't deserve to be forgiven of my own sin. I didn't deserve to be forgiven, but good people in my life forgave me. I didn't deserve to be forgiven, but God forgave me and that's why I am who I am today. In other words, forgiveness is a gift. It's a gift. It's right there in the word – forgive. It's generosity. Forgiveness is one of the most generous, merciful, Christ-like, kind things you can do. And it is not deserved. Nobody's entitled to be forgiven. It's a wonderful gift. And you're a wonderful person for forgiving your neighbor.

So forgiveness means that you don't excuse it, you don't pretend that it didn't happen, you don't forget it, it's not deserved but rather you call it what it is. It hurt! It hurt! It was a wound. Maybe it broke you. Maybe it changed years of your life that you can never get back. Don't forget that. Don't sweep that under the rug. That's a way of shame, that's a way of saying I don't deserve those years. I don't deserve good things in my life. You do. And that is why forgiveness is not deserved, but instead it's a wonderful gift. And when we engage in it, we are engaging in generosity of the highest and most beautiful kind.

When we forgive then, we are giving up our right to get someone back and forgiveness is a process. Nobody truly forgives overnight. God can and God does, but He's God. He's a little better at stuff than we are, right? Can I get an amen on that? You're not God. You're a person. And the deeper the wound, the longer the forgiveness takes. And you begin that process by first acknowledging that it was hurtful, acknowledging that what you're doing is a gift, acknowledging that this forgiveness is not deserved, but you choose today to let go of justice. To let go of setting all the scales right. To let go of setting everything right because in the same way that you're forgiven, you're going to forgive others. It's entrusting justice to God and just living in the serenity and freedom of not having to judge. It's giving up your right to get someone back.

And that's why I'm harping on this so much is because the healing really comes when we feel it. You can't heal what you can't feel. And so

you feel the pain. You acknowledge the pain and you choose to forgive. This hurt, but I forgive. This was wrong, but I forgive. I deserved better, but I forgive. I don't have to do this. I choose to do this. I forgive. I forgive. I forgive. I forgive. And you watch that as you say those words and breathe in and out those words you just receive everything you need. Everything you need. Peace, joy, fullness. What was done to you was wrong and evil and hurtful, and never forget that. And yet acknowledge that you have this amazing thing to choose how you'll respond: to forgive. Amen?

Lord, thank you that you forgave us of so much. I just want to pray for everyone under the sound of my voice who has been wounded, hurt and broken, beaten, harmed, Lord, many of us have lost so much of our joy because of what was done to us, so I pray healing in Jesus' name. And I pray you teach us all to forgive. And that you'd be patient with us as we go through a process of entrusting justice to you, amen.