

Forgive Your Neighbor

By Bobby Schuller

Have you ever had a roommate? Years ago, when I was living in Tulsa Oklahoma as a college student, I had literally no money. One of the main ways that I got paid was by doing bets and dares; gambling. Well it wasn't gambling because I knew I could always follow through. I could totally eat that or jump off of that.

One time, Gabe Swaggert, incidentally the grandson of Jimmy Swaggert, who was on our floor and was actually in my wedding, is a good friend, bet me \$50 - actually he got a pool of money together from people on the floor - that I wouldn't go across a street in my towel after getting out of the shower, to Wal-Mart and ask where the shampoo is. There was nothing underneath. I did. I got paid.

And it was during that time, I was at this really C-class Italian restaurant called Zio's in Tulsa. I loved this place and they had this frankly disgusting pasta that I thought was delicious called the Southwestern chicken pasta. I'm pretty sure it was a mish mash of pasta, mayonnaise, cheese slurrp and tortilla chips and processed chicken that was made of meat products.

Anyway, I loved this dish and I was at the restaurant and I ordered this dish, and the guy said 'oh, you picked a good day to order it. Today's the last day we'll be serving it.' And I said why? And he said 'well

apparently people think it's disgusting.' Anyway, I loved it. And so I got an extra bit to go, you know? I'm like give me a second Southwestern chicken. And this was \$14, so for me, this was a lot of money. So I got it to go. I put it in the fridge with a note on it that said "Do not eat. Bobby's last Southwestern chicken pasta ever." And went to class; went through class.

About one o'clock in the afternoon came by, I was starving, I was going home. I'm like at least I've got my pasta. And there it was in the fridge with the note on it, but when I grabbed it, it was lighter than it should be. And I opened it and it was completely empty. My roommate ate the whole thing, and then closed it, left the note on it, and put an empty box, to add insult to injury, back into the fridge.

Today we're going to talk about forgiveness and how we have these moments as roommates, as spouses, as best friends, colleagues, co-workers, in all seriousness, the importance of forgiving people we love. And that guy Quinn, at the time, was my best friend, he was the best man in my wedding, and he could be a pill sometimes. So could I. But to have a good friend, you need to forgive your friends. You need to forgive your family, your siblings. You need to forgive everybody, and that's what we're going to talk about today, that Jesus' teaching on forgiveness to us is a great, great gift.

Every good relationship consists of two people that are good at forgiving. It's true, isn't it? When we live with people and do life with

people, there's just going to be times when we have sometimes little things and sometimes big things, but there's going to be things that we're going to have to forgive and move past in order to have a fruitful, joyful relationship.

Hannah tells this story. Poor Hannah. Grew up with five brothers and no sisters. She was right in the middle, so she had to take care of the little ones and get picked on by the older ones, and in all truth, she was a princess and they all really treated her very well, they still do. But there were moments like this when she was, I think, 14, you know they didn't have a lot of money either. And she had this dress that she bought, and they were on their way to some event, and there were going to be a lot of people there, and so she went and got this dress dry cleaned and paid for it with her own money. And she sat in the back, because there were six kids, when their family went anywhere, they went in those giant like youth group vans, you know? Those wide vans?

And so she was sitting in the back next to her brother Samuel, and they started driving and he was drinking a cup of coffee and she goes Samuel, keep that cup of coffee away from me. I've just got this dress dry cleaned. And as brothers do, he's her older brother, he holds it over her like this and he goes, 'oh, oh, oh, what's going to happen, oh,' and right as he does that, the car hits a speed bump and it goes boom, and coffee goes all over, and poor Hannah.

But we have stories like this don't we of like it seems like a little thing, but it's not, it's a big thing. And there are things like this in life that we get so flustered and frustrated and angry, and you know what, we should. It's good to feel your anger and not bury it. It's good to understand that that wasn't cool, that wasn't nice, that wasn't fair, that wasn't respectful, but even still, after we feel those things that make us angry, our next response should be to train ourselves, not into forgetting or to overlooking or to excusing, but to forgiving. To say that was a bummer, that crossed a line, but I forgive you.

And actually learning to be like Jesus means learning to have that merciful response towards everybody we do life with. God's forgiven you of all of the stuff that you've struggled with in your life – addiction, sin, mess ups, short comings; He still looks at you and loves you. Remember that next time somebody hurts you or crosses the line, that you choose to forgive.

There's no such thing as an easy relationship, did you know that? There's no such thing as an easy friendship. Once that friendship gets closer, the relationship gets harder. There's no such thing as an easy marriage. There's certainly no such thing as easy parenting, am I right parents? And there's no such thing as being an easy son or daughter. You have to deal with your parents. In life, our relationships are difficult, but they're worth it. They require hard work, they require a learning, they require patience, but most of all, they require forgiveness. Learn to

be a forgiving person, and you'll have a lot more joy, and love, and laughter in your home and in your life, and better night's sleep.

Some of us, we can't help it but when someone crosses our line, a spouse or a kid, we lash out more than maybe we should. Or if we don't lash out, we become embittered. Maybe it's the opposite. We stonewall and get cold and calloused towards that person. Stop returning their phone calls for awhile, or stop texting them back because there's this part of us that we just want to like let off some steam. But very often I think this is like, for many of us, we've been so used to fighting that it's almost like we're looking for a fight.

It reminds me of this character in the Bible. This is his name, by the way: Eleazar son of Dodo, the Ahohite at the Battle of Pas-dammim, who struck down the Philistines and taunted them. Okay now just some context here, David had three mighty warriors, and the mightiest of his three warriors was this guy Eleazar. And there's this one battle called the battle of Pas-dammim, and there's legends about it and stuff, where the Philistines and the Hebrews are fighting back and forth, and right in the middle, right in the front is this guy Eleazar and he's just cutting down soldiers left and right, to the point where the Hebrews actually retreat, but these three warriors and David continue to fight and cut down everyone. And at the end, there is a pile of enemy bodies around Eleazar and there he is, just like Eleazar with my sword. Just looking awesome!

And he gets this name, Eleazar Son of Dodo the Ahohite who struck down the Philistines and taunted them.

And the Bible says that at the end, when he was done fighting, he had been fighting so hard, so vigorously for so long, that his fingers froze to his sword. Have you ever had that? Ever held onto something so tight for so long you can't let go anymore? Like your muscles become used to it. And if you're able to relax and open your hand, it almost hurts and creeks and feels weird, and if you open your hands, they want to close again.

I think many of us, in our souls, maybe you're like this. You went through a difficult fight in your life. You had to go through a lot. You had to fight a lot, you had to push through, you had to get through challenges, but now the Lord is saying to you the fight is over. You can put down your sword because the battle has been won. You can forgive. You can forgive and receive all the good gifts from heaven that come when we approach life with the posture of giving. Forgiveness. Forgiveness is generous, isn't it? It's right there in the word: for-give.

You don't have to forgive. Nobody's entitled to your forgiveness. Did you know that? Your forgiveness is a gift, and the Lord is asking you forgive in the same way He's forgiven you.

We say that a lot, don't we. If you've grown up in church, you've probably gotten used to the Lord's Prayer. And there is this one part of the Lord's Prayer that says "forgive us our offenses as we forgive those

who have offended us.” Or “forgive us our trespasses” or “our debts.” Listen to what you’re saying when you say that. You are saying Lord, forgive me to the same extent that I have forgiven others. This is how Jesus teaches us to pray and its honestly kind of scary. Jesus goes on to say “for if you forgive men their sins, the heavenly Father will forgive you of your sins, but if you do not forgive men of their sins, your heavenly Father will not forgive you of your sins.”

Now being from a Reformed tradition, that’s a hard scripture to read. We believe that we’re not saved by works or saved by grace through faith, but there does seem to be this caveat that as we receive forgiveness from the Lord, we sort of like a funnel, allow that forgiveness, compassion, mercy and love to spill out to the people around us and in doing so, we become conduits of God’s mercy, grace and power.

This was a really, really important central theme to Jesus. Not only is Jesus going to become forgiving through the cross and the resurrection Himself but He constantly talks to the disciples about becoming forgiving people. Now there’s one story where Jesus is again teaching on this. In Jesus’ day, rabbis used to teach that you forgive your brother three times. Everybody say three times. See, this is why I like Jewish rabbis. Very clear. You forgive a guy one time, you forgive him two times, three times, fourth time, nope. He’s gone. Its crystal clear, right? Rules. Them’s the rules. You got one forgiveness left. Use it wisely.

So in this world, its commonly taught that you forgive three times, and so Jesus, here He is teaching on forgiving, and He's talking about pursuing your brother who you've hurt or who's hurt you, and just not giving, not stopping before you've reconciled with your brother. And then Peter sort of steps in and he says, rabbi, how many times should I forgive my neighbor? Remember, three times is the number. He goes how about seven times, like you know what I mean? Like aren't I great?

And Jesus famously looks at Peter and he says, 'Peter, you must forgive your brother seventy times seven.' Now Jesus is not saying forgive 490 times. Some of you are like I'm so close. My roommate is at 486; got 4 left. Seventy times seven means you just always do it. You just keep forgiving. You never, never, never, never stop forgiving. Why? Because it's so good for you. It's such a gift to you.

And when Jesus says seventy times seven, when He says basically you in a rabbinic way, just always keep forgiving no matter what. It's like this – like from the people that are listening to Him: are you serious? I'm not a doormat. I'm not going to let people just push me around. If I keep doing that, they're going to use me, abuse me. They're going to cross my boundaries. They're going to take advantage of me.

Jesus then goes right into this story, and He says for the kingdom of heaven is like a servant who is forgiven of talents. Now in this story, Jesus says that there's this king, and the king is reconciling his debts and his books, and he begins to collect from people who he's lent money

to or whatever. And there's this one servant who owes him ten thousand talents. Now a talent is six thousand Denarius, for all you accountants in the room, and a Denarius is one day's work so one Denarius is roughly twenty years of work. He owes the man ten thousand of those.

Furthermore, if you're reading this in Greek, in Jesus' day, the largest number that existed in the Greek language was the word myriad. It means ten thousand. And we have that similar kind of word, googol. Googol's the largest number in English, incidentally. It's a one with a hundred zeroes behind it. I digress.

So he says there's the largest number ever, of the largest increment of money ever, and this is what the man owes the king. You might as well have said a trillion dollars. It's just an infinite.. millions and millions and millions of dollars. And the king says to this servant, you wicked servant, you haven't paid me back, I'm going to throw you into prison. You and your wife and your kids. And the man falls on his knees and begs the king just give me more time! It's a ridiculous thing to say. A theologian from Biola did the math and figured it would take this guy 200,000 years to pay back this money.

We say that, don't we. Try and work out our salvation, try and make recourse for our sin, for the things that we've done. And we just say give me more time! I'll work it out! And this is what he does, he falls on his knees before the king. Just give me a little more time. And the king, it says he was filled with compassion and mercy for his servant.

And he looked at him and joyfully said, it's all forgiven. The slate is clean. You don't owe me anything. You are free, and be on your way. Can you imagine what that would have felt like to be forgiven of a debt of a trillion dollars or something?

And you'd think that this man would be like Scrooge McDuck, or Ebenezer Scrooge, just full of joy, just giving things away. But Jesus goes on to say that on his way home, he ran into one of his neighbors who owed him a hundred Denarius. Now again a hundred Denarius is still a lot of money. That's a hundred days work. I don't know why the NIV says a few dollars. It's not. It'd be like ten thousand dollars. Right? That's a lot of money. Somebody owes you ten grand you deserve to collect on it. But considering what he's just been forgiven, it's really not.

And he sees this man and he goes, you, you owe me. And the man falls on his knees, it's the same thing this guy did, falls on his knees before his neighbor, and says just give me more time. He doesn't say wipe it out, he doesn't say forgive it, he says just give me more time. I'll pay you back. I just need more time. And it says this man grabs him by the neck and strangles him and says no, you are going to prison till you pay back every last penny. So he doesn't even give him more time, throws him in prison and the other servants see this and they tell the king. And they go to the king and they tell him this story, and the king calls in his servant and he says I forgave you of ten thousand talents, and you wouldn't forgive your neighbor of a hundred Denarius and he

throws him into prison. And he says this is the way the Father will treat you if you do not forgive your brother and your sister. That's heavy, isn't it.

What we miss when Jesus says that is yes, there is punishment for not forgiving, but we also forget that this is how the Father will treat you in your sin. When we come before the Father with this huge debt, with all these things that have happened to us, and we beg for forgiveness, He wipes the slate clean! He's forgiven you, He's forgiven you of everything that you've ever done, everything that's been done to you, He's called you blessed, He's called you above and not beneath, He's opening the windows of heaven to pour out blessing on you. He's got nothing but good to pour out onto you. God is doing so much for you, we shouldn't spend one more minute being offended or unforgiving or holding a grudge. He's forgiven us, He loves us, life is too good to spend being offended all the time, am I right? Life is too good to be bitter and to hold onto our anger towards others, and to hold our wrath against others, and to hang others past over their head. Today, we forgive. And when we forgive, we invite healing, joy, prosperity, life, good relationships, happiness. That's the kind of environment that forgiveness creates.

You might say to me, Bobby, you don't understand what he did to me. You don't understand what she did to me and the horribleness in her heart and the way she did it. Maybe you've been betrayed, maybe you've been sued, maybe you've been abused. You have something from your

past and like Eleazar, you've learned to become strong and to fight, and you've beat all your enemies, but friend, there are no enemies left. Put your sword down. Forgive. God's forgiven you, and He's going to keep forgiving you. Forgive your neighbor seventy times seven. Do I forgive those people? Absolutely. Not because they deserve it, they don't. Not because they've earned it, they haven't. And not even because they've asked for it. Many of them haven't, or some of them are dead. You can still forgive them.

For some of us, we have a misunderstanding of what forgiveness means, so this sounds painful, almost like we have to pretend like nothing bad happened. And that's not the truth at all.

I talked with my mentor, who's also a therapist, Bill Gaultiere, a Christian therapist for pastors, about this years ago, and used this with permission, but here are some of the things that he and I would say forgiveness is not, before we talk about what it is.

Number one: forgiveness is not excusing. It's not looking and saying well my dad did the best he could, or my husband, or my wife. They did the best they could. Or she just wasn't well at the time. She was really struggling with this. It's not that.

Number two: forgiveness is not overlooking. It's not saying oh, I'll just pretend this isn't happening right now. It'll just make things easier. I'll just look the other way.

Forgiveness and this is one of the most important: forgiveness is not forgetting. Forgetting is one of the worst things you can do when you've been hurt. You can't forget anyway. When you forget something that was bad that was done to you, all you do is put it in that unconscious place of your body where it can do you harm. In fact, a biggest part about forgiving is remembering. Remember how bad it hurt. Remember how harsh it was. Remember how unfair it was. Write it down. Think about it. Meditate on the pain and the suffering that it caused you, and then look at it and forgive it. Forgive. Forgive. Forgetting can actually make it worse because you can't heal what you won't feel. We all know that, don't we. So it's not pretending like nothing happened.

And because of that, forgiveness may not include reconciliation. Boundaries are an important part of every relationship and sometimes, if the line is crossed, forgiving doesn't mean necessarily you're going to be best friends again, or that you're going to be married again, or that you're going to be going whatever. So it doesn't always mean reconciliation because you have to have boundaries as well. In fact did you know the word holy means set apart. Another way of saying holy means unique. You're a unique person and you have to say no to some things in order to be truly you.

And most of all, forgiveness is a process. God can forgive right away and overnight because He's God. You're not God, right? Neither am I. Forgiveness takes time. The harder the pain was, the longer it may

take to forgive, so be patient with yourself but continue to go down the path of forgiving the person that hurt you.

You might say well Bobby, you said a bunch of things that forgiveness is not. Well what is forgiveness? Forgiveness is entrusting justice to God. Forgiveness is saying this person hurt me, this person crossed the line, this person wounded me, but I'm going to let it go. I'm not going to forget it, I'm not going to say it was okay, but I'm going to wish the best for this person. I'm going to pray that God would bless them. I'm going to ask that God would turn their heart around, that they would find His light and His life and His goodness. And then I'm going to believe that they'll be better and not hurt people. And I'm going to put my sword down. You see when you do that, you become less offend able and it becomes easier to not get so upset at your husband for not putting the toilet seat down.

When you forgive the big things it becomes easier to forgive the little things because all of our pain is in like a spider web – it's all connected. So that even when you touch a little thing that seems like not a big deal, sometimes it can move everything in your past and it becomes like when you bump into a spider web and it bounces back and forth. So when we forgive the old stuff from twenty, thirty, fifty years ago, it helps us to be more forgiving and compassionate today.

Friend, you can forgive your neighbor, you can forgive the guy that took your parking spot in the church lot out here. As we forgive people,

we're going to just watch as we invite blessing into our life, and to that, I'm going to pray a blessing over you. Would you close your eyes? Take a moment to meditate on the painful experience you had. I bless you.

Every part of your life is lovable and loved by God. The angry parts of you are loved by God and loveable. You can feel angry and frustrated and hurt and you ought to. It's unfair what was done to you. You've been through a lot, but today, the Lord is asking you not to forgive.. or not to forget, but to forgive so forgive. Today the Lord is asking you to forgive and to bless and to enter into new life.

And so Lord I just pray in Jesus' name that you'd break every chain, and renew the hearts and minds of everyone under the sound of our voice. Thank you that you love us and you've forgiven us and you just have so much mercy and compassion towards us. Lord, we love you, it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.