

*“Getting Unstuck So We Can Live Free!”**Pastor Randy Orndorff**“Getting Unstuck From Unforgiveness”**July 29, 2018*

Key Texts: Ephesians 4:31-32

**I. Introduction: Forgiveness, No Easy Matter**

You’ve probably noticed that as each Sunday passes we seem to be tackling tougher issues which tend to keep us stuck. Today we look at getting unstuck from unforgiveness. I believe unforgiveness is one of the toughest issues any of us have to face. Of course, that starts with our own personal lives. There are plenty of things I have had to ask God’s forgiveness for and plenty of people I have had to ask forgiveness of. People have asked me to forgive them. That always catches me a bit off guard, but for the most part I find that I’m pretty quick to offer forgiveness because it takes a person a lot of courage and humility to come and say, “I’m sorry. I messed up. Will you forgive me?” I know because I had to do that last week.

I’ve also learned when I mess up, or sin, or misspeak that I tend to really beat myself up and then sometimes it’s the Holy Spirit convicting my spirit telling me what I said, did, thought, or watched was wrong. That’s where we need to go ahead and get right with God, repenting of our wrongdoing, and then listening to God so that we can take appropriate next steps to seek forgiveness from others. Hopefully, we then learn from our mistakes so that we avoid that sin, or that wrong doing next time.

**II. Reasons We Often Stay Stuck**

Do you ever wonder why we often stay stuck? Stuck in our bad habits, stuck in our fears, stuck in a bad self-image or inflated ego, stuck in our dysfunction or our dysfunctional family, or in the pains and rejections of our past? Do you ever wonder why we get in ruts and stay there?

There are a number of reasons.

**1. We Accept Our Situation**

First is we just accept our situation. We accept our lot in life. We give up trying to be better or in trying to improve ourselves or our situations. And yet we say we believe in a God who helps us take away the old and helps make all things new. I think of the woman in the New Testament who had a bleeding issue for years. One day, when Jesus walked past, she reached up thinking, “If I can just touch the hem of his garment.” She did, and Jesus felt power go out of him and she was healed. She just didn’t accept her situation. She reaches out for Jesus. (Matthew 9:18-26) Maybe it’s time we tried reaching out for Jesus.

**2. We Become Creatures of Habit**

We also become creatures of habit. Our daily routine, for better or worse, feels safe and secure and at least we feel like we’re in control. We choose our daily routine and say to ourselves, “No one is going to mess with my routine.” And yet scripture tells us to “trust in the Lord with all our hearts, to acknowledge Him in all our ways and God will make our paths straight.” (Prov 3:5-6) We try to stay in control instead of allowing God to be in control, to help get us unstuck so we can live free. We get set in our ways and, honestly, we don’t want to change. And yet, the Bible encourages us to grow and learn as disciples of Jesus Christ.

**3. We Want To Avoid Risk**

Let me give you one more reason we stay stuck. Because most of us want to avoid risk at all cost. To go and seek forgiveness of someone is a great risk because they might just look at you with anger in their eyes, with hair raised on their neck, steam blowing from their ears, and with clenched fists say, “No Way!” That is always a possibility.

If you never ask for forgiveness, or you are not willing to try to forgive someone, know what you'll stay? Stuck. You'll live in the hurt and that's not living in faith. You'll stay in a safe cocoon, but in staying in that safe cocoon you will never really live.

### **III. Thoughts On Forgiveness**

It was Benjamin Franklin who said, "How few there are who have courage enough to own their faults, or resolution enough to mend them."

Jesus said, "But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father in heaven will not forgive your sins." (Matthew 6:15)

Paul says the same in our text today concerning how we are to live. "Forgive each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (Eph 4:32)

### **IV. How Do We Get Unstuck From Unforgiveness?**

So, we see why we might stay stuck. How do we get unstuck? Let's face it, there are countless people we pastors encounter, whom our Stephen Ministers encounter, who you likely encounter who have been mistreated, victimized, and offended. There are plenty of stories of betrayal and heartache. Stories that will wreck you when you hear them.

Here's what we need to realize. Relational rifts extract energy and life from us. They take up head space and heart space. They hang over us like a dark cloud.

We sometimes think that it will take too much time and energy to set things right and think "I'll just move on". That only leaves a broken path of desolation in its wake.

Know what Jesus did right in the middle of being wronged? As he hung there on the cross he prayed, "Father forgive them for they know not what they are doing." (Luke 23:34) Jesus forgave those who beat, tormented, mocked, and killed him. And Jesus forgives us. Your accepting that forgiveness may just be the most liberating and freeing thing you can do for yourself.

I can only say being forgiven, forgiving others and learning to forgive myself have been some of the most spiritually intense moments in my life. When that weight on your mind and heart gets removed, maybe the tears flow, when that sin is released there is a freedom that comes that empowers you to live life and to do relationships in a whole new way.

You can grow closer to God, your family your friends, your spouse, your children—everyone.

And once you experience God's forgiveness in your life it becomes much easier to forgive others or seek forgiveness from others. It's hard to offer something you have not experienced in your own life.

When Paul says, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger and brawling and slander, and every form of malice", which is "the intention or desire to do evil or ill will", I think, how can one get rid of all this stuff, and how can a person be kind and compassionate to others unless we do experience forgiveness and learn to forgive others as God has forgiven us? I do not think we can. Forgiveness is at the heart of why Jesus died. Unforgiveness is what keeps us stuck, or even trapped.

### **V. Letting Small Offenses Go**

Now it is also true some folks get offended by the smallest of things and want to put people on the carpet for the smallest of things because they take things the wrong way. Minor irritations are going to happen to us all. We need some spiritual maturity and resilience not to be angered or provoked when the minor

irritations of life come our way. Can we overlook the small speed bumps and forgive minor things without making mountains out of molehills? I think, if we have the grace of God filling our hearts; if we take time each day and pray and read God's word, then we can begin to see things in its proper perspective.

Here's the key: In moments when things don't go your way, or something isn't said just the way you wish it had been said, the condition of your heart is revealed for all to see. How do you react? Or do you respond graciously?

Here's what I know. If I am allowing myself to be offended too easily it is a clear indicator that I am a spiritually and emotionally depleted. Think, "What do I need to do to refill my bucket which will allow God's grace to flow more freely in my heart?"

## VI. Dealing With The Deeper Wounds

There are deeper wounds though. Things happen to us that cause pain. Things that truly need resolution and healing. Broken promises, lies, betrayals, infidelity, and abuse (verbal and physical and mental). Angry words hurled. There are murders, drunk drivers killing loved ones, bullying. What is your deeper wound? What wounds have you caused? Some of these wounds cause us to want to seek revenge. Some make us want to seek justice. Unfortunately, justice alone never leads to relational peace. Is there a place for justice? Yes. At the end of the day, we still must forgive. And when wounded deeply, forgiveness is not a simple process. We have to fully acknowledge what has been done to us, grieve over what has been lost, and yet eventually let the other person off the hook. Romans 12:17-19 tells us, "Do not take revenge, but leave room for God's wrath. 'It is mine to avenge, I will repay', says the Lord"

We release them and let them go, not for our sake, but for their own and for Christ.

I'd never offer you a quick fix or to try to minimize anyone's pain. The truth is, forgiveness in God's time is the only door to healing and freedom and to ultimate releasing of our pain.

## VII. 5 Steps That Lead to Forgiveness and Reconciliation

There are five steps from Matthew 18 that seem to be steps that help lead us to places of forgiveness. Many of you know these. It begins with:

1. Go! You go and take that first step in making reconciliation. Don't wait for a person to come to you. That's the risk we spoke of earlier. Matthew 18:15 says, "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault." Do so after prayer and be gracious, but direct. They may not even know what they said or did, or they might. Have that crucial conversation.
2. Go alone. Don't take a posse! Don't talk to ten other people before you go! "Do you know what Randy did?" Go and take the offense to the person directly. I can't prove this, but most of the time you'll catch a person completely off guard and they not even realize what they did. Or they may have been thinking about it too and will be glad for the conversation.
3. Go with the intent to reconcile the relationship. Go with the intent to forgive. Matthew 18:16 says "If they listen to you, you have won them over." Watch going with a bitter, angry, malice-filled spirit. I promise you, it will not turn out well. Talk to a trusted Christian friend, practice what you'll say the how you'll say it. Go to set things right and to restore the relationship. (If you're attending 9:29 and want to learn more, go to the Flock Sunday School class after the service in room 203)

Most relational breakdowns can be restored, and Jesus says in Matthew 18:16 if the person does not respond well the first time, then you might need to take a trusted, mutual friend and try again. And if that does not work Jesus actually says in verse 17, "If they refuse to listen, tell it to the church".

We don't do that very often no matter how conservative or liberal the congregation. Most will work it out before reaching this point and be restored or they'll leave.

4. Go Now. Go talk to the person you are thinking about today. Make the phone call. Drive to someone's house. Go and get it worked out. It's an incredible God moment when we actually live into God's word and reconcile with God, others and ourselves as soon as possible.
5. Let It Go! Lastly, Let it Go! Lee Anne shared this last week in getting unstuck from past pains and rejections. She, in her point #4, spoke about the need to forgive.

Today, we've tried to lay out the biblical process in forgiving others or in seeking forgiveness. Sometimes we've had a role to play in the relational rift. And then sometimes we can do everything right, but the other person will not reconcile. They want to hold on to the anger and bitterness and the grudge. They don't want to fix it.

Paul says this, "As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." We cannot control other people's responses. If you and I do our best, if we're intentional, if we really try and the other person will not reconcile, then we have to let it go. If the relationship is restored, you can give God the glory. If it cannot, despite your best efforts, move on with your life. Just remember you never know how God will work in another person's life or the timing of that. Prayer does make a difference. Let it go!

### **VIII. Does Forgiveness Seem Impossible?**

It might be that, at this moment, forgiveness today seems impossible. Can you stay open to the possibility of forgiveness? It's like Mark 9:24, "Lord, I believe; help me overcome my unbelief." That can translate. "Lord I forgive, help me with my unforgiveness." Sometimes we have to grieve our loss before we can forgive. But someday forgiving those who wronged you will open up a path so you can get unstuck to a place of hope, healing, and freedom. To a place of "God forgive them, for they know not what they do."

### **X. Closing Prayer**

Let us Pray:

God, first off, thank you for forgiving me. Help me be right with you. Thank you, that while I was yet a sinner, Jesus died for me. And God help me have the courage to follow Your Word and to forgive others just, as in Christ, you have forgiven me. And on those deeper wounds, help me not have the desire to exact revenge, or cocoon up. Help me give up my desire for control and allow You to work in my life. Give me wisdom, give me courage, to take a small or a big step today. I'll trust you and do my best, that as far as it depends on me, to live at peace with all people.

Amen.