

Sermon Highlights of Nov. 10, 2024 Message by Pastor Joe

FORGIVING AS WE HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN

As the holiday season approaches, many of us prepare to gather with family and friends. While these gatherings can be filled with joy, they can also bring us face-to-face with unresolved tensions and past hurts. There are no lasting relationships without forgiveness.

The Challenge We Face

Many of us have experienced deep wounds and betrayals, leading us to question how to forgive those who hurt us. It's common to feel that forgiveness should be contingent upon the offender's acknowledgment and apology. However, Jesus challenges this notion, teaching that an unforgiving heart can obstruct our relationship with God and hinder the abundant life He desires for us.

The Heart of Forgiveness

But forgiveness is a cornerstone of Christian discipleship and is central to the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6. Jesus teaches us to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." This prayer is not just about seeking forgiveness from God but also about extending forgiveness to others. It is a call to live in the freedom and abundance that Jesus offers, unencumbered by the weight of an unforgiving heart.

What Forgiveness Is Not

Forgiveness is not about enabling harmful behavior, rescuing someone from the consequences of their actions, or putting ourselves at risk. It is not about minimizing the offense or pretending it didn't happen. Instead, forgiveness is about releasing the debt, letting go of the moral obligation created by the offense, and freeing ourselves from the burden of resentment and bitterness.

How Can I Forgive?

Forgiveness is both a decision and a process. It begins with a conscious choice to let go of the hurt and the moral obligation that was created by that person's offense. When we forgive, we allow life-draining emotions like bitterness and cynicism to be replaced by peace and freedom. Research has shown that forgiveness can lead to improved mental and physical health, reducing anxiety, depression, and stress. God understands this and so He tells us, "don't." He says, don't hurt yourself by harboring an unforgiving heart. Your inability or unwillingness to forgive will block your way toward the abundant life Jesus came to give you.

Practical Steps to Forgive

Identify the Offense: Write down who hurt you, what they did, and how it affected you. Be specific in acknowledging the pain.

Make a Decision: Choose to release the person from the "debt" they owe you. Use the same measure of forgiveness you want God to use for your offenses. Allow God to take that offense and have it either be paid for at the cross or in eternity.

Commit to the Process: Resist the urge to replay the hurt in your mind. And avoid bringing up the offense to others or yourself or even that person, unless it benefits the relationship.

Conclusion

Forgiveness is a powerful act of grace that reflects God's heart. It is not just about freeing the other person from moral debt they created when they harmed us, it's also about liberating ourselves from the relational "baggage" that accumulates in our hearts... When we forgive we align ourselves with God's will and that opens the door to His abundant life. Let us embrace forgiveness this holiday season, allowing it to transform our hearts and relationships.

May we all find the courage to forgive as we have been forgiven, experiencing the deep peace that comes from living in the freedom of God's grace.

Call to Action

God the Father, can through Christ Jesus, give you the power to extend to that person genuine forgiveness. Today is the day to allow God's Spirit to show you the way to do life the Jesus way.