

**Sermon – The Healing of Forgiveness**  
**Sunday September 8, 2024**

How many of you would consider yourself handy?

You fix leaky faucets, paint walls and unclog drains. You repair drywall, refinish furniture and install light fixtures.

Show of hands again, how many handy people do we have? Good. Now I know who to call when I need help. Because I am definitely not a handy person.

When Joanne and I got married, we moved into our home that was thankfully new because it meant I didn't have to fix anything. I naively believed this would go on forever and Jo would never find out how incapable I am at fixing things.

But that wasn't meant to be. Because over the years, things started to break down. Our air conditioner stopped working during a heat wave. Our roof shingles flew off during a windstorm. Our windows started to mold and form condensation.

Now all this happened, not because we were doing anything crazy to our house. It happened because over time, things will break down - it's not a matter of if, but when.

And what I learned is that when things do break down, if I want things to go well, if I want to enjoy my house, if I don't want things to get worse, then I need to fix the problem when something gets broken.

Now I'm not here to talk about home repairs. I'm probably the last person you should take advice from on that subject. But I am here to talk about relationships.

Because just like your home, over time, your relationships will break down – it's not a matter of if but when. Whether it's a relationship with your friend, your classmate or your neighbour. Whether it's a relationship with your colleague, your partner or your spouse. Eventually things will break down.

- You'll hurt and blame each other
- You'll argue and disagree.
- You'll withdraw and disengage.

When your house breaks down, you can call a contractor or look up a YouTube video.

But who do you go to when your relationship breaks down? How do you repair the relationship? How do you address the hurt? How do you heal the anger?

We're wrapping up our series, *Navigating Relationships: Wisdom from the Book of Proverbs*. We kicked off the series by talking about how we were created for relationships. You and I were created in the image of a relational God and so we need relationships to thrive. When our relationships are healthy, they're life-giving and a source of joy.

But because of the Fall, our hearts are curved in on themselves. We look out for our own interests. We hurt each other. And as a result, our relationships are often a source of frustration and pain.

So this summer, we've been studying the Book of Proverbs to learn God's wisdom to help us navigate our relationships. In this series we've looked at:

- The Power of Words
- The Gift of Listening
- The Restraint of Self-Control
- The Selflessness of Humility
- The Benefit of Loving Rebuke
- The Prudence of Discretion
- The Importance of Keeping Good Company

If you missed any of these messages, we got you. Just go on to our website where you can watch them.

But today, we're concluding our series by talking about forgiveness. Because eventually our relationships will break down – it's not a matter of if but when. So what do you do when your relationships get broken? How do you address the hurt? How do you deal with the anger? How do you move forward?

The Book of Proverbs acknowledges that you will get hurt in your relationships and when you do, you'll get angry.

**Do not testify against your neighbor without cause—  
would you use your lips to mislead?**

**<sup>29</sup> Do not say, "I'll do to them as they have done to me;  
I'll pay them back for what they did." (Proverbs 24:28-29)**

King Solomon who wrote the Book of Proverbs is describing a situation where people have hurt each other and the relationship's been broken. But notice, what kind of language does he use here? He's using financial language – did you see it?

*I'll pay them back for what they did.* In other words, they took something from me so I'm going to take it back. This is financial language.

You know who does the same thing? Jesus. In the Lord's Prayer, he teaches us to pray:

**And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors. (Matthew 6:12)**

Both Solomon and Jesus use financial language to describe broken relationships. Why do they do this? We don't often think in these terms, but whenever someone hurts you, there's a sense that they've taken something from you and so there's a debt.

What are some things that have been taken from you?

- Maybe someone took away your trust and your dignity.
- Maybe someone took away your security and your self-esteem.
- Maybe someone took away your dreams and your best years.

Whenever a relationship's been broken, whenever someone's been hurt, the Bible uses financial language to describe this. Because something's been taken from you – there's a debt that someone needs to repay.

So what do you do? Many of us walk around with a ledger sheet that details these debts. We look at people and say, *You owe me*. But here's the problem. In many cases, they can't pay you back anyway. How can someone pay you back for the damage that's been done?

But we don't care - we hold on to that debt. We try to collect on it. But here's the problem with that approach: **If you keep waiting to collect on the debt, your heart will only grow bitter.**

**Hatred stirs up conflict,  
but love covers over all wrongs. (Proverbs 10:12)**

The word hatred here refers to the bitterness in your heart when you don't deal with the hurt. It's what happens when you:

- Dwell on the pain.
- Hold on to grudges.
- Root for the other person to fail.

The Apostle Paul describes it in his letter to the Ephesians.

**Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. (Ephesians 4:31)**

This is what bitterness will do to you, says Paul. And he uses two two-word groupings to show us.

The first two-word grouping here is *rage and anger*. Rage and anger are *internal* conditions.

- The Greek word for *rage* refers to a white heat. It's when your bitterness festers and your hatred towards someone becomes white hot.
- The Greek word for *anger* refers to a settled condition. It's when the bitterness settles and you see the world through the filter of your anger and cynicism.

Have you ever known someone like this? They're never happy because they can't let go of the past. They're always angry and irritable because they find fault with everyone and everything. Do you know someone like this? Would someone describe YOU like this?

The second two-word grouping is *brawling and slander*. These are *external* actions. This is what people DO when they're filled with bitterness. They rage and vent. They get mean and violent.

Do you know where this happens a lot? Social media. Now social media can be a great way to connect with people but it's also where people feel like they can unleash all their bitterness.

- Hinting at their frustrations through passive-aggressive comments.
- Detailing every grievance with people, groups and society at large in long emotional rants.
- Leaving angry comments and engaging in heated conversations.

Where does this anger come from? It comes from the bitterness in our heart. Because when you get hurt and you keep waiting to collect on the debt, your heart will only grow bitter. You say:

**“I’ll do to them as they have done to me;  
I’ll pay them back for what they did.” (Proverbs 24:29)**

But notice the irony. You think bitterness will protect you but it actually harms you. It twists you and turns you into what you hate most.

For years, there was a wound I had experienced from someone and I didn’t know how to let it go. It didn’t involve any abuse or major trauma. But it did leave deep emotional wounds. It took away my sense of trust, my confidence and my emotional well-being.

I became bitter. I would hold on to those one or two memories and struggle to have a close relationship with that person. I was miserable because bitterness poisons your soul.

Bitterness damages you physically. Studies have shown that bitterness increases blood pressure and the risk of heart attack. It affects your sleep patterns and appetite.

Bitterness damages you mentally. It leads to depression and anxiety. It impacts your self-esteem and confidence.

But do you know where you really see the destructive power of bitterness? In your relationships. Not just your relationship with the person who hurt you – that’s pretty obvious to see. But do you realize that bitterness damages *all* your relationships?

Listen to these words from Christian author Robert Mulholland Jr.

**When we have been wronged by another, that wrong becomes a festering sore, a developing cancer in our soul, that not only degrades our relationship with the one who wronged us but also degrades *all other relationships*.**

**Having been deeply wounded in one relationship, we become hypersensitive and defensive in *all other relationships* to ensure that we are not hurt in that way again. The resentment and bitterness we nurture in our spirit against the one who abused us becomes a poison that pervades *all other relationships*. (Robert Mulholland Jr.)**

Have you ever lashed out at someone and didn’t know why? Has your anger ever been disproportional to the situation?

Why is that? It’s because you’re still holding on a debt. The person who took something from you may not even be aware of this. They might not even be alive anymore. But as long as you hold on to that debt, you will try to collect on it – if not from the person who hurt you, then from the people closest to you.

Do you see why bitterness is so toxic? It chains you to the person who hurt you. It keeps you stuck in the past. It keeps you from trusting people. It robs you of your joy.

And while you’re stewing in bitterness, the person you’ve given power of your life to, doesn’t even know it. Like when you give someone the silent treatment because you’re angry at them but they don’t even notice.

Someone once said: **Bitterness is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.**

So how do you free yourself from the bitterness? How do you heal from the hurt and anger?

The answer is YOU FORGIVE.

**Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. <sup>32</sup> Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Ephesians 4:31-32)**

Some people think that forgiveness means forgetting what someone has done to you – you know... *forgive and forget*. But that's not in the Bible.

The prophet Isaiah says that God forgives us and remembers our sins no more. But he's not saying that God erases those memories from his mind. He's saying that God chooses not to bring them up or identify us with our sins.

Some people think that forgiveness requires the other person to want to be forgiven. But that's not forgiveness, that's reconciliation. It takes two people to reconcile. But how many does it take to forgive. One. So even if the other person doesn't want it or ask for it, you can still forgive them.

Some people think that forgiveness means restoring the relationship. And in many cases it can lead to that, and when that happens it's a beautifully redemptive thing. But there are also times when restoring that relationship isn't safe or wise to do.

For example, if someone abuses you, you need to forgive them. But does that mean you need to restore your relationship with them? No. Because you still need healthy boundaries - forgiveness is given but trust must be earned.

So what is forgiveness?

**Forgiveness is choosing to cancel the debt.** It's saying, That person hurt me, that person took something from me and I might not get it back. But I'm choosing to let it go, I'm choosing to cancel the debt – they don't owe me anymore.

Many people don't know how to forgive because they haven't named what's been taken. They're just angry and hurt and they don't know why.

But to forgive someone, you need to identify what they took, you need to identify the debt. And then you need to cancel that debt and let it go. And when you're tempted to pick up that debt again, you need to let it go again. You need to say, *They don't owe me anymore*.

**A person's wisdom yields patience;  
it is to one's glory to overlook an offense. (Proverbs 19:11)**

I know what you're thinking. Many of you are saying, Someone hurt me and I've been living with this hurt for years. I'm just supposed to let them off the hook? I'm just supposed to forgive them? That's not fair. Why should I forgive them?

Do you want to know why? Your Heavenly Father loves you so much and he sees how not forgiving is hurting you.

- He sees the bitterness destroying you.
- He sees the bitterness damaging your relationships.
- He sees the bitterness keeping you from being the person you were meant to be.

And so he says, *You need to forgive. Forgiveness isn't for the other person, it's for you. It's so that you can experience my healing, it's so that you can experience my freedom, it's so that you can experience the power of my love.*

Someone once said, **Forgiveness is setting a prisoner free only to find out that the prisoner was you. (Lewis Smede)**

There's also another reason Jesus tells us to forgive. He knew that something was going to happen that was going to change everything. He knew that when he went to the cross to die for your sins and mine, we would lose our right to refuse to forgive.

You see, Jesus knows all about us.

- He knows how selfish we can be.
- He knows how we use everyone and everything (including God) to serve our own purposes.
- He knows how we've hurt and betrayed the people closest to us.
- He knows how we've fallen into temptation
- He knows how we live secret lives.

Do you realize that Jesus knows all of that? And do you know what he did? He forgave us anyway. He came into the world he created only to be rejected. He was betrayed and abandoned. He was tortured and mocked. He was nailed to a cross where he died.

Why did he do that? He did it for love. He did it for you. He did it so that your debt could be cancelled, so that your sins could be forgiven, so that you could live the life you were meant to live.

Jesus told a parable about a servant who owed his master \$5M. But this servant couldn't repay the debt so he begs for mercy. And his master forgives the debt. Then the man's servant comes to him because he owes him \$5. So his servant also couldn't repay the debt so he begs for mercy.

What do you think this man does? This man who was forgiven \$5M and is asked to forgive a debt of \$5? He refuses to forgive the debt. The master finds out about this and is furious. So he throws his servant into prison and has him tortured until he pays back his debt.

Why does Jesus tell this parable? It's because he wants us to know that when we refuse to forgive others, we fail to recognize the massive debt we owed God but he forgave us.

Did we deserve it? Of course not. We deserved death. But instead Jesus gave us mercy and grace.

- Mercy is not giving someone what they deserve.
- Grace is giving someone what they don't deserve.

On the cross, Jesus gave us mercy and grace not just for our own sake but also so we could give mercy and grace to others. On the cross, Jesus forgave us, not only so we could be forgiven but also so we could forgive others and bring the redemptive power of his healing love into our broken world.

Maybe you're still thinking, But God, you don't know what they've done! Yes I do. And I also know what you've done. And I forgive you.

You see, God isn't asking you to die for your enemy. He's simply asking you to cancel their debt against you. That's why in light of God's love, in light of what Jesus did, in light of the cross, you and I are required to forgive.

This doesn't mean you can forgive someone just like that. First, you need to pray and ask for God's help because only God can help you to forgive. But you also need to do your part.

- You need to walk through painful memories and hurts;
- You need to identify what was taken from you;
- You need to choose to cancel that debt. They don't owe me anymore.

At Cornerstone, we run a powerful program that can help. **Freedom Session** is a 20-week healing-discipleship journey that uncovers the roots of your pain and invites Jesus to heal those areas of your heart. You'll be equipped with practical strategies to deal with issues like strained relationships, unforgiveness, feelings of not being good enough, addictions, and more.

We're running Freedom Session again this Fall starting Oct 16<sup>th</sup>. Spaces are limited and the registration deadline is September 23. So if you want to learn more or signup, check out our webpage by **scanning the QR code on the screen**.

**Note to V/W: Please create slide with QR code for Freedom Session website - <https://cornerstonechurch.ca/freedomsession>**

I was part of the pilot group years ago when we first started looking into this. And as I went through the program, some of the wounds and painful memories that I shared about earlier came up for me. I was encouraged to take an inventory of these things and worked through a powerful process to acknowledge the pain and forgive that person.

What's amazing is that recently a situation came up involving that person that would have been painful for me in the past. But it didn't bother me like it would have. People close to the situation even commented on that as well. They noticed how I wasn't as hurt or bothered as I should have been. They noticed how I was able to show that person grace and love. They noticed that something in me had changed.

When they asked me how I was able to do that. I told them that I had forgiven that person.

We've been saying in this series that relationships are messy because people are messy. We've all been hurt. But when you look at your pain, you have a choice.

- You can choose to go down the path of bitterness that will destroy your life, your health and all your relationships.
- Or you can choose to go down the path of forgiveness. You can choose to cancel the debt, you can choose to let go of the anger and hurt, you can choose to let go of the grudge.

And if you go down the path of forgiveness, you'll be set free from the chains of bitterness. You'll be free to heal, free to move on from the past and free to live the life you were meant to live.

Forgiveness is setting a prisoner free only to find out that the prisoner was you.

Let's pray.



## Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We come before you now. We bring you our broken relationships and our broken hearts. You know our stories and you see our hearts because you were there. You grieved with us, you wept with us and you hurt with us. And now you invite us into your love – a love that has the power to heal us from the pain and redeem what was broken.

For many of us, this morning has brought up a lot of pain and yet we sense your Spirit inviting us to forgive. To break free from the chains of bitterness. Jesus, would you give us the grace to do that.

Whatever the wound, whatever was taken from us, we name it now in your presence.

And we ask now for the desire and for the power to forgive. To cancel the debt. To let go of the anger. To let go of the hurt. They don't owe me anymore.

Jesus, would you bring your healing into my heart, into my memories and into my relationships. Redeem and rebuild the hurt and brokenness. Free me to love you with my whole being, help me to love others out of a heart that has been healed and forgiven.

Maybe for some of you, the broken relationship that comes to mind is your relationship with God. Maybe you've never given your life to Jesus. You've lived for yourself and have never received the new life God wants to give you. But you know you need him, you know you can't do life without him.

If that's you, and you feel like God is speaking to you right now, if you want to restore your relationship with God, if you want the forgiveness and new life he offers, would you raise your hand?

And now, in solidarity with everyone in the room, let's all pray this prayer together. Repeat after me:

Jesus, thank you for your love. Thank you for the cross. Thank you for dying for my sins. I confess my sin to you. Would you cleanse me and forgive me. Make me brand new. Fill me with your spirit so I can live for you. Use me as an instrument of your kingdom love in this broken world, so that wherever I go people would see your love and praise your name. Thank you for new life, I give you all of mine.

In Jesus name

Amen