

**When Someone Hurts Me: Extend Forgiveness**  
Part 3 in the message series, "Beyond Hurt"

St. Paul's United Methodist Church of Elizabethtown  
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**Pastor David Woolverton**

Fifteen years ago, last weekend, Charles Carl Roberts. Stormed into an Amish schoolhouse in Nickel Mines and he shot 10 girls, killing five of them and forever changing the trajectory of life of the other five and their families. And yet within twenty-four hours, the entire global community was fixated on their TVs watching the unfolding of the Amish response. And the Amish response was one of forgiveness. Not just forgiveness for the perpetrator, but forgiveness for the perpetrator's family. And what the world saw in that act of forgiveness was the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ flowing through a community of people doing a deed of obedience when it didn't make logical sense. It didn't make emotional sense. How did they get beyond hurt? How did they get beyond their pain?

Today, we're continuing in and our worship service focus in a series called Beyond Hurt. Beyond Hurt is a look at Matthew Chapter 18 and all of its different facets and the variety of ways that God equips us to move beyond the things that focus in on our pain. Two weeks ago, when I introduced this series, we showed you a mosaic and I basically said that the best way for us as followers of Jesus to approach life is to approach it mosaically. And to approach life, mosaically really fundamentally revolves around a basic principle when it comes to our pain. That principle was that when we're hurting, we tend to see only the single tile of our pain rather than the mosaic of our destiny in Christ. For those of us who remember that the truth is that that pain, that single tile event can consume us. It can become our only focus and when it does, we will fail to see how that one tile is connected to other tiles, which are connected to other tiles. And what we discovered is that a mosaic is best seen from a distance. Backing up and looking from a distance at what the Lord is creating is going to help us not only navigate through our current pain, through our current situation, but it's going to remind us of who we are and where we're going in the grander design that God has for our lives and not just for our lives, but for our whole community of faith. That's the beauty.

Well, today we're focusing on just a little bit further on what it means to move beyond our hurt through the power of extending forgiveness. Forgiveness. So, I got to ask this question, how many of you by a show of hands have ever faced a situation in your life where it was really hard to forgive somebody that hurt you? It's OK, to be honest. I'm asking you reading this, too. If you've ever found it hard to forgive someone raise your hand where you're sitting. So, it's pretty universal. All of us have at some point in our lives, dealt with a significant moment of pain or hurt or offense where we were called on to forgive and we were in that tension of not being able quite or quite ready to forgive, but we knew that we, as followers of Jesus should forgive. Or perhaps the relationship demanded forgiveness in order to move beyond the pain. But the reality is, if we're honest, we found it really difficult to release the other individual from the debt that they owed us. That's a real struggle. But forgiveness really is not just about an individual response to our offense or our grief or our loss or our pain. Every time we forgive or withhold forgiveness, it actually impacts the entire body of Christ, the church. It impacts everybody. And so when we look at forgiveness and we will look at it in terms of how do we get beyond our pain to the place of extending forgiveness, when we examine it, we as the body of Christ have been called to live mosaically and to see that our individual pain, the individual tile of

our situation of offense is actually part of a grander design that God is doing in redeeming even those moments of hurt.

He has called us to be part of a larger community, a community of faith, a new community. And as we represent that new community, it means that we have to live out the values that Jesus taught us. And one of those values is the value of love. In fact, I really believe that the primary language of the new community is love. Love. Jesus teaches it. In fact, if you combine the great commission where we're to go into all of the world and teach what Jesus taught and baptize in Jesus' name, when you combine that with the great commandment that Jesus gave to his disciples and to all of us to love, to love. When we get those two together, we live out the destiny of the new community, called the church. But doing so is hard. In fact, if love is the primary language of the new community called the church, then forgiveness is actually the best way of expressing that love within the world in which we live. In fact, Mother Teresa once said, "If we really want to love, we must learn how to forgive." If we really want to love, we must learn how to forgive. Forgiving is hard, but for followers of Jesus, ideally forgiveness has a goal, and that goal is reconciliation. Two weeks ago, when we began the series, we talked about the heart of Jesus is that we, as the church, would be one. One. How do you get oneness in the midst of our diversity? We talked about that two weeks ago, and last week Dominic engaged what does that look like in terms of living within boundaries, healthy boundaries to establish those relationships with one another.

Today, as we look at forgiveness, we got to realize that the ultimate goal of forgiveness ideally is reconciliation. First to God. So, the vertical is important. And second to the church and then third to one another. Now what do I mean by, you know, moving beyond just our relationship with God into the church? Forgiveness, as I said, really implicates the whole body of Christ, because our mission, our mission is really critically connected to how we forgive. Our witness depends on our oneness. So, if our oneness depends on forgiveness, then how we forgive is going to impact our witness. The Nickel Mines Amish community discovered that without trying. The entire world was befuddled by how the Amish community forgives. That taught them a lesson. I was privileged to be a part of that conversation with a couple of those family's way back 15 years ago. And I watched on TV, as well as the Amish community just did what they believe, they lived what they believed and commentator after commentator, news broadcaster, after news broadcaster, they sat there, and they were at a loss for how to explain this. But their faith told them to take these steps. How do they do it? That's what I want to talk about very briefly with you. And in order to do that, we have to define forgiveness.

In many places in our New Testament, the Greek word for forgive is the word *Aphiemi* (off-e-aimee), *Apheime*. Would you say that out loud with me? *Aphieme*. *Aphiemi* is actually the combination of two Greek words *Oppo*, which is a prefix it means 'from' and *hiemi*, which is the verb that's translated literally as 'to send'. And so, when you talk about forgiveness, you're literally talking about sending the debt away from an individual that owes you or releasing the person from the debt that they owe you. It's sending away, casting it away, if you can imagine that definition when we talk about Matthew Chapter 18, then you're going to begin to capture the essence of what Jesus was trying to communicate to his disciples.

Now, if you remember, Matthew, 18, was actually built around a concept many churches over the course of years have focused in on Matthew 18 as being the teaching tool for how we are to forgive one another, how we are to confront one another. We'll actually talk about that in two weeks, but when you look at Matthew 18, it's not just about forgiveness, it's not just about church discipline, it's about getting those disciples in all of us connected with the bigger plan of

oneness of unity, unity of the body of Christ, keeping us on the same page for the sake of our mission. It's about reconciliation. And so, Matthew 18:1, starts out with the disciples not getting it. They say to one another, "Hey, I wonder which of us is going to be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" Hey, can you picture that these disciples who have spent two plus years with Jesus watching him teach and preach and convert hearts and minds to the following ways of God and watching him do miracles and casting out demons and healing blind people and raising the dead. They saw all of this, and they were consumed with their own individual tiles. Which of us is going to be the greatest? And so Jesus begins to change the course of their thinking. He puts a child in the center of their gathering, and he begins to invert their way of thinking about the design of the Kingdom of God. You see, in the Kingdom of God, things look differently. And we respond differently. That sets the stage for today's passage of scripture.

I invite you to open your Bible, starting at verse 21 on a very particular section of Matthew 18, where Jesus is about to teach them a new lesson about forgiveness. So, He starts in verse 21 by saying, or this passage begins by saying,

*"Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?'"*

Now, I got to love Peter here. For many of you may know this, but I spent at the beginning part of my career in ministry, I spent about eight years doing youth ministry. Three of them, I was a youth pastor, the remaining five years I was overseeing the youth department and Youth Ministry and so you need to know I absolutely love junior high kids. I'm one of those rare individuals, I love middle schoolers. Sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth graders, I love them. Why? Because you get raw, malleable, almost malleable forces of nature that you can speak into, and they playfully speak into you as well. I like that freshness of teenagers. But one of the things that I've learned many times over the years in working with teenagers, especially young middle schoolers, is that if there is a rule, they will find loopholes. Right? Didn't we when we were teenagers? Oh, my goodness. I'm still 13 in my mind. Yes, we find loopholes, they find loopholes. That's what Peter is doing right here. There's a general rule Jesus's teaching about forgiveness, and so Peter goes, "hey, a point of clarification, exactly how many times am I supposed to forgive somebody that offends me, especially somebody who's in the body of believers? And I'll go magnanimous. Peter goes seven times." And Jesus responds, "no, not seven. Seventy-seven times." In other words. There is no end. Why? Because it's not about the single tile. It's not about the single event of the offense. It's not even about your feelings being hurt. It's about a greater witness. It's about the unity of the body of Christ. It's about the oneness because our mission is more important than our moment. So, Jesus then teaches them a parable.

It says here in verse 22, Jesus answered,

*"I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven."*

Verse 23,

*"Therefore..."*

Every time you see the word, therefore, you have to ask what's it there for? Everything that Jesus taught in that moment was about now to enter into a parable. Jesus says, "Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven is like..." every time you see that phrase, most times it's about the

introduction of a lesson that Jesus is teaching. Most times. But every time you see it, think mosaicly. What scripture is doing, what Jesus is doing is he's giving us a chance to step back and look at the grander design. The Kingdom of Heaven is like... it's a grander picture. And this is what he says.

*"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt."*

The reality is any time we have a debt, it implicates our entire family. It implicates the church. Hold on to that. Then it goes on and verse 26,

*"At this, the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go."*

The contrast in this passage of scripture, the parable is that what the guy owed was huge. It's not payable, by most people. It was huge. Hold on to that comparison, because the rest of the parable becomes the second half of that comparison. So, look at the phrase in verse 27, "the servant's master took pity on him and canceled the debt and let him go." When it comes to forgiveness this is teaching us a very important lesson, and it's not the lesson that you would think. Lesson number one about forgiveness is that the one who has the power is the one who forgives. The one who has the power is the one who forgives.

Listen, in our culture, what we're taught right now is that the person who is hurt is the victim. The victim. And they're the individuals by virtue of their hurt that are in the loss mode. But in the economy of the Kingdom of God everything is inverted. Actually, it is the person who was hurt that has all of the power. Only the individual who has power can forgive. In this parable, it was a king. The king was the one who had the resources and the king loaned them out. The servant is the one who had accrued debt. The master, the king was the one who was calling to account all of that debt. In the parable, the king is to represent God. But in the reality of the grander mosaic, how God treats us is how we need to treat one another. The person with all of the power is the person who has been hurt. If you see yourself as the victim, then you will engage two things. One, you will engage the mindset that the world has hurt you and you are powerless. In God's kingdom, that is wrong. The second thing is that the person who has been hurt is actually the person and only the person who can offer forgiveness. The offender. It doesn't make sense for them to forgive. Right? So, it is the person who has the power. That's the one who forgives, and the person who has the power is the person who has been hurt. Hold on to that.

Now the story continues, verse 28, we read,

*"But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins."*

Now, by comparison, this is a pittance. It's a little bit. It's a tiny amount compared to what this guy had owed the king. That's the comparison. Then,

*"He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me and I will pay it back.'"*

Notice the same phrase was used by this guy when he went to the king.

*"But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay off the debt."*

Verse 31.

*"When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told the master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had on you?' In anger, his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all that he owed."*

Incredible parable and this parable teaches us another important lesson about forgiveness. In the Kingdom of God forgiveness is actually something we discover when at the foot of the cross, we realize how equal we are with those that have offended us. It's a discovery and the use of that term, I'm actually borrowing it from a colleague of mine, a pastoral counselor who wrote a book decades ago back in the 1980s called 'Is Human Forgiveness Possible?' and his conclusion was "only when we see how equal in need of grace, we are with those that have offended us."

Why is this important? Simply put, it's important because it teaches us that forgiveness is not a transaction. It's a transition. It's not a transaction. Many of us, and if you're like me, I'm guilty of this all the time. We have been offended by an individual and the challenge of forgiving them, I might even say, "well, they didn't even say, I'm sorry. He didn't say I'm sorry. I'm not going to forgive them until they say I'm sorry." Right? That's a transaction. You give me this, I will give you that. Well, forgiveness is not a transaction. There was only one transaction related to forgiveness and that was the transaction on the cross when Jesus gave himself to pay the penalty for our debt. That's the transaction. And for the followers of Jesus in the Kingdom of God, what Jesus is teaching us is that we are to give away what has been given to us. Shouldn't you have had mercy on that other individual, even as I have had mercy on you? That's what the parable said. So forgiveness is actually a discovery. You cannot forgive truly, until you realize that you have been forgiven. That act of forgiveness takes us as followers of Jesus to the foot of the cross. Where we are equal in need of grace with those who have offended us.

Now, you might say, "well, Pastor David, you don't know what this person did to me." No, I don't. And this principle does not negate the pain. It does not negate the intensity of that pain. But what it does say to us as followers of Jesus is that our pain is but a tile in a grander mosaic of what God is doing. And we, as followers of Jesus need to live in obedience to what he has called us. And therein is the rub. This parable is this teaching ends with Jesus looking at his disciples and saying the following, this is how my heavenly father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart. Wow. And that means that forgiveness,

according to the Kingdom of God rulings, is actually a mandate. Forgiveness is a mandate. So, for us, as followers of Jesus, it's irrelevant how we feel. It's a mandate. How we get there is a different story. Sometimes forgiveness takes a while. It's a progression of daily choosing to look mosaicly.

The reality is forgiveness is uniquely tied to a command. A command. We said it just a little while ago, and we recited the Lord's Prayer. Forgive us as we have been forgiven. Hmm. Therein lies the challenge. Jesus says to his disciples, just after His resurrection, before He ascends, He says to his disciples, I want you to know something, whoever you forgive on Earth will be forgiven. Whoever you do not forgive on Earth will not be forgiven. There's a great power there and the mandate is our witness is at stake. Our witness depends on our oneness. And so, what do we do with that?

So, offense focuses on the single tile of our grief, of our pain of the offense. Forgiveness focuses on the mosaic of our destiny in Christ. And we need to think mosaicly. How do we do that very quickly? To forgive someone, we need to ask God for strength. And in addition to asking God for strength, we really need to just take a step-in obedience. We need to take a step towards forgiveness, realizing that sometimes and depending on the intensity of the feelings and the intensity of the offense, it's going to take us a little while. But we need to take a step. The oneness is on us, the follower of Jesus to be the one who forgives.

In addition, we need to believe in the mosaic. Thinking mosaicly helps us to forgive. We have to remember that our tile of offense is connected to other tiles. And so, we need to consciously pull back and engage the mosaic. And then we redefine the necessary relational boundaries, as you heard Dominic share last week. What does that look like and how do we then relate to one another? And as we do, we reestablish trust to the degree that the relational boundaries are honored. Our relationship with the person who has offended us may radically change. But how we choose to love is critical. How we choose to forgive impacts our witness. You see forgiveness is the price tag of oneness. Being a follower of Jesus, it's not easy. Yes, God takes us on a journey that we will never forget. But in the here and now, we need to remember who we are and why we're here, and where we're going. That's thinking mosaicly. And in the grand design witness, our witness is more important than our pain.

Who do you need to forgive?

Let's pray. Gracious, Lord, we thank you. In as much as this word is challenging and difficult, we know that the design of it is to set us free. So, Lord, equip us your people to be a people of forgiveness who remember the hope that you are a God who never wastes anything. You're a God who redeems even our pain. Help us to forgive even as we have been forgiven. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.