

## **The Hardest Part of Being a Christian**

I will apologize up front. This is a long article, but it is on an important topic that I promised I would address last week--**forgiveness**. I'll start with a parable.

Imagine you are on a road carrying two heavy suitcases. In those suitcases are all the negative emotions you have experienced in life—grudges, hurts, jealousy, heartache, betrayal, anger, and the like. There is so much negativity in fact that they don't fit into just one suitcase. Now also imagine Jesus comes up to you, face to face, and offers you two more suitcases, except they are full of good things: love, grace, forgiveness, repentance, reconciliation, acceptance, peace, joy, and so on. What do you do? What choice do you have in that moment?

You and I have two options. Option 1 is that we can hold onto those heavy suitcases. The inability to forgive is a burden we alone carry. It has nothing to do with the other person. Yes, folks do try to make forgiveness contingent on the other person, but that approach is not in accordance with Jesus' teaching on forgiveness in Matthew 6 and other places in the Gospels.

Option 2 is the better option. We can let go of one, but preferably both, of those negative suitcases; just let them fall right out of our hands and onto the road. Then, and only then, can we take hold of the suitcases that Jesus is offering. That process of letting go of the negative in order to accept the positive is the *process* of forgiveness. I stress the word *process* because, for human beings, forgiveness is not a one-time act (an apology is, but not forgiveness). It takes time and physical/spiritual energy to accomplish forgiveness of others and/or forgiveness of oneself.

**Forgiveness is, in my view, the hardest thing we are called to do as disciples of Jesus Christ.** Putting it more bluntly, we cannot call ourselves Christian and hold onto unforgiveness.

Maybe a metaphor on forgiveness will help in addition to my parable. Let's say that a hurtful or traumatic event caused by someone else occurs (whether real or perceived, really doesn't matter). There are various levels of hurt, but this wound is really deep, and the pain is ongoing to the point of creating many of the negative emotions mentioned in my parable, particularly anger. That set of emotions becomes a **heavy spiritual anchor**, and you are linked to that anchor by a heavy chain. You are stuck, in other words; you can't progress or move forward because you are at the end of your chain (and you may not even know it). You can certainly stay that way; that is your choice. But let's say you decide that you are tired of feeling stuck (jealous, resentful, angry, etc.), and you want to move on. **To do so, you have to cut the chain.** The problem is that to do so, all you have is a hack saw, and maybe not a very sharp one at that. Nevertheless, you begin to saw on that chain, but you don't make much progress because of fatigue. That's natural, so you set the saw down and wonder if it is really worth the effort. But you want to work through the process of forgiveness that you hear about so much in church, so you pick up the saw and start cutting again, utilizing the progress, although small, that you made earlier. This cycle repeats itself as often as necessary until, at last, the chain link is severed, and you can move on in life. (One link of the anchor chain of an aircraft carrier weighs around 360 pounds and is around eight inches in diameter. Let's hope our spiritual chain is much lighter and smaller.)

That is what forgiveness looks like. The dynamic is different if we are in the process of forgiving ourselves for a hurtful and damaging act we did to someone else (assuming we have taken responsibility for the act), but we're nevertheless the one who is freed. Again, forgiveness has nothing to do with the other person who has hurt you. They're not carrying the suitcases; they're not being restrained by the chain. You are. Forgiveness frees you and me, regardless of what the other person does or does not do.

That brings up an important side lesson on forgiveness. **Reconciliation** is not the same thing as forgiveness. There is, however, a clear relationship between the two. For reconciliation to happen, two people must simultaneously work on forgiveness of each other and meet in the middle. Think of it as in building a metaphorical bridge of trust from two different shores. If the other person stops working on forgiveness (stops building the bridge from their side), then reconciliation cannot happen. Forgiveness continues, however, on your side of the divide because, as I have said, forgiveness frees us. It does not take the other person "off the hook."

In our heavenly relationship with God, it is Jesus that builds the entire metaphorical bridge of trust from his side of heaven to our side on earth through his life, death, and resurrection. A lyric by the group Point of Grace several years ago says it succinctly: "*There's a cross to bridge the great divide.*" That is establishing God's **spiritual** (non political) kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. We have been forgiven, we are loved, and reconciliation with God is always possible, no matter how far we think we've fallen away from God. All we must do is step out in faith and walk across that bridge, one step at a time. When we do, we will find that our prayer life and worship are enhanced by God's Spirit, our earthly relationships will change for the better by God's grace, and we'll see things in a new light as someone who is truly in Christ.

*Pastor Tom*

# Forgiveness Is the *Foundation* for Reconciliation



## *Update on our Lazarus Table Ministries Mission:*

Saturday I was able to take 15 sleeping mats, a large bag of bath items, 25 pairs of new socks & underwear and 12 bags of slightly used clothes and shoes for the homeless. Thanks so much to the Be an Angel Mission for all your hard work and dedication and to all that donated.



## *Bottled Water for Mason Elementary*

Missions will be collecting cases of bottled water or monetary donations for the purchase of bottled water for Mason Elementary for the remainder of this month and November.

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions this school year, students K thru 3rd grade, 290 students, are requested to bring their own water bottles daily. Currently, students are not allowed to refill their bottles nor use the water fountains. Therefore, the need for bottled water.

When donating a monetary gift in the form of a check, please write “water” in the memo line. Please leave cases of water in the Commons area.

Also, due to the pandemic and at the request of Mason principal Beth Ratty, Back Snacks will no longer be obtained from Harvesters and delivered weekly to Mason. If you have questions, please call Cindy Cromer at 816-682-2435.



**On Going:** Les Case, Wade Davis, Roger Grable, Richard Fuerst, Winnie Fuerst, Harvey Geary, Michael Hatfield, Linda Koleiny, Shane Miley, Nancy Rowe

**Strength and Healing:** Ken McDaniel, Mike McMillin, Andrew White

**Missions:** Kenyan G-Marc Project (Chics for Chicks), Hillcrest Transitional Housing, Harvester’s Food Bank, Lazarus Ministries, Tarsney Lake Families, Congregation de Mellier, Heart and Soul Children’s Learning Center

*Please contact the office to update or add prayer requests*

### **COME JOIN A JOINT ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS!**

I will be facilitating a joint adult class starting **October 18** (three Sundays from now) during the pandemic. I could start sooner, but I wanted to give plenty of notice. I use the verb “facilitate” intentionally. I will ask a question, verbally put an idea on the table, or share a diagram on the whiteboard and have a discussion instead of “teach”, which suggests I will do most or all of the talking. Besides, we will need to end the class no later than 9:45 so that I can be ready for the 10:00 service, but that’s not to say that the discussion can’t continue. It certainly can! We will meet in the back classroom for now and move into the sanctuary if we get more than 12 in class in order to remain physically distanced from each other. **Face coverings will still be required.** We’ll start this journey with the Letter of James—a short epistle in the New Testament that does not get much attention but has a lot to say. Since there are only six chapters, feel free to read ahead! If you’ve not been a part of the adult classes in the past, here’s an opportunity to start with something brand new. Hope to see you there!

# October 2020

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
<b>4 Services</b> <b>8:00 &amp; 10:00</b>	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>11 Services</b> <b>8:00 &amp; 10:00</b>	12	13	14	15	16	17
<b>18 Services</b> <b>8:00 &amp; 10:00</b>	19	20	21	<b>22 PPRC</b> <b>Meeting 7:00</b>	23	24
<b>25 Services</b> <b>8:00 &amp; 10:00</b>	26	27	28	29	30	31

