

How to Forgive

Forgiveness part 5 Selected Passages 12-5-10

This message will show you how to overcome anger in your heart and soften your heart toward someone when your heart is refusing to forgive.

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Matthew 18:15-35 If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. 16 But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. 18 "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." 21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. 23 "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. 25 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. 26 "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' 27 The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. 28 "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. 29 "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' 30 "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. 32 "Then the

master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' 34 In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. 35 "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

Introduction

The hardest commands in the Bible are always the ones that involve emotions. If God commands you to perform a physical action you can just decide to do it. But when you are required to feel a certain way – to feel joy or compassion or hope or fear or love – you can decide to do it and nothing happens. Then what? We are taking a little interlude in the midst of our study of the Sermon on the Mount to look in depth into one of those commands – the command to forgive. Forgiveness extends a soft, gracious heart to the person – how do you do that when your heart is cold?

So far we have learned in this study that there is a difference between forgiveness and patience. Patience is the love you show the person while the sin is still ongoing, forgiveness is the love you show after they repent. And so we did a whole sermon last week on how to bring the person to repentance.

If he says, “I repent,” forgive him

But suppose you do all that, and the person claims to be repentant – how do you know if it is really repentance? How do you know when their repentance is adequate so you can forgive them? It is very simple. They say, “I repent.”

Luke 17:4 If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him.

If they claim to be repentant you assume they are repentant. When you assess your own repentance you need to set the standard very high, and be very suspicious about your sincerity and motives. But when you assess someone else's repentance you just simply take them at their word.

Inadequate sorrow

“But what if they are not really taking it seriously? What if they do not appreciate how much they hurt me? What if they are not properly remorseful?” Well then, they are a lot like you, right? Isn't it true that when you first came to God and repented of your sins, you did not take your sin anywhere close to as seriously as what was warranted? Didn't God accept your repentance and forgive you even though you barely felt a fraction of the remorse that was called for given how guilty you really were? No sinner has ever come close to appreciating the full gravity of their sin against God. But thanks be to God that in His infinite mercy and grace He accepts our lame, inadequate, partial, half-hearted, weak repentance and forgives us anyway. God accepted that from us and He calls us to accept one another's half-baked repentance. If a person admits what he did was sin and claims to be repentant – that is enough.

We are not in a position to demand perfect repentance from those who sin against us. So if you are the one who sinned, do everything you can to understand and appreciate the pain you inflicted on the other person. But if you are the one sinned against, realize that just as the Lord is patient with your inadequate repentance, so you can cut the people who sin against you a little slack in their repentance.

Fruit of repentance

“But doesn't Scripture speak of proving repentance with your actions?”

Acts 26:20 I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.

Where there is true repentance it will have an impact on deeds. So what do you do? Do you wait until there is proof from their deeds before you accept their claim of repentance? No – Luke.17:4 says if he says, “I repent,” then you forgive. And if he falls into the same sin again – and again – and again, seven times in one day, you do not assume his repentance was false. You assume it was real all seven times and you forgive seven times.

Refusal to avoid temptation is unrepentance

“But what if there is some action he can take now to avoid the sin in the future and he refuses to do it?”

That is different. If that is the case then he is really not even claiming to be repentant. If the sin is drunkenness and he claims to repent but refuses to throw out all the alcohol in the house, he is really not even claiming to repent. If he claims to repent of his use of pornography but will not put a filter on his computer or shut off the cable, or if he claims to repent of a sinful relationship but will not tell that person that it is over, if he will not make himself accountable to anyone, will not seek any help from anyone, then it is not repentance. But if there is no obvious step he could take to guard himself from temptation then you just simply accept his word.

And if there is a disagreement – he is insisting that he has repented and you are sure he has not, that is what the church discipline process is for. You take one or two others along with you and if they tell you he is repentant or he is not in sin, then you accept that. If they agree he is unrepentant and he will not listen to them, then you go through the rest of the process. But if that happens, and you say that someone who claims to be repentant is not repentant because of his actions, then you had better have a very clear conception in your mind of exactly what you would accept as repentance. Very often the person who was offended is so angry that there is really nothing the other person can do that will be accepted as true repentance. You do not want to forgive, and so you have some standard of repentance in your mind that is really impossible. If someone asks, “What would you accept as true repentance” and your answer is, “I don’t know” – that is just a disguise for an unforgiving heart.

The issue is the present, not the past or the future

A patient heart is eager to forgive as soon as there is repentance. And when you assess someone’s repentance, the only thing that matters is the present – not the past. Aren’t you glad God deals with you according to the present, and not the past? A man is what he is, not what he was. Your husband sinned against you ten years ago, at the time he did not take it very seriously. Now he has a better understanding of how serious it was, and he fully acknowledges that it was a terrible sin and that his repentance at the time was inadequate, but you are not satisfied with that because you have never seen any significant remorse. What matters is not the past – it is the present. If he claims to be repentant today, then accept his word.

And do not worry about the future either. Some people withhold forgiveness because they assume you will hurt them again in the future. Aren’t you glad God does not do that? Can you imagine if God withheld forgiveness from us based on future sin?

“But what if he has proved he is not trustworthy in this area?”

Can you say to a person, “I forgive you but I do not trust you”? It depends on whether you are willing to trust them. If you refuse to trust the person because you are angry – that is not forgiveness. If there is nothing the person can do to win back your trust, you have not forgiven him. Where there is real love there will be an eagerness to restore every aspect of the relationship.

But how is that done? How do you make your unwilling heart become willing? Forgiveness is when you say, “OK, it is in the past. I don’t want you to walk around feeling bad and grieving any longer, I don’t want this sin to be a factor in how we relate to each other any longer, I am just going to

absorb the loss and put it behind us and never bring it up against you ever again – in my mind or in my words or attitudes.” But what happens when you say that and then the next morning you wake up and all you can think about is that sin they committed against you? And no matter how hard you try to put it out of your mind, it just will not go away? And when you see the person instead of feeling joy you feel anger or sorrow? Then what? Scripture gives us several principles for developing a forgiving heart.

1) Observe the Command (It is not optional!)

The first step is to realize that forgiveness is not optional. If someone sins against you and says, “I repent,” you *must* forgive. God commands it.

Luke 17:3 if he repents, forgive him.

Matthew 6:15 if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Matthew 18:34 In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured ... 35 "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.

We do not have the option of withholding forgiveness. Nor do we have the option of delaying forgiveness. The psychologists will tell you, “Don’t forgive until you are ready.” But God says...

Luke 17:4 If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him.

You do not wait a month or week or even a day - you do it on the spot. Patience keeps your heart soft while the person is hurting you, with an eager desire for reconciliation, so the moment the person repents your heart gushes forth with forgiveness.

People who think you should withhold forgiveness until you are psychologically ready do not understand the human heart. Every day you delay makes your heart less ready to forgive, not more ready. Holding on to a grudge has a hardening effect on your heart, not a softening effect.

And besides that, withholding forgiveness is a form of punishment. The reason people do not want to forgive immediately is because they are holding on to anger. They want to punish the person. And after the person has suffered enough, then they will “forgive.” But that is not forgiveness. Punishing the person first is like saying, “First pay me the \$10 you owe me, then I’ll forgive the debt.” You cannot forgive a debt after you have collected.

Unlimited forgiveness

If the person repents we must forgive immediately and completely and, if necessary, repeatedly.

Matthew 18:21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

The Rabbis said the limit was three times – after that you did not have to forgive. And Peter knows Jesus well enough to know that it is better shoot high right out of the gate, so he takes the Rabbi’s number and more than doubles it with the number of perfection – seven times. But any time you try to determine the right standard by starting with the human standard and ramping up a few levels, it is going to miss the mark.

22 Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."¹

In other words – unlimited. It is not that you count up seventy-seven times and then drop the hammer on #78. Love keeps no record of wrongs, so you would never know when you got to seventy-seven. Jesus is taking Peter's number and multiplying it times ridiculous. And it is fascinating to look back at where Jesus is getting this number. It comes from Genesis 4:24 where Lamech is bragging about his revenge.

Genesis 4:23 Lamech said to his wives, "... I have killed a man for wounding me ... 24 If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times."

He is bragging about how vengeful and unforgiving he is. You so much as bother him and he will kill you. And his point is, "I take vengeance to the absolute extreme." The greatest vengeance the world knew was the vengeance on Cain. Cain was avenged seven times, and Lamech took that number and multiplied it times ridiculous. He wanted the reputation of being the most dangerous man on earth. And so Jesus says, "I want you to be the Lamech of forgiveness. What Lamech was to vengeance, you should be to forgiveness. You want to know the limit, Peter? Just take the greatest, most magnanimous forgiveness this world can conceive of and multiply it times ridiculous, so you are the most forgiving person on earth."

The words of Jesus on forgiveness could not be stronger – it is commanded. And that is crucial to understand because if there is anything in you that clings to the idea that maybe in your case it is OK not to forgive then you will probably never win the battle against unforgiveness. Unforgiveness is a sin that begins the moment the person says, "I repent" and continues until you forgive. "But how do I make my heart willing to forgive?"

2) Overcome Anger

"OK it's commanded – I get that. But how do I get rid of my anger? I can't restore intimacy and closeness as long as the anger continues, so how do I overcome anger?"

James 4 helps us with that. Anger is a symptom of two spiritual diseases: coveting and pride.

Killing Covetousness

Coveting is when you believe that you must have something other than God in order to be happy. It is OK to desire something, but when you say, "I've got to have that thing in order for me to be happy" then you are coveting that thing. And that always leads to anger.

James 4:1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight.

At one time or another we all fall for the lie that something besides the presence of God is a source of happiness and joy and fulfillment. We think to be happy we have to have a certain relationship or money or health or children or peace and quiet, or some sinful pleasure or whatever. If you think you have to have it to be happy, that is coveting. And as soon as someone blocks your access to that thing, you will get angry.

Usually the thing we covet in relationships with people is a certain kind of treatment. We covet respect, or kind words, or affection, or understanding, or consideration, or attention, or companionship,

¹ Some translations translate it seventy times seven rather than seventy-seven times. I believe seventy-seven is correct translation because the number in the Greek is identical to the Greek translation of Genesis 4:24, where the Hebrew can only mean seventy-seven, not seventy times seven.

or conversation. And we do not get it, so we get angry. And most people think the solution to their anger is to get the thing they covet. If that person would just change and give you what you covet, there would be no problem. That is like saying, "I would be a much more patient person if people would stop being annoying." That would not make you patient; it would just hide your impatience. And if you covet consideration or anything else from your spouse, if your spouse changed and suddenly became the most considerate person on earth, all that would do would be to hide your real problem – which is coveting a certain kind of treatment from your spouse.

The solution to anger is to kill covetousness by seeking your joy in God alone. You realize God is the only source of happiness

Do you know what the thirsts of the soul are? We all have cravings and longings, and when they are unfulfilled we are restless and uneasy and unhappy in life. And as a result the pleasures of life do not satisfy us, and our spirits are down, and we start sliding toward depression. That is what the thirst of the soul feels like. Just as your mouth thirsts for water, your soul thirsts for things like peace, joy, hope, security, confidence, insight, etc. Those things are like water to the thirsty soul. And there is only one Fountain where we can get real water that will actually quench the thirsts of the soul – the presence of God. And anything else we look to to satisfy those thirsts is an idol. And our hearts are idol factories, so we are constantly thinking that some human relationship will quench that thirst for love, or some sinful pleasure will satisfy that thirst for happiness, or a better job will satisfy that thirst for security, or the removal of our suffering and troubles will satisfy that thirst for peace. And so we covet those things. And when anyone or anything stands in our way of getting those things we think we need to satisfy the thirst of our soul, we get mad. But when you realize that the only thing that will satisfy those thirsts of the soul is the presence of God, no one can block access to him, and so anger is no longer such a problem.

So if you struggle with anger, ask yourself, "What is it that I am coveting? What is it that I think I have to have in order to be happy that this other person is blocking my access to?" And when you discover what it is, repent of that idolatry and rejoice that you do not need that thing to be happy. And that will enable you to love, and to pour yourself out to other people. Instead of approaching people like a leach – trying to extract what you want from them, all your needs are met by God, which frees you up to give and give and forgive without fear of going unfulfilled.

Putting away Pride

The other disease that results in anger is pride and self-esteem. Pride gives you an inflated sense of self-importance. Your thoughts become self-centered, and you develop an attitude that says, "The supreme good and the highest priority in this world is my comfort. The world exists to please me. Even God's main job is to please me." But neither God nor the world will cooperate. The world refuses to revolve around you, and God refuses to set aside His perfect plan and replace it with yours, and that makes you mad.

So the second solution James gives us in James 4 is humility.

James 4:6 God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. 7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. ... 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will lift you up.

Humble people are not angry over being mistreated because how they are treated is not their focus. Their focus is on what is truly important in this world – the glory of God. I am a speck of dust on a speck of dust in the universe. My comfort means nothing. What matters is that God be honored and that His glory be put on display. And that is happening! People all over the world and countless millions of angels are worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ and giving Him the glory that He deserves right now at this very moment. And if God is being honored and glorified, and that is what is really important, then that should be enough to make me happy - if my focus is on Him and not me.

And this is hard because some of you have been taught a man-centered theology. There is a man-centeredness in the preaching of the gospel these days that focuses all attention on us rather than God. “God loves you, He’s crazy about you, He’s madly in love with you, and if you just believe He will give you the things you want because He is just so enamored with you, and if you were the only person in the world Christ would have died for you because you are so supremely important...” And then you turn on Christian radio and hear song after song about you, you, you – painting a picture of God’s world revolving around you.

That is not the gospel. The wonderful truth of the gospel is not that I am important but that God is important, and great and beautiful and delightful and worthy of worship and praise and adoration. Does He love you? Yes! Is it important to understand that? Yes! I have no argument with that part. My argument comes with the “therefore.” The message today is, “God loves you, therefore think of how important you are!” That is the wrong conclusion. The right one is, “God loves you, therefore think of how gracious He is!” The good news is not that I am important because God loves me; the good news is that the God who loves me is important. And the more you shift focus from self to God, and you humble yourself under His mighty hand, the happier you will be. When people mistreat you, learn to accept that from God’s hand. God is in control of how people treat you. Someone creates a hardship for you - God is the one who arranged for that to happen for His perfect purposes. Even if that person meant it for evil, God meant it for good and so whatever that person is doing is irrelevant compared to what God is up to. So the question is, when someone hurts me, am I going to remind myself that this is from the hand of God, and that God only does good things, and bow my knee and humble myself before Him and say, “Yes, Lord. Whatever You have for me, I will accept from Your hand”? Or am I going to focus only on the human aspect and pretend I am God and get all worked up because I am not receiving proper honor and glory and love that I am due?

3) Enjoy God’s forgiveness

Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

A couple weeks ago we talked about the parable of the unforgiving servant who owed his master ten thousand talents, which is 200,000 years’ wages. The man begs for mercy and gets it.

Matthew 18:27 The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

That is what happened the day you became a Christian. The immense, incalculable, infinite debt of your sin was instantly and totally wiped away.

28 But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii.

That is one hundred days’ wages.

He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. 29 'His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' 30 'But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

Why are the fellow servants so upset? One hundred days’ wages is one-third of a year’s salary. If you earn \$60,000 a year, this would be like \$20,000. That is a lot of money. I have heard people say this guy was petty because he would not forgive a debt of a few dollars. It was not a few dollars; it was

a very significant debt. I think if this had happened one day earlier, the fellow servants probably would not have taken much notice. Normally \$20,000 is considered a huge debt. But in this particular case this man's actions are seen as outrageous because of the fact that he had just been forgiven a debt that was sixty thousand times larger than this one.

The sin against you was significant

I think it is significant that Jesus used these numbers. The 200,000 years wages represents the sins we have committed against God. The one hundred days wages represents the sins others commit against us. And it is significant that Jesus makes those a \$20,000 debt rather than a few dollars. Jesus is acknowledging the enormity of the sins people commit against you. Some of the sins people commit against you are small – a few bucks. But some of the things people have done against you are huge, massive, \$20,000 offenses. Some of you have been lied to in horrible ways – or lied about or stolen from, or horribly abused. Some of you have been abandoned by the person who vowed to love you forever. And God calls you to be patient with them and to love them, and when they repent to forgive them instantly, completely, permanently, eagerly, and whole-heartedly. And He calls you to that not because the sins against you are piddly little \$10 offenses. Jesus acknowledges that they are huge, \$20,000 offenses. You must forgive – not because the sins were insignificant or small, but because they are insignificant and small compared to what you have been forgiven. The only way that servant could be so ungracious toward his fellow servant was by forgetting what had just transpired between him and his master. And the only way you can have trouble forgiving someone who has hurt you is if you have completely forgotten the forgiveness you have received from God. That is why when we are commanded to forgive we are also reminded of the forgiveness we have received.

Colossians 3:13 forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Mercy

So why is it that we are so prone to forget the forgiveness we have received? The behavior of this unforgiving servant is so outrageous – how is it that we are so prone to exactly the same thing? I think there is a clue to the answer to that in verse 33. Listen what the master tells the unforgiving servant:

32 Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn't you have...

And at this point we expect him to say, "Shouldn't you have forgiven – just as I forgave you?" But he does not say that. Look what he says instead:

33 Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?'

The issue is mercy. Mercy is when you see someone who is in desperate trouble, you are moved with compassion, and your compassion drives you to relieve their suffering. Compassion is always the key to a forgiving heart. That is what displaces anger from your heart.

Ephesians 4:31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger ... 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Do you see that? You get rid of anger by replacing it with compassion, and the compassion drives you to forgiveness.

“But what if I do not feel any compassion toward the person? What does the master tell the unforgiving servant?”

33 Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?

In order to have compassion and show mercy to someone who hurts you, you must have a strong sense of what it was like when the Lord had compassion and showed mercy to you. But for many of us that does not happen because we have never really felt God's compassion and mercy very much. We are like the unforgiving servant in the parable. He never did really have an understanding of how much trouble he was really in. He owes 200,000 years' wages and says, “Be patient and I'll pay back everything.” He did not appreciate the size of the debt, and so he did not appreciate how much mercy he had received.

Imagine you were driving and you got really angry at someone in traffic, and so you decided to teach him a lesson. You are going to cut front of him and hit your breaks. But when you go to cut in front of him you miscalculate a little, and clip the front of his car at 80 mph and both of you crash. He has some serious injuries, but is still able to get out of his car. But you are trapped in your car, and it is on fire. You cannot move, but you look out your window and there that guy is. And you think, “What's he going to do?” And as you feel the flames burning your skin you cry out to him and beg him to have mercy on you. And even though this all happened because you were trying to anger him, he has compassion on you and risks his life and suffers terrible burns rescuing from your burning car. If that happened you would have a strong sense of what it feels like for someone to have compassion on you.

But what if you were delirious and did not realize you were trapped in the car? And you did not realize there was a fire. You had no concept that your life was in danger. And you do not realize that this whole crash was your fault. And the guy helps you out of your car. Now you have nowhere near as strong a sense of receiving mercy.

That is the way this unforgiving servant was and it is the way we are when we cannot find it in our hearts to forgive. That day we became a Christian we had such a tiny perception of how much trouble we were in with God – such a tiny understanding of how guilty we were and how much punishment we deserved – that when we received mercy and forgiveness from God it did not have anywhere close to the appropriate impact on our hearts that it should have.

So the solution to an unforgiving heart is to enjoy God's mercy and forgiveness more. Every time you are tempted to think about the horrible thing that person did to you – think instead of the horrible things you have done against God. Study what Jesus taught about hell – the place where more than any other place you and I deserve to be, and spend some time imagining yourself being there – forever. And keep thinking about that until some level of gratitude is awakened in your heart for the forgiveness you have received. In comparison to that, even the worst sin any human being could ever commit against you will seem like nothing. No matter what sin has been committed against you, any sin against God is infinitely worse. We would do well to have a consciousness of how much we have been forgiven *each day*. We offend God more every hour of our lives than all the offences against us put together.

Believe God's promises of forgiveness

The more you enjoy God's forgiveness the greater the impact on your ability to forgive. And that is why Satan works so hard at getting you to doubt God's forgiveness. The question comes up all the time, “What about when I can't forgive myself for my past sins? I keep beating myself up over them, and I can't get over it.” And the psychology world says, “You need to forgive yourself!” The Bible never says that, though, because it is not the right solution. You cannot forgive yourself because the

sin was committed against God, so only God's forgiveness matters. The solution to self-condemnation is not self-forgiveness, it is faith. If you have repented, the Bible promises that God has forgiven you. And if you do not feel forgiven it is because of unbelief. You are doubting what God has said, and so the solution is not self-forgiveness but faith. You need to preach to your soul about the price that Jesus paid for that sin, and about the reliability of God's Word.

There are some of you who struggle to forgive others – not because you fail to recognize the enormity of your own guilt, but because you do not believe you have been forgiven. You doubt God's willingness to forgive you. You doubt His mercy and compassion. He says, "I'm not angry at you anymore," and your heart says, "Yes, You are."

"I am compassionate toward you."

"No, You aren't – You're hard-hearted toward me."

"I'm a loving Father!"

"No, You are a hard master who is impossible to please."

We think of God that way and so we become hard masters who are impossible to please when people sin against us.

When God told Moses, "I'm going to reveal Myself to you," and He passed in front of Moses, He said, "Yahweh, Yahweh..." and then went on to describe exactly what He is like. Of all the thousands of things God could have said to describe Himself, He kept it very concise – two verses. And those two verses are repeated throughout the Old Testament as the most fundamental description of what God is like. They are repeated again in Numbers 14:18, again in 2 Chronicles 30:9, then Nehemiah 9:17; it shows up in Psalms 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; 116:5; 145:8; then we see it in Joel 2:13; in Jonah 4:2; and in Nahum 1:3. Scripture speaks of hundreds of attributes of God, but when God boils it down to the most basic essentials – this is what He

Exodus 34:6 And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Yahweh, Yahweh, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."

God is a forgiving God.

Psalms 103:8 The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. 9 He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; 10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. 13 As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him

Learn to enjoy that. Think about it and study it and rejoice in it and take delight in it. Revel in God's forgiveness, and forgiving others will not be a problem.

Benediction: Isaiah 55:2 Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. 2 Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. 3 Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live.

Summary

If he so much as says "I repent" you must forgive. Do that by realizing forgiveness is mandatory, then overcome anger by killing covetousness and pride, and learn to appreciate and enjoy how much you have been forgiven so you will have compassion on others.

Q&A Questions:

- 1) Why does God say he will punish children for the sins of their parents to the 3rd and 4th generation?
- 2) What if the person you forgive won't reconcile?
- 3) It was stated in the sermon that God arranged for people to sin against you. Doesn't that make God guilty of sin?