



Family Ties

Text: Ecclesiastes 7:2-4; 8-9; 11-12; 20; 29

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1. When was a time when your dreams and your reality went in different directions, especially in terms of family? It can be something light-hearted or something more serious, like the father you wanted but never had, the child you long for but cannot have, or the picture in your mind of what a perfect marriage would be but in reality, it feels like you are more like roommates. Are you in a season like that now?
2. Read Ecclesiastes 7:2-4. According to Solomon there is wisdom in thinking about the end of your "dash".
 - a. Do you tend to live life focused on instant gratification or focused on how to make your "dash" count?
 - b. If you knew that the end of your dash was coming soon, is there anything you would want to change in your relationship with your parents, with your spouse, with your sibling(s), or with your kids? Is there anything you would want to ask forgiveness for?
 - c. Is there anything you would want to change in your relationship with God?
3. Read Ecclesiastes 7:8-9. Here Solomon encourages us to let God be God and not fall victim to pride and anger.
 - a. Where do you see a desire for control in your relationships?
 - b. When you realize that things are actually out of your control, how does your anger usually come out?
4. Read Ecclesiastes 7:11-12. Solomon encourages us to seek wisdom in these verses.
 - a. Where have you lost your teachability?
 - b. When was a recent time that someone tried to give you a word of encouragement or advice that you dismissed too quickly before really weighing what they had to say to see if there was indeed wisdom in their words?
5. Read Ecclesiastes 7:20. In this verse, Solomon hits us with the sober reality that there is no perfect person except for Jesus Christ. That means all of us need practice in asking for and extending forgiveness.
 - a. Would you consider yourself to be good at asking for and extending forgiveness?
 - b. If you do say you're sorry, is there often a "but" statement included or do you truly repent of your actions?

- c. When you forgive, do you truly hold no grudges going forward? How quick or slow are you to repent/forgive? If any of these is a struggle, what do you think is the root cause of your difficulty or slowness to repent and/or forgive?
- d. When was a time that you experienced the power of forgiveness in a relationship?
- e. How could all of our relationships be transformed by the power of forgiveness?
- f. In what relationship do you most need the power of forgiveness right now? Explain.

Challenge: Take a minute to pray for the person and relationship that needs the power of forgiveness. Is God prompting you to let go of something or to reach out to someone this week?

Prayer: Dear Merciful Lord, Thank you for your gift of forgiveness. Your only Son loved me enough to come to earth and experience the worst pain imaginable so I could be forgiven. Your mercy flows to me in spite of my faults and failures. Your Word says to “clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.” (Col. 3:14) Help me demonstrate unconditional love today, even to those who hurt me.

I understand that even though I feel scarred, my emotions don't have to control my actions. Father, may Your sweet words saturate my mind and direct my thoughts. Help me release the hurt and begin to love as Jesus loves. I want to see my offender through my Savior's eyes. If I can be forgiven, so can he. I understand there are no levels to your love. We are all your children, and your desire is that none of us should perish.

You teach us to “let the peace that comes from Christ rule in our hearts.” (Colossians 3:15) When I forgive in words, allow your Holy Spirit to fill my heart with peace. I pray this peace that only comes from Jesus will rule in my heart, keeping out doubt and questions. And above all, I am thankful. Not just today, not just this week, but always. Thank you for the reminder, “Always be thankful.” (Colossians 3:15) With gratitude I can draw closer to you and let go of unforgiveness. With gratitude I can see the person who caused my pain as a child of the Most High God. Loved and accepted. Help me find the compassion that comes with true forgiveness.

And when I see the person who hurt me, bring this prayer back to my remembrance, so I can take any ungodly thoughts captive and make them obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5) And may the confidence of Christ in my heart guide me into the freedom of forgiveness. I praise you for the work you are doing in my life, teaching and perfecting my faith. In Jesus' Name, Amen. (crosswalk.com)

STUDY DEEPER

Interview with John Piper
Founder & Teacher, desiringGod.org
Audio Transcript

Welcome back to the Ask Pastor John podcast. Pastor John, you shared with me a conversation you had recently with someone who was wondering if he could forgive his father when the father did not even admit to having done anything that needs forgiving. And you said that as that conversation unfolded it proved really fruitful for yourself and for him. Could you take us into that conversation, and explain why it was so helpful and what we can all learn about forgiving others?

Right, yes. The reason it became so helpful is that I saw implications from my own life and my relationship with my wife, my children, my colleagues. I saw reverberations everywhere. That very often happens to me when I am trying to help someone else who asked me a question to sort out their relational issues. I am forced to apply those very things to myself and so the insights don't stay at any kind of theoretical level or even just relevant for others, but they become urgent for me. So that was the case and that is why this is on the front burner for me.

So the first thing I was drawn to say to him was: Yes, the fullest experience of forgiveness involves the other person recognizing the wrong that he has done against you and repenting and asking for forgiveness, and then you give forgiveness freely by grace because of what Christ has done for you. And so the offense that has been taken and the offense that was done are laid down, put aside, and not brought up again.

That is full, robust forgiveness. Jesus talked about it in Luke 17:3–4, where he said, “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”

But my friend, who asked me this question, was asking not about that situation and how you get the grace to forgive somebody seven times who repents seven times, but what do you do with a father who doesn't recognize any wrong that has been done and so isn't repenting and isn't asking for forgiveness? Does forgiveness make any sense in that situation? How do you navigate that?

And what I said was that there are at least two other biblical categories that need to be stirred in here besides forgiveness. One is I will call enemy love. And when I say enemy love, I am not just thinking about a declared enemy, but rather people like spouses or sons or daughters or dads in this case who in the moment are acting like an adversary. They are hurting you the way an enemy would hurt you. They are not your enemies in that sense, in the big sense, but rather they are in that moment acting with enmity toward you.

The Bible doesn't just talk about forgiveness there. It talks about enemy love. Jesus said, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). And Peter picked it up in 1 Peter 3:9, “Do

not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.”

So here we are told how to relate to a person who is not repenting, not recognizing any wrong being done, or maybe they are and they are glad they are doing it. And the answer is: Don't return evil for evil. Rather, bless them. So it is not an issue of the fullest kind of forgiveness. You could call it, maybe, one-sided forgiveness. The Christian is choosing not to be the punisher, but treating the other person better than they deserve – in a sense, as if they hadn't been hurt.

Now the second category besides enemy love and forgiveness is forbearance or endurance. Colossians 3:12–13, “Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another.” Or the old King James says, “forbearing one another” or “enduring.” And Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:7, “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

So love doesn't just forgive when another person repents and doesn't just bless when we are hurt, but it bears with, it endures, it forbears. And both Peter and James call that a covering of a multitude of sins. Love covers a multitude of sins – just covers them and endures them. They don't go away. You are just enduring them and you are covering them.

Now at this point in our conversation with the man I am talking about, it became clear that one of the main obstacles to forgiving, forbearing, returning good for evil, blessing those who hurt us, is that if we do this – if we really return good for evil, not the kind of manipulative way that hopes to really draw attention to the other person's guilt, but I am talking about a really authentic blessing, treating them with kindness and hope from the heart – if we do that, then very few people, if anybody, will know that we have been hurt. And that is the challenge.

If we return good for evil, we are not moping around. Our countenance is not cast down. Our shoulders are not shrugged. We haven't withdrawn into a silent funk. We are not drawing attention to our woundedness. We are acting in a cheerful, hopeful, gracious way, and nobody will have any idea that we have been insulted or put down or wounded or cheated. And almost everything in my sinful soul cries out against that.

We want people to know that we have been hurt. We want people to pity us or at least sympathize with us or recognize that our effort to return good for evil is a noble effort in the face of much difficulty. Good grief, if nobody knows, shoot – you can see what's going on.

And perhaps most of all we want the person who has wounded us to be aware that they have wounded us, and we don't want to act in a way that looks as if they didn't hurt us – that looks as if it makes light of the fact that they wounded us or insulted us or put us down or criticized us in an inappropriate way or cheated on us. And all of this is a huge obstacle to obeying the Lord when he says, “Do not return evil for evil, but bless those who do you harm” (see Luke 6:27–28).

And here is the key, and this is where I am right now in my dealing with this and my trying to process it for my own soul. Here is the key that proved so convicting to me: The key is how important and how satisfying

to us is the fact that God knows we have been hurt, that God understands and God attends to us. God feels with us. He is a merciful High Priest. Is that enough? What this showed me was how deeply my heart tends to be oriented on other people more than it is oriented on God.

Our great need, my great need, is that God be more real to me than other people are. When God sees us returning good for evil, he knows everything. He knows we have been insulted or treated unjustly or cheated or whatever. He knows it. And he is sympathetic and he is attentive and he sees that we are returning good for evil when harm has been done to us. He sees that we are obeying him. He sees that we are loving our adversary.

First Peter 2:19 says, "This is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly." God delights in it. We are pleasing God at that moment. And the key passage that I think we have to come to terms with is 1 Peter 2:23: "When [Jesus] was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly."

And so my question for myself and for my friend, for anybody who finds himself like us: Is it enough for God to know our sorrow, for God to know our pain, for God to know our disappointment, our frustration? Can we hand our cause entirely over to God? Can we move forward treating others better than they treat us, even if it means only God knows and nobody else? That is how real God has to become to us.

<http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/the-major-obstacle-in-forgiving-others>