

**April 27, 2008**

**Title: Give Forgiveness**

**Text: Ephesians 4:30-32**

**Thesis: Forgiveness is a gift we give to others...**

**Series Introduction;**

Tim McGraw's hit song *Live Like You Were Dying*, is the springboard for the current series of messages. The song is the story of a man who learned he was dying of a fatal disease and what he learned about living his final days well. It is a song about what he found to be important and how he hoped everyone could have the chance to live like they only had thirty days to live.

The series is based on the materials provided for the *Live Like You Were Dying Church Campaign Resource Kit* available from [WWW.LLYWD.ORG](http://WWW.LLYWD.ORG). In addition to the suggested sermon titles and general outlines, I have attempted to cite any other specific references lifted from the resources.

**Message Introduction:**

**We are beginning our fourth week in our *Live Like You Were Dying* series.**

- **The first week we talked about how it is we can begin to live like we were dying... how it is we can begin to make the most of the days and the relationships God gives us.**
- **The second week we talked about speaking sweeter.**
- **Last week we talked about loving deeper.**

**Let's begin by taking a moment to watch "*The Rock*."**

**Video Clip: "*The Rock*" (*Live Like You Were Dying*, DVD Resource)**

**Many of us can relate to that video clip... some of us have carried rocks of bitterness and unforgiveness in with us today. The question for us today is this, "Are you going to pick up your rock and carry it out with you when you go, or are you going to let it go and leave it?"**

**Today we are going to talk about letting it go, about giving forgiveness. This is a great day. It is a day of opportunity. "This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." Psalm 118:24**

**When I go to the bank to make a deposit, I fill out a deposit slip. If I am depositing a check in our checking account, I write the amount of the check on the deposit slip and give it to the cashier along with the endorsed check. That amount is then deposited into our checking account.. When that money is placed in our account... it is then available for Bonnie and me to use. We can squander it or we can spend it wisely.**

**God has made a deposit in your life account today. God has given you another 24-hours to live. God has given you this day... but it is not deposited in a savings account. You can't bank this day for later use. It is more like a spending account... It is more like a great giveaway. But rather than having to give away \$100,000 in 8 hours, you have 24 hours to tick away 1,440 minutes one by one.**

**So it is important that we be sensitive to the enormity of this gift. So pray ever day, "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." Psalm 90:12**

**We would be wise to give thought to seizing this day as an opportunity to let go of any bitterness you hold in your heart.**

**We are amazingly and wonderfully made. We have the capacity to love deeply. But we also have the capacity to hurt deeply. (*Live Like You Were Dying, Give Forgiveness, Part 4, Page 2*)**

**And it would seem that having loved deeply and then been hurt serves to exacerbate the pain of the offense... sometimes beyond our perceived limits for forgiveness. Sometimes we feel so injured, betrayed, or abandoned... sometimes the wound is so scathing that there is no way to heal it. Time does not heal such wounds. They may not be open festering wounds but the scab never quite heals over before we peel it away and reopen the wound.**

**Last year about this time, I was in severe discomfort. Something was wrong, so I went through a rather prolonged diagnostic process that eventually led to an MRI, which revealed a cyst on my spine. It was not the most delightful discovery ever made but it was good to know what it was and what had to be done. The cyst had to be removed or I would soon discover how truly miserable life could be.**

**X-Rays, MRIs, and CT Scans are helpful diagnostic tools to looking inside to see just what it is that is unhealthy and hurtful. Interestingly enough, we cannot order X-Rays, MRIs, or CT Scans for the other person. We can only take a look at ourselves. If we wait for the other person to get well and ask our forgiveness, we may carry our bitterness all the way to the grave**

**So we do what we can... the onus rests on each of us to, "Do our part to live in peace with everyone, as much as possible." Romans 12:18**

**If we plan to hold onto an offense and nurse bitterness until we get an apology or restitution, we may never be rid of the rock or rocks of unforgiveness we lug around.**

**There is a story in the bible where one of Jesus' disciples asked Jesus how many times he should forgive someone who offended him. Peter asked the question and then suggested the number 7 as a possibility. Jesus responded, "No, not seven times, but seventy times seven." So Jesus says the challenge for each of us in doing our parts in living at peace with others is to forgive and forgive, and forgive, and forgive... And here is why.**

**1. You've been released from God's judgment!**

**And the natural response to such good news is to celebrate.**

**Key Word: CELEBRATE!**

**However, one of the problems with us is that rather than be rid of our flaws, we try to cover them up.**

**Video Clip: The Evolution of Beauty (The Evolution of Beauty, YouTube)**

**Isn't it interesting what an extreme makeover can do? Extreme makeovers can cover a multitude of imperfections. An extreme makeover can transform an ordinary woman into a supermodel, but under the surface imperfections continue to lurk... temporarily disguised by applied glamour.**

**The bible says that underneath our external makeover, underneath the surface, "No one is good... not even one." Romans 3:10**

**We are told, that despite whatever face we put on, "At one time you were far away from God and were his enemies because of the evil things you did and thought." Colossians 1:21**

**That's who we are apart from the offer of forgiveness God extends to each of us. So we begin with the understanding that we are flawed human beings in deed of more than just an external makeover... we need an extreme internal makeover. We need to be transformed into new people. We need to be washed clean by God's forgiveness. And when we grasp the nature of God's forgiveness for us... we can grasp the extent of forgiveness we may extend to others.**

**There is a story in Matthew 18:21-35 about a man who was forgiven an enormous debt... let's just say a million dollar debt was written off. He did not have to settle the debt dollar for dollar or even cents on the dollar. The debt was written off. He was forgiven.**

**However, the next day, the man forgiven so much foreclosed on another man who owed him ten thousand dollars. The man pleaded with his lender**

for an extension of time but the man would not budge. He foreclosed on the man who owed him ten thousand dollars.

Eventually, the story got back to the man who had forgiven the man a million dollars who in turn, had then refused to forgive another man a mere ten thousand dollars, and he was furious. He was so furious that he reinstated the original debt of the unforgiving man.

He said, "You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant just as I had mercy on you?"

The lesson of that parable is to remind us that rather than be unforgiving of others we, "Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you." Ephesians 4:32

So the starting place is to celebrate our own forgiveness and then, release others as we have been forgiven.

## 2. Release others from your judgment

And when we forgive and release those who have offended us, we liberate them.

**Key Word: LIBERATE**

A colleague of mine who is a pastor in the Kansas City area told me a story about how his wife had to work late one night so it was his job to pick up pizza for the family. The pizza place was about fifteen miles or so from their home so he asked the pizza man to not completely bake it and to not cut it, since he would have to reheat it when he arrived home. The pizza man said it would be about twenty minutes.

When my friend returned to pick up his pizza, the man was smitten. He was embarrassed and apologetic. He said, "I'm sorry. I cut your pizza." He went on about how he was so accustomed to cutting the pizzas that he cut it without thinking and offered to bake him another pizza.

This is what my friend said to the offending pizza man, "I want you to give me my pizza, and then I want you to give me your guilt."

That is what we do when we forgive another person, we liberate them from their guilt just as God has liberated us from our guilt.

In the wisdom literature in the bible we read, "A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense." Proverbs 19:11

**One day at work, a man was telling one of his co-workers about a fight he and his wife had the night before. He said, "My wife was so upset that she went historical." His friend asked, "Don't you mean hysterical?" No," he said, "she brought up everything I had ever done wrong. She was definitely, historical." We have a hard time overlooking offenses. We may or may not be hysterical, but we are likely to be historical when it comes to nursing a grudge. (Live Like You Were Dying, Give Forgiveness, Part 4, P. 8)**

**So when you feel resentment toward another person or you can't stop thinking about the hurt someone has caused you, you know you are harboring an unforgiving spirit. The Live Like You Were Dying people suggest that we learn to release, not relive hurts. (P. 9)**

**So with a spirit of grace, we make allowances for others. The bible says, "You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others." Colossians 3:13**

**I know I have no clue as to how horribly you have been hurt by another person, but our model is Jesus Christ who prayed at the time of his death, asking God to forgive those who were taking his life. He even gave them the benefit of the doubt when he said, "for they know not what they do."**

**I wonder if Jesus wasn't giving us some, not so subtle, hints as to how it is we let go of an offense when he taught, "But if you are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Pray for the happiness of those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you." Luke 6:27-28 "Love your enemies! Do good to them! Lend to them! And don't be concerned that they might not repay. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting like children of the Most High, for he is kind to the unthankful and to those who are wicked. You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate." Luke 6:35-36**

**Listen to the ways we are to demonstrate forgiveness toward those who offend and hurt us.**

- **Love your enemies.**
- **Do good to those who hate you.**
- **Pray for the happiness of those who curse you.**
- **Pray for those who hurt you.**
- **Don't worry about being repaid when you are owed.**
- **Be kind and compassionate toward those who are ungrateful.**

**We begin our journey of forgiveness by receiving forgiveness from God.**

**We continue our journey of forgiveness by giving forgiveness to those who have hurt us. We celebrate our own forgiveness and we liberate our offenders.**

**Now the question remains, what if we don't let go of our grievances and forgive?**

**If you don't forgive, you condemn yourself to judgment.**

### **3. Condemn yourself to judgment**

**And instead of the key word being celebrate... it is devastate.**

#### **DEVASTATE!**

**Remember the parable from Matthew 18 that I referred to earlier? "Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?' Then the angry king sent the man to prison until he had paid every penny."**

**And this is the scary part of Jesus' teaching: "That is what my Heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters in your heart." Matthew 18:35**

**I was reading a book by Rob Bell last week titled *The Velvet Elvis*. In his book, he wrote of how their church sponsored a "Doubt Night" one evening at Mars Hill in Grandville, MI. The people were encouraged to write down all of their questions... to freely express all their doubts about their faith. He said they had to get a larger box to hold all of the questions. Bell says that, "Questions, no matter how shocking or blasphemous or ignorant or raw, are rooted in humility. A humility that understands that I am not God. And there is more to know." (Rob Bell, *The Velvet Elvis*, Zondervan, P. 30)**

**I confess to you that if God's forgiveness is conditional on our willingness to forgive others, it is troubling to me. Does the grace of God not extend to include an unforgiving spirit? Does the fact that a person will not forgive prove that he or she has never really received the grace and forgiveness of God and therefore is not a true follower of Christ? Does it mean that when we pray The Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors," that God's forgiveness is directly proportionate to the forgiveness we give to others?**

**I don't know and I am willing to admit this morning that I don't have a nice clean explanation for you. I only know what the bible says. The bible says,**

**“See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.” Hebrews 12:15**

**When we fail to give forgiveness and liberate those who have hurt us, we perpetuate an endless cycle of offending and getting even. A bitter root has a way of growing deeper and deeper if you do not cut it off.**

**Illustration: There is a story in the bible about two army commanders. Their names were Joab and Abner. Joab’s brother was killed by Abner, so Joab gave chase to Abner. That night Joab’s army camped at the foot of a hill, below where Abner and his army were camped.**

**This is the conversation that ensued: “Abner shouted down the hill to Joab, ‘Must we always solve our differences with swords? Don’t you realize the only thing we will gain is bitterness toward each other? When will you call off your men from chasing their Israelite brothers?’ Then Joab said, “God only knows what would have happened if you had not spoken, for we would have chased you all night if necessary.” II Samuel 2:26-27**

**Someone has to break the cycle or vengeance goes on forever. Someone has to say, “Enough!” When we decide to say, “I forgive you,” we have said, “enough.” When we decide to forgive another person, we lay down the rock we have been carrying and walk away. When we walk away, we leave it with God... if there is any judging to be done, let God do it.**

**Will you let it go?**

**Will You Break the Cycle... Will You LET IT GO!**

**Leave it here today... celebrate your own forgiveness and in letting go, liberate yourself and anyone who has hurt you.**