

LIVING IN FORGIVENESS

To those of us who pay attention to our South African holidays, you would have celebrated Heritage Day yesterday. On this day, South Africans are encouraged to celebrate their culture and the diversity of their beliefs and traditions.

Our nation is very diverse and whilst this enriches us as a people, it brings with it a lot of complications – the more diverse a group is, the more differences and disagreements you are bound to experience. As a result of our diversity, we have hurt each other quite a lot and what was meant to be beautiful, has become a nightmare to some degree.

For us to enjoy this rainbow nation of ours, we need to master the art of tolerance, acceptance, and forgiveness. Our history calls upon us to exercise caution and care as we deal with each other. The truth is that our past was filled with prejudices and if we are not careful, we can perpetuate them knowingly or not knowingly.

- In this regard, this morning I want to talk to you on the subject matter **LIVING IN FORGIVENESS**.
- Forgiveness is such a beautiful thing when you are on the receiving end but not so much when you are the one who must forgive.
- There is a group of people that struggle to forgive whilst there is another group that struggles to receive forgiveness.
- Your quality of life is greatly impacted by whether you live in forgiveness or not – have you been forgiven and have your forgiven.
- To appreciate forgiveness, we need to go back to its origin – forgiveness is rooted in the nature of God. Righteous and Holy is our God and in Him there is no evil – man fell from grace and from that point on, we have needed God's forgiveness and from our fellow man.

1. How does God's forgiveness look like?

- The meaning of the word "forgive" gives us an insight into how God's forgiveness looks like.
 - To forgive means to cancel one's liability for punishment for a wrongdoing
 - To forgive means to willingly release someone you had legal control over.
- When God forgives, He also forgets the sin – this is the only time that God the all-knowing and all-powerful God loses His ability to remember something.

Jeremiah 31:34 And they shall no more teach each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah; for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says Jehovah. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sins no more.

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- When He forgives, He eternally separates you from the sin – you can never live in the same space as the sin He has forgiven.

Psalm 103:12 As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

- God's forgiveness does not temporarily suspend punishment but rather it is complete and forever.
- God's forgiveness cannot be overturned by any other authority.
 - God's forgiveness is very much like the presidential pardon. There are five characteristics of a presidential pardon:
 1. It must be exercised by one who has the power to pardon.
 2. No other judge or magistrate can overturn the pardon.
 3. The crime for which the pardon is granted is completely erased from all police or FBI records.
 4. You can never be tried for that particular crime again.
 5. That crime can never be held against you again.
 - In other words, it is just as if the crime never occurred. Even on a job application that asks for whether or not you have ever been convicted of a crime, you can legally say "NO!"

2. God's forgiveness is conditional and not automatic

- God is and has always been ready to forgive you, but you need to position yourself aright in order to receive it.

2.1 You must confess your sin

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

- Though your sins were fully paid for on the cross, though the debt was cancelled completely, you need to realize that those whose sins were cancelled have a tendency to sin - 1 John 1:8: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves."
- Those who know that their sins were fully forgiven go to war when they see sin in their lives, and they do that by confessing them. To confess is to say the same as God says about sin – each time you confess your sins, you are waging war against your sinful nature and in so doing you obtain forgiveness from God.
- The only sin that God cannot forgive is the unconfessed sin.

2.2 You must repent of the sin

- Many people do not see the gravity of their sins and as such they don't have godly sorrow that results in a change of heart and mind.

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- In the absence of repentance, you will always find yourself going back to your old sins
- The usual thing is to confess after you have been caught – are you in the habit of confessing before you are caught out.

Acts 3:19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

- Genuine repentance produces a change in the way you live and even in the way you think.

2.3 Be willing to forgive others

- In as much as God is willing and capable to forgive you, your lack of forgiving others renders it impossible for you to receive God's forgiveness.
- In other words, God's forgiveness flows through your act forgiving of others.

Mark 11:25 And when you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive it so that also your Father in Heaven may forgive you your trespasses. 26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in Heaven forgive your trespasses.

2.4 Receive the forgiveness

- In as much as God freely offers forgiveness, He will not force its acceptance.
- Many self-righteous people cannot receive God's forgiveness until they feel they have paid the price by causing themselves some form of pain or harm.
- The only way to receive God's forgiveness, is to learn to forgive yourself. As long as you keep on bashing yourself for your foolish behavior, you are not yet in a position to receive God's forgiveness.
- You forgive yourself by disciplining your thought patterns – forget what God has forgiven you.

Philippians 3: 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead.

- Choose to forget those things that God has forgiven you
- Do not give those things mindshare and disregard them.
- Remove your attention from what God has forgiven you
- Exercise the renewal of your mind in this regard.
- You receive forgiveness by faith – after confessing your sin, it sometimes does not feel as if you have been forgiven.

3. Extend forgiveness to others

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- Maybe you have heard the statement that says, “the prisoner that forgiveness frees is you”.
- Many people feel that forgiving someone is licensing or condoning a bad behavior. No, when you choose to forgive, you are taking back control of your life to choose how you feel about someone and about yourself.
- Maybe you are that person who struggles to forgive. There are plenty of reasons why the idea of forgiving your enemy sounds unrealistic and unfair:
 - They’ll think they got off easy and do it again
 - They hurt me, so we can’t forgive them
 - What they did was horrible, and they shouldn’t be let off the hook. It would be unjust to forgive them
 - They don’t deserve it; they haven’t even repented!
 - They don’t seem to care one way or another if they’re forgiven
 - I was hurt too deeply, and I just can’t let it go
- The truth is that all these are legitimate reasons but how do they match up with the related consequences of not forgiving?
- Let’s explore the negative fruit associated with not forgiving others. Lack of forgiveness lies behind the breakdown of many relationships

3.1 Your intimacy with God diminishes

Isaiah 1:15 When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you multiply your prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood.

3.2 Your gifts and ministries will be rendered ineffective.

Matthew. 5:23-24 Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

3.3 God will withdraw His forgiveness

Matthew 18:35 So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.

3.4 You experience internal turmoil and negative emotion

- Studies have found that the act of unforgiveness has huge negative impact on your health.
- Unforgiveness increases the risk of heart attacks; increased cholesterol levels and lack of sleep; and increased pain, blood pressure, and levels of anxiety, depression, and stress.

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4 How does it look like to forgive someone

- The way you forgive others must reflect the way that God has forgiven you – it cannot be more or less. The Bible says as you have received, also give freely.
- Forgiveness must be expressed in words – it cannot be that you just forgive them in your heart.
- Refuse to bring up the matter again to the offending party.
- Begin to treat the offending person as if it never happened.
- Refuse to talk to others about the matter anymore.
- Refuse to dwell on the offense in your mind.

5. What are the benefits of living in forgiveness

- Forgiveness is a great gift that keeps on giving and when you live in it and by it, you will greatly benefit.

5.1 You are at peace with God and with man (justification)

- It means that you can live your life as if nothing happened.

5.2 Healing and restoration

- A forgiven person heals from past wounds, and they can live without scars
- Your relationship with God and with man are restored to where they were before the offense occurred.
- There is no sin so gross that God cannot forgive.
- God's forgiveness extends to such things as abortion, divorce, homosexuality, adultery, fornication, stealing, child abuse, failure in business, failure in parenting and failure in ministry.