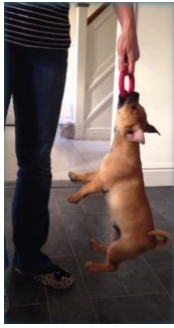


Freeway Series / #5: Forgiveness

May 8, 2016



I found this picture when I was digging around the internet last week. It's a picture of a lot of you guys. Well, to be honest, it's a picture of me too. And it pretty much captures what we are going to be digging into this morning. Here it is, in a nutshell: "Holding on keeps us from moving on."

Guys, we are sinful people, and we are surrounded by sinful people, and we're doing life in a broken world. That means we're going to pick up some pain along the way. You're going to be hurt, and marginalized, and disrespected, and betrayed. And every time hurt happens you are going to accumulate some baggage. Listen guys, God does not intend for us to carry a load of baggage that just keeps getting bigger and bigger as life goes on. He gave us a way to dump the baggage. It's called ... forgiveness; because holding on keeps us from moving on.

So, if you have a Bible app on your phone or tablet, or one of those old-fashioned paper Bibles, find the Gospel of Mark, chapter 2. We're going to get there in a couple minutes. Mark 2. We'll also have the key verses on our screens as well... But before we get there, let me ask you a question: "Why did you come to church today?" You don't have to answer out loud.

- For some of you that's pretty easy: It's Mother's Day, and your mom wants you here. And at least on Mother's Day, you're going to do what mom wants.
- Others of you are just curious. You are kind of curious about God, you are curious about the church, maybe you are curious about Capital City Christian Church. We're really glad you're here!
- Some of you guys are here because this is where your friends are. They mean a lot to you, and this is part of how you do life with your friends.
- Some of you guys are here because you genuinely enjoy worship. Now I love watching the little guys. The lights come on and their eyes get big; and they watch the screens, they dance to the music. That's so cool. But some of you older guys really enjoy worship, too. And for you it's way more than the lights and the screens and the music; you sense the presence of God. And that is so important.

- I've been told two of you guys actually look forward to the preaching part. You get to go to the front of the line when you get to heaven, I'm pretty sure. At least I'll let you cut in front of me.
- And some of you guys are here because you feel the need to pray. Life's been hard; it's been messy; and you're needing some help. Maybe your marriage is struggling, or you're sick. Maybe you have a kid with issues, or bills you can't pay, or you need a job, or you're are battling an addiction. Or maybe you have anger issues, and you hate it; or you are lonely. I don't know why you're here.

Here's the deal: What you think you need from God and what you really need from God may be two very different things. Whatever your reason for being here this morning, God may have something way better for you...

(Mark 2.1) So here's what's going on in Mark chapter 2. Jesus is about to encounter a man who is physically paralyzed. Now he actually has issues way more serious than paralysis, he just doesn't know it yet. Because sometimes what we think we need from God and what we really need are two very different things. But this guy is fixated on his physical disability. He's tired of bed sores. Ever seen them? They are nasty. He's tired of laying there staring at the ceiling. He's tired of relying on others to turn him, bathe him, dress him, take him to the bathroom, whatever.

Anyway, somehow either he or his friends start hearing stories about ... Jesus. The reports are that Jesus has this extraordinary power to heal people. Now that would stir something in this guy, wouldn't it? So his friends pick him up on his mat, and they carry him to where Jesus was, somewhere in Capernaum. *(Mark 2.2)* And when they get to the house where Jesus is teaching, it's standing room only. People are packed in the doorways, they are crowded around the windows ... there's just no way in.

So one of them gets this crazy idea: "Let's tear a hole in the roof and just lower George down in front of Jesus." Can you imagine that? Now, I know that roofs were different back then. They would make this lattice of saplings, and then they would pack it with mud. It might be a foot thick! So they could kind of dig out the dirt, and cut away the branches, and make a hole big enough to drop this guy through. But don't you think that would be a little annoying for the guy who owned the house, or for the people who were packed inside who were having to brush the dirt out of their hair, and their eyes, as they looked up at these twits?

(Mark 2.3-4) And, what do you think Jesus was thinking? Do you think he was annoyed at the interruption? I doubt it. Do you think he was amused at their creativity, at their gall? By the way: How would you like to have four friends who would go that far to get you to Jesus? How far would you go to get a friend to Jesus? Would you go this far? ... Why not? And what do you think the paralytic is feeling about now? A little terror: "Guys, please don't drop me! I hope those ropes are strong enough!" And he is about to see Jesus face to face. This could be the best day of his life. "But ... what if he doesn't heal me? What if it turns out he can't heal me?" This could be the most disappointing day of his life. Have you ever been disappointed by Jesus? Have you ever prayed hard for something, believed hard for something, and it just didn't happen?

(Mark 2.5) Well ... that's how this paralytic must have felt. Because here's what Jesus says, when this paralytic is finally lying on his mat in front of him. He says, "My child, your sins are forgiven." ... "What?! My sins are forgiven ... Are you serious?" I figure the guy is dumfounded, he is utterly deflated. He is disappointed with Jesus, right? Wouldn't you be? "I wanted to stand up, I wanted to walk, I wanted to run, I wanted to dance." And Jesus says, "Nah, I'm going to forgive your sins." But ... what if ... what if Jesus was doing what Jesus does: he looks inside us and instead of seeing what we think we need, he sees what we really need. And that's where he lasers in.

So, why are you here this morning?

- Because it's Mother's Day? That's cool.
- Because you are curious? Maybe you are wondering whether there is something here that you need, that would make your life better.
- Maybe you are here because your friends are here.
- Or because you enjoy worship. You ache to feel God's presence.
- Maybe you are here because you've heard there's an amazing preacher at Capital City.
- Or, maybe you are here because life is pretty messy right now: your marriage is struggling, or you are sick, or you are lonely, or you need some help with some sin that's crushing you.

And Jesus looks inside you, and instead of seeing what you think you need, he sees what you really need, and he says, to you, "Your sins are forgiven" ... or "They can be, if you'll let me help you my way." You see,

maybe what we really need this morning is a fresh touch of grace. Maybe what we really need is some freedom from the guilt and shame that is crushing us, from the baggage that is weighing us down.

Now there are some things that we are going to have to do if we are going to experience the freedom he wants to give us. Here's the first: I have to admit I need forgiving. Now that kind of goes back to where we were last week. Guys, it's time to stop blaming someone else for my sin. It's time to stop playing the victim. It's time to stop calling my sins mistakes, or failures, or issues, or indiscretions, or shortcomings, or hang-ups, or challenges, or struggles. We are sinners. We sin. We know what God wants us to do, and we don't do it. We have to admit it, guys ... if we want to be healed.

Do you remember that verse we unpacked last week? The Bible says, "If we refuse to admit that we are sinners, then we live in a world of illusion and truth becomes a stranger to us." (1 John 1.8) We are sinners; we sin. The Bible says, "No one is righteous -- not even one." (Romans 3.10) None of us. The Bible says, "All have sinned, (all of us) and (all of us) fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3.23) Now, you may hide your sin from your friends, even from your family; but guys – you know you are a sinner, and he knows it, too. We keep no secrets from God. You can't close your bedroom door to keep him out. You can't create a password that will keep him out. When you go there, he knows. What's in here (mind), what's in here (heart) he knows.

Guys, this room is chock full of what we could call "secret carriers." Nearly everyone in this room carries around "secret sins." You cheated in school, and no one knows ... you hope. You cheated on your husband, or your wife ... and they don't know ... you hope. You spoke some careless words, and you hope someone never finds out. You had a sexual encounter you shouldn't have had. You took some pills you shouldn't have taken. You carry around the baggage of a secret abortion. You stole from a family member, or a business, or a church. There's a folder on your computer that has pictures in it you hope no one ever finds. There are texts you have sent you hope no one else ever discovers.

You know what I am talking about. And the guilt can eat you alive; it can actually be almost ... paralyzing. It steals your joy; it robs your sleep. Guys, I know what it feels like; I have failures. I have sins that have

haunted me. If God gave me what I deserved, he'd crush me like the cockroach I am. Which is why I am drawn like a magnet to Jesus, who tells spiritually paralyzed people like me: Your sins are forgiven. Do you know how freeing it would be if we could accept that forgiveness?

You see it starts with admitting I am a sinner, and I need forgiving. If you won't acknowledge your sin, you won't be freed from them. We studied this verse too, last week. The Bible says, "People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy." (Proverbs 28.13) Maybe you didn't quite get there last week. Maybe what you need most today is a truth-telling time with God. "God, you know who I really am; I know who I really am. I'm a liar; a cheat; I hurt people with my words. I'm a thief; an adulterer; I have a greedy heart; a lust-filled heart; I'm a trust-breaker." Can you say that to God? I hope so. Because until we do, we live in a world of illusion; and the only path to freedom is get honest with God about our sin. That's step 1.

The next step may be even tougher: We have to allow God to forgive us. We have to accept his forgiveness. Do you actually think God wants to forgive you, completely? There are Jesus followers in this room, some of you guys have been Jesus followers for decades, and you still won't accept his forgiveness! It's no wonder you don't experience the freedom he died to give you.

(Mark 2.6-7) Now, you need to know that when Jesus told that paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven," he stirred up a hornet's nest. Now, for the paralyzed guy, they were not the words he came to hear. I suspect he was crushed, he was disappointed. "Thanks a lot, Jesus, but I wanted my legs to work again!" He was probably so wrapped up in himself that he was oblivious to the buzz that was building around him: "What did Jesus say?" "Did he just tell that guy, 'Your sins are forgiven.'" "Can he do that?" "Who does he think he is?" "I think that's way above his pay-grade!" "Only God can do that! Does he think he's God!"

(Mark 2.10-11) But before they could finish processing his words, Jesus blows their minds again. He looks at the crowd who were deeply unsettled and he says, "I will prove to you that I have the authority to forgive sins." And then he looks at the paralyzed guy and he says those words the dude came to hear. Jesus says, "Go ahead, stand up. Pick up your mat, and go on home." And ... he did. Have you seen that Jet.com commercial

where their minds explode? Well, can you imagine seeing a paralytic get up and walk! Minds are exploding! (*Mark 2.12*) You see, this story is not about the healing of a paralytic's body. This story is demonstration that Jesus has the willingness and the power to forgive sins. Healing a paralyzed body is pretty big; but healing a paralyzed soul – guys, that's eternity changing! I don't care what brought you here today. If you find forgiveness for your sins, you will have the greatest gift God can give.

Listen guys, if you have the courage to confess your sins, he's going to tell you what he told that paralytic: "Your sins are forgiven." Your sins are forgiven! Do you buy that? Your sins are forgiven! And to prove he is willing and able, he went to a cross, and he died in your place, and he was buried, and three days later he walked out of a tomb to show you that God doesn't want you to be tortured and dogged by guilt anymore. Someday, guys ... Someday you are going to stand before God, and he's going to render a verdict on your life. You'll hear either "guilty," or "not guilty." And your whole life will be defined by that moment; your whole eternity will be defined by that moment. You'd better have a great lawyer, because you know in your heart right now what the verdict ought to be! Well the apostle John put it like this. He says, "My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate (we have a defense attorney) who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world." (1 John 2.1-2)

Someday, I suspect, I will experience something like this ... "On the charge of lust we find the defendant, Stephen Pattison, not guilty." And I will drop to my knees, because I know I am guilty. "On the charge of gluttony, on the charge of greed, on the charge of laziness, on the charge of a wicked tongue, on the charge of ungodly jealousy, on the charge of ungodly pride, we find the defendant, not guilty." And the relief I will feel, the freedom I will feel, the joy I will feel, I can't put into words. And I will look at my attorney, my advocate, and he will say, "It's okay; it's on me. It's all on me."

Now ... do you believe he'll do that for you? Do you believe that he's already done the tough part? Guys, that's what this table is all about – this bread, representing his body, broken for you on a cross; this juice, representing his blood, shed for you on a cross. But before you come to

these tables, I want to ask you to pray with me. If you want, hold your hands open, palms up – because you are letting go of what is yours, and receiving what is his.

Now will you bow your heads with me ... Can you tell God, with all honesty, “God, forgive me, a sinner.” ... Remember, if we refuse to admit that we are sinners, we live in a world of illusion and the truth is not in us. Is there an attitude, a thought, a word, a behavior, an action, a sin that you just need to come clean with God today? Just ask Him, “God, please forgive me, through Jesus.”

Maybe you’ve never accepted Jesus as Lord of your life. So maybe today with your hands open, you’ll say to him, “Jesus today, I ask you to come into my life. I want that forgiveness you won for me on that cross, so that one day I can stand before the Father and hear the words, ‘Not guilty’. Not because of anything I’ve done, but because of what you have done for me. I want to follow you with my life.”

Now, if you would open your eyes and look up here. I know Jesus isn’t here physically to say the words to us that he said to this paralyzed man, but maybe we could be his voice to one another. So I’m going to say those words, and I’m going to ask you to repeat them after me so that your neighbor can hear the words. Let’s serve each other that way. “In Jesus, your sins are forgiven.” [Tell your neighbors: In Jesus, your sins are forgiven.] Now tell yourself: “In Jesus, my sins are forgiven.” [Crowd: In Jesus, my sins are forgiven.] If you will accept that, it will be life changing!

Now we are going to get really quiet here for a few minutes. This is a time for you to get right with God. Just get quiet, sense his presence, and tell him what you need to tell him. And when you are ready, make your way to the worship stations for the Lord’s Supper. This is a time to celebrate his grace all over again. And while you are at the worship stations, give him your first part back as an act of worship. And we’ll have some elders standing at the back of the room. If you need prayer, or if you want Jesus to be your Savior, please go talk to one of them...

Okay, one more piece, guys, maybe the toughest part. Here it is: Once I’ve experienced God’s forgiveness, then I must irrationally extend that forgiveness to others. (Repeat) That’s the part we don’t like. We like to receive grace; but we’re not so fond of giving it.

(Mark 2.11) There's a little detail in the story that is strange. Jesus says, "Get up – take up your mat – and go home." "Don't forget the mat; take it with you." Now I know this is really speculative. I know that Jesus may have told him to pick up his mat because it's not courteous to leave a mess behind you. But I wonder if Jesus wanted him to keep the mat as a reminder. Every time he sees that mat from that moment forward, he remembers what Jesus did both to his body, and to his heart. Jesus healed his body; but way more than that, Jesus healed his heart.

And here's the deal: I wonder if the next time he was hurt, or wounded, or betrayed, or abused by someone in his life, I wonder if he didn't look at the mat and remember, "God has forgiven me of so much. How can I not forgive you?" Do you remember those four guys who carried him to Jesus? Eventually they are going to mess up. We all do. Eventually one of them is going to hurt his feelings. And when we get hurt, our instinct is to hurt back, right? Our bent is ... unforgiveness.

I heard about a woman who walked into a pet store one day and said to the owner, "I want the meanest, nastiest animal you have. What do you have?" The owner said, "Well I've got this attack bird." "An attack bird? What can he do?" "Well, just watch." So he opened the bird's cage and he said, "Attack bird, the chair." The bird flew out of his cage, swooped down to the chair—it was like a chainsaw—in about 30 seconds the chair was gone! "Wow! That is impressive. What else can he do?" "Attack bird, the table." Same thing, the bird attacks, sawdust flying, in less than a minute no more table. "I'll take it. I don't care what it costs. I'll buy that bird." "He's yours, lady, but I'm curious, why do you want it?" She said, "I am married to the meanest, nastiest man in the world. He has been nothing but unkind to me for years. Today I am going home with this bird. And when I walk in he will ask me what I have and I will tell him, "I bought an attack bird." And he will say, "Attack bird, my foot." Actually that's not quite the way I heard it, but you get the idea. In any case, when we get hurt we want to strike back; we want to attack.

So imagine this guy who has been forgiven of so much, absolutely every sin he has ever committed. Imagine the next time he is ticked off ... and he sees the mat ... I wonder if in the heat of the moment, maybe he looked at the mat and remembered those incredible words: "Your sins are forgiven, I forgive you." And I wonder if he didn't just shake his head in

disbelief at what he was about to do. And I wonder if he didn't say, "God forgave me of so much. How can I not forgive you?" You see that's God's will; and that's a key to freedom.

One time Jesus told a parable about forgiveness. He talks about a King who forgave a servant an immense debt. And then the servant refuses to forgive another guy who owed him a much smaller debt. Here's what the king says. He says: "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?" (Matthew 18.32-33) Guys, you have been forgiven by God; now it's your turn.

A whole lot of you in this room this morning, you're living in conflict with another person, and you are not free because of it. Maybe it's your spouse, or your ex, or your son, or your daughter, or your mom, or your dad. Maybe it's your neighbor, or your boss. Someone hurt you; they disrespected you, betrayed you, lied to you, exploited you. And you are nursing grudges, you are harboring unforgiveness, and it is diminishing the quality of your life. Your unforgiveness is robbing you of your freedom. And you know it is not God-honoring.

And what makes it harder to forgive is that you have every right to be bitter. I mean, if we were to ask you to stand up and tell your story, we'd probably all go, "Yeah, you have every right to be bitter." Well, isn't it time for you to remember what life was like for you on that mat? Isn't it time for you to let it go and release them from the grudge, from the resentment, from the hatred that you carry? Maybe for some of you it's even time for you to attempt to reconcile with that person? Why is it that we are unwilling to forgive? I mean, is what he asks of us greater than the grace he has extended to us? Are the sins you won't forgive greater than the mountain of sins that he's already forgiven in your life?

The Bible says, "Be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you." (Ephesians 4.32) He says, "Forgive one another as quickly and as thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you," so you can be free from the baggage of unforgiveness. The way to forgive, guys, is to remember the way we have been forgiven.

I know it's not painless. I know you are going to have to absorb the pain they deserve ... kind of like he absorbed ours. Remember what we ended with last week: You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free ... but it will sting first. Forgiving is hard, but it will be worth it. You cannot take the journey of freedom without going through the door of forgiveness. And I don't know what you thought you needed today, but maybe what you actually need is different than what you thought.

Wouldn't it be something if in this room, because we are aware of what he has done for us, we could irrationally extend his forgiveness to someone who has hurt us? What if we did more than just talk about forgiving? What if we actually did it, right here, right now? Do you want to be free? Well, we are going to get quiet here for the next few minutes. You can either sit here uncomfortably, or you can take a step down the path of freedom. I am going to ask you – right here, right now -- to extend forgiveness to someone who has hurt you, because God has forgiven you. Maybe you need to write a note – right here, right now -- or an email, or a text to someone you have been angry with, someone who least expects it. Maybe all you'll say is, "Hey, I'm thinking about you. All is forgiven." Or maybe you need to say, "Hey, please forgive me. I love you." It will blow them away, and I'll tell you what else it will do: It will set you free. It doesn't have to be long, just clear and sincere. Or maybe today you need to go knock on somebody's door today. Maybe you need to make a phone call. Just don't put it off. If the Holy Spirit is urging you to do this, do it now, do it today.

We're going to get really quiet. You can either use this time to be really uncomfortable, or you can use this time to get free. Pray for someone, text someone, write someone, call someone. "Forgive someone as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ has forgiven you."