

F.O.R.G.I.V.E.

**Matthew 11:28-30; Luke 6:27-28;
Romans 12:14; 1 Peter 3:9-12**

How a Word from God Can Teach Us to Love

By

**Ric Webb
Pastor-Teacher**

**Heart's Journey Community
9621 Tall Timber Blvd.
Little Rock, AR 72204**

**Website www.hjcommunity.org
Phone 501.455.0296**

Opening.

I want to summarize for you our teaching on forgiveness. To do that, I need to deal with the ideas of 'replay' and 'revenge.' So, let me walk you through a couple of concepts here. First of all, replays of events don't divert anger; they sustain it. We dream of revenge, payback, retribution... and the desire to get even starts taking its toll. We've seen and studied already the command to "**Never take your own revenge ...but leave room for the wrath {of God}...**" Romans 12:19a. If there's one thing we know for certain, it's that **we cannot conquer evil with evil; we can only overcome evil with good**— the "**good**" that God is {1 Jn. 4:8 and 16}, which is to say, with expressions of His love, with out-workings of *agape* applied directly to the people in our periphery, and sometimes the people in our past. The divine instruction to forgive, which we've noted over and over in the New Testament, is not in God's best interests, but in ours. Letting go of our anger, turning loose of our desire to exact revenge, and stepping out in faith on the Path of Forgiveness, are one and the same.

Secondly, refusing to forgive only freezes us in the past and gives our betrayers more power than they deserve over our hearts and lives. **To believe there are benefits to unforgiveness is to deceive oneself.** And self deception is a practiced art of arrogance. As Paul said to the Galatians in 6:3, "**if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.**" What happens is that when you release your 'gorilla grip' on the wrong that was done to you by giving it over to God, by placing it in the Father's hands, you set someone free from the prison of pain. And that someone is you.

Third, forgiveness is rarely easy; it's not natural to our sin-stained souls. And the more we've been hurt, the deeper the wounds, the more we need supernatural strength to enable us to forgive. **Deeper wounds need greater grace.** And that's just what we have in the indwelling Spirit of Grace: "**He gives**" us according to James 4:6, "**a super-abounding grace.**"

Finally, forgiveness is a process, and in each step are two parts: *ours* and *God's*. In order to execute the objective of forgiveness, we have to walk through these in step with the Spirit of God. Let's take a look at the acronym F.O.R.G.I.V.E., and draw from this our insight into the progression of forgiveness.

Essay-- How a Word From God Can Teach Us to Love.

F = Face the Facts {i.e., don't live in unreality}.

Ours: [1] Face our own indignation at the injustice done and admit our constant rehearsals, our incessant replaying of another's wrongdoings. [2] Acknowledge that our obsession has only fueled our anger and hatred. [3] Admit we are helpless to let go of our hatred and hurt, then *homologeo* {name, identify, or acknowledge} the ill will we have wished on our enemies.

His: God forgives us fully and purifies us completely— 1 John 1:9. His Word gives us that absolute assurance; in Psalm 51:17 David said, “**a broken and contrite heart, ‘O God, You will not despise.’**” You remember what occasioned this Psalm, don’t you? That statement was uttered and inspired in the midst of his own personal confession to the Lord God of Israel, Jesus Christ, concerning his hand in the murder of Uriah and his adultery with Uriah’s wife Bathsheba. “**If we admit our sins— make a clean breast of them— He won’t let us down; He’ll be true to Himself. He’ll forgive our sins and purge us of all wrongdoing.**” That’s how 1 John 1:9 looks in *The Message*.

O = Obstruct Your Thoughts of Revenge.

Ours: When memories surface {and they will}, when painful episodes from the past reemerge, take control of your thoughts. Paul instructs us, to take “**every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,**” 2 Corinthians 10:5b. The verb for ‘taking someone captive’ in 2 Corinthians 10:5 comes from the root noun *aichmalotos*- a ‘captive’ in war {a compound from *aichme*- ‘spear’ and *halotos*- ‘be taken:’ *be taken by spear*}. It is used here of bringing our thoughts under submission to our Savior, of leading our hearts back under the authority of Jesus Christ ..in “**obedience**” to Him. Even the apostle Paul, one of the most bold and brilliant thinkers in all of human history, lays his thoughts at the feet of his Lord. Take your stand in the Spirit, and make your mind work *for* you and not *against* you. E.g., “I bring these thoughts under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, King of Kings and Ruler of All. I reject these things, I renounce them as a proper response to pain. I will not dwell in the realm of evil and arrogance. It’s not my job to balance the scales; it’s God’s!” As it says in Hebrews 10:30a, “**Vengeance is Mine; I will repay!**” Or, like the message carved into the stone of Edmond Dantes’ prison cell in the movie *The Count of Monte Cristo*, “God will give me justice!”

His: God is faithful; He always keeps His promises. If He ever fails in one, then He is not immutable and He will certainly fail in all. Nor is He absolute Truth, and how can we trust anything He’s said? *He is True to His Word*. That means in His own impeccable timing, He’ll do what He say’s He’ll do. He will hold each and every one accountable for their own lives. What does Paul say in 2 Corinthians 5:10? “**For we must all appear [without exception] before the Judgment Seat of Christ [the Bema, the Tribunal of Eternal Reward], so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether divinely good or eternally worthless,**” {RR Expanded}. Notice my emphasis is not so much on eternal reward, but on the fact that we stand ‘alone and accountable’ before Christ for the life we live “**in the body.**” That’s the principle derived from *hekastos*: “**each and every one.**” Now, if this is true for you, then how much more for those who have wounded you?

R = Relinquish Your Rights {which means put away the demand that this person owes me; you might as well forget that debt, because whatever you think is owed you is *never* going to be paid, and the wages of trying to exact it yourself will destroy you}.

Ours: Ask God to do what we cannot.

*Holy Father and Mighty God, I don't know where to begin, I don't know how to forgive, but I am willing to be willing. I am willing to let You work in any way You see fit. Help me to see through the eyes of Your Son, to see those who've hurt me, wounded me, betrayed me, from an eternal perspective— as wounded sinners desperately in need of mercy. Do the work within my heart necessary for me to let loose of my anger and hand it over to You. Lead me by Your Spirit to that place of empathy and understanding Christ experienced when He prayed on behalf of His murderers, “**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing,**” Luke 23:34. In Jesus' name ...Amen.*

The Point: *Understanding leads to compassion that leads to forgiveness.*
Understanding— Compassion— Forgiveness.

His: In response to our pleas for His provision, our Father empowers. He softens our stubbornness, defeats our defensiveness, and tenderizes our hearts by His mighty Spirit within us. In Psalm 73 the psalmist Asaph wrote, “**My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever,**” v. 26. In the New Covenant of the nation Israel, God promises His people in Ezekiel, “**I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh,**” 36:26. A “**heart of flesh**” is a heart of tenderness and compassion, a heart alive to God and responsive to His Spirit.

G = Grant the Forgiveness {and grant it in grace}.

Ours: Do what Paul, inspired by the Spirit, encouraged us to do. That is, “**be quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you,**” Colossians 3:13c {*The Message*}. Now comes the time to choose. We make a conscious and deliberate choice to forgive those who've hurt us. You might even write down the date and time you do it {just in case you need a reminder}. This has little to do with feelings, and everything to do with faith... with our own trust in the Father's heart toward sinners and the Son's omnipotent strength. Philippians 4:13 says, “**I can do all things** [not some, not a few, but *all*] **through Him who strengthens me,**” through the God who keeps on infusing His strength, His power, His ability, into me! It is an act of the will— a difficult decision, but one that must be made.

I want to go back to a quote from Dr. Neil Anderson that I gave you on the Path of Prayer and Healing. “Don't wait to forgive until you feel like forgiving; you will *never* get there. Feelings take time to heal *after* the choice to forgive is made.” {Italics mine.}

His: Over time, God heals our unsettled emotions.

Time doesn't heal all wounds, but God does; and time is the medium He uses to do it. Psalm 147:3 says, **“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”** The **“wounds”** David speaks of belong to the children of God: all the pains, heartaches, and hurts of our lives. He heals, He renews, and He restores until our feelings catch up with our choice to forgive and to let our anger go.

I = Investigate Your Own Life.

Ours: Shift our focus away from those who have hurt us and concentrate on being who Christ created us to be: that man, that woman. There is a perfect passage for this. Matthew 7 in the Sermon on the Mount— vv. 1-5.

His: As we continue to make the **“mind of Christ”** {1 Cor. 2:16} our own, as we live in the light of the Father's love and walk in the strength of the Spirit's power, something glorious begins to happen: a transformation within, as we move from darkness to Light, from resentment to mercy, and from rage to redemption. Our God gives us a new perspective: the ability to see the world through eternal eyes; and with that understanding comes compassion, humility, and a tender heart. **“Love comes from God,”** as it says in 1 John 4:7; He is the origin of love. And the Love of God eventually eclipses our anger.

V: Validate Their Worth.

Ours: We pray for the healing of those who've harmed us. Our Lord said in Luke 6:27-28, **“love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”** We have four distinct concepts here, concepts which in themselves are total contradictions to the 'ways of the world' and the mindset of men.

“Love your enemies.” Love was the core of Christ's teaching. Why? Because love is at the heart of God; love is the very center of *who* God is. It's that simple. 1 John 4:9 tells us, that **“By this the love of God was manifested among us** [‘love’ made its ‘appearance’ in the history of humanity], **that God has sent** [notice the past completed action; this is a perfect active indicative for all our Jewish friends: not ‘will send’ but ‘*has sent*’ for the purpose of your salvation] **His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.”** The same principle Jesus taught His disciples was the same one which had brought Him from the Throne of Glory to the pit of poverty: *love*, without preconceptions or preconditions.

“Do good to those who hate you.” This is love shown in return for hate, right given instead of wrong, compassion in return for cruelty— an impossible requisition when ‘self’ is the sole focus of life. We will nurse the latest bruise to our over-inflated egos, especially in marriage, to the point that revenge seems almost a necessity for existence! What Jesus presents is an honorable response to a dishonorable exchange.

“Bless those who curse you.” Why? Because it’s the only way to prevent a **“root of bitterness”** from **“springing up”** in your own soul. Leave it in the Lord’s hands. When you are maligned, slandered, criticized and castigated, *He* will defend you! Let the Supreme Court of Heaven vindicate your case, no matter how long that takes.

“Pray for those who mistreat you.” You’re saying, “Rev. Ric, these things are *impossible*.” And they are, from human perspective and in human power. When it comes to commands like these the Spirit of God must urge us on to obedience. The issue here is not how you feel about this person. The issue is not even how you feel about the commands to love and do good and bless and pray for them; the issue above all others is obedience. Because obedience to the Word is your faith in action. In v. 35 He adds, **“and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil {men.}”**

This is exactly what Paul builds on in Romans 12:14 when he lays down the command for those of us in the Age of Grace, to **“bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”** The command to **“bless”** is repeated twice. What Paul gives us is the present active imperative of *eulogeo* lit.- *speak well of* {from *eu-* ‘well or good’ and *logeo-* ‘speak’}, and *invoke a blessing upon*. If we trace its usage back to the Septuagint {the 3rd century BC translation of the OT Scriptures into Hellenistic Greek} it meant ‘to *call down* God’s grace and power upon someone.’ *Eulogeo* is where we get ‘eulogy’ and ‘eulogize’- ‘praise highly, extol the virtues of.’

To **“bless”** is to ‘speak well of,’ to ‘speak words of grace and power into the life.’ When God blesses something He speaks words of grace and power; and whatever He speaks comes to pass. When He blesses a man, a marriage, a family, a nation, He speaks words that bring strength to the soul. You can bless others by asking the **“God of all grace”** {1 Pet. 5:10} to **“do good”** for someone else, to extend His hand of mercy to someone who may have hurt you, wounded you deeply and painfully. To **“curse,”** on the other hand, means- *wish evil* upon someone, to lit. *pray against* this person, as opposed to for him. We can express this in words {and we often do}, or just in thought, and believe that no one knows anything about it. Don’t think for a moment that the rage and resentment you harbor for someone inside won’t make its way out. Jesus said in Mark 7:21, **“from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts”** that lead to evil deeds as well as evil speech. **“All these ...things proceed [‘come forth’] from within;”** it is these that **“defile the man,”** v. 23. You cannot nurse the ‘bottle of bitterness’ without seeing its effects in your life!

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.” The fact that the curse is even mentioned shows us what? That this is not natural to any of us— male or female. It’s always easier to curse; and it always has been. From the day Cain looked with envy and jealousy upon his brother and cut him down in a fit of rage, man has never lacked the means or the motivation by which to curse another. This v. is calling for a radical restructuring of life as we know it in the world.

Now do you understand what I mean when I say, “What we need above all else as a body of believers is power: phenomenally overwhelming power”? We need the Spirit of God to move in a mighty way in every one of our lives.

The present tense always speaks of continuous, ongoing action, a ‘from here-on-out’ type of action; the active voice means our volition is involved in carrying out this command. The imperative mood is where the ‘command’ comes in, because the most basic function of an imperative is for someone in authority handing down orders to his subordinates. Here, the Holy Spirit with sovereign authority is giving divine direction to a persecuted believer, whoever and wherever he or she is.

The presence of a command in the NT should give us hope. Why? Because we know that change can come: it can be done. **Whenever Christ commands, He also supplies the strength to execute it!** It is possible and we can learn to bless; this is only impossible when we refuse to see it through the eyes of Christ. What we want in the flesh, what we want when we take hold of the same spirit that motivates Satan, is to curse those who curse us. **It’s the most natural thing in the world.**

Every sinner is born with the capacity to curse already in place. And since every one of us was born a sinner, what does that tell you? We not only need a new nature through “**regeneration**” {Titus 3:5}, we need a new mindset through renovation. Romans 12:2 speaks of “**the renewing of**” our minds, or ‘the renovation of our thoughts.’ What happens when you renovate something? What do you have to do? You have tear out the old and build in the new. There is a demolition that takes place before construction can begin. We have to not only learn and receive and absorb the Word, we have to trust that there is, in fact, potential for power in its application, that Truth always wins out in the end. If you don’t believe that, you’re not going to make it very far on this pilgrim’s path. And if you don’t know where to start, why not try asking God to guide you?

His: To teach us how to pray for those who hurt us. He can not only give us the words to say, but also the power to release others from judgment whenever memories surface. Stephen in Acts 7 is a good example of one living and dying in imitation of His Savior. As the Scribes and the Elders of Israel were stoning him to death, with Saul looking on in approval, he said, “**Lord, do not hold this sin against them!...**” v. 60.

E = Exercise the Compassion of Christ.

Ours: is found in 1 Peter 3:9 where Peter speaks of, “**not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.**” To do this we have to **think and to live utterly unlike the world around us.** Our response, reflexive and ingrained through our hearts having been trained by the Spirit of Christ, to those who do us wrong must be to give good in exchange for evil, blessing in response to cursing. Blessing in this sense is good accomplished aggressively.

It is not, like the average believer, passive; it doesn't just sit by while evil takes the reins. It is an active response, an aggressive return of good as God has defined it for evil as the enemy designed it! What this does for the other person, especially those you care about, is it demands something better from them. It demands that they look beyond their own selfishly ego-centric interests. And it provides an opportunity for them to 'change their minds,' or as the English puts it, to 'repent.'

Love is always a decision, a choice we each must make; and this is the unconquerable love of Christ in action. In Scripture love is always related to giving {and essentially, to sacrifice}: John 3:16, **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...;”** in Galatians 2:20 Paul speaks of **“the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me;”** Ephesians 5:25 tells us, **“Christ ...loved the Church and gave Himself up for her;”** 2 Thessalonians 2:16 says, that **“God our Father... has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace.”** To give something in grace to another is the fullest expression of love. In Romans 12 we are giving what God demands: a blessing instead of a curse. By the way, it doesn't matter how you and I feel about this. It's not a matter of whether you feel like doing anything; it's a matter of faith, not feeling. If you wait til you 'feel' like it to **“love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you”** and **“pray for those who mistreat you,”** you're going to be waiting a long, long time.

You think Jesus felt like going to the Cross? His first prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane was, **“Father, Abba, if it is possible let this cup of pain pass Me by...,”** Matthew 26:39 {RR}; i.e., 'if You can take it away, take it.' His second was, **“if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done,”** v. 42. You think He felt like it after the 'railroading' they gave Him, after the scourging with the Roman *mastix*, after the crowning with thorns, after the beatings and abuse, the heaps upon heaps of scorn and ridicule— Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 18-19. How 'bout it... think He felt like it then? Somehow, I doubt it! But He endured anyway in obedience to His Father's will; in Hebrews 9:14 we see that it was **“through the eternal Spirit”** that Christ **“offered Himself without blemish to God.”** Anything less than omnipotence, than the stamina and strength of the mighty Spirit of God, and He would've been gone. Of course, you and I would have bailed after the very first trial; at the very latest when the first strike of that Roman whip took the hide off our backs. “Whooaagghh, heyyy, that's enough.”

When it comes to the command to bless we have to look beyond the immediate pain of our periphery and to the ultimate outcome in others' lives and in our own. *God gives grace to those who least deserve it*; and so should we. That's the inner essence of grace right there: God gives it to us as His enemies. This was an unknown understanding of grace among the ancient Greeks.

In the book *Shame and Grace: Healing the Shame We Don't Deserve* author Lewis Smedes writes,

Grace overcomes shame, not by uncovering an overlooked cache of excellence in ourselves but simply by accepting us, the whole of us, with no regard to our beauty or our ugliness, our virtue or our vices. We are ...accepted with no possibility of being rejected. Accepted once and accepted forever. Accepted at the ultimate depth of our being. We are given what we have longed for in every nook and nuance of every relationship.

Want to know when you're ready for grace? When you're dead-dog tired of struggling and striving and straining to be worthy of love and deserving of acceptance. When the years of trying over and over again to *earn* the approval of someone important to us have passed, now we're ready for grace. When you're sick of living your life as someone else, the person somebody somewhere convinced you, you had to be, grace is waiting. When we've given up the false and futile hope of ever being perfect, now our hearts can hear the resounding reassurance: we *are* accepted, in His grace. You are accepted "**in the Beloved**" with no risk of ever being rejected again. Those days are gone, never to return.

Satan loves to sneak in through the circumstances of our lives and wipe out every trace of grace... remove every element of pardon, acceptance, power and attitude, and convince us it was all just a dream. "God couldn't really be that kind, that caring, that compassionate toward His creatures. And certainly not towards *you*." This is the accusation we hear whispered on the wind; it comes to us through guilt and shame, through the words of other people, and from our own distorted image of God. It was Blaise Pascal who said, "God made man in His own image ...and man returned the compliment." The enemy wants us to believe the Good News is too good to be true, the Word of Grace is just too gracious, the Message of redemption and restoration is just a fantasy of the faithful! And more often than not, we buy what he's selling and swallow it whole. We demonstrate our unbelief by the fact that we go back to living out of fear, not out of faith, back to a familiar rule of law and not the reality of Love.

His: The Father of mercies blesses us with His goodness and grace in ways we never imagined. The rest of this section in 1 Peter 3, vv. 10-12, reads: "**For, THE ONE WHO DESIRES LIFE [Isn't that the purpose of living, to find *life*?], TO LOVE AND SEE GOOD DAYS [Peter quoting from Psalm 34:12-16 say's, the 'one who desires' this:], MUST KEEP HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING DECEIT. HE MUST TURN AWAY FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD; HE MUST SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT [why?]. FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER, BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL.**"

Even with the divine help of the Holy Spirit, it takes time to move through this maze, and to navigate it effectively. Forgiveness is rarely an instantaneous event; the process of healing comes in meters, not in miles. But a day will dawn when we're able to bless those who curse, pray for those who persecute, and even love those who hate; and that's when we will have found our freedom in forgiveness.

When fallen people in a fallen world hurt us in ways we don't deserve, sooner or later we come to a crossroad. You look at the rage and bitterness of your own unforgiveness and ask: "Am I going to hang on tight to my anger and do damage to myself ...or am I going to forgive those who've wounded me and give my anger over to God?" In Matthew 11:28 Jesus said, **"Come to Me, all who are weary and weighed down, and I will give you rest."** As it says in *The Message*, **"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to Me. Get away with Me and you'll recover your Life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with Me and work with Me— watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with Me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly,"** vv. 28-30. And that, my friends, is a Life worth living— **"freely and lightly,"** in the unforced rhythm of grace.

⇒ The acrostic 'FORGIVE' and its related concepts were adapted, then rewritten by me, from the book *Letting Go of Our Anger and Frustration* by John and Pam Vredevelt.