

Forgiveness

DARRELL DELANEY

Picture a family fractured by deep-seated grudges: a betrayal cutting through trust and the burden of guilt from past mistakes. In this episode of *Groundwork*, we explore the transformative power of forgiveness. Join us as we unravel the profound impact forgiveness wields within families, its ability to heal betrayal's wounds, and the lifechanging relief it offers for unresolved guilt. Discover how forgiveness—an echo of God's grace—holds the key for restoring relationships, releasing burdens, and fostering personal wellbeing. Stay tuned as we navigate the intricate tapestry of forgiveness, revealing God's liberating strength in our lives, coming up today on *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, we are in the sixth...the final episode of our series on Christian virtues. We have covered compassion, humility, gratitude, generosity, and truthfulness; and today, we are going to jump into forgiveness.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sometimes we don't think of forgiveness as a virtue; we think of it as a practice—a discipline; it is listed as a virtue in the sense that you want to be a forgiving person. It needs to be part of your character. So, all of these virtues that we have looked at in this series go to your character; and forgiveness goes to our character, too, Darrell, because we want to be forgiving people; we want forgiveness, and the willingness to forgive, at least, to be our default setting all the time. We want to be known as a gracious person who doesn't hold onto grudges, but who lets things go.

I have told this story before: President Franklin D. Roosevelt had this kind of a strange man...kind of a personal assistant known as Louis Howe. Louis Howe never let anything drop. So, one time he and Eleanor Roosevelt were at a party and somebody came up and said hello, and Louis Howe was cruel to that person and mean; and after he walked away, Eleanor said: Why were you so cruel? He said: Well, because 18 years ago, he said something really nasty about Franklin. Oh, goodness, Eleanor says: I forgot all about that! Louis said: I never forget.

We don't want to be people who are just full of grudges and with chips on our shoulders. We want to be known as forgiving.

DARRELL DELANEY

Forgiveness is pivotal for us as Christians because it is not just an action, like you said. It is a disposition, and it reflects God's grace in our lives. It is the conscious decision to pardon those who have wronged us; and when we do that, we mirror God's forgiveness. It is a decision that we make. It is not ignoring the problem, and we will get into those things later; but right now, you need to know that it is basically a decision that we make, and it is very crucial in the lives of Christians.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I think we have quoted before a line from theologian Neal Plantinga: Forgiveness is letting drop an anger you have a right to feel. So, forgiveness doesn't come in for just little tiny things, like somebody stepped on your

toe by mistake, or something. No; you genuinely have a right to be upset and angry, but as you just said, Darrell, with the help and the prompting of the Holy Spirit, you make a conscious decision to drop it. That is what the main verb in Greek—*aphesis* in the New Testament—forgiveness—literally means to release. Literally it means drop it. You have a right to feel anger, but you are going to drop it for the good of all.

DARRELL DELANEY

And it reflects God's character, as we see here in Colossians Chapter 3, when it talks about forgiveness. It says: ¹³Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

The essence of the forgiveness is the basis coming from God forgiving us. Because he forgave us, we are able to forgive others.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Forgive as the Lord forgave you, Paul wrote in Colossians 3. It reminds me of the Lord's Prayer, which we did a series on, on *Groundwork* a while back; but we know in Matthew 6, when Jesus teaches the Lord's Prayer, that kicker line in verse 12:

Forgive us our debts, *as* we also have forgiven our debtors.

And that little word *as*...it is also just two letters in Greek...that packs a wallop, because we are saying: God, forgive my sins *as* I forgive other people's sins. In other words, we need to show God that we get it. God has forgiven us, so we go and do likewise for people. We have sinned grievously against God. Others sin against us, probably not in as grievous a way as we have sinned against God; so, if we want God to forgive us, we have to forgive others. Forgive us our sins, *as* we forgive those who have sinned against us. There is a lot of power in that little *as*—in that little, two-letter word.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it is kind of like Jesus' fine print, because...I mean, I think of it as an equal sign. If we forgive this way, then it equals the way God is forgiving us; and if we don't forgive in this way, then it equals the way God will not forgive us. So, I pray that we strive to live in forgiveness, and remember that God is the one who enables us to actually do the forgiving. So, it is like this, Scott: we freely receive the forgiveness; and therefore, we freely give the forgiveness; and there is no exception there. It can be complicated, but definitely the reason why we can do it, even the power to have forgiveness comes from God's ability to forgive us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; it is sort of what Jesus is saying...what Paul was saying in Colossians 3: this is sort of the family style of God. Forgiveness is the family way. If you are a member of this family, this is how you act. And as I said a minute ago, we show that we get it. You know, later in Matthew, Jesus tells that parable of the unmerciful servant. He owed the king like a million dollars, and the king said: I'll tell you what: I am going to erase your debt... Oh, thank you; thank you. He goes out and runs into a guy who owes him five bucks and he says: Pay up or I am throwing you in jail. The guy cannot pay up...he throws him in jail. The king gets word of it, calls the guy back and says: I forgave you a million bucks, and you turn around and put somebody in jail for five bucks?! I am putting you in jail, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You don't get it! You were supposed to do for others what I just did for you. That is the family style of God. It is forgiveness.

DARRELL DELANEY

I cannot even imagine that it would fit in my mouth to say that it is easy to do, because it is *not* easy to do. It can be very challenging. It requires humility and empathy. It also is something that literally can transform you, because it can free you from resentment or anger, and it helps you to foster reconciliation between you

and another person. It can bring healing if you actually forgive them, even though it is very challenging, especially when we have been hurt.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Lewis Smedes said in one of his books on the art of forgiveness: When you forgive someone who has hurt you, you set two prisoners free: the other person and yourself. Because when we are people of resentment...like that Louis Howe that I talked about from Franklin Roosevelt...when we are people like that, we are trapped too; you know, we are stuck. We are imprisoned by our own grievances—our own grudges. It bends us into a pretzel. So, when you forgive someone else, you set two prisoners free. You let the other person off the hook; you are letting yourself off the hook, too. That shouldn't be the primary motivation that we forgive, just to, you know, for self-therapy; but it is true; it benefits us, too, and all of our relationships.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, why is forgiveness a Christian virtue? I think the reason why is because it mirrors God's nature; it reflects Christ's teachings; and it fosters the healing and reconciliation that God desires for us and for our relationships; and that is exactly what we need. I think that it will...like you said...it will set us free; and I pray that we actually live into what that means, so that we are not prisoners as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But lots more to say, as we dive deeper into practical ways to live out forgiveness—to embody forgiveness. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and today, we are exploring the Christian virtue of forgiveness. Scott, let's jump right back into scripture here with a verse from Matthew 18 that talks about forgiveness.

SCOTT HOEZEE

²¹Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" ²²Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. Or some versions...seventy *times* seventy times. In other words, Peter is saying: What's the clock? What's the tote board? How many times do I have to forgive somebody before I don't have to forgive them anymore? When does forgiveness of someone else stop, Peter says. Jesus says, basically, it doesn't stop. It never ends.

DARRELL DELANEY

And so, Jesus is showing him it is not a math problem, Peter. You don't get to do it four hundred ninety times and be done; but if you perfectly and completely forgive a person, then you will be releasing them every time they transgress against you, and that actually shows the character of God, who, when we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us. Like we talked about in the last episode, when we confess, we are forgiven by God. Therefore, when people confess to us, we forgive them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly. You know what Jesus could have said to Peter? In essence, he did. So, Peter says: When do I hit full? When am I done forgiving other people? Seven times, you know. What Jesus could have said is: Well, Peter, when do you want God to be done forgiving you? Do you want God to put a limit on forgiveness? Oh, well, Jesus; if you put it that way, never mind.

In other words, you know, it is an unfortunate truth that we are never done forgiving because other people, and we ourselves, are never done hurting each other, right? That is an unfortunate fact of life, Darrell. We can never be done with forgiveness because we are never going to be done with hurting others and getting hurt ourselves. That is not a pleasant fact, but it is true. But again, it is the same with God. He is never going

to be done forgiving us, because we are never done sinning. We try; we are justified; we are in the process of sanctification; but as we live between what we call the already and the not yet—the kingdom that has begun to break in and the full inbreaking of the kingdom—until that happens, God is never going to be done forgiving us. So, we are never going to be done forgiving one another either. It is not a pleasant reality, but it is the truth.

DARRELL DELANEY

And what I like about that truth is that God reflects his endless mercy toward us. If we think about Ephesians 2, it says that: ^{verses 8,9 paraphrased} we are saved by grace through faith, and that is a gift of God, not by works so that no one can boast. So, it is a gift, not only to receive the faith to believe in him, but it is also a gift that he, who is rich in mercy, pardon us, because we were definitely sinners and still dead in our transgressions. So, we see it in scripture that God gives a gift of forgiveness to people who don't earn it, and don't deserve it at all; and so, if we are going to model that character of forgiveness, we also give to one another the gift that they don't earn and they don't deserve; and if we think of it that way, it could be easier to bestow the gift of forgiveness on people, even if you are rightfully justified, and your sin or your frustration that has hurt you or broken your heart, you can still give them that gift.

SCOTT HOEZEE

A little later, in Ephesians 4:32: Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

There is that little word *as* again...just *as*. That is the connection all through the New Testament: in the Lord's Prayer, in Colossians, in Ephesians, in all of the New Testament. Why do I have to forgive you if you hurt me, Darrell? Because God forgave me, right? Why do I have to forgive? Because God forgave me. Just *as*...just *as*...just *as* God forgave you, forgive one another. It shows the character of God, Darrell, as you said earlier.

But practically speaking, let's just admit that there are situations in life where forgiveness is very, very hard—very, very difficult; and even some people who genuinely want to forgive another person...it takes time; sometimes, a long time; and there are other circumstances, too, Darrell, that make this difficult, right? Again, to go back to Lewis Smedes and his book on the art of forgiveness, you know, Smedes says there are certain things that complicate our ability to forgive. One is when people refuse to acknowledge they did anything wrong...when they are unrepentant...when they won't confess...they won't even acknowledge what they did. That makes it pretty hard to forgive them, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I mean, somebody comes and sobs and cries and says: I am so sorry. Well, that is a whole lot easier to forgive; but when they say: I am not going to apologize to you; I didn't do anything wrong. That is hard. It is also hard to forgive people who die on you before you get a chance to forgive them. So, the impenitent and those who have passed away, those are just a couple of things that complicate forgiveness; but as does the depth of the hurt. When people are victims of sexual abuse...sexual abuse by a parent...that is difficult; and we shouldn't say to anybody: Well, you have to let that go. It is fine, just...you know. It is hard; it takes time.

DARRELL DELANEY

It definitely takes time. I don't want people to hear that we think it is easy or that, you know, it means you are excusing all of those things. It doesn't mean that; it just means you are deliberately choosing to release the debt that they owe to you. It starts with a change of perspective. If we can view the person who did wrong to us with empathy, it is really hard for you to curse them or be frustrated with them if you are praying for them or if you are asking God to give you the help to humanize them in some way. It doesn't always mean that you will reconcile with them and go back to the way things were.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; forgive and forget, we sometimes say; but sometimes you cannot forget; and there is really...as C. S. Lewis wrote...there is really no contradiction between forgiving someone for a crime and supporting the court that sends them to jail, right? There are consequences for certain actions. So, I can forgive the perpetrator, and support their going to jail at the same time. Forgiveness does not mean that the criminal justice system goes offline and says: Oh, well; it doesn't matter. If you have forgiven them, then, you know, the fact that he robbed your house doesn't matter. Go and be free. No; you know, there can still be consequences, even when we genuinely forgive someone; and as you just said, Darrell, we can forgive someone even if it was an abusive relationship, for instance, a marriage, let's say, that ends in divorce. Maybe a spouse can forgive the abuser, but that doesn't mean you get remarried and go right back into the same situation. Again, these are real-life complications of forgiveness.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, it also aligns us with God's heart. When we forgive, we reflect the love and mercy that God has for us, and we foster an environment of healing and reconciliation; but as we close out the program, we want to talk about some practical steps toward forgiveness, and how to navigate those complexities. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, we have been talking about the virtue of forgiveness and understanding that it is not simple to do that, even though it is required of us as believers. So, I want to circle back to Matthew 6. You talked about the Lord's Prayer, and in 6:14 Jesus says: For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

I think it was so important to Jesus. He knew that we would have challenges with this particular part in his divine wisdom. He circled back to this after the Lord's Prayer because he knew that forgiveness would be challenging for believers.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is; it is not easy, but the point is, we try. We want to be forgiving; we want this to be our default setting; we want to be known as people of grace...gracious people...because that is who God is, and that is how he has dealt with us. Again, that desire...as we were just saying at the end of the last part of this program...that desire...that default setting...even so, does not always make forgiveness a cinch, right? It is not a slam-dunk all the time. It takes work; it is hard; it might involve a longer-term process of reconciliation, but the point is, we work toward it. We don't just say: I don't even want to. I don't even want to forgive that person. I am not ever, ever going to try...huh uh; nope. We don't want to be that kind of person. So, being defined by forgiveness, aligning ourselves with God and knowing that God has forgiven us inclines us to be people of forgiveness, even though it is often a process; but the other option is that we are people of unforgiveness, and that makes us often very unpleasant people.

DARRELL DELANEY

It has been said, and I don't know who said it, but they said: Unforgiveness is like the bitter cup of poison that you drink thinking other folks will die. So, you know, unforgiveness is one thing that could make you a bitter person, because you are holding onto that toxic stuff—you are holding onto that grudge—and it is really changing your demeanor. It is literally one of the things that Ephesians 4 tells us to get rid of. In 4:31 it says this:

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

So, that is right before we are told to forgive. He goes into bitterness first because he knows bitterness can actually block us from giving the forgiveness that we need to one another.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Clint Eastwood made a movie some years ago called *Unforgiven*, and it was about this gunslinger in the old West, who indeed, would never forgive anybody. What did he do instead? He killed them. In that movie, he literally killed people who he refused to forgive; but you know, in a metaphorical way, we do that. When we don't forgive somebody...when we make what they did that defining moment for everything else in their life...we are kind of killing them. We are consigning them to kind of a living death. We are saying: I am never going to look at you in any way other than with bitterness and rage and malice; those things that Paul just said in Ephesians 4 to get rid of; and again, it makes us very, very unpleasant people to be around.

DARRELL DELANEY

And we actually kill ourselves in a way, too, because we are fixated and we are stuck in that moment, and that whole moment defines us; but when we choose to forgive people, it sets us free from that and we can live in the dynamic life and the abundant life that Christ has called us to.

I will give you an example from my own life. This is very personal to me. My mother had struggled with substance abuse and addiction for most of my life, and when she struggled with substance abuse when I was a kid, her addiction literally tore our family apart; and it was very painful; and I began to become bitter. I started responding to her in very snappy and disrespectful ways. She didn't like it, and we were getting into verbal altercations, but then my grandmother...she is very wise...I told her how I felt, and she said: Would you go to her and explain to her how you feel? And I said: What if she doesn't listen, this and that? And she said: Trust me; you want to tell you how you feel. It is going to help *you* to tell her how you feel. So, when I told my mother how I felt, and how painful it was for me, she owned it—she confessed it—she asked me for forgiveness; and I was able to forgive her because she acknowledged what she had done, and now she is in recovery and we have a healthy relationship; because God is good and because he is faithful, we have a healthy relationship, but it started with us having that hard talk, and sometimes you have to have that hard talk and confront someone, but then you can give them that forgiveness and set yourself free as well. So, I thank God that that happened in our family. It changed the way we relate to one another.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am also very thankful for that, because Darrell, you and I both know people...probably everybody listening to this knows some people who haven't talked to their mother or father in twenty years. Why? Because they cannot forgive them for something...whatever, you know; I mean, the relationship is completely, irretrievably broken.

You know, another aspect of forgiveness that we should talk about briefly is that sometimes one of the hardest persons to forgive is yourself...

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right? When I mess up, when I make a mistake, I find myself coming back to: Why did I do that?! Why did I say that?! I am such an idiot! Forgiving yourself sometimes is a pretty big challenge as well. If we really believe that, well, God forgave me for messing up, maybe I can let myself off the hook, too.

As we close out, Darrell, let's think about again just some more practical steps, and let's admit that one practical thing that we do on the road to forgiveness is that we pray for God to help us.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, whether you are struggling to forgive someone who did something to you, or didn't do something you thought they would do, or if you are struggling with forgiving yourself for your shortcomings, prayer is one of the ways that you can get there, because you literally can ask God...I mean, the Bible says: Proverbs 3:5,6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart; lean not on your own understanding; in *all* your ways acknowledge him

and he will make your paths straight. So, this way of struggling with forgiveness with people is a way that you would need to acknowledge God in and say: God, I need your help. Could you help me? Could you give me the ability to forgive this person? I don't think I have it in me; I don't think I can do it, but please help me; give me your divine ability and power to give them the grace that I so freely enjoy each and every day; and if you start prayers like that, I think that God can start working on your heart.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And in our prayers, too, another thing we can do is engage in some self-reflection; you know, I am broken, too. So, you know, I am a fellow broken person, along with the person who hurt me. You know, we see this is Psalm 139. Psalm 139 is this beautiful psalm, but then all of a sudden, near the end, starting in verse 19, the psalmist just goes on a rant against his enemies: Oh, God, you know, slay the wicked; do I not hate those, you know, just go get them, God; and then, as you get to verse 23, it is like the psalmist stops, and he sighs...he takes a deep breath...and then he says:

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. ²⁴See if there is any offensive way in *me*, and lead me in the way everlasting.

In other words, I am going to stop getting all hot and bothered by my adversaries. God, straighten *me* out. I mess up, too. So, show me my flaws, and then forgive me, and let that be a goal to help me forgive others as well.

DARRELL DELANEY

That is a beautiful thing; and I think also, it is important for us to recognize that forgiveness is a process. It may take weeks, months or even years for you to actually work through the process of forgiving a person from something they had done. So, don't be upset with yourself if you feel: I should be over this by now; I should be done with this. Because forgiveness, like grief, has a process to go through, and let's be patient with that process.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And let's deal gently with those who genuinely struggle. We cannot always know the depths of another person's pain. We mentioned abuse earlier...physical abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse...that pain runs deep, and none of us who are not experiencing that pain ourselves should put ourselves in the position to say to such a victim of abuse: Oh, just let it drop; you know, just forgive them...just forgive them. No; I mean, yes, they do ultimately need to forgive them. Accept the fact that it is a process, and that it can take years, and don't try to dictate to other people how they ought to feel or how quickly they should forgive.

DARRELL DELANEY

As we close this program, we want to remember forgiveness isn't easy, and neither are these other virtues of compassion, humility, gratitude, generosity, truthfulness, and forgiveness, but God can give us the grace to do that; and we thank him for that. So, thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Darrell Delaney, and we hope you will join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives.

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DARRELL DELANEY

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