

# *Forgiveness – The Shovel to Freedom – Bill Stewart*

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As Christians, we tend to overlook the power and gift God has given us to forgive and be forgiven. Though this commandment does not feel like a gift at times, it is foundational to the well being of our soul as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

The Bible tells us that the Lord is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. It is He who is the author and finisher of our faith. If this is true, and it is, He should also be the Lord of our healing, restoration and sanctification process. Too often we reverse this and try to control God, telling Him

where and what He should do as it relates to our life. Where all along His desire is to go into the leper colony of our heart and knock on the doors of our soul asking us to invite Him in and shine His light into the dark areas of our life (past and present). Unfortunately we allow fear, shame, pride and ignorance to say “go away” forgetting all along that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. He only wants to show His love for you, reveal truth and set you free.

As I step down from my soap box, let me share a testimony of when God came knocking on a door in my heart I had no idea existed...

One weekend morning, as I was shaving, a very ugly mood came over me. I had a chip on my shoulder brought about by absolutely nothing. Knowing that God had his hard hat on and was working on very stony places in my soul, I thought this would soon pass as I allow Him to continue His work. Well, to make a long story even longer, it didn't pass soon. In fact it got worse as time went on. Feelings of isolation, hard heartedness and indifference grew and I didn't know any way out of it. God felt a million miles away and my heart felt like it was in a cold, damp dark prison. This went on for 10 days and my wife, who is a wonderful Christian woman, and I were like two ships passing in the night as she left me alone completely trusting in the Lord that He was doing something in me. Well, He was, and I didn't care much for it to be quite honest.

I have regular weekly prayer times with a buddy of mine named Dan Hitz. Every week we get together trading off prayer and intercession for one another. This week was my turn to get prayed for as Dan was away on vacation last week. I came into his office feeling as though I was simply going through the motions. By this time my heart felt so hard I almost didn't care if God intervened. (just being honest) As Dan prayed he said, “Lord, only you know what's going on. What would you have us to do?” I heard that still small voice say “Forgive and be forgiven”. As I thought on this instruction, I didn't think I had any unforgiveness in my heart so I said “Lord, who am I to forgive and what do I need to confess”? With that the Lord began to bring people and circumstances to mind that I needed to forgive and my reactions to those people that needed to be forgiven. As I forgave my offenders of specific things that occurred many years ago (as far back as early childhood), I also confessed and repented of my reaction to them, God and myself. (If you don't deal with offenses and hurts in a godly manner you will do so in an ungodly manner through pride, isolation, vows, revenge, anger, etc.)

As freedom began to enter in I felt stronger to continue on in this process. The Lord was bringing things up that I never knew were an issue. I thought they were either long gone, already dealt with or not worth bringing up. Boy was I wrong! This process carried over into the next day as I spent 1 ½ hours in my car, by myself, going to a business meeting. The Lord was cleansing and freeing me with each act of forgiveness I took. I simply listened and obeyed, forgiving and being forgiven of specifics the Holy Spirit brought to my remembrance. I spoke openly to the Lord, as he transcended time in my life. As my Heavenly Father, He allowed me to discuss these issues as if they had just happened. (This is one of the ways we get beauty for ashes described in Isaiah 61.) Life, joy and peace came into my bones, as I felt alive again.

In the past week and a half it was like the Lord opened a door in my heart to a room full of (unknown) unforgiveness. And the gift of forgiveness was the shovel God had me use to gain freedom. In retrospect, I guess that's how we cope when we are ignorant of God's ways. We create a "black box" (prison) and throw everything and everyone into it hoping it will go away. Jesus came to set the captives free and I'm a living ex-P.O.W. to tell you His ways are true.

Below is some information about forgiveness that we share with the students in "The Father's Heart" class at Bethesda Christian Church.

- For Him to increase, we must decrease. The act of forgiveness helps Him to increase in our lives.
- Forgiveness and Beatitudes are medicine for our wounds. Forgive, bless and pray for your offenders.
- Forgiveness is from an act of our will, not a feeling from our emotions.
- Forgiveness opens the prison doors and allows in God's love, healing and freedom.
- Unforgiveness is the prison that ushers in sickness (physical, emotional and spiritual), discontentment, divorce, hate, control depression, and a distant feeling from God.
- The heart is desperately wicked. You don't know yourself like God does. Give Him control and allow Him to forgive the "unforgivable" through you.
- The walls we build to protect ourselves from others are built with bricks of unforgiveness. These walls made to protect only enslave.
- Confess and repent of unforgiveness and let Jesus be your wall of protection. Ask Him to give you a forgiving spirit.
- Some adults deeply wounded or betrayed in childhood fear if they forgive their offender that they will open themselves up to more pain. This is a lie. Ask for God's truth as you forgive and be forgiven. He is your strong fortress.
- The enemy comes to steal and kill through lies he buries in our soul. (As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.) Ask Jesus to reveal lies and unforgiveness in your heart. Don't dismiss anything as you bring it all into His light and His truth sets you free.
- Confess your faults one to another and be healed. Find yourself a good prayer partner and get together regularly to intercede for one another.
- Sometimes we have offenses against God. Though He never sins, we must release (forgive) Him of blame we hold against Him for things He allowed in our lives.
- Give every part of your life to Jesus and allow Him to take you on a wonderful journey in your heart. Though you will be surprised it will lead you to become vessels of honor.

