

Offering Grace
Matthew 6:11-15

Slide 1

The Rhone River begins high in the Swiss Alps, some 5000 feet above sea level. It's one of the most important commercial waterways in France, stretching more than 500 miles in length.

The river that glistens and sparkles through France, however, is much different than at its origin. As it begins its voyage, glacial clay is picked up making it very milky and muddy.

Just before it enters France, the Rhone empties into Lake Geneva where a wonderful transformation occurs. The clay sinks to the bottom of the lake, and the Rhone emerges clear and blue!

Why am I telling you about the Rhone? Well, our lives are like that river. Shortly after we begin our journey of faith, we find ourselves polluted by our sins and the sins of others.

But, when we come to Jesus, He washes us and cleans us and, as Micah 7:19 says, throws our *"sins into the depths of the sea."*

In Jesus, we find forgiveness, and along with it the strength to forgive others.

Today we're concluding our series Amazing Grace. We've looked at Saving Grace, Sustaining Grace and Restoring Grace. Now, I want to talk about Offering Grace to others.

God tells us to share what we have received, which is also true of grace.

Matthew 10:7-8, *“As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.”*

We’re to extend the grace that we’ve been given to others. Not because they need our forgiveness, but because we need to give it.

Matthew 6:11-15, *“Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”*

A man by the name of General Oglethorpe once said to John Wesley, *“I never forgive and I never forget.”* To which Wesley replied, *“Then, Sir, I hope you never sin.”*

There are consequences in our lives when we fail to forgive others. John Iverson once said, *“The man who refuses to forgive destroys the bridge over which he himself must cross”*

Often, we struggle forgiving others because we don’t understand true forgiveness. That’s why I want to share with you four things that forgiveness is not.

Slide 2

First, forgiveness is not conditional. In other words, forgiveness isn’t based on the action or inaction of the person who hurt you.

It’s something you do for your sake, not something that’s dependent on anyone else. The Bible tells us that real forgiveness is unconditional.

Forgiveness not something you earn or something you deserve. It’s not something you buy or bargain for. It’s unconditional.

When you tell a person, *"I'll forgive you if..."*, that's not forgiveness. You're bargaining, not forgiving. Genuine forgiveness is unconditional. It's offered even if it's not asked for.

Colossians 3:12-13, *"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."*

We're to forgive as Jesus forgave us. God didn't wait until we deserved forgiveness, He simply forgave.

When Jesus hung on the cross He prayed in Luke 23:34a, *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."*

Certainly, nobody deserved it. Nobody had bargained or bartered for it. It was an unconditional offer of pardon. Genuine forgiveness is unconditional.

Two little brothers had finished supper and were playing until bedtime. Somehow, one brother had hit the other with a stick; tears and bitter words followed.

Charges and accusations were still being exchanged as their mother prepared them for bed.

She said, *"Now boys, what would happen if either of you died tonight and you never had the opportunity to forgive one another?"*

The one brother spoke up and said, *"Well, okay, I'll forgive him tonight, but if we're both alive in the morning, he had better look out."* That's not forgiveness. Forgiveness is unconditional.

Slide 3

Next, real forgiveness doesn't minimize the seriousness of the offense. It's not saying, *"It is no big deal, I'm okay. It really didn't hurt that bad. I'll get over it."*

The truth is... if something is worth forgiving, it did hurt. It caused pain. You don't need to minimize it.

Forgiveness isn't minimizing the offense, it's simply saying that I'm not going to hold it against you.

God takes sin seriously. All though the bible we see this. Sin has consequences. God hates it. He doesn't like it when His children are hurt by others.

Mark 9:42, *"And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck."*

Part of forgiveness is that you need to understand that there's a difference between being wronged and being wounded.

Wounds are unintentional, wrongs are intentional. We all get wounded from time to time by people accidentally.

Someone might say something that hurts you. They didn't mean to hurt you, it was unintentional. These are the times we're wounded, but they don't require forgiveness.

What they require is acceptance, recognizing that we live in a fallen world and that there'll be times when people are going to hurt us unintentionally.

Wrongs are intentional. Forgiveness needs to be reserved for the big stuff, for the things that are intentionally hurtful where people mean you harm.

Let's say you don't like what I am wearing this morning. Maybe you don't like my tie. It offends your fashion sensibilities, so you're wounded by it. I don't need your forgiveness, I need your acceptance.

On the other hand, if someone hurts you intentionally, you've been seriously wronged, that's what you need to forgive.

Whenever you minimize a wrong and say, "*It's no big deal!*" you cheapen forgiveness. Reserve forgiveness for the serious things.

Slide 4

Third, forgiveness isn't trust. Forgiveness isn't the same thing as reconciliation. They're two different issues. Forgiveness isn't the same thing as rebuilding or restoring a relationship.

Forgiveness is instant, but trust has to be rebuilt over time. There's a big difference between forgiving a person and trusting a person.

Forgiveness means letting go of the offense. The longer you hold onto an offense, the more it'll hurt you. When you forgive someone, you're saying that you're not going to let that pain hurt you anymore.

However, that doesn't guarantee that the future relationship is going to be restored. That's a different issue.

It takes more than forgiveness for reconciliation to occur. It requires three things:

- Repentance – genuine remorse and acknowledgement of what was done.

- Restitution – making up for the offense where and when possible.
- Rebuilding trust – showing through time that you have changed.

If you've been hurt, forgiveness is the part you do. But they have to do some other things to show that repentance and restoration has taken place.

For instance, suppose you separated from an alcoholic, abusive spouse who hurt you repeatedly over and over.

If that person comes to you and says, *"I'm sorry will you forgive me,"* you should say, *"Yes, I forgive you,"* because God commands you to forgive.

But if they say, *"Now, will you let me back in your life"* then you should say, *"That's a different issue. We need to have some progress here first. You need to get some counseling. You need to develop a track record to show there's some genuine change."*

It requires wisdom. Matthew 10:16, *"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."*

While forgiveness is based on grace, trust is earned. Big difference. If somebody hurts you over and over again, you're called by God, for your own, sake to forgive them.

But you're not obligated to instantly trust them and act like everything's fine. That they can come home and things will be different. There must be change.

When Thomas Edison and his staff were developing the light bulb, it took many hours to manufacture a single bulb.

One day, after finishing a bulb, Edison handed it to a young errand boy and asked him to take it upstairs to the testing room.

As the boy turned and started up the stairs, he stumbled and fell, and the bulb shattered on the steps.

Instead of rebuking the boy, Edison reassured him and then turned to his staff and told them to start working on another bulb.

When it was completed several days later, Edison demonstrated the reality of his forgiveness in the most powerful way possible.

He walked over to the same boy, handed him the bulb, and said, *"Please take this up to the testing room."*

The boy slowly and carefully took the bulb up the stairs, with Edison following from a distance.

Slide 5

Finally, forgiveness is not forgetting. Some of us have a hard time forgiving because we think that it means that we have to forget what happened to us, something we can't do.

Forgiveness isn't forgetting what happened. I know you've heard this cliché -- forgive and forget. That's so sweet! There's only one problem. It doesn't work.

It's impossible for you to forget everything that's happened. The more painful something is, the less likely it is that you're going to forget it.

Think about the logic of it. It's impossible to try to forget something. Why? Because the more we try to forget it, the more we're focusing on it.

You can't forget something by trying to forget it. It doesn't work that way. The only way you forget something is by replacing it with something else.

Hebrews 8:12, *"For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."*

The word for remember in the Greek is the word *nah'-om-ah-ee* and it comes from the word meaning *"to fix in place or to chew."*

The picture is of someone who's constantly calling to remembrance something that's been done to them in the past.

Scientists have proven that your brain is like a giant warehouse filled with thousands and thousands of file cabinets and you never really forget anything.

The more important an event is in your life, the more likely it is you'll remember it.

You may block some things out or some type of trauma may cause you to erase the events but that doesn't mean they're still not there.

Surgeons are able to open up your brain and stimulate certain parts with a probe. By doing so, they can bring back colors, memories, and smells of past events.

Christian maturity isn't forgetting, it's remembering the offense but no longer feeling the pain of it. In other words, remembering, but seeing how God has worked in it.

Do you know there's something far better than forgetting? It's remembering and seeing the sovereign grace of God at work.

Romans 8:28, *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”*

When I forget something, I don't thank God or praise God. It's when I remember something that God has done, that's when I really thank God and I praise God.

So, forgiveness isn't forgetting, because you probably never will. However, you can let it go and move on.

Corrie ten Boom told of being unable to forget a wrong that had been done to her. She had tried forgiving the person but she kept rehashing the incident and so she couldn't sleep.

Finally, she cried out to God for help in putting the problem to rest. She confessed the problem she was having with a pastor.

The pastor told her that in the church tower is a bell which is rung by pulling on a rope.

After the person lets go of the rope, the bell keeps on swinging. It keeps sounding, getting slower and slower until there is a one final sound and it stops.

The same thing is true of forgiveness. When we forgive, we take our hand off the rope.

But if we have been tugging at our grievances for a long time, we shouldn't be surprised if those angry thoughts keep coming for a while.

They're just the ding-dongs of the old bell slowing down. Corrie ten Boom said that proved to be right.

A couple of bongs later she found it no longer bothered her. The issue came up less and less and then stopped altogether.

Slide 6

Conclusion

So, what's forgiveness? Real forgiveness is four things:

1. Remembering how much you have been forgiven. Remembering how much you've already been forgiven, how much grace you've received from Christ.

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

2. Relinquishing your right to get even. That's the heart of genuine forgiveness -- relinquishing your right to get even.

Romans 12:19, *"Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord."*

Don't try to get even or retaliate or seek revenge. You leave that up to God. Forgiveness is no' fair. Justice is fair, forgiveness is grace.

Does that mean that the person who hurt you get's away with what they've done? No! One day God's going to close the books. He's going to balance the ledger.

God is the God of justice. On day He's going to even the score. So, who can get better justice, you or God? Let God handle the other person, you look after yourself.

Frederick Buechner is a pastor and author. He wrote a little book called *The Alphabet of Grace*. In it he says something very important about forgiveness.

He describes forgiveness as "*an act of radical self-interest.*" Forgiveness is for you, let God handle the other person.

3. Respond to evil with good. Genuine forgiveness is responding to evil with good.

Luke 6:27-28, "*But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*"

How can you tell when you've really forgiven someone? You can pray for God to bless them.

When you come to the point when you can actually pray, "*Bless that person who hurt me,*" you'll know forgiveness is complete in your heart. When you can look at their hurt and not just your own.

Hurting people hurt other people. If somebody hurts you, it's most likely they're hurting on the inside.

When you've genuinely forgiven a person, you can look past the ways that they've hurt you and see how they're hurting. How that hurt is part of the reason they've chosen to hurt you.

4. Finally, repeat the process as long as necessary. You do these things over and over. Forgiveness isn't a one shot event.

How long do you have to keep forgiving a person? You do it as long as the feeling of revenge keeps coming back. Peter asked that question of Jesus.

Matthew 18:21-22, *"Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."*

Peter's thinking he's being really generous here. The Jewish law said you had to forgive a person three times. He doubles it and throws one in for good measure. Jesus says, *"Not quite. How about seventy times seven."*

The point is -- for infinity. For as long as it takes. Until you let it go. You have to keep forgiving that person until the pain stops and the desire to get revenge goes away.

Martin Luther King said, *"Forgiveness is not an occasional act; it's a permanent attitude."*