

Let Go

One of Six Decisions that will Change Your Life

May 23 & 24, 2009

Communion:

Song: You are my King:

I'm forgiven because You were forsaken (that's not fair)

I'm accepted, You were condemned (you got what I deserved...)

Amazing love how can it be

That You my King would die for me?

Amazing love I know it's true

It's my joy to honor You

John 3:16; Rom 5:8.

Intro: Memorial Day commemorates Americans who died while in military service. I recently gained a greater appreciation for the value of valor by reading some essays by an Englishman, CS Lewis, who wrote during the WWII era. He applauds heroism and views cowardice as one of the lowest of vices. This attitude is reflected in his fiction writing as well - you've gained a feel for this if you've read any of the Narnia books or seen the movies.

Those who have lost their lives in military service have made the ultimate sacrifice. No matter what your view is on American foreign policy, this Memorial Day it is good to pause and remember the fallen.

To respond to an opportunity to sacrifice with heroism is a noble thing. But sacrifice can elicit some very different responses. When people suffer, *another way to react* is to *hold on to the injustice* and *stew* over it. It's human nature to *resent* things that are unfair. We think, *Why me? I don't want to give up anything!* What's so sad about this is that *what we hold on to* tends to *get a grip* on us and we're inevitably crushed in its grasp.

Last week I started this series by saying that in order to *get well*, we have some choices to make: we must be *willing to leave the way of life we've become accustomed to living* and *do*

things God's way, even when that seems crazy. Today we'll examine a second *decision that will change your life*, the choice to *let go*. First, I'll urge you to *let go of your efforts to control others*.

1. Let go of your efforts to control others.

Have you ever been labeled a *control freak*? Maybe you are known for wanting things *just so*. This tendency may be manifested in a variety of ways. Of course, what some people would call *signs of being a control freak* are actually just evidence of a disciplined life. A perfectionist might say, *It's better to be a control freak than an out-of-control freak!*

But I want to talk about the habit of having unrealistic expectations. It's a tendency that inevitably doesn't work because *we can't hold on* to all we try to control. People *don't do what we want* them to do! Story of Martha: Luke 10:40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" *Where did that come from?* She was a good woman doing good things. But her attitude turned sour. *She wanted things done a certain way.*

A woman told me of a syndrome she sees: *"Women have a certain way that things need to be done. Picture a young mom: her husband won't do things her way so she ends up feeling like she has to do it all. So she gets worn out all because his way is not good enough."* This thinking is *not only self-destructive*, it's *not too good for the relationship either!* For many people, the thought of *losing control* produces anxiety.

I heard a talk by author Beth Moore in which she said we need to relinquish control because we never really have it in the first place! She told a story about holding on to her dog's leash not aware that the dog had slipped its head out of the collar. There she stood, certain that she was in control, but completely wrong. The dog was laughing.

We think we've got our mate on a leash. We think we can control our adult children. But their heads aren't there! Remember in Christ's parable of the prodigal son that the father in the story, who depicts God, *does not try to control the son!* Luke 15:12. He *lets him go*. He releases him to go and do *really stupid things*. Was the man a poor parent? No. Young people will eventually do their own thing. We build values into them, but they can leave it all behind. In fact, *all of God's children have rebelled!* Some come back around.

Relatives of alcoholics learn to say, *"I didn't cause it, I can't control it and I can't cure it."* This saying is not meant to be used as a way to *shirk real responsibilities*, just to *release us from false guilt* for things we didn't and can't do. You think you can *control* your kids? *Less and less as they grow up*. They need to learn self-control empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Let go of the expectation that others will act or be a certain way. This applies in the most sacred of human relationships, marriage: 1 Cor 7:12 If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13 - same with roles reversed. 15 But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. 16 How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? You can't make someone stay in a relationship and you certainly can't make them into a Christian. You can't control anyone!
T - *If we can't make them follow Christ, what should we do?*

The alternative to expecting things to go your way is to trust in God. Prov 3:5,6 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. □ Why can't we lean on our own understanding? Why can't we trust our grasp of the situation? We might be all messed up in how we are looking at it. Our perception

could be distorted because we rely on subjective emotions. We create our own version of truth. We *mold our memories* to match what has developed in our imagination. This verse reminds us: *my way is not the only way. In fact, my way may not be right at all. I've got to trust in God and follow his way, even when it contradicts my understanding.*

Maybe you're ready to say, *I agree, I need to let go of my efforts to control others. I admit that I have insisted on my own way and it hasn't worked. Because of that, I'm holding on to some significant pain.* I turn disappointments over in my mind and reexamine them from every possible angle. If you can relate, then you've got to *let go of your tendency to replay hurt.*

2. Let go of your tendency to replay hurt.

Harsh words are like bullets; and when we've been hit, it hurts and we remember. Unfortunately, life hands each of us many chances to wallow in pain:

- Your business partner cheated you and *you hold a grudge.*
- A relative abused you then denied it. Parents offered no support. You won't forgive.
- God let someone close to you die. He let you down and you are nursing your resentment.

Do you tend to *replay the tape of painful disappointments* over and over in your mind? Do you dwell on negative, self-destructive, thoughts? That kind of thing is common. We're dominated by the memory of painful events in the past. We rehearse angry words after being put down. The cost of *holding on to your hurts* is high. Some of you know this well. You're *paying the price* even now. Maybe you're stewing over unresolved issues. Day after day your anger boils on the back burner. Eph 4:26,27 In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. What is that saying? Not all anger is sinful but it easily becomes so when we *stew over it. Unresolved anger is a tool in the hands of the enemy.*

And it is really bad for your physical health too! Being hurt is bad enough; don't let it fester in to bitterness.

Mt 18:21-35: The unforgiving person is handed over to torturers! When we hold on to how much others owe us, we only hurt ourselves. Unforgiveness imprisons us!

Seminary president: *"If I insist on dredging up the bitter sludge of some past offense, it is my own spirit that becomes poisoned. The world is filled with wounded Christians who refuse to let the guilty person go, only to find that they are the ones who are bound, shut off from loving relationships, forever turbulent within."* Let go of your tendency to replay hurt.

The alternative to dwelling on disappointment is to take the thoughts captive that have imprisoned you.

2 Cor. 10:5 - ...we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. We don't allow our minds to wander haphazardly out of bounds but discipline ourselves mentally. You can do this. Turn the tables. You've been at the mercy of your thoughts. Now *you* take *them* captive. Your thoughts are the *one thing you can control*. Don't say you are at the mercy of your mind. Decide to dwell on things that are good. Phil 4:8 - Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. It is up to you. The *choice* is yours.

3. Let go of your "right" to wrong others

I don't want to hurt anyone! Don't you? Admit it, you'd be happy if something bad happened to the creep at work who was promoted over you. You feel like *you have every right* to think this way because of the way he's treated you. He needs to learn a lesson. You *relish the idea* of the boss realizing that *you were the one who really deserved the raise*.

1 Pet. 3:9 - Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. When we've been injured, we may want to retaliate

in hostility. While this is natural, taking vengeance is no good. The satisfaction we hope to obtain is elusive. Offending the offender doesn't help. Trust that God will set things straight! Rom. 12:19 - Never take your own revenge... but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. 1 Pet 2:21-23 - Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ...When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. Put yourself and the situation in God's hands.

The alternative to returning evil for evil is to extend mercy and grace. Why? They don't deserve it. And neither did we, but this is what we receive from God! Col 3:13 - Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Eph 4:32 - forgive each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. How has he forgiven? Totally! Jer. 31:34b - I will forgive their iniquity and their sin I will remember no more. Wait! He's omniscient. What does that mean? He doesn't hold the past against us. Ps. 103:10 - He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. He treated Jesus as our sins deserved. Jesus paid our penalty. Forgiveness comes at a high price. Song: *"I'm forgiven because you were forsaken."* Jesus asked the Father to forgive those who were killing him. He extended undeserved unilateral forgiveness. This means *we don't get what we deserve*: that's mercy. And *we get what we don't deserve*: that's grace. And that is what we are to give to others.

When you forgive it doesn't change the past but it sure will change the future! To forgive someone doesn't mean to pretend that it didn't hurt. That isn't Christianity; that is insanity. It *does* hurt. It's tough to let go of a grudge. Forgiving costs *us* something valuable: our rights! Forgiveness is *letting go of your "right" to wrong others*.

Think again of Christ's story in Matt. 18. Because the

first servant mentioned was a recipient of mercy and grace; he should've shown the same. Recognize the relative size of offenses. To do any less is a slap in the face of the master. We should be overjoyed that God has forgiven our huge debt. How others have hurt us is insignificant in comparison. Who are we to hold anything against anyone?

Concl: To be free, we have to let go of a few things: our efforts to control others, the tendency to replay hurt, and the supposed right to wrong others.

Prayer: We find ourselves in situations that make us want to grasp for control. And when that doesn't work, we tend to dwell on disappointment and sometimes want to hurt people back. Instead, help us to focus on what has been done for us and extend that same mercy and grace to others.

More Meat:

What might all this look like for you? Michelle gave me a picture and I'll quote her: "Women, in particular, want to control the relationship between the children and their father. She tries to fix it. She tries to protect them. You've got to trust God with your children. They will just have to learn how to negotiate through difficult relationships."

What does Christ require from His followers? Wild forgiveness. 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 ill-treat you. Luke 17:3,4

- If your brother "...sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him."

Forgiveness leads to reconciliation, unity in relationships. Eph. 4:25-5:2; Col 3:12-14; 1 Pet 4:8 "Above all, keep fervent in you love for one another because love covers a multitude of sins." Prov 19:11 - overlook a transgression. 1 Cor 13:5 - Love "...doesn't take into account a wrong suffered."

Accounting is not good for marriage. Have no record.

Forgiveness is setting the captive free and then realizing that you were the captive!

Control freak: This applies to you if you have the belief that things have to be your way and that you define what is right and wrong.

Can you imagine if someone you respect knew all your thoughts? God does!

1 Sam. 16:7 - God doesn't look at us like other people do, seeing only the outside.

Rev. 2:18 - Christ's eyes are like of a blazing fire.

Rev. 2:19 - He says that He knows the deeds of His people.

Rev. 2:23b - He is depicted as the one who searches hearts and minds. (Ps. 7:9)

Ps. 33:13-15 - He looks down and sees all, He understands.

Ps. 139:1-12 - He knows our thoughts; we have no privacy, even in our minds.

Pr. 5:21 - A man's ways are in full view of the Lord, and He examines all his paths.

Pr. 24:12 - Do you think He doesn't know? Don't pretend.

Jer. 16:17 - My eyes are on all their ways, nothing is hidden, nothing is concealed.

Jer. 17:10 - He sees the heart, examines the mind.

Jer. 23:24 - God is near. Can a man hide so that God doesn't know what is going on?

Lk. 16:15 - Jesus said that God knows our hearts.

1 Thes. 2:4 - He examines the motives of our hearts .

Heb. 4:12,13 - Nothing is hidden.

Is. 55:6-9

Prov 20:22 - Do not say, "I will repay evil"; wait for the Lord, and He will save you.

Dan Schaeffer - "Forgiveness is intentionally gazing again at our wounder and our wounds and deciding that we will no longer continue the role of the victim."

Focus on what God will do and what he already has done! Trust in God to be just. Taking out your frustrations on them does no good. James 1:20 - man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Retaliation doesn't help.

Is 1:18 - God offers forgiveness. Ps 86:5 - You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you. Ps 130:3,4 - If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness....

Our behavior is to be dependent upon what God has done, not upon what others do to us. God has forgiven my sin. Rom 3:23; 6:23; James 2:10; Titus 3:5. I deserve the spiritual death penalty.

Move on; don't live in the past. Look forward to the next chapter of your life.

Mark 7:21-"From within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts..."

Moments of pain feel permanently frozen in our minds.

Let go of the bitterness that sets in when people let you down.

Sometimes we find ourselves in these situations and it was not our doing. A fire takes your valuables. Finances turn. We think: it is all someone else's fault that I am here. A professional victim. Or we blame God: he made me this way.

Mt 5:23,24 - forgive before you worship.

Matt. 6:14,15; Mark 11:25 "And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions."

Mt 5:7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy." James 2:13 - "...judgment without mercy will be shown to whoever has not shown mercy." Not optional!

Wait, I thought that we were forgiven based on the work of Christ on the cross for our sakes! Do the Scriptures contradict? Well, we either have to conclude that they do or we must say that forgiving others is inextricably part of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Central to what it means to be Christian. The act of showing mercy through forgiving does not earn salvation, but it is a manifestation of saving faith. It reveals condition of heart.

From Larry Osborne:

Forgiving is not optional. It is required by God of those who follow Christ. It is central to Christianity.

Do we picture forgiveness as a never-ending series of second chances? A new beginning with no trace of consequences? Full restoration of relationship with full trust and privileges?

Self-induced amnesia? Forget?

What does it mean that God remembers our sin no more? It means they are taken off the ledger. They don't count against us.