**October 20, 2019 Matthew 5:3-12**

 ***Life’s Healing Choices: The Relationship Choice***

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:3-12 NRSV

 (3)"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (4)"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. (5)"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. (6)"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. (7)"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. (8)"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. (9)"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. (10)"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (11)"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. (12)Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

**Notes:**

1. The ***Relationship*** Choice: I evaluate all my relationship, offer forgiveness to those who have hurt me, and make amends for harm I’ve done to others, except when to do so would harm others.
2. Because I ***have been forgiven***, I ***can*** ***forgive***.
	1. We are the ***prodigal*** children.
	2. Psalm 103:1 (NIV) *“Bless the Lord, O my soul; all* ***my******inmost******being****, bless his holy name*.”
3. The ***unforgiving***, become the ***unforgiven***.
	1. Matt. 6:12 (NLT) *“And* ***forgive*** *us our sins, just as we have* ***forgiven*** *those who have sinned against us.”*
	2. Matt. 6:14-15 (NLT) *“If you* ***forgive*** *those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will* ***forgive*** *you. But if you refuse to* ***forgive*** *others, your Father will not* ***forgive*** *your sins.”*
	3. Mark 11:25 (NLT) *“But when you are praying, first* ***forgive*** *anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will* ***forgive*** *your sins, too.”*
	4. Luke 6:37 (NLT) *“Stop judging others, and you will not be judged. Stop criticizing others, or it will all come back on you. If you* ***forgive*** *others, you will be* ***forgiven****.”*
	5. James 2:13 (NLT) *“For there will be no* ***mercy*** *for you if you have not been* ***merciful*** *to others. But if you have been* ***merciful****, then God’s* ***mercy*** *toward you will win out over his judgment against you.”*
4. How can I become a ***forgiver***?
	1. ***Nail*** it to the Cross
	2. Start right now, ***start*** today.
	3. Jesus because you have forgiven me much; I am choosing to forgive \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

**Transcript:**

Everyone has broken relationships. In our pain and our woundedness we tend to build walls, walls meant to keep the pain out, to keep ourselves from being hurt again. When we do that, we end up locking ourselves in a prison and locking other people out. To rebuild relationships, you have to tear down the walls.

That’s what we’ve been talking about in the last six weeks, the ways to tear down the walls between us and God, and between us and other people. We talked about choices and how the choices that we make can either create or keep us in our hurts, and our habits and our hang-ups can open up the possibilities that life can be radically different.

As we look at the sixth choice of Life's Healing Choices, the Relationship Choice, there are two Beatitudes we’ll be concentrating on. These are the foundation of what we’ll be talking about. Matthew 5:7 says *“Happy are those who are merciful to others,”* and Matthew 5:9 says *“Happy are those who work for peace.”*  You and I are going to have the opportunity to make ***The Relationship Choice***: **To evaluate all of my relationships, offer forgiveness to those who have hurt me, and make amends for harm that I have done to others, except when to do so would harm them or others.**

If I were going to take a survey of every single hurt that has ever happened in your life… If I passed out pieces of paper and said I want you to start now and I want you to write every word that has ever been said to you that hurt you, every wound that has ever come your way, every relationship that was broken, every person who betrayed you; all the way back to kindergarten on the playground until today, we would be writing until the day Jesus comes back because the list is endless. The reason for that is we love poorly. When you get right down to it, we don’t love well. And because for this reason we are constantly hurting each other, we need forgiveness and mercy and we need those walls torn down on a daily basis.

In Matthew 18, Jesus tells a very disturbing and yet a very profound story about forgiveness. He begins in verse 21, *“At that point* *Peter got up the nerve to ask, ‘Master how many times do I forgive a brother or sister who hurts me? Seven?’ Jesus replied ‘Seven? Hardly. Try seventy times seven. The kingdom of God is like a king who decided to square accounts with his servants. As he got under way, one servant was brought before him who had run up a debt of a hundred thousand dollars. He couldn’t pay up, so the king ordered the man, along with his wife, children, and goods, to be auctioned off at the slave market. The poor wretch threw himself at the king’s feet and begged, ‘Give me a chance and I’ll pay it all back.’ Touched by this plea, the king let him off, erasing the debt. The servant was no sooner out of the room when he came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him ten dollars. He seized him by the throat and demanded, ‘Pay up now!’ The poor wretch threw himself down and begged, ‘Give me a chance and I’ll pay it back.’ But he wouldn’t do it. He had him arrested and put in jail until the debt was paid. When the other servants saw this going on, they were outraged and brought a detailed report to the king. The king summoned the man and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave your entire debt when you begged me for mercy. Shouldn’t you be compelled to be merciful to your fellow servant who asked for mercy?’ The king was furious and put the screws to the man until he paid back the entire debt. And that’s exactly what my Father in heaven is going to do to each one of you who doesn’t forgive unconditionally anyone who asks for mercy.’”*

We can bevery uncomfortable with this story. This is one of those stories that Jesus told and told it for a reason; to change our lives. There are two deep thoughts that relates to me and my own relationships. I hope they will encourage you as you work on the relationships in your life, relationships that need some repairing as well.

The first principle that Jesus shared is so simple: **Because I have been forgiven, I can forgive.** The foundation for us to be able to forgive this huge catalog of hurts and wounds is simple and to the point; if we have asked the Lord for forgiveness, we have been forgiven. And because we have been forgiven, we are then able to forgive.

I want you to picture this story in your mind. Here is a servant who worked for a very wealthy king. He doesn’t know when he gets up one morning; that this is judgment day. This is the day that it’s all going to come down for him. He living his life, and suddenly he gets word the king wants him. the king discovered that the servant owes him a hundred thousand dollars. Now I don’t know how this guy ended up a hundred thousand dollar debt. But his debt is enormous; The king says, “Pay up now. I want my hundred thousand dollars. If you don’t, I’m going to put you and your family and everything you own in jail until you can pay up.” The servant, falls down on his face and he begs this king for mercy. “Please please, if you’ll just give me some more time, I will pay you back; every penny. For some reason the king says, “Ok. I will do better; I’ll forget it. I’ll wipe it off the books. Go about your way. You’re free. I release you from this debt that you have.”

Let’s just pause right here and really think about this for a minute. This is really us. We owe a debt to the king, to God, that is an unpayable debt. It is compiled of everything you’ve ever done or said or thought. It comes just by virtue of the fact that we are born in sin and are separated from God. We owe him this gigantic debt we cannot pay off. Even like that servant who said, “I’ll just work a little harder and I’ll pay you off.” He could never have paid it off and neither can we. No matter how hard we tried, how long and hard we worked We can’t ever pay it back.

Why did the king forgive the man? Why does God forgive me? Why did God forgive you ? We’re just little pitiful pieces of dirt. That’s all we are. Yet God has mercy on us, it takes my breath away. It is still hard for me to believe it. It’s because of Jesus. The debt didn’t remain unpaid in me. The debt that I owed God, did not remain unpaid. The debt that you and I owe God, has been paid in full; because of what Jesus did in taking on the debt that I owe, God had mercy on each of us.

In Luke 15 is a little bit more of this amazing God, this Father who longs to forgive us. You may be familiar with this story, this passage: the Prodigal Son. A wealthy man who has two sons and the younger one, comes to his dad and says, ‘Dad, you know what? I am bored here; I’m doing something completely different. I would like for you to give me my share of the inheritance, please.” The father doesn’t say, “What? Are you crazy? There’s no way!” I can imagine him, with tears in his eyes, handing over what he worked hard to build up. The son’s share of his inheritance which is to be distributed after the father’s death. A portion of what the Father had to survive on. He gave the very rebellious son his share and says, “You may go my son.”

The son went and lived, his exciting life. He squandered his inheritance on wine, women and song; and the money ran out. He is penniless, friendless, and he finds himself in a pigpen. For a Jewish boy to be lying in a pigpen was just the absolute epitome of shame. But it is here in the pigpen he realizes all he’s lost, and comes to his senses. He says I’m going to go back to my father’s house.

He knows his father’s kindness, and he knows he doesn’t deserve it. He knows he deserves judgment; words of reproach and his father’s anger. He has broken everything that was sacred and holy to his family, and in his own life. “…if I go back to my dad’s house and tell him ‘Dad, don’t treat me like a son. let me be a servant; that will be enough for me. I know I don’t deserve anything else.’” So the son heads home. Practicing his request along the way.

When the son arrives at his father’s road; the father is waiting, watching for his son. When the father sees him, he does the most undignified thing. He gathers up his robe like a skirt and he starts running toward his boy; when he gets to him, he hugged him and he kissed him. The father was waiting patiently, eagerly, scanning the horizon for this child. When the child comes back, the father does not greet the child with ridicule.

Sometimes we think that that’s the way God feels about us. That if we were to come to him and say, “I’ve blown it. I’ve really messed up. I’ve lived life in a way that I’m very ashamed of. I’ve made some terrible mistakes and I have brought shame to just about everybody that I love. And I’m embarrassed.” We think God would treat us like some earthly parent; with criticism and contempt. The passage tells us we have a Father, a King, who knows the enormous debt we owe. He knows we have blown it. Yet he runs to us with arms that say welcome home. He hugs us and kisses us and he says you are my child.

Why does he do that? Why does he treat us with such kindness? Look at Psalm 103:1 “*Bless the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, bless his holy name.”* What does it mean for my inmost being to bless his holy name, to praise his name? What does it mean to praise God from the depths of who you are? You and I have these hidden places; layers and layers deep within us in our soul. This is where we hide all of our junk, all of our garbage; stuff that is pathetic and awful. I don’t mean the sins we classify as being really mean, wicked, bad, and nasty. I mean just ugly sinfulness of our soul. We keep it so well hidden from each other.

Very few of us really know the depths and ugliness in anybody else’s soul. We would be horrified if the real depths within us could be seen by others. But God sees it. He’s already seen it and he doesn’t run. He sees those Caverns deep inside your heart; the places that are so dark. He sees the places where you struggle and hurt, where you question, where you doubt. He sees where you’ve blasphemed. And he sees where you’ve cried in agony. He sees it all and he doesn’t run. He loves you. He offers you grace and mercy. Because he’s treated us this way, he asks us to treat others with the same mercy and grace. So because I received mercy and forgiveness from God, I can forgive others. Simple, right? A plus B equals C. God forgives me, I forgive you. Simple. We’re done. That’s the way it always goes. Right? Right! Isn’t that the way it is in your life? God forgives you and you forgave everybody else.

But there’s a problem. Human nature doesn’t like to forgive. Let’s be honest. I don’t always like to forgive and I bet you don’t either. I think the biggest barriers in my personal relationships through my lifetime up to this day, the deepest barriers that I have in my relationships is me. Not wanting to forgive. I have been hurt and my pain makes me feel entitled to make others hurt as much as or more than I have been, even when they are totally innocent. Instead of it working in the way God forgives me and I forgive you, it more typically is God forgives me and I don’t forgive you. There’s something very distorted and even dangerous about that way of responding.

That leads to the second truth in this passage. It’s a very chilling, disturbing truth. **The unforgiving become the unforgiven.** Lookback to the king and the servant. The servant receives forgiveness from the king. He skipped out of the king’s chambers. He’s happy. He’s excited. The king has forgiven his debt. He doesn’t have to pay back this gigantic debt. His wife and his kids aren’t going to prison. He is happy. As he’s skipping along down the road, he sees a guy that he remembers owes him ten bucks. He goes up to this guy who owes him ten bucks. He grabs him around the collar and says, “You owe me ten bucks and I want it now.” The other guy goes “Ok, I realize that, but I don’t have it.” “I want it now. If not, I’ll have you thrown in prison where you can rot until I get paid. Your wife and your kids can join you; ten bucks right now, or you’re in prison.”

I used to be able to see myself in the role of that ungrateful servant. I could have played the part without and cues from the side. It’s embarrassing but, when it comes to my sin, I want mercy. I want mercy from God. I want the people that I’ve wounded to look at me in that same way. “I know you had a hard day. It’s been a rough week. Don’t worry about it. It’s ok. What you said yesterday hurt but it’s ok. It’s all right.” Mercy. I’m greedy for mercy.

But when it comes to being wounded I’m not so interested in mercy; I want justice. Pay up. I want you to pay what you owe me. You hurt me, you need to pay. I’m angry, I deserve to be angry. What you did was wrong. I’m going to be mad. I’m going to make you pay for it. If you don’t like it, too bad for you. And if you’re not careful, I’ll throw it up to at some other point.

But in this story the king hears about what this ungrateful servant did. And he calls that first servant back and he goes “You evil, wicked man. I forgave you a debt you couldn’t pay; a debt that you could never, ever pay. Why couldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant who owed you so much less than what you owed me? Why couldn’t you have mercy?” So he threw the servant into prison to be tormented. I’ve looked at many different versions of the New Testament and commentaries. They all say put him to the tormenters, let him be tortured, put the screws to him. If you are not forgiving, you are creating a torture chamber for yourself. You’re going to build a wall around your heart. Hold on to resentment and bitterness and unforgiveness, and build an emotional prison a place where you will suffer and be tormented until you break.

It would be nice if this was one of those optional passages to learn from. This is not an isolated teaching. Here are some passages with similar instructions:

Matthew 5:7: *“God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”* That’s the Beatitude we looked at today.

Matthew 6:14-15 *“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sin, your Father will not forgive you.”*

.Mark 11:25 *“But when you are praying, first forgive anyone that you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too.”*

Luke 6:37 says *“Stop judging others, and you will not be judged. Stop criticizing others, for it will all come back on you. If you forgive others, you will be forgiven.”*

James says in 2:13 *“For there will be no mercy for you if you have not been merciful to others. But if you have been merciful, then God’s mercy toward you will win out over his judgment against you.”*

I read a quote this week that says, “As long as we are unable to forgive we keep ourselves chained to the unforgiving. We give them rent-free space in our mind, emotional shackles in our heart, and the right to torment us in the small hours of the night.” John Perkins says, “The saddest people I know are those who are unable to forgive.”

Have you ever heard of bedsores? They are dangerous to people who are confined with very little mobility. Bedsores first look like a little sore, while under the surface, it eats away healthy tissue and if not stopped, they get badly infected which spreads through the body. Unforgiveness, bitterness and resentment become like bedsores in our lives. Some of us look good on the surface, like we have it all together. But unforgiveness, resentment and bitterness, lingers deep beneath the surface. Unforgiveness, resentment, and bitterness are poisons that slowly eats through healthy relationships in the same way a bed sore will eat through healthy tissue. The bitterness and resentment in your life, the anger and hostility that you keep suppressing is like a bed sore. It’s eating at your healthy relationships. And one day if you are not careful, It will rear its ugly head and somebody says, “I want you out of my life.” Friendships die, love dies, and marriages die because of this unforgiving sin.

It’s time. My friends, it’s time to forgive. It’s time to release the offender. It’s time to stop hurting yourself with the pain you feel towards those have not forgiven. You have been forgiven a debt that you cannot repay. So whatever wound comes your way is not as critical as the wound God suffered for you. That may seems hard to believe since, we haven’t done anything bad, evil, nasty. We don’t have some horrific story of something heinous we have done. But what we have is an unpayable debt to God; that has been paid. Anything that happens to you in your life is still not as critical as that debt against God.

C. S. Lewis said, “To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.” So how do you become a forgiver? How do you let go of the layers of resentment, bitterness, and anger, layers that sometimes sit deep in our soul, brewing and simmering? There are two ways that I know and neither of them is very easy.

**The first is to nail it to the Cross.**

Take the wound, unforgiveness, bitterness and figuratively nail it to the cross of Jesus, He’s the one who paid your debt, the one who settled your unpayable debt finally. Because he paid my debt I can take whatever debt you owe me and nail it to his cross. Because of his forgiveness for me, then I can forgive you. Refusing to forgive is actually the best barometer of your walk with God. We think that going to church, serving in the same spot for twenty years, being at all the different Bible studies in the week, memorizing verses, giving to the poor, helping homeless people. We check off our list; all the things we think show our love to Jesus Christ. But if you really, really want to know how deep your walk with him is, tell me how quickly and how easily and how completely you forgive. That will tell you where you are in your walk with God. An unforgiving Christian is an oxymoron. There is no such thing. Those who have been graced can grace. Those who have received mercy can give mercy. Those who have been loved to the depths of their broken souls can love those who are also in desperate need of mercy and grace and forgiveness.

**The second step: start right now, start today.**

Begin with a grateful heart. “God, I tell you again how grateful I am for the love you have given me. For the way you have poured your mercy out upon me. For the fact that you took a debt that I couldn’t pay and payed the price for me. I thank you. And, because of that I am willing to forgive.”

In Matthew 18 the servant didn’t get another chance. The king found out that he had blown it and just threw him into prison. But you get another chance. You’re here today and you have another chance. It doesn’t really matter who it is you have not forgiven or what that grudge is. You have another chance today to actually begin to release it. This is your moment.

I’m going to ask you to take a step in this direction today. In your bulletin there is a paper that says “***Jesus because you have forgiven me much; I am choosing to forgive \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.***” I want you to write on that blank line the name or names of the unforgiven in your life. Who is there in your life that you need to forgive. It could be somebody very close to you, it could be family, a parent, a sibling, a child. It could be a neighbor or a coworker, another member of this church. It could be somebody you have not thought of in years, as far back as childhood. It could be somebody who has passed away, maybe even years ago. I want you to write that name down.

We’re going to take a minute in the quietness. And as Gwen plays softly, just listen to the music and commune with God. Maybe you’re writing down that name and saying, God this is the person. I don’t know how to release him yet, but this is the person. After you have written down the name or names; say this prayer, “*Lord help me forgive this person. Their offense to me is nothing compared to my offense against you. Release me from this resentment, bitterness, and anger*.”

Don’t try to tell me that there’s no one. I don’t believe it. You can be in denial if you want. That’s between you and God. But I am pretty confident there is somebody that you could find to forgive. Some of you will find this to be an incredible moment of freedom. I even have to forgive today, as I prepared to teach this to you this week, God showed me someone that I had not recognized, I have been holding on to resentment. And the struggle is real, “God, come on! You know what they did. It hurts. I don’t want to forgive him right now.” And God says, “Really? You’re going to stand up in front of all those people and tell them that they need to forgive but you won’t. It doesn’t work that way.”

So today I have names on a piece of paper, And I have asked God to help me to forgive them. in the quietness, you and God do some business. They may not deserve it. That’s the point. They wouldn’t need forgiveness if they deserved it. You may find that you have to do as I have and nail it again and again to Jesus’ cross. But a counselor cannot release you from the bitterness you’re holding on to, your pastor cannot release you from the resentment that you have held on to in your heart. Your boyfriend can’t release you; your girlfriend can’t release you. Nothing can release you except our Lord Jesus Christ, if you take it to the cross.

Some of us need to start at the beginning. You desperately need to be forgiven by God. You’re a prodigal son. We’re all prodigal sons and daughters. We’ve all strayed away from God – all of us. This may be the moment for you to say, “God, I’m coming back.” Just know that he is scanning the horizon waiting to see if you’re coming. His arms ready to receive you.

Some of you are Christ followers and have been for a while. By all appearances you’re looking pretty good. Very few suspect you’re carrying around the resentment and bitterness and guilt. Let him go. Let her go. Let them go. You have been forgiven a debt you cannot pay. Do it for someone else.

**Here is my prayer for us today:**

*Father, sometimes your word can be very difficult, painful, and disturbing. t has a way of breaking me down and exposing me for who I really am. We try to live our lives and everybody thinks that we’re okay. But many of us are not; we are hurting, we’re angry, we’re bitter, we’re deeply wounded.*

*Jesus, thank you for going into the depths of my soul and seeing what is there. Thank you that you are so ready as a Father to welcome us back to your arms. Thank you for your mercy.*

*God, help us today in this moment, to release that person who we has been holding us in our unforgiveness. True, they may not deserve it, but neither did I when you found me. When our soul is overcome with doubt, remind us again of the debt that we could not pay and how Jesus paid it for us. Some of us need to say, Jesus, I don’t even know what this means, but I’m tired of running. Would you welcome me home? I’ve lived my life apart from you. Please would you welcome me back into your family? Could I be a part of your family? Thank you for loving me and forgiving me.*

*This week may we experience the true freedom that comes from nailing to your cross those who have been the unforgiven in our lives. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen*

There is one thing that I want you to do before leaving today. If you have truly forgiven the name on that paper, I want you to crumple it up and throw it away on the way out. Especially if you’re ready to let go; if you’re ready today for the first time to say, “God because you have forgiven me, I make a human choice to forgive this person.”