

First Things First - From Grudge to Grace
Matthew 5:21-24
January 23, 2011

Do you ever have the need to leave worship early? Have you ever had to slip out before the invitational song or maybe the sermon cause you just had to be somewhere else? Pastor and author Max Lucado has said, there is one time when God doesn't mind if we leave worship early. The one time is when it involves the need to straighten out a problem in a relationship. ("When God Whispers Your Name," 127) Listen to these words Matthew 5:21-24 and see if you agree.

Read the scripture: Matthew 5:21-24

God cares about his relationship with us. God always makes the first move reaching out to us. It started in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve disobeyed God and hid from Him. God came walking through the garden calling out to them. We see the priority God had for Adam and Eve, Jesus wants us to have with each other.

Jesus said, if you are at the altar, your worshipping God in that sacred moment and you are about to offer your gift in an act of worship, and then realize there is a rift of some sort between you and you another stop, leave worship and go to that person. God's idea of putting first things first means relationships are so important we stop worshipping and go address the situation.

Jesus isn't saying - please others over God: Acts 5:29

Lets consider first though what this scripture isn't teaching. This is not scripture that is encouraging us to do anything in order to please others. The first commandment found in Exodus 20 states we are to have no other false gods before God. Our ultimate faithfulness is not to our spouse, our kids, our parents or anyone else but it is to be to God. This is not scripture that encourages us to compromise what is right to appease or soothe someone else.

- Sadly, we have all seen some people who won't enjoy involvement in church because they can't get their spouse to come, their kids to attend and they stay home or limit their involvement. This is not scripture to encourage or condone that way of living.
- This is not instruction for our jobs that we should always try accommodate our co-workers for the sake of avoiding friction.
- This is not scripture that teaches that if my kid's coach says were playing ball games on Sunday, I'll have to miss church so I don't upset the coach and other parents. I wonder how much of the sports activities that are taking families out of worship on Sunday morning would die down if Christian parents would stand up and go to coaches and say you have six other days of the week to play a game; but Sunday mornings are for our family for worship.

Acts 5:29 contains the words of the Apostle Peter who once said, **"...we ought to obey God rather than men."** Sometimes in order to obey God others will be displeased. Scripture is clear that God is to come first, be the one we seek to please the most; **however we cannot be pleasing to God when there is no effort to heal and renew damaged relationships.**

God doesn't care who is to blame: v.23

God is very relational. Relationships matters to Him. Genesis 1:27 teaches us we were created in His image, and therefore relationships should matter to us.

Jesus said, if you're at the altar ready to offer your gift and you remember your brother or sister has something against you stop and go to them. **Notice that Jesus doesn't place any qualifiers on this. He doesn't say if you made a mistake or if they made a mistake, he just says if you know your brother or sister has something against you, go to them.** They may have something

against you because you failed. They may have something against you because they failed. **God doesn't care who is to blame: v.23**
If we are going to move from grudges to showing grace, who is to blame is not the issue, the issue is restoring the relationship.
The issue is to live like God has always treated us with a willingness to come seeking us even though we stray away.

Keep in mind, Matthew's gospel was written first for the believers of Jesus. This book was written so Christians/the church would know how to live. I touched on this last Sunday, but too often we as Christians are willing to give up on relationships without even trying to work through them. Too often the place where the worst example is set for coping with broken and damaged relationships is set by Christians. Things come up and Christians/church members pull away from one another. People stop attending worship, they stop coming to special functions, they cease serving and helping with the ministry of the church. Those types of responses to rifts in relationship are not of God; they are not Christ-like. **They are the very opposite of the teaching we have here because God doesn't want us to stop at the point of deciding who is right and who is wrong; but make an effort to restore the relationship.**

Illustration: The first of the week I read a story that I believe was from the Associated press. It was about an anonymous Southwest Airlines Pilot. A man was trying to catch an emergency flight from Arizona to Colorado. Tragically his grandson had been beaten by his daughter's boyfriend. The little boy was on life support system and they were waiting for the grandfather to get there before they had to remove the life support. The grandfather wanted to see his grandson alive one last time.

When the grandfather got to the ticket counter there were delays, he was in tears explaining the urgency of his situation but it didn't matter to the ticket agent. He asked if they could notify the pilot to hold plane for departure given his unusual circumstance.

The ticket agent said they would try but doubted it would do any good. Once through the long line of being searched, the man grabbed his stuff, and went running for his boarding gate with his shoes and socks in his hands even though according to the clock his plane had already departed. As he arrived at the entrance to the boarding gate, there stood the pilot and stewardess. The pilot first said to the man, **“I am deeply sorry about your loss. But you can relax now were going to get you there on time. They can’t take off without me and I wasn’t going to take off without you.”**

I would say that is the type of spirit Jesus is calling us to have toward each other if as Christians were going to seek to move from grudges to grace. If we are going to be an example instead of an exception. But our sinfulness, stubbornness to often has us willing to leave one another behind.

Worship of God is contaminated by unaddressed strife v.24
Isn’t interesting that Jesus said leave your gift at the altar. We cannot force things to work out in relationships. The Apostle Paul said in the book of Romans, be at peace with all men as much as it lies within you. Which means there is only so much we can try and do. But there is an implied warning here. Pastor Brian Bill writes, The warning and reality check is this, **worship of God is contaminated by unaddressed strife in relationships v.24** We really cannot come into God’s house this place of worship and honor God if there are relationships that need addressing. **Putting first things first means we realize we aren’t worshipping God when we hold bitterness, anger resentment toward people in our hearts.** From God’s point of view we can say we went 103 W. Main St at 10:50 AM on Sunday morning. We saw our friends. We sang Christian songs or we just stood there while others sang. We closed our eyes when there was prayer. We sat through the message. We put money in the offering plate. But from God’s point of view there was no honoring him not when in our lives we

have 1, 2, or more relationships where there is some type of rift and we haven't taken steps to see if those relationships can be salvaged.

Pastor Brian Bill goes onto say, “Anger can annul our adoration. Internal attitude is more important than external offering. As long as there is internal sin, outward acts of worship are not acceptable to God. 1 John 2:11: “But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.”

Galatians 6:10 states, **“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”**

Maybe the reason we don't sing like we should or our thoughts stray to other matters during prayer or during the message is because we enter worship with this baggage of relationship issues. One thing we can't control is God and God is not pleased with us if we try and worship him' yet let relationships dissolve without trying to save them.

Illustration: (Willingness) In the movie called “Straight Story,” based on an actual event, 73-year-old man named Alvin Straight decided it was time to end the silence and break down the wall of anger between him and his brother that had built up for ten long years. Because he was too impaired to drive a car, he decided to drive his riding lawn mower 300 miles from Iowa to Wisconsin to make things right with his brother. It took him six weeks to get to his brother. Question. **How far are you willing to go to live at peace with someone especially someone who is brother or sister in the faith? (Pastor Brian Bill, sermoncentral.com)**

What grudges to grace requires us to do: Galatians 6:2

Moving from grudges to grace requires us to take action. It requires for us to get moving and not delay. Jesus said “go.” It requires us to not have a one of these days mentality; but and urgency toward mending a relationship. Stop what you are doing and address it. Today make a call, send an email, text, go on Facebook, drop by, send flowers but go in some manner and begin to check in with that person. If we don’t go sooner or later the friction of that relationship is going to do some damage.

Illustration: In a 1994 article, “Wars’ Lethal Leftovers Threaten Europeans,” a reporter writes: “The bombs of World War II are still killing in Europe. They turn up--and sometimes blow up--at construction sites, in fishing nets, or on beaches fifty years after the guns fell silent...Unexploded bombs become more dangerous with time. With the corrosion inside, the weapon becomes more unstable, and the detonator can be exposed.” **What is true of lingering bombs is also true of lingering anger. Buried anger will explode when we least expect it because it’s been corroding our insides.** (sermon central.com, Brian Bill) Jesus said go, don’t delay.

It requires us to care more about being humble than being right. One of the be-attitudes read yesterday at the funeral service to honor Rose Tillman was **blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God. (Matthew 5:9)** It is not easy to sometimes reach out especially when we think we haven’t done anything wrong. But that humility or humbleness helps send the message we seek to be at peace. We want to be a peacemaker and care more about the relationship than finding fault.

Illustration: I have started trying to take a daily vitamin. It’s a huge pill, not the easiest to swallow but it is good for the body. Humility in trying to mend a relationship is like that vitamin not always easy to swallow; but necessary for spiritual health.

Moving from grudges to grace requires a willingness to endure each others sins and faults. The Apostle Paul said **we are to bear our brothers burden.** (Galatians 6:2) In the Greek the original intent of that phrase bear one another's burden means carry something that requires two people to move a heavy object. Our sins, our mistakes our blind-spots, the negative ways about us are the burdens of which we are called to help each other - not run from one another.

Jesus knew as long as one was willing to go to the other there was a better chance for the relationship to be restored. As long as one is willing to put first what God values, relationship, then rifts can be healed.

Illustration: I am enjoying taking a class at the Y that is similar to the P90X. It is that combination of lifting weights and aerobics. It is a very strenuous class. When the workout ends I'm so tired I am just looking for a corner to crawl to and go to sleep. But I like something the instructor does. His name is Logan and he is in his mid 20's. Logan will often say to us as were huffing and puffing, "rest if you have to but don't quit on me." That seems to be what Jesus is trying to say.

Don't quit on him by quitting on each other. Don't quit on him by giving up on friendships. When those rough times in any relationship happens, okay rest for a moment, vent your hurt and frustration to someone and to God through prayer, but then go to that person and that situation because God is all about relationships. He calls us to move from grudges to showing grace to each other.