

Sermon Series: The New Normal  
To Forgive is Divine and Normal  
Matthew 6:12

Lets get into the message by taking a look the following video, by Francis Chan.

Today I hope we will honestly question ourselves about how obedient we have been to stick the Bible's teachings of about forgiveness between our teeth and live those teachings, and admit where we are reluctant to forgive. Early on in his ministry as Jesus first began to teach his inner circle of disciples, he taught them to pray. Part of that prayer included the need to be ready to forgive when hurt by others. Matthew 6:12 is part of the Lord's Prayer. Jesus taught that the norm for his disciples was to pray, **"forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."** Throughout this sermon series we have been reversing the view of Jesus by saying Jesus isn't radical; he is normal and we're the ones who get radically away from God's will. Jesus is the perfect revelation of God's idea of normalcy. Early on he taught his disciples that forgiveness is what followers of Jesus do. No exceptions. No "yeah, but you don't know the home I was raised, or what my business partner did to me, or the war I fought in" - no exceptions.

The **word forgiveness** means to send away or even **to cancel a debt that is owed**. The language and image here is financial. It's like wouldn't it be great if tomorrow the 15 trillion dollar debt of our government could be cancelled. The intent of the word would be like someone knocking on your door and telling you every debt you have has been forgiven, the slate wiped clean. But so many times the Bible reveals we have trouble completely cancelling the debt of hurt that has been done against us. We struggle to forgive; therefore forgiveness is a reoccurring topic in the Bible. Forgiveness keeps getting air time because we resist sticking that

teaching between our teeth and being obedient.

### **Do not tolerate bitterness: Hebrews 12:15**

Hebrews 12:15 states that we are not to “**let the root of bitterness to grow in us because by it many are defiled.**” That verse warns us about two things if we want to be normal like Jesus and forgive.

First it warns that bitterness, the continual ill spirit is not the right response to have when we are injured by an individual or group. He said bitterness is like a root. The root to a plant absorbs from the soil what it needs to feed itself. If we let bitterness remain, we won't just get better over time. We'll start absorbing in our minds the different ways we'll treat those who we believed have injured us.

- **If bitterness remains we absorb reasons to hold hostility.**
- **If bitterness is tolerated then we soak the reasons we'll withdraw; instead of trying to work things out.**
- **If bitterness is justified we'll seek to retaliate with some form of punishment.**
- **We'll keep sponging up bitterness to the point of even having disrespect.**

The second point from Hebrews 12:15 is that our bitterness will “affect many.” Our bitterness will have an impact on others. It may cause others to respond bitterly like us. It may force people to choose sides or go to unnecessary efforts to keep matters from getting worse. So if we are going to look at Jesus as the one who is normal, then we're going to have to look at bitterness as radically wrong. Bitterness cannot be allowed to drop into our hearts, unpack its bags and stay as long as it wants.

Today you may have a situation where bitterness is like the root of a plant and you are taking in more reasons to be at disease than at peace. If you're willing to admit to yourself the bitterness is there

then Bible can give us help to cope by forgiving.

### **Pray for your enemies: Matthew 5:43**

One thing we can do to take that first step to forgive those who have injured us is to pray for them. Jesus said in Matthew 5:43 we are to **“pray for those who spitefully use you.”** Pray that God’s truth will get through to them.

In his book Practical Atheist, Pastor Greg Groschel describes how we had a little sister who he use to do his best to look out for since he was her big brother. He learned in his early adult years that a friend of the family and local school teacher had sexually abused his little sister as well as other girls. The man would shop at their family’s hardware store. The perpetrator would go to ball games to support his sister when she was a cheerleader. He put on the mask of a safe, supportive role model in the community; but behind the mask was a monster. Pastor Greg said his first step in releasing the hatred and bitterness was to start praying for the man even though his prayer was nothing more than a simple, “God work in his life.”

Application: **Praying regularly for our enemy begins to tell our bitterness it cannot stay in our hearts long term.** Praying for the one who has broken trust reminds us bitterness is not the norm. Praying for your enemy is seeking to remove the root of bitterness from our hearts like the weed you spot in your garden. You can write in your bulletin next to the first sermon point the name or names of people you feel or are tempted to feel bitter toward and at least make a decision to start praying for them.

### **Be obedient to forgive: Colossians 3:13**

The second thing we need to do is pray for them as we would our selves. Colossians 3:13 states, **“Bear with one another and if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other just as the Lord as forgiven you, so you must also forgive.”** We are

to forgive the one we perceive who has somehow injured us. It is not up for debate, Paul said you must forgive. This is a command so we can live normally like Jesus Christ. There is not the slightest scriptural, biblical ground to stand on to support an attitude that says we are the exception from practicing this command.

Willingness to forgive comes to us when we stay humble enough and remember as Paul said, **“The Lord has forgiven you.”** If God treated everyone like we want to when we are bitter, no one would have a chance. Paul stayed in touch with that awareness of his need to be forgiven. We hear that awareness when Paul said things like in 1 Timothy 1:15, **“I am the chief of all sinners”** or Romans 7:15, **“The good I would do; I don’t.”** Paul stayed in tune with his need for grace, therefore he could have a forgiving spirit toward those who harmed him.

It’s often said, **“you cannot give away what you don’t have.”** If we struggle to forgive, maybe its because we haven’t ever experience that sense of guilt being lifted from us, or it has been a while since we have been in tune with our flaws and vices. Maybe its been a while since you have got humble before God and realized your need for God to forgive you because you have been so bitter toward others?

Listen there is nothing in this scripture that says we have to have warm fuzzy feelings to forgive; rather to forgive is an action of obedience. It means we are obeying God; rather than the bitterness inside of us. The payoff from forgiving means we are dominated by God’s grace that sets us free from bitterness and resentment.

I talked to someone last week who told about an employee who asked him for a loan. My friend had loaned a man 5,000 dollars. The man promised to pay the money back when a workers compensation settlement was awarded. The man’s settlement finally came and he was awarded 90,000 dollars. Yet, he never repaid my friend. My friend contacted him about the money but

no response. He ran into him in a store once and asked about the debt, the man said nothing and simply walked away. The one who was owed said as a Christian he knew the bitterness he felt was wrong. One day he ran into this man at a hospital and sensed God was telling him to walk over and tell the man he was forgiven of the debt and you have forgiven. He said at first all he wanted to do was hit the guy; but instead he obeyed God and told the man he forgave him for breaking trust and the debt. He said after that moment was when then he began to be free from the desire to retaliate and collect the lost money.

Speaking the words of forgiveness may not feel warm and fuzzy. It's about sticking the teachings of the Bible between our teeth and obeying God who has to forgive us.

### **Be prepared to forgive often: Matthew 18:21-22**

The final truth about being normal like Jesus is to be ready to offer forgiveness over and over. Matthew 18:21-22 states, **“Then Peter came to Jesus and said to him, Lord if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times? Jesus said to him, Not seven times but I tell you seventy seven times.”** No matter what version of the scripture you have, the same answer intends for us to forgive unlimitedly. Which means not only do we need to give forgiveness freely **we also need to be prepared to endure the hits we will take over and over.** Especially if we seek to stand or lead for the sake of Christ. One preacher has said, **“If you lead, you bleed.”** (Renovate or Die, Bob Farr, p.21) So especially those of us in leadership roles, need to get good at forgiveness because in leadership you will be hurt and need to forgive and you'll make mistakes and need to seek forgiveness.

### **Signs of forgiveness**

Here are some signs God is helping us to break grip of bitterness

and heal us because have cancelled the debt against the person who has injured us.

- You engage them; not alienate them- Jesus was willing to talk with even those who tried to entrap him. Luke 10 “Good Samaritan” Jesus was tested with a question.
- You seek to bless; not punish - Jesus would have a meal with those who resisted him. When you are willing to eat with some one it says you rather get along with them rather than be against them. Luke 7:36-50
- You can talk about the wrong with a sense of peace, rather than pain. Scripture tells us Jesus spoke words of invitation to those who rejected him. Luke 13:31-35
- You also can forget the issue. Sometimes we say you can forgive but you don't have to forget. I agree with that in the sense of not trusting some one the same way we use to or at least trust having to be rebuilt over time. But forgetting can be a sign of true forgiveness. Luke 15 Prodigal Son's father was ready to forget the past.

I heard a story recently about a man who had gone through a bitter divorce and he sought counseling so he could cope with the bitterness he felt toward his ex-wife. He said the counselor told him that he would know he was on the way to forgiving his ex-wife and healing his own heart when he didn't think about his ex-wife anymore. The counselor said the healing will come gradually - first you'll go a day without thinking about what she had done to you. Then you'll go a week, then a month and soon you won't think of the injury at all.

He said one morning he was out jogging when it dawned on him he had gone his first week without remembering how his wife had hurt him. He was jogging up a hill and about the time that realization came just as the morning sun began to shine on him. He realized the chains of bitterness were being broken by God's power working in him, and he was finally experiencing the victory.

If forgiving the one/s who has injured us does nothing for them, obeying God's command to forgive will free us and transform our lives.

The old adage is to error is human to forgive divine. Jesus might say to forgive is divine but it is also very normal for those who claim they believe in him and his teachings.