

The Healing Power of Forgiveness

Isaiah 53:3-5

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Forgiveness! In order to understand what forgiveness entails, you have to know first who you are. Not who you are in or to the world, but who you are in the eyes of God.

In Romans 3:10, the word of God says, “There is no one righteous, not even one; All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.” And Isaiah told us in 53:6 that “we all like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way....”

All of us are sinners, and sinners need to be forgiven so we can be healed, so that we can be made whole again and have peace with our family, our neighbor, our nation, peace within ourselves, and most important of all, peace with God.

King David committed the sin of adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his soldiers. After David sinned, his life and the life of his family were never the same: (1) Murder was a constant threat in David’s family (13:26-30; 18:14, 15; 1st Kings 2:23-25); (2) his son Absalom rebelled against him and publicly slept with David’s wives (15:13; 16:20-23); (3) David’s first child by Bathsheba died (12:18).

That sin disrupted David’s life and the life of his family and his kingdom. The pain and guilt were too great to bear. In Psalm 51:3, David said, “And my sin is ever before me.” Sometimes he couldn’t eat, sometimes he couldn’t sleep, sometimes David couldn’t think right or do anything right. The guilt and shame he felt was always a burden on his mind.

Sin is a burden. It is a disease that eats at the heart of all mankind. Sin is hate. It is racism. It is discrimination. It is violence. It causes division in your life, your family’s life, your church, your community, and the nation!

The eighth chapter of St. John talks about a woman caught in the act of adultery by the Jewish leaders. According to the law they were ready to stone her to death. But Jesus showed her love and compassion. Jesus forgave the woman. He said to her, “Go and sin no more.” Imagine how she must have felt when the burden that she bore for so long was lifted. She now had peace with herself and peace with God! She was healed from the inside out.

And if you want to rid yourself of all the guilt that is heavy on your mind, if you want healing in your life, your family life, your church life, your community, and your nation, it all begins with a simple act of asking God to forgive you. Whatever is in your past, whatever you have done wrong and somebody keeps throwing up in your face, you need to know that God was standing at the window, and he saw the whole thing. God has seen your whole life, the good and the bad, and he wants you to know that he loves you and that you are forgiven. 1st John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” You have been forgiven! God is just wondering when you will forgive yourself. Forgive yourself and let your healing begin!

Isaiah predicted almost 500 years before it happened that Jesus would suffer and

die on the cross for your sins and mine. And he said, “By his stripes we are healed.” Do you really understand what Isaiah meant when he said, “By his stripes we are healed”?

On the way to the cross, they battered his face. Soldiers whipped him and whipped him with a whip three feet long with several strands weighted with lead balls or pieces of bone that tore flesh from his body. Following his scourging, Jesus was literally a dead man walking. They put a crown of thorns on Jesus’ head, and the blood streamed down and around his face. A beam weighing about 100 pounds was tied over Jesus’ bloody shoulders. They nailed his wrists and feet to the cross. And if that was not enough, they pierced his side with a spear that ruptured the sac surrounding his heart, and the blood and water ran down his body. Jesus never sinned, yet he died in our place, “took our pain and bore our suffering.” And before dying, Jesus prayed, “Father forgive them; for they know not what they do.” If somebody had done all that to you, would you be able to forgive them? Don’t answer that! Listen to what God said about this!

Forgiveness is Two-Fold

In St. Matthew 6:14, Jesus says, “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” If you want God to forgive you, you have to “forgive those who trespass against you.”

You may think that revenge is sweet, but in Romans 12:17 it says, “Do not repay anyone evil for evil.” Forgive and forget! The more you plot and wish them harm, the more harm you bring into your own life. The more you hold on to your anger, the more miserable your life will be. By contrast, repaying evil for evil hurts you just as much as it hurts your enemy. In Galatians 6:7 it says, “For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” It is better to forgive and forget. Letting go of anger at those who wronged you is a smart route to your forgiveness from God. Even if your enemy never repents, forgiving him/her will free you of a heavy load of bitterness. God will forgive you, and you will begin to heal.

Forgiveness Heals

Isaiah 53:5 tells us that Jesus “was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his stripes we are healed.” Sin is the barrier that divides and conquers us. It separates a wife from a husband, a child from a parent. It separates families, churches, communities, and the world from each other. But forgiveness is the cure when Christ died on that cross and prayed, “Father forgive them; for they know not what they do.” He destroyed those barriers, removed those walls that people, families, communities, and the world build between themselves. Because of Christ’s death, our hostility against each other has been put to death. “By his stripes we were healed.” We can come together as families and begin to heal today. But like Christ, each one of us has to start with an act of forgiveness. Only forgiveness can bring about healing in our lives, our families, our communities, and the world. I know it can!

I know, because one day I forgave a young man who killed my wife and eight other people at Emanuel A.M.E. Church. Dylann Roof, the young man who killed my wife Myra and eight other people at Emanuel, was going to a bond hearing. I

didn't want to go. I didn't have Dylann Roof on my mind. All I could think of was did Myra suffer. Why wasn't I there for her? I didn't want to go the Bond Hearing, but my children wanted to go and would not go unless I did. So I went for them. I told them, "Keep your mouths closed. Don't say anything." And when we got there, I sat with my head down. I wanted it to be over so I could go back home. Then God intervened. He whispered in my ear, "I have something to say."

I got up immediately. I learned from a previous experience back in 2010 that when God speaks, you listen and do what God says, and it will turn out all right. So I listened and said what God told me. I said, "Son, I forgive you, and my family forgives you. You need to repent and confess, and give your life to the One it means most to. You are in a lot of trouble, but if you do that, no matter how much trouble you're in, you will be all right."

You see, God's love was about me forgiving Dylann like God, for Christ's sake, forgave me! And after I did that, *I* experienced God's love! I experienced a "peace that passeth all understanding." God's love freed my heart of the burden of bitterness and anger. God's love assured me that he is in control, that he had prepared a place for Myra, and that he was going to bring me and my family through this, day by day! I know without a shadow of doubt that acts of forgiveness can heal you, heal your family, your church, your community, and our world, right now! I know because it is healing me. And not only is it healing me, but the City of Charleston is healing! The community was united. People from all walks of life, from every race and creed united and helped in every way they could to console each other, to be there for each other. The state of South Carolina is healing. Our governor, legislators, and senators had a change of heart, and the confederate flag came down. Our nation's capital is healing.

When President Obama came to the late Rev. Clementa Pinckney's funeral (one of the nine), he for the first time talked about racism! In Charleston, SC, the first state that seceded from the union because they wanted to keep slavery, people are now talking about racism.

Shortly after the Emanuel massacre, I spoke at a predominantly white aristocratic church concerning the scripture "Ye are the light of the world." The lesson emphasized that as children of the light, we need to ask forgiveness, confess, and repent. After I completed the session, a middle aged white woman stood up and said, "Rev. Thompson, I am not sure how anybody else may feel." Then she paused and started looking around. As she continued to speak, she seemed a little fidgety. She said, "I was taught racism. I saw family members practice it. They told me that I was better than black people." She said, "And as I got older, I realized that it was wrong. However, I could not bring myself to do the right thing because of my status, my friends, and others I knew to be racist." Then she said, "But after I heard you and the other family members forgiving the young man who killed your wife, I admitted my racism, confessed, and repented of it. She concluded with this statement: "I ask God to forgive me, and I repented of racism! Now I am asking you to forgive me." Forgiveness brings healing!

When you get a cut in your hand, it splits the skin, leaving a gap where blood seeps out. The blood will continue to flow until you bring the skin back together. And in order to bring the skin back together, you will need to put a band-aid on the cut. And as you pull the band-aid to the other side of the cut, it will bring the skin back

together to stop the bleeding and begin the healing. Forgiveness is like a band-aid. When you forgive someone who did you wrong, your wound and their wound will heal. When you forgive someone, it pulls you and that person back together, it pulls you and your family back together, it pulls you and your community back together, and it begins to heal your relationships with other people. But more importantly, it pulls back to God. Forgiveness heals your relationship with God. And “with God all things are possible.”

We are so quick to pass judgement when we catch other people in sin. We act as if we never sinned. How can a sinner pass judgement on a sinner? It is God’s role to judge, not ours. Our role is to show forgiveness and compassion. Maybe there is someone in your family, church, community, or on your job that you need to forgive. Maybe you have a gay daughter, son, or relative who is waiting for you to ask them to forgive you for the wrong you have said and/or done to them. Maybe you have a drug addict son, daughter, or relative who is waiting for you to forgive them and show compassion. Maybe you have a father or mother that you never knew or who left you, and you are running around in life being angry, when all you need to do is forgive them to begin healing and gain peace. What are you going to do?

In the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, it says that Jesus “was crushed for our iniquities. He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter.” Yet he never raised a hand to get back at us; Jesus “never said a mumbling word” against us. Jesus suffered our pain, died for our sins, then said, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And that is all God asks of you and me.

So keep that band-aid as a reminder that your life can be healed, somebody else’s life can be healed, and your relationship with God can be healed through a simple act of forgiveness. Ask God to forgive you so that you can begin to heal. Ask the person whom you have done wrong to forgive you. Then go out and forgive the person who did you wrong. There is a healing power in forgiveness!

Heal your family. Heal your community. Heal your nation. In Ephesians 4:32, he says, “And be ye kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”