

SERIES: THE DAY OF MERCY
PART 4: MERCY FORGIVES

Welcome home, CVCHURCH FAMILY. If you're a guest today, we think of you as family. We are a multicultural and intergenerational family. One of our favorite motto's is **WE'RE BETTER TOGETHER**. One of our daily readings from last Sunday is Psalm 68:5-6. It says, "**Father to the fatherless, defender of widows--this is God, whose dwelling is holy. 6 God places the lonely in families.**" One of the leading metaphors in the Bible for the church is the local church is a family. If you are a guest, or you're new to our CVCHURCH family, we will host our Meet The Pastors after church this afternoon at 1:30 p.m. We would love to have you join us. If you would like to come, we need to know right after service so that we can make sure we have enough food for our time together. If you will fill out the **FRIEND'S CARD**, and give it to an usher or to me at the door when you exit. Welcome to our fourth week of our new series THE DAY OF MERCY. I want to talk with you today about a truth that promises to bring freedom to every corner of your life, to every one of your relationships. It's the truth that mercy forgives. God's mercy bring forgiveness into every one of our lives. It's one of the most amazing and awesome truths that you can get ahold of.

When it comes to God's marvelous mercy, there are two sides to this truth that mercy forgives. In Matthew 6:12, 14-15, Jesus talked about the two sides of mercy in what is called the Disciple's Prayer when He taught us how to pray. "**Forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us.... 14 If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. 15 But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.**" Jesus taught us that the miracle of mercy brings freedom into our lives in two specific ways: **1) When you ask God to forgive you, 2) then when you say to the person who has sinned against you--they have violated you in some way--and you say to them, "I forgive you."**

We're working with the definition that **mercy is undeserved forgiveness and unearned kindness**. I need forgiveness from God and I will need to forgive

those who sin against me. This is the truth of mercy and the truth of forgiveness. How does this work. How does God apply this truth to me so I can truly experience God's forgiveness, and how do I apply this to others? I want to discuss these two simple, but profound, truths with you today.

I. Mercy means God forgives me

Mercy means that God lavishes my life with His forgiveness. He cancels the debts that I have accrued in my life. He says to me and to you, "I have canceled your transgression by nailing them to My cross." Colossians 2:14 says, "**He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross.**" God gives you a fresh start when you receive His forgiveness. He has purchased your freedom so you can live free in every area of your life. You don't have to be a Christian very long and you realize that it is easy to get used to the Good News. After a while it seems like, "Oh yeah, I already knew that. Could you tell me something I didn't know yet?" You see forgiveness is not merely a theological fact. It's a personal gift. It's a gift from God to you. So to get to the personal side of this let me ask you a question: Do you feel forgiven? I know forgiveness is a fact, but I'm asking you right now, do you feel forgiven? I know because of God's Word that His forgiveness towards me is a settled fact. Whether you or I feel it or not. But it bothers me that there are a lot of people that I talk with that say they are Christians, but they don't feel forgiveness in a way that shows up Spiritually, Emotionally, Relationally, Financially, Vocationally, Intellectually or Physically. They don't look, act or feel free when you relate to them. I'm used to hearing people say, "I feel so guilty, so shamed, so embarrassed, so bound." Have you heard anyone say lately to you, "You know what, I feel so forgiven today. I feel so free. I feel so liberated." We don't say this enough, do we. I hear, "I am so stressed. I am so tired. I'm so exhausted." Loved ones, forgiveness is not just an emotion. But it's this genuine experience of God's forgiveness in our lives that creates an emotion when it sinks deeply into our hearts, and it impacts and influences all of our relationships. I want to do three things with you this morning (afternoon). I want to give you four facts about God's forgiveness of you that will help you experience God's forgiveness in a deep personal way. Then I want us to look at a quick quiz on forgiveness and, then, at what it means to truly forgive others.

A. God wants to forgive me

This is incredibly life-giving when you believe this and receive it as true. God in Jesus has always wanted to forgive you. He wasn't forced into it. He chose to go the cross and take your place; take your sin, shame and rebellion. He chose to do it because of His love for you. One of the ways to feel forgiveness at a personal level is to recognize how God feels about forgiving you. He wanted to forgive you, and He has chosen to do so. Nehemiah 9:17 says, **“But You are a God of forgiveness, gracious and merciful, slow to become angry, and rich in unfailing love.”** In this portion of scripture the author demonstrated how God so richly cared for His people in the desert, but they were proud and stubborn, and they refused to obey God and did not remember the miracles God had done for them. Instead, they became stubborn and appointed a leader to take them back to their slavery in Egypt. Then the author says God's response to disobedience, stubbornness and nonresponsiveness is that He chooses to forgive us, be gracious to us, rich in unfailing love and slow to anger--not because He is codependent with us, or that He doesn't have good boundaries--but because He chooses to be merciful, because that is His nature. Micah 7:18 says, **“Where is another God like You, who pardons the guilt of the remnant, overlooking the sins of His special people? You will not stay angry with Your people forever, because You delight in showing unfailing love.”** Why is God so graciously merciful accepting of us? Because He delights in showing His unfailing love. What are the things that just delight you? Is it seeing, holding and listening to a little baby? That is a real delight for me. I loved the baby days with Benjamin and Whitney. I have loved the baby days here at CVCHURCH for 25 years, and I am delighting in the little babies in our church. I delight in Kathe, Benjamin and Whitney. I delight in each one of you. The other night, after our successful PURPOSE PROJECT CONCERT, I just sat and smiled as I watched and listened. I delighted in hearing Poli Poli's testimony. I stepped outside and was talking with Bryan Miller and said to him, “Isn't this night just delightful?” But God's Word says that God delights, takes joy, experiences happiness and ecstasy in forgiving us. If it brings God so much pleasure to forgive us, it would be a very wise thing for each of us to accept and bask in His forgiveness and to thank Him and be grateful for the lengths He went

to because He chose to forgive you.

B. God freely forgives me

Forgiveness is costly. There is nothing you or I can do to earn it or merit God's forgiveness. We have sinned against Him, and He wants to forgive us and gives it to us freely. Romans 3:23-24 says, **"For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. 24 Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when He freed us from the penalty for our sins."** The fact that God's forgiveness is free meant it cost Him everything. John 3:16 says, **"For God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life."** You might be here and be saying to yourself, "I'm not sure I'm forgiven." You can be sure right now. You can be sure, because God wants to forgive you, and it is His free gift to you. How do you get the gift? By trusting Jesus Christ and what He did for you on the cross. You can pray right now and simply say, "Jesus Christ, I accept your gift of forgiveness right now. Thank You for loving me enough to give Your life for me and so You could give this unbelievable gift for me. Jesus, I trust You right now for Your forgiveness." It's a simple prayer, but it can change your eternity right now. Colossians 1:14 **"Jesus purchased our freedom and forgave our sins."**

C. God immediately forgives me

God wants to forgive you, and through Jesus His Son, He has forgiven you. He chose to forgive you. God freely forgives you. To personally experience and feel God's forgiveness is to know that God immediately forgives you. He forgives all of your sins immediately. The reason it's immediate is because Jesus has already died on the cross for every one of your sins. Because Jesus died and has been raised from the dead, you are immediately forgiven when you confess your sins and turn from them and turn the focus of your life towards Jesus Christ. Isaiah 55:7 from the TEV translation says, **"God is merciful and quick to forgive."**

D. God completely forgives you

God has completely, absolutely and totally forgiven you. When God forgives you there is no part of the sin that is not forgiven. Colossians 2:13-14 makes this very clear. **“You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for He forgave all our sins. 14 He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross.”** This is Good News. Christ has canceled the record against you. If you have a bill that someone paid for you, how long do you remember that bill? You don’t remember it at all. Because your debt has been canceled. These verses tell us that God destroyed the record of your sin against you. When you fully build your life on these four facts that God in Jesus Christ wanted to forgive you and that God forgives you freely. No one forced Jesus to take your place on the cross. He gave His life for you willingly and freely. Your sins have already been paid for, so when you confess your sins and repent of them they are forgiven immediately. God completely forgives you. You and I don’t deserve to be forgiven. If justice was to be served, we would suffer and die in our sins, but Jesus, who is the justice of God, took our place. This biblical truth is so critical for you to understand and be able to apply it to your life. Why? Because confessing Jesus as your Lord and Savior is the only way to truly experience forgiveness, freedom, liberty, love, joy, acceptance, purpose, significance, and value. There is no other way. This is the first side of this most profound truth. God has forgiven us in and through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. Let’s look at the other side of forgiveness.

II. Mercy means that I forgive others

In Matthew 18, Jesus gives His famous example of what it means to truly accept His forgiveness, acceptance, mercy, and compassion. It becomes a matter of evil to receive His mercy, grace, kindness, and patience, and then not give forgiveness and mercy to others. I believe it is fair to say that we all struggle with forgiving those who have hurt us, been mean to us, have neglected, abused and betrayed us. It’s hard to love and forgive those who treat us as if we don’t matter and have no value. Is that fair to say that it’s hard for all of us? I think it is. There are quite a few reasons why we don’t forgive. I want to do an in-depth study of

forgiveness and all of the factors that are involved and impact our ability and willingness to forgive. But with our time restraints, I want to mention three reasons why we don't forgive. First is that you haven't been forgiven. I haven't asked for forgiveness, so I have nothing to give to others but anger, rage, indifference, and neglect. Another reason we don't forgive is because we don't feel forgiven, and I have just dealt with this. If I don't feel forgiven then I will feel guilt, shame, humiliation, and embarrassment, and I won't forgive you. I think there are some misconceptions about what forgiveness is. So I thought we would take a quiz together. Please look at your notes. I have four questions for us. Please read them with me and then circle either T for truth or F for false. Please don't answer out loud. I want each one of you to put down what first comes to your mind, then we will look at each one of these questions. Here we go.

- 1) **A person should not be forgiven until he or she asks for it. T F**
- 2) **You haven't really forgiven until you've forgotten the offense. T F**
- 3) **Forgiving includes minimizing the offense the pain caused. T F**
- 4) **Forgiveness includes restoring trust and reuniting a relationship. T F**

The answer to each question is false. Let's look at them one at a time.

A. Forgiveness is not conditional

By this I mean forgiveness is not earned or merited by someone. Other people don't have to earn your forgiveness before you give it. They don't even have to ask for it. If they have to ask you for forgiveness, they most likely won't--just to make you more miserable because you haven't forgiven them. Ephesians 4:31-32 says, **"Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. 32 Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you."** Paul says you and I have done nothing to merit God's forgiveness, and people don't have to do anything to merit ours. We forgive them based on two reasons. One, Jesus has forgiven me. Secondly, if I don't, anger, resentment, bitterness, and unforgiveness will take over my life. Yes, most likely if this person keeps wronging me, I will need to place appropriate

boundaries on myself so that I don't keep being wronged. But my forgiveness cannot be conditional, or it is not forgiveness. The actual Gk word for forgiveness as Jesus used in Matthew 18 is the word that means to cancel the person's debt. One of the best definitions of forgiveness I have come across yet is Drs. Carter and Minirth's, found in their book entitled, **The Choosing to Forgive Workbook: Discover Contentment and Peace by Letting Go of Harmful Anger.** **"Forgiveness is defined as the willingness to let go of self-harming or ineffective forms of anger, choosing instead to turn over ultimate resolution of the wrong to God."** Forgiveness is a choice. You choose to let go of bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander. You choose, through God's help, love and forgiveness for your own wrongs to instead be kind, tenderhearted and forgiving to those who wrong you, and then you trust God to bring resolution of the wrong. In Romans 12:17-20, not only does Paul says forgiveness is not conditional, but there are actions we are to take when we are wronged. **"Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. 18 Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. 19 Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, 'I will take revenge; I will pay them back,' says the Lord. 20 Instead, 'If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads.'"** Jesus, Paul and Peter take the blessing of our enemies and forgiveness incredibly serious, and they realized this is not easy. Forgiveness is not some romantic, sentimental, emotional response we can give if we want to or when we want to. A true follower of Jesus Christ will ask God for His love and then take loving action toward their offenders. Forgiveness is not conditional, but it is volitional, and it is meant to be active. Paul most likely means when he says if your enemies are hungry or thirst then give them something to drink and eat, and you will heap burning coals of shame on them, means that acts of kindness are to be carried out, but not with the purpose of causing shame and remorse, though they many well have that effect, but we're to bless our enemies because it is the Jesus-like thing to do.

B. Forgiveness is not forgetting

This is a very important and powerful principle. Our culture has perpetuated this myth that to truly forgive means that you must forget what happened. That is not in the Bible. That's just in our lexicon. Forgive and forget? The truth is you cannot begin the process of forgiving until you remember vividly what has been done to you and what actually happened. Again this is where boundaries come in. I must do what I can to protect myself, at the same time I must forgive, cancel the debt against the person, and where appropriate, do good to this person and allow God to deal with what needs to be done. In 2 Timothy 4:14-15 Paul writes, **“Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm, but the Lord will judge him for what he has done. 15 Be careful of him, for he fought against everything we said.”** This is a great example of Paul not forgetting what Alexander did to him personally. He is not unforgiving toward this man, but he knows what damage he caused, and he is warning Timothy be very careful of this man. Paul demonstrates great boundaries and how to deal with personal injury so it doesn't turn to bitterness, anger and rage. Paul states as a known fact that Alexander is an enemy of the gospel, and Timothy needs to be on guard. The point is forgiveness can't take place until you remember what actually happened so you can process your hurt and pain. (Scott Possibly give Rwanda as an example. 1994 amidst the civil strife over 1 million people died in 100 days. Neighbor was killing neighbor. Rwanda had to make a decision. They became a nation of Forgiveness. They have a Genocide memorial and you can see the horrific scenes but also scenes of forgiveness. They left bullet holes in the walls of the parliament building so they would not forget. Just as we remembered the Armenian Genocide in our culture on April 24th 1915 they remember their genocide on April 7. During this month there are no weddings that take place because it is their month of mourning. In the case of the Armenian, Rwandan or Jewish genocide it is sinful to forget.) What you forget is likely to happen again. You must remember before you can truly forgive.

C. Forgiveness is not trusting the person right away or again, necessarily

In 2 Timothy 2:15b says, **“Be careful of him, for he fought against everything we said.”** He doesn't say, I have forgiven him, and give him another chance. No, he says, “This guy hurt me and the ministry, and he can do the same to you, if you're not on guard.” An important note on having boundaries with yourself

and others is that you can bless your enemies without trusting in the person right away or ever when it comes to personal dealings with this individual. I don't have to trust you or be reconciled to you to forgive you. That might come down the road. Forgiveness is unconditional, not conditional. Forgiveness is remembering, not forgetting. Forgiveness is canceling the debt against the person but doesn't mean you will trust them right away or ever. Again trust is from 0-100. I might trust the person who sinned against me but not at the same level before the incident. In other words I might begin to trust the person at 10, 20, 33, 44%, where before the wound I might have been anywhere from 80 to higher. Does this make sense? Part of your boundary is if you choose to trust you are responsible for how much and how soon you will allow yourself to trust the person. You might go right back into the relationship and get hurt again. If so that just proves you trusted too much. For trust to be reinstated you might have to discuss the rules of your relationship. The person might be violating one of your rules that you have not made specific. This might sound strange but all relationships usually have unspoken and unwritten rules. You know you're bumping into one of those unwritten or unspoken rules when your spouse or friend says to you, "You should have known. You should have known what I was thinking or feeling." That is often times incredibly unfair. If the person refuses to change you must set boundaries. I often say, "I didn't know, because you never communicated that to me. Please tell me what you're thinking and feeling so that I will know next time."

D. Forgiveness means to cancel the person's debt against you and release it to God

When you're hurt by someone, how do you start to heal? Forgiveness is a process. Please write these six steps down.

- 1) Admit what actually happened**
- 2) Identify the emotions that have been caused by the hurt**
- 3) Confess the hurt and emotions to God and to a trusted friend**
- 4) Set healthy boundaries on yourself**
- 5) Cancel the debt**
- 6) Be open to reconciliation.**

Revenge doesn't work. Repayment doesn't work. Resentment doesn't work. These inappropriate ways of dealing with your hurt only bring it into your life

more. Have you ever been caught in an undertow in the ocean or a river? All of a sudden you're some place in the water you didn't want to be. You didn't take yourself there, the current did. Unforgiveness is just like that in your life. It will take you places you don't want to be. You'll find yourself saying things you never wanted to say, doing things you never wanted to do and being the person you didn't want to be. That's just how dangerous unforgiveness is. It destroys families, marriages, careers, relationships, your personality, emotions, and it can destroy your physical health. We all struggle with forgiveness. When someone does something to you that you didn't want, you enter what I call the crisis of forgiveness. We have heard from God's Word today how we start responding to God's mercy for our own sins, faults and failures and how to forgive one another.

COMMUNION

“As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then He broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, ‘Take this and eat it, for this is My body.’ 27 And He took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them and said, ‘Each of you drink from it, 28 for this is My blood, which confirms the covenant between God and His people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many.’” Matthew 26:26-28