

The Courage To Forgive

by Carter Conlon

This sermon emphasizes the importance of forgiveness and the transformative power of God's forgiveness in our lives. It highlights the need to let go of bitterness, embrace forgiveness, and extend grace to others as Christ has done for us. The message encourages a heart posture of forgiveness, acknowledging the healing and freedom that comes from releasing unforgiveness and embracing God's mercy.

Scripture: Luke 11:4, Hebrews 4:14, Hebrews 12:1, Matthew 26:39, Ephesians 4:32

Topics: "Forgiveness", "Grace"

Description

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Transcript

I saw a prayer request tonight of a young lady in Sweden, and this was your prayer request. I'm paraphrasing it, but as I remember it, you said, the Holy Spirit left me in 2017, and I feel like I've lost my salvation, and I'm wondering if there's any hope for me. Number one, the Holy Spirit did not leave you in 2017.

You lost sight of God. He still knows you. Thank you.

He still knows you. He still knows you. He still sees you.

He's still looking for you. He's still waiting for you. He's still with you.

Jesus Christ said, I will never leave you or forsake you. He's not a fair weather friend that takes off when things get tough in our lives. He's with you, and what I want to encourage you to do tonight, you've been looking for an answer.

That's why the Holy Spirit has prompted me to speak to you tonight. I just want you to get up in your heart like the prodigal son did in the Bible and just make your way home to God. That's all you have to do.

He will meet you on the way. You don't have to do anything. You don't have to say anything.

Just get up and go home. Whatever that means to you and however you do that, you can do that tonight. It's a heart issue.

You get up in your heart and you start moving back towards God and you will find him running down the road embracing you, covering your shame, covering your failure with the blood of his son, Jesus Christ, empowering you for the future that God has for you and giving you a set of new shoes, may I say that, to go the places where he's calling you to go and to do the things he's calling you to do. Don't buy the lie that God took off because you ran into a hard spot in your life. He didn't.

Now tonight, I want to speak to you about the courage to forgive. The courage to forgive. From Luke chapter 11.

If you want to go there in your Bible or whatever device you have, I'm going to share from the word of God tonight and then we're going to pray together. Luke chapter 11. The courage to forgive.

Now Father, I just want to thank you tonight with all of my heart for your presence in this prayer meeting. It speaks to me that you are drawing us to yourself, God, in this hour which we now find ourselves living in all over the world. You're drawing us to that which matters.

You're drawing us to the only really lasting truth once again. You're drawing us to the very center of your heart, which is a heart of love for every one of us, God. And you're giving us not only redemption, but a reason to live.

God help me to speak this tonight in a way that it can be understood. Help us to hear it, God. Give us the ears to hear, Lord, for God, when you're speaking, there should always be an advance in our lives and in our hearts to that which you have destined each one of us to be.

So help us tonight, Lord. We acknowledge we can't do this on our own. We need your grace and we need your strength.

In Jesus' name, amen. Now it came to pass, Luke chapter 11, verse 1, as he, that being Jesus Christ, was praying in a certain place, when he ceased and one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. So he said to them, when you pray, say, our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our sins as we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. And in the gospel of Matthew, the same teaching has the capstone statement of, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Now it's interesting. This is a teaching on prayer. They said, how do we approach God? How do we talk to God? What are the things that we should say when we're in a prayer meeting? Because they saw him pray and they saw the evident results of prayer.

The presence and power of God, obviously, was radiant in his life and flowing through his life. And they knew the source of this life that was before them, this demonstration of God that was before them, was birth in intimacy with the Father. A communication with God.

So they said, teach us to pray. So it's interesting because the whole prayer he teaches is about acknowledgement of who God is, our Father in heaven. It's about adoration.

Hallowed be your name. It's about understanding there's only one kingdom that really matters. Your will be done on earth.

Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. For yours is the power and the glory now and forever.

It's the kingdom, the power, and the glory. Then it's a place of petition. Give us day by day our daily bread.

And don't lead us, don't let us be led into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. It's a prayer of acknowledgement, adoration, petition, and expressing trust in the ways of God and the power of God to keep those who entrust their lives and their future into his hands. But something interesting is inserted right in the middle of this prayer.

And it's in verse three, verse four actually, where he says, and forgive us our sins for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. Another translation says, forgive us as we forgive others. It's the only place in the scripture, the only instance in this teaching on prayer where we're asked to do something for others.

We're asked to actually get involved. We're actually asked to make a decision. You know, it's interesting that it doesn't say, and forgive others as you have forgiven us, like placing it in a sense all on God.

But he taught us, he said, I want you to forgive others in the same manner that I have chosen to forgive your sins. Now, unforgiveness has a direct effect on even health and longevity. I did some research on this.

I'm going to read you an article I pulled offline. And here's what it says. The latest research to give credence to the link between the state of mind and health is a recent study from Concordia University that has found constant bitterness can make a person ill.

Holding on to bitterness can affect metabolism, immune response, even organ function, and lead to physical disease, researchers say. Psychologists for some time have observed that personality traits such as anger, hostility, or optimism are linked to longevity, or how long we live, and physical illness, and can impact the development and course of cardiovascular disease. Intense life regrets have been linked with acute physical symptoms, and chronic headaches have also been associated with retained anger.

Conversely, life satisfaction has been linked with reduced mortality risk. In one longitudinal study, a group of young Catholic nuns were asked to write a short personal essay about their lives in the 1930s. More than 60 years later, a group of researchers evaluated those essays for positive emotional content.

They found that the nuns who expressed the most positive emotion lived up to 10 years longer than those who expressed the fewest. It's amazing. When we hold on to unforgiveness, it actually, you read some other articles, it actually releases things into our physical body that can actually cause illness, can cause heart issues, headaches, joint pain.

I mean, it just, you read the list of things that come into our physical bodies that are just the direct result of harboring unforgiveness in the heart. You know, in the book of Ephesians, chapter 6, the scripture says,

honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth. It's almost as if God knew this before Concordia University did.

He knew that harboring bitterness, starting in the home, you see, because it's the unraveling of the nuclear family has led to an epidemic of unforgiveness in our modern day society. The numbers of young people that are bitter against their parents, the numbers of divorced people that are bitter against one another, it really is epidemic. And I believe that's part of the problem why we're facing such a problem with drug addiction and opiates and such like in our society today.

It's all linked and rooted to unforgiveness in the heart. It's hard to forgive, isn't it? I mean, in the book of Hebrews, in the New Testament, I'm just going to read it to you in Hebrews chapter 4, verses 14 to 16, it says, seeing then that we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. We don't want to think of Jesus that way sometimes as actually being tested, tempted, in every way as we are, yet without sin. Don't forget, he was fully God, but he was also fully man.

And the human side of him endured all of the struggles and the weaknesses that we do and the temptations in all points. So if you look at this, you have to draw the conclusion that at some juncture on the journey, he must have been tempted not to forgive us. Was it really worth it? Matthew 26, 39, he says, father, if it'd be possible, let this cup pass from me.

He knew the cross was about the forgiveness of God. He understood his mission. He knew that coming to the earth was going to send him to a cross for the sole purpose of paying the price for our sins so we could be reconciled to God.

But yet in the garden, he says, father, if it's possible, let this pass from me. If it's possible, I don't want to do this. You know, so he was tempted as we are because we can come to the house of God.

We can be in a prayer meeting tonight. We can hear these words. And yet in our hearts, we find ourselves saying, God, if it's possible, I don't want to do this.

I don't want to forgive those people who did this. I don't want to forgive that person who did or didn't do or was or wasn't there for me. I've held on to this so long.

It's become almost a source of comfort to me. I don't want to let it go. You know, one person said bitterness is a great example of bitterness is two people sitting at the same table and one person drinks a glass of poison and waits for the other person to die.

That's what bitterness is like. It releases something inside of us and it's so hard to forgive. Ask me how I know.

I'm not going to tell you tonight. Maybe some other time I'll tell you, but I know what I'm talking about. I know how hard it is.

I know what it's like even as a pastor to be marching on the platform back and forth and back and forth on Sunday morning and everybody's looking at me and say, oh, what a holy man of God. He's there

interceding for us. And what I was praying is, God, I can't forgive.

I don't know how to forgive. The wounds are too deep. It's not within me to want to forgive.

One time I was so wounded, Pastor Teresa said to me, why don't you just forgive the person? And I said, forgiveness? I'm dealing with not hating him. Forgiveness is not even on the radar. And that was just honesty in my heart and I finally got to the point of saying, God, I can't do this.

I can't do this. You've got to come and do this in me. You've got to do it through me.

You've got to do it for me. You know, we find it hard to forgive because we have this inner concern that it legitimizes or maybe trivializes what somebody has done to us. We have this sense that if I forgive, that means it was right.

No, it doesn't mean it was right. When you forgive a person, you're doing it for yourself first and foremost. And then secondly, you're releasing that person into the hands of God.

Let God deal with it. And if God chooses to show mercy, let him show mercy. But if judgment is warranted, judgment belongs to God.

It does not belong to us. It's not our right to judge somebody else. It's our responsibility to forgive others as Christ has forgiven us.

Or we find it hard to forgive because we have a feeling that the offenders won't understand the pain that they have caused us. We want to hold on to the pain. We want to grimace at them a little bit.

We want to make them uncomfortable in every thought in our minds or every possible interaction we have. But we don't really want to let it go because they're going to think it was a trivial thing they did. We really want to play the part out really, really well.

We want to drag our pain with us into the room, you know, so they understand what they've done to us. How many of us don't fully understand the pain that we put into the heart of God when we sinned against Him and put His Son on a cross? Can we honestly say we fully understand the pain that was in the heart of Jesus Christ, the pain He endured on that cross, the emotional pain, the spiritual pain, the separation from His Father that He'd never known ever at any time? Do any of us, can any of us lay claim to understanding the depth of the pain we caused the Son of God? And on that basis then, what right do we have to hold on to unforgiveness towards somebody else just because we're afraid that they'll take it lightly if we say, I forgive you. And then the third thing and probably one of the most pronounced is that we, it leaves us vulnerable to being hurt again.

See, if you've hurt me, if you've betrayed me and I keep my distance and I grit my teeth at you, I'm defending myself from putting myself in a position because when you forgive somebody, you really do forgive them, which means that if it's genuine forgiveness, that means you're open to dialogue, you're open to fellowship, you're not going to necessarily put yourself in a place to be physically harmed or anything like that, but there's an openness that comes into your heart and the thought comes like, if I truly forgive, I'm going to be hurt again. I don't think I could endure this again. And the fear of being vulnerable again to this type of a thing causes many people to draw back and say, I can't do this.

You know, it's amazing in the prayer that He teaches, He, it's the only thing He asked us to do. He doesn't say, you know, pray, teach us how to make our own bread every day. No, He says, give us this day our daily bread and you go through all of the prayer that He taught His disciples and the only thing He actually asks us to do is to forgive others in the manner that we have been forgiven.

Jesus Christ is my only example and when I look at Christ in the Bible, it honestly leaves me without excuse. There's no justification that I could ever make in my heart to holding on to bitterness to any person in this world. And I personally can honestly say that I have forgiven.

I don't know of a single source where I haven't. One time I tried to fake that I had forgiven somebody, but my wife called me out on it and said, no, you haven't. She said, every time you mention the person's name, your whole countenance changes, the tone of your voice changes.

I argued and then I eventually, you have to yield because, you know, women are always right and guys are generally wrong, especially when it comes to feelings, especially when it comes to feelings like, come on now. We know that's true. We defend ourselves and they just nail us right to the wall.

But Hebrews 12.1 says, therefore we also, since we're surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight. And is not unforgiveness a weight? And let us, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is set down at the right hand of God. Who for the joy that was set before him, who for the joy of you and I being here in fellowship with him, no matter what we've done to him, who for the joy of spending eternity with us, who for the joy of releasing us from the debt that we owed, endured the cross, despised the shame and is now sitting at the right hand of God, eagerly awaiting the day that you and I come home.

We've wounded him. We've hurt him. We've done things that we're not even aware that we've done, yet he's not failed us.

He's not forsaken us. And thank God that the forgiveness of heaven is at the center core of his heart. Every time we think a thought, we shouldn't think.

Every time we say a word, we shouldn't say. Every time our feet go in a direction, we shouldn't go. Every time our eyes are looking at something, they shouldn't look at.

Every time he doesn't walk away from us, there's this constant anointing and baptism of God's forgiveness that covers us. No matter what we do or how we act or whether we honor him or we don't, but the joy of sharing eternity with even those that have wounded us, the joy of being free from the poison of bitterness, the joy of following in the footsteps of our Savior and say, as you chose to forgive me, and you're the one who said, Father, forgive them. They don't know what they do.

And as you chose to forgive me, God, I'm making the choice to let your power inside of my life, let go of the debts that others owe me. I'm letting it all go. I'm not going to hold it back and I'm going to start praying for the people that have wounded me.

And folks, it's hard to be bitter against people you pray for. You start praying. If you have a name that I know you do, some, you've got a name right before you right now.

And if you start praying for that person, pray God bless them and mean it in your heart. God, forgive them. God, help them to repent.

Help them to walk a straight path. Help them to receive your mercy. You begin to pray those things.

And suddenly, there's this inner joy in your heart that starts to rise and say, God, what a day that's going to be when I arrive at your throne and this person is there with me. And you've chosen to extend mercy as I have. And you answered my prayer and you brought them out of their own shame and you brought them out of the place that they shouldn't be in either.

You see, this is a kingdom of forgiveness. The whole kingdom of God is about forgiveness. Without forgiveness, there is no kingdom of God.

Without forgiveness, there is no church. Without forgiveness, there is no salvation. Without forgiveness, there's no eternal heaven for you or for me.

It's because this is a kingdom of forgiveness. That's what the cross is all about. And he said, pray this way, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us.

God, give us the grace to forgive those that have wronged us. This kingdom of forgiveness starts by being forgiven. Starts by an acknowledgement in my heart, God, I can't forgive myself.

I can't save myself. I can't change myself. I can't bridge the gap that exists between you and I. Thank you, Lord, that you sent your son to a cross to pay the price for my sin.

Thank you, God, that you took the nails I deserve. You took the spitting I deserve. You took the punishment I deserve and you put it upon your own son because you wanted to forgive me.

Because you knew there was a day coming when I would come to you and say, God, is there mercy for me? And can you forgive the wrongs that I have done? And can you bridge this incredible gap between you and I because of the way I've lived, the things that I've thought and the things that I've done? And suddenly you find this unrestricted, unrestrained forgiveness of God just simply runs towards you to meet you because it's been his heart's desire to forgive no matter what we have done to him or how we've lived or whether or not we've honored or cursed his name. It starts by being forgiven, admitting, and then believing that Jesus Christ took your place on a cross and confessing him as the Lord of your life. Now part of the confession is saying Jesus is Lord.

Now there's a scripture that says, where Jesus said, why do you call me Lord and don't do the things which I say? So it's like a catch-22. If we're going to call him Lord, he's got to be Lord. You can't be almost under authority.

You either are or you aren't. There's no middle ground on this. And he says, I want you to forgive as I have forgiven you.

It's now, I'm not saying it's easy. I'm not saying it's easy. There have been some horrific things done to a lot of people.

And even sometimes with religion mixed in with it, and that's probably the worst kind of hurt. But still, I don't think any one of us were treated any worse than the Son of God. And it was my sin and it was yours that put him on that cross, that caused his back to be beaten to a shred, spitting in his face, the pulling out

of the hair of his beard, the mockery of the soldiers.

My sin did that to him. So what right do I have to withhold forgiveness from somebody else when he has given me such great mercy? I've had to reason this in my own heart. I've had to reconcile it in situations throughout my life where things were said or done or not said or not done.

You know, if I told you some of the stories of things that were done to me, you'd get mad at the people. But God wants to forgive them, and he wants me to forgive them in the same way that he's forgiven me. So I want to encourage people online tonight, you know, not everybody, obviously not everybody, but some of what people are experiencing, the mental torment, the addictions, the inability to bond or form relationships or stay in relationships, a lot of that is all connected to unforgiveness.

Somebody somewhere along the line betrayed you. Somebody somewhere along the line did something or didn't do something and left you vulnerable to other people. And because of it, a bitterness got into your heart, and that bitterness is releasing something into not only your body, but also into your spirit and into your mind.

And tonight, I want to challenge you with all my heart. I'm going to lead you in a prayer to receive Christ as your savior. And as I do this, I want to challenge you to consider forgiving everyone who has ever hurt you.

I want to tell you a story, and I'm going to close with this. I think the musicians, please feel free to comment. I want to tell you a story.

When I was a police officer, I was transferred into a public relations office. And in the office that I was in, there was a young man that they put there just to answer the phone. He had a terminal illness.

He wasn't given very long to live. He was only 32, I think, at the time. But because his parents were friends of the chief, they put him in just to answer the phone in the public relations office as long as he could.

One day, I walked into the office and he looked at me and he said, Carter, he said, I just see something in you. I see something in your life. What is it I'm looking at? I said, well, it's Christ.

I've given my life to Jesus Christ, and he's saved me, and he's given me a hope for the future. And then his name was Tom. And then Tom said to me, well, what do I have to do to have that happen in my life? And so I explained that we have salvation.

And right there, let him, right in the office, let him in the sinner's prayer to receive Christ as a savior, as I'm about to do tonight for people online. Not too long after that, he went back to the doctor to get his regular evaluation and went and got his evaluation. They told him, the doctor said, Tom, I don't know how to explain this to you, but you've had a miracle.

Your disease is gone. He said, I really don't know what to say. The disease you have does not ever go away on its own and there is no treatment, but it's gone.

There's no trace of it in your body. You've got a bill of clean, a clean bill of health. Now, folks, I never prayed for him.

I never prayed for him. Never prayed for healing. Never even occurred to me.

I was just happy to lead him to Christ before he died. So I asked him later, I said, Tom, why do you think the healing came into your life the way it did? I've just had a conversation. He said, when I was young, my father was a violent man, a vicious man.

He said, when I was a kid, he would stand me in a bathtub of ice cold water and he would beat me naked and he would beat me with a belt until it was waltz all over my legs, buttocks and my back. He said, I hated that man. And I lived to see him suffer.

I lived for the day that he was dying and I could go in the hospital and stick my finger in his face saying, you're getting what you deserve. And he said, but when I gave my life to Christ that day in the office, I went home and I was in prayer that night and I said, God, what right do I have to hold this bitterness against my father when you have forgiven me for all that I have done? And he said, so that night, nobody had ever preached this. He never read it in the Bible.

That night, he just said, God, I forgive my father for what he did to me. And he said, when the bitterness left my body, the disease went with it. That was his testimony.

That was his story. Praise be to God. Praise be to God.

Pray this prayer with me, everyone who's here and people who are online tonight. Lord Jesus Christ, tonight, I open my heart to you and I ask you to forgive me for all the wrong things I have done. I want to thank you for taking my place, suffering my punishment, because you wanted to forgive me and set me free.

And so tonight, I open my heart to you and I invite you into my life to be my God, my Savior, my Lord. Oh, Jesus Christ, thank you for giving me freedom. Thank you for forgiving my sin and forgiving me the promise that I am now a child of God and that when I die, that heaven will be my eternal home.

Help me now to forgive others as you have forgiven me. In Jesus' name, amen and amen. Praise God.

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