



Jesus Provides Strength for Forgiveness
Adapted from “A Great Way To Think – Forgiveness” series by Rick Allen

Unforgiveness in your life will grieve the Holy Spirit, and in turn, quench the Holy Spirit. There is a vast number of people today who have been hurt or offended in their life. Many have responded to the hurt or offense in the typical way our selfish human flesh urges us to respond. In his sermon, Rick Allen suggests some of those typical responses might be:

- (1) Ignore the offense and go on doing the best you can.
- (2) Actively seek revenge or in some way try to return the hurt upon the person who inflicted it upon you.
- (3) Stay angry at the person who hurt you and cut off fellowship with them.
- (4) Refuse to forgive them unconditionally because they have not asked for forgiveness nor do they really deserve your forgiveness.

I believe one of the greatest illustrations of unconditional forgiveness is from a mom, Sharletta Evans, whose son was murdered in 1995 in a drive-by- shooting. Read the following:

That smirk. There was something disturbing about the way Paul Littlejohn, just a teenager, wore it at his sentencing, the way it radiated an attitude impervious to his circumstance: He shuffled through the courthouse corridors in shackles on his way to prison, possibly for the rest of his life, for his role in the shooting of a 3-year-old boy.

Sharletta Evans, the toddler’s mother, could not forget his expression — a mask of carelessness that, in her eyes, trivialized the loss of her precious Casson in the 1995 drive-by shooting that marked another in a litany of tragedies with roots in Denver’s “summer of violence” two years earlier.

“I could not shake that smirk,” Evans recalls now. “Only he could change that image for me.” For more than 20 years, Littlejohn’s face remained a jagged memory for her. And then came contact, a response to her request for dialogue.

The now-37-year-old accomplice in the drive-by that killed her son had agreed to engage in restorative justice — a face-to-face atonement based on an offender’s remorse, accountability and willingness to repair harm that Evans helped the Colorado Department of Corrections pilot in 2012.

Then, she had [met with Raymond Johnson](#), who also had been a juvenile when he got life without parole for firing the shot that killed Casson. Months of preparation for the encounter, requested by Evans and ultimately accepted by Johnson, culminated in an eight-hour meeting at the Limon Correctional Facility.

She long since had forgiven him, after a spiritual epiphany that settled over her within hours of the shooting. The meeting four years ago added momentum to Evans’ work that has spanned gang alternatives to criminal justice advocacy, addressing both victims and offenders, and continues to mold her personal and professional life.

But Littlejohn was another matter — a harder case who remained under gang influence for years after he started doing time. “I forgave Paul,” Evans says, “but with that act of forgiveness, it’s not to the point you have to embrace someone or even be in their company. I chose not to embrace him as I did Raymond Johnson, because I did not know Paul. I didn’t know what his goals were, if he ever would come to a place of accountability.”

As Littlejohn entered the room at the prison where Evans sat waiting for him, the questions that raced through her mind had less to do with her loss than with the arc of his life behind walls. Why had he finally decided to change? What did he plan to do with his life? Throughout their exchange, she noticed an odd, pained look on his face, as if he were fighting something back. Then, Littlejohn offered an explanation: He apologized for the smirk Evans had seen on his face that day in the courthouse and explained that it was a lifelong, involuntary reaction to anxiety. He was struggling with it at that very moment, not wanting to inflict any further harm, and assured her it did not reflect indifference.

She told him: “Paul, you smile as much as you need to.” He broke into a grin, took a deep breath and thanked her for understanding. She saw a breakthrough as he opened up and “showed me his authenticity, and let me know he’s a better man.”¹

¹ Kevin Simpson, Haunted by a face, mother of slain toddler finds restorative justice 21 years later, <https://www.denverpost.com/2016/10/20/mother-slain-toddler-restorative-justice/> (Accessed May, 24, 2018)

COURAGE

C1: What are your thoughts concerning the introduction?

C2: What comes to mind when you think about forgiveness? Unforgiveness?

C3: One of the subtle enemies to your spiritual well-being is how well you forgive. Answer the following.

- Describe your most painful life experience.
- Describe your most recent painful life experience.
- Name the person who has hurt you the deepest in your life.

C4: On a scale of 1-4, with 1 being totally forgiven and 4 being not forgiven, rate yourself in how well you have forgiven in each of the three scenarios from C3. Write out a plan to improve your level of forgiveness.

STRENGTH

S1: Jesus told a parable that deals with the issue of forgiveness. Read the following and answer the questions.

Matthew 18:21-35

- What point was Jesus trying to make?
- What are three elements of forgiveness you can gather from these verses?

S2: Read and answer the following.

Colossians 2:13-14 (ESV)

Colossians 3:13 (ESV)

Ephesians 4:32 (ESV)

- On whom does the burden of forgiveness fall? Why?
- On a scale of 1-4, with 1 being very well and 4 being not very well, rate yourself on how well you take the initiative to forgive others. Write out a plan to improve.

S3: What thoughts come to your mind when you hear the following statements about forgiveness like

- Genuine forgiveness is always unconditional.
- It makes no difference who is right and who is wrong.
- It makes no difference who is the offender and who is the offended.
- It makes no difference whether the person who is indebted to us deserves to be forgiven or not.
- It makes no difference how great the injustice or injury is.
- It makes no difference how often the individual repeats the offensive action against us.
- It makes no difference whether the offender asks for forgiveness or not.

ENDURANCE

E1: Jesus demonstrated and modeled unconditional forgiveness. Read the following and answer the following.

Matthew 6:12 (ESV)

Mark 11:25 (ESV)

Luke 23:34 (ESV)

2 Corinthians 5:14-19 (ESV)

- What three – five things do you gather from these verses?
- On a scale of 1-4, with 1 being very well and 4 being not very well, rate yourself on how well you model forgiveness like Christ did? Write out a plan to improve.
- Why does our flesh resist us exercising forgiveness?

E2: Unresolved anger and bitterness is the most dangerous, deadly emotion you possess. Read and answer the following.

Hebrews 12:14-15 (ESV)

- What are three-five implications in regard to bitterness?
- How do you stop the growth of bitterness?
- For the next seven days, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you any bitterness that may have taken root in your life. Write out the plan He gives you to extract the root of bitterness.

E3: Four ways to know you have forgiven someone unconditionally are: the original offense is no longer a constant mental irritation; fellowship with the offender is complexly restored if possible; when you once again have a passion to minister and serve; and when you feel yourself spiritually growing again.

As you look at this list, rate yourself from 1-4, with 1 being very well and 4 being not very well, that you are walking in forgiveness. Write out a plan to improve.