

**\*How To Forgive**  
*Total Forgiveness, 3*

I shared with you some time ago that I had started running – jogging – again.

[\*]So, let me put up an appropriate running picture...(\* **Homer Simpson**)

No, not *that!* (\* *cheeta pic*) Ok, that's more like it...

Well, I'm still at it, up to about 4 miles, 4 – 5 times a week. There are a lot of people in this church who are excellent runners, and you all inspire me to keep at it. Although, I have to say, they are almost all considerably younger than I am. (If there is anyone else here my age who also runs, please don't tell me. I want to keep up my illusion/ delusion!)

Anyway, it occurred to me the other day, that even something as simple as running can become kind of ... complex... without even realizing it. I mean, running is basically a simple process, right? It's much like walking, except its faster (in my case, not all that much, but somewhat). So, if you want to run, at its most basic form, you put something on your feet, and you find a road, or a trail, and you just go! [Just do it!]

But these days, for me, it's not quite that simple anymore. See, I found that there are certain pieces of 'equipment' that have become part of my running experience. I thought maybe I'd share this with you! (You know, in case you decide you want to be a runner like me.)

Now of course, the essentials start with running shoes. And running shorts. (And they're functional, but obviously, more importantly, is that you have the right 'look', you know; people are always recognizing me as I'm running, and toot their horns, so I have to look respectable. In case they're from the Presbyterian church.)

Anyway, that was all I needed for awhile – shorts and shoes. And a T shirt. (I got this one out of the wash. Ewe!) But it wasn't long before I realized that I really needed to know how long (time-wise) I was running, so I got a watch with a stopwatch feature. That was good. And then I thought that some music would be nice occasionally (not always, but once in while), and what better for music to run by than an iPod shuffle? It hardly weighs anything. But that also then, required Bose ear buds, because, really, there's no point in listening to music with bad sound, you know? These are awesome!

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The iPod requires a docking station so you can charge it up, and change music (or books) now and then. Even though this holds about 10 – 12 hours of music. So that's what this is. And, I guess I need to add that you have to have a computer to connect all this to – and a laptop works best for that!

So that was all I needed. Shoes, shorts, T-shirt, a watch and an iPod. And Bose earbuds. And a laptop. That was it, I was good to go.

But then our Conference insurance company came up with an incentive program to try to get us pastors more active. Apparently we are the most unhealthy demographic group in the nation (UM Clergy). I'm serious! #1 in type 2 Diabetes, right up there in heart diseases, hypertension, stress, etc. So they offered us these Pedometers to wear around. You might have noticed me and Pastor HY wearing them.

This thing counts our steps, and keeps a record of distance, calories, and reps every day. If we make certain goals, there are monetary rewards, but mostly it is just motivating to track my activity, I think. So I wear this whenever I'm up and around. And you need a way to dock it on your computer, too – that's this cord. I'm averaging about 11, 000 steps a day, since last June. And I've walked almost 750,000 steps!

So – there it is. All I need to run are my shoes, running shorts, a watch and an iPod. And Bose earbuds. And a laptop. And my pedometer. And all the connectors and chargers for each of these. NOW, I'm all set ... I was content at last.

But then, for my birthday a couple weeks ago, I got a present. This is a Garmin Forerunner 305. You wear it on your wrist... and oh, yeah, you need to put this around your chest. And this all keeps track of your exact distance traveled, and your pace. It has a built in GPS – connects with 12 satellites - and it tracks exactly where you went, and then it will trace your route on a Website and connect with Google Earth. It also tracks your heartrate, and you can see all this information on graphs – heartrate, distance, speed, everything except what song I was listening to on my iPod. Its pretty cool.

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So, that's really it. Along with its docking station.

That's all I need. . . shoes, shorts, a watch, iPod, Bose earbuds. A laptop, pedometer. All the connectors and chargers. A Garmin GPS and heart rate monitor... And a hat. That's it. For now.

[\*] Now, you know what – forgiveness is a lot like running.

On the one hand, it is rather simple – last week in sharing a definition of forgiveness I said that I think that we all know what it is, we might hope that it is something else, but the meaning of the word forgiveness is pretty clear. It is “letting someone off the hook for what they've done to us, or to someone we love... intentionally or unintentionally.”

In more theological terms we saw that forgiveness means to deliberately ‘Leave the punishment for a persons actions (i.e., vengeance) to God.’ That while we might, out of the best course of love, hold a person accountable for their choices (and expect counseling, restitution, even prison in extreme cases) that still, their *punishment* (which typically amounts to their being the recipients of our anger, bitterness, bad talk, remembering and sharing the event as frequently as possible, etc) is the thing we need to walk away from.

And we need to do that for a number of reasons. One is simply because Jesus tells his children to ‘forgive as we have been forgiven’. In the same manner, to the same extent, with the same liberalness, frequency and completeness... we are to share what we've been given. There seems to be, scripturally speaking, a definite connection between our capacity to receive forgiveness and blessing from God and our willingness to give the same thing away.

[\*] This is part of the great plan if God, shared in Jeremiah 29:11 to “Bless us and not curse us, to give us hope and a future.”

Part of the way forgiveness can bless us is another reason for us to want to at least *try* to do this in our lives: forgiveness releases us from the bondage of the evil that we have experienced. When bad things happen to us, when people betray us, slander us, steal from us, and all the rest of the creative ways to hurt that we humans are capable of doing... its one thing to have to deal

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with those events. That's hard. We talked about this last week: forgiving someone does not mean that we have to pretend that what they did wasn't really wrong, or that it didn't really hurt, or that they had no choice in the matter.

But when we withhold forgiveness, we are then binding ourselves to that person, and that evil event, remains part of our lives forever. We are placing ourselves in bondage to that person. If we are insisting that this person apologize to us, and recognize (admit) what they have done, before we will forgive them, we are leaving ourselves open to their continued hurting of us.

And where does that typically end?

Someone shared with me last week after church about a situation in their life where a person hurt them very badly. And she told me, very honestly, how she carried this anger and bitterness toward that person for years. And then, (I guess, unexpectedly) she came upon this person socially. And realized that this other person had *no idea* about that event, no remembrance of it at all. This was an unnecessary burden.

A lot of people carry burdens like that. We allow ourselves to be in bondage to the evil of someone...and that evil then is allowed to *continue*. It is compounded. Its effects seep into our other relationships. We can't trust people, we think. We become cynical... bitter... angry – and the anger pops out in all sorts of unexpected places.

Another part of forgiveness is realizing who is included in our bitterness and anger...

We may find, if we think about it, that we are angry most of all, at God, who allowed this event to happen. Most people would rarely come out and admit that, but it is true. Repressed anger at God is a certain joy stealer in worship. We may feel that we *have* to worship, and give, and even serve... but if there is little joy, and if you can't understand why some people get so worked up and excited over this, maybe you've got some anger at God.

It is OK to share that with God, I believe. Just read the Psalms. I was reading Jeremiah this week, and I was really surprised to come across Jeremiah 4:10

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Jeremiah says, “Then I said, “Ah, Sovereign Lord, how completely you have deceived this people and Jerusalem by saying, ‘You will have peace,’ when the sword is at our throats.”

Wow... Jeremiah says to God, “You have lied to us!”

Well, I don’t need to get into all that, except to say this, there are 48 more chapters in Jeremiah *after* that statement, so apparently God was able to handle it OK. Talk to God. Tell him everything you’re feeling.

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In addition, realize that you may need to put *yourself* on your forgiveness list. And for some, this may be the hardest of all. We beat ourselves up over questions like, “Why did I do that?” “Why did I let that happen?” The ‘Should have’s’ \_\_\_\_\_, the ‘could have’s’ \_\_\_\_\_. The Missed opportunities, terrible mistakes that have changed the course of your life.... And people live in regret. Not repentance, but regret.

Repentance is recognizing that something is wrong, to say that this thing was *sin*, and we tell God, “I want to move on... I want to change.” God promises – *promises* – that whenever we do that, we are forgiven, and we are given a new start. The past is what it is – it cannot be undone (in this life, anyway). But as God promises not to ‘remember our sins’(not to ever bring them up to us again, or to accuse us of them) – we need to do the same. Not just with the sins of others against us, but with the sins that we have committed against ourselves.

As we understand our forgiveness from God, we need to tell the Accuser to be silent; we have been forgiven. God will never *un-forgive* me! In Christ, we are free.

Now, I opened with that running story for a reason – I’m glad you laughed, but there was also a point in there. See, with running, it seems very simple. At first. Just like forgiveness. And then it tends gets a little more complicated.

So, it’s comical, on one hand, to think that I have all this stuff to help me do something as ‘simple’ as running. But on the other hand – all of this is actually very helpful in making me a better runner. These are tools, see.

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And what do they do? They help me focus my mind, they help me set goals – and they provide ways to monitor my progress.

Forgiveness is simple in theory. Doing it, is harder, as you well know. And certain circumstances require more time, more effort to complete.

If a person is going to run a marathon, they're going to train harder, and with more discipline than someone who simply wants to do a 1 mile 'fun run' at the local park. What kind of tools do we have available to us to help us forgive?

[\*] Well for one, we have **Scripture**. There's an insert in your bulletins tonight/ this morning with some passages about forgiveness on them. I'd encourage you to read these, and read them in their context once in awhile. This is the primary way that God speaks to his people.

[\*] We also have the resource of **honest prayer**. Prayer is talking to God. We can't hide anything from God, so why try? Be honest in your prayers, tell God what you are feeling and experiencing. Tell God about your struggle to let go of a certain situation, your desire to be released from the bondage of an event in your life. And keep at it. Whenever you feel that surge of anger – hand it over to God. (It might even help to symbolize that by “taking it from your heart and giving it to God.”

[\*] And **be patient**. You don't decide to be a runner and the next day go out and run a 10k. In fact, most people, when they start running, will run for about a minute or two... and then they walk. And they run... and walk. And then they take Ibuprofin. And ice up the aching muscles. And then they go out again. Forgiveness as an attitude gets easier in the little things with practice. We can become people (as we described two weeks ago) who are 'a little less likely to be offended'.

But, bigger events will always be difficult. In the smaller events, we will be convinced that we can do the bigger ones.

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[\*] Another resource is **a partner**. This is someone who will listen to you without judgment and with confidence. This is *not* a person that you can constantly gripe and complain to. Not someone who will provide an audience for you to slander and punish a person. But sometimes we need to honestly share our hurt so we can heal. A pastor, trusted friend, a Stephen Minister... someone who can pray with you – so that you can then leave this event behind, and find healing.

[\*] And just like in running, we need to have **goals**. And the more specific they are, the more likely that we can reach them. When I run, I set mileage goals – this is how far I want to go today. I don't care how long it takes, I just know I want to get there. Kim (my daughter) would rather set time goals – this is how *long* I'm going to run today. They both work really well, but the point is that if you don't have a goal, you'll never get *anywhere*.

So, on that same sheet with the Scripture references is a blank space. I'd like to close this service and give you an opportunity to think of a forgiveness goal. (Let the Holy Spirit lead you, as I know has been happening over the past three weeks). And I'm going to ask you to be bold and write a sign a symbol, an initial – something that you know represents this person, or situation that you need to walk away from. Put it on the bottom of that page, tear it off, and bring it up here, put it in the bowl.

You can kneel here and pray for awhile for the strength to carry through in this.

Pastor HY and I are going to take these pages and burn them after the services today; and we're going to save the ashes to mix with some Palms for next year's Ash Wednesday service. This is to be a sign of God's grace and mercy to us... let us forgive as we have been forgiven.

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Time of reflection...

**Hold in your mind someone you find it hard to forgive (this may be yourself also)**  
**When you are ready pray for that person, asking God to love and bless them.**  
**Be specific and generous in your prayer.**

**If you find anger still there, tell God about that, don't pretend.**  
**You will be able to forgive when the time comes.**

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**If you will see this person again imagine yourself being different with them, the difference forgiveness will make.**

**If you won't see them again or if they have died, simply open your hands to let go of the anger and hand them over to God.**

**If you are not ready to forgive yet, simply pray for the grace of forgiveness. There is no need to feel guilty, forgiveness takes time and healing.**

**If the anger is still strong you may need to find a way to let it out by sharing it with a trusted friend, pastor, Stephen Minister, etc. Be honest with God, and yourself, if your prayer needs to begin, "God, I don't want to forgive \_\_\_\_\_, but I know you want me to", then start there.**

**Thank God for this time of prayer.  
Amen.**

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**Proverbs 20:22**

<sup>22</sup> Do not say, "I'll pay you back for this wrong!"  
Wait for the LORD, and he will avenge you.

**Matthew 5:24**

<sup>23</sup> "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to that person; then come and offer your gift.

**Matthew 5:44-45**

<sup>44</sup> But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

**Matthew 6: 12-15**

<sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
<sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.'  
<sup>14</sup> For if you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup>  
But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

**Matthew 18:21-35**

<sup>21</sup> Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive someone who sins against me? Up to seven times?"  
<sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

**Luke 6:35-38;42**

But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." ... How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

**Colossians 3:13**

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

**1 John 1:9-10**

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

**Romans 12:19**

<sup>19</sup> Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.