

## ARE YOU SERIOUS

*I Can't Imagine*

October 15, 2023

**INTRO.:** There are certain things that are so amazing I have a hard time imagining how they happen. Do you ever get overwhelmed by the awesomeness of God? I certainly hope so. Let's take a minute and look at Genesis 1 and the creation story. What did it take for God to create?

**Genesis 1:1** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

**Genesis 1:3** And God said, "Let there be light," and **there was light.**

Genesis 1:9 And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." **And it was so.**

Genesis 1:14–16 And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, **15** and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth." **And it was so.** **16** God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars.

**Genesis 1:24** And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind." **And it was so.**

Throughout the creation narrative, what did it take for God to create? There is not one of us here that can relate to this totally. Nobody here has made something out of nothing. Some of you here are very creative and have made some great things, way beyond my ability. I worked in a cabinet factory for several months in between churches many years ago. I was an entry level sander but right next to my area was where the custom cabinets were made by some real craftsmen. Every so often the company would allow them to use the equipment after hours and they would bring in their own wood to make furniture or cabinets. One man made a bedroom set out of black walnut he had harvested from his property. It was beautiful and I can't imagine what it would cost to buy something like that. Early in the morning one day this past week I was walking from my car in the church parking lot and marveling at the stars. The stars that God created by speaking them into existence. We are currently in our series on forgiveness entitled, *Are You Serious*. We have looked at several things over the course of four messages leading to today's message, *I Can't Imagine*, wondering how does forgiveness work.

The first week was this idea of **INCONCEIVABLE**, that apart from God forgiveness doesn't make sense and we have no reason to forgive. Forgiveness is based in the character of God, for He is forgiving in His nature. This doesn't mean that sin is overlooked or just brushed aside. The source of forgiveness is Jesus Christ, for in and of ourselves we are unable to forgive. Finally, Jesus Christ is the pattern for forgiveness. We need to get to know God better if we are going to understand forgiveness. The second week we looked at **EXPLAIN**, that is, what forgiveness is. Forgiveness is God's idea, Costly, therefore not easy, and Possible through Christ. We also looked at what forgiveness is not. It is not Pretending it didn't happen, it is not sweeping it under the rug, it is not adding "But" (therefore excusing sin), and it is not continuing to allow abuse to continue. That brought us to this question, **REALLY?**, the third week, answering the age-old question, **WHY**, that is, "Why should I forgive?" Again it is because of the forgiveness of God (forgave us ALL our sins), it affects my fellowship with God (if I don't forgive what makes me think God will forgive me), and because forgiveness sets me free. Two weeks ago we looked at, **LIKE NOW!** When does God want me to forgive others? It involves three things I need to do:

**I NEED TO DECIDE** (conscious decision to forgive)

**I NEED TO REALIZE** (it may take some time, I may need some help, some may not recognize their need for forgiveness, may be in denial, or may not even care)

**I NEED TO UNDERSTAND** (this is a spiritual battle and I will need forgiveness from God and others)

So, today, you may still be thinking or saying, "Pastor, I can't imagine forgiving them." None of us here can really imagine the power it takes to make something out of nothing. What does it take to forgive someone or to be forgiven? How does this work? I'm not going to share a neat little 4 step process that will get you through this but I do want to share some biblical principles to help us on the journey of forgiveness. The first thing I want to share is:

### **THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE**

I truly believe that you and I cannot forgive apart from the miracle working power of God in our lives. As I think of this I'm reminded of the rich man who came up to Jesus asking, Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" (Mt. 19:16)

**Matthew 19:17–21 (NKJV)** — **17** So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments." **18** He said to Him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, " 'You shall

not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' **19** 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' ” **20** The young man said to Him, “All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?” **21** Jesus said to him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

The young man wasn't willing to part with his stuff and his money, so he went away sad. Jesus told the disciples it is difficult for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. Why is that? They can think they have everything they need. Jesus says it would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God. This shocked the disciples prompting them to ask, “Who then can be saved?”

**Matthew 19:26 (NKJV)** — **26** But Jesus looked at them and said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

In the last message on forgiveness, I stated that forgiveness is a spiritual battle because the enemy does not want us to forgive. He wants us to stay angry, divided, bitter and spread gossip about what terrible things this person did to us. Since it is a spiritual battle why would I think I can navigate this on my own? There are two things in particular that are key in my forgiving others, and they are both spiritual weapons.

### **\*Prayer**

**Philippians 4:6–7** Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. **7** And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

*“do not be anxious:”* present tense command

*“in everything:”* what does this include?

*“prayer, petition, requests:”* all referring to specific, direct offerings of petition to God (John MacArthur)

*“present:”* to make known, present tense command

Paul expects that believers will cry out to God with their problems, challenges, hurts, and needs. They believe that God will answer and thus will bring these things, peoples, difficulties before God, thanking Him for His answer. Stop pretending you can do it without God!

**Psalm 62:5–8 (page 898)** — **5** Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. **6** He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. **7** My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. **8** Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge. Selah

*“find rest, o my soul, in God alone”*

*“He alone is my rock and my salvation”*

*“He is my rock, my salvation, my fortress, my mighty rock, my refuge”*

*“trust in Him at all times”*

*“pour out your hearts to Him”*

Forgiveness is supernatural!! God's power is limitless!!

### **\*Scripture**

This is where we learn about forgiveness. This is where we have examples of forgiveness and unforgiveness.

We have Joseph forgiving his brothers for all the bad things they had done to him. He had the opportunity to repay them, to take revenge for their evil actions toward him. Their actions caused great harm and pain to Joseph and in fear for their lives they concocted one more story after their father died.

**Genesis 50:16–21 (NIV84)** — **16** So they sent word to Joseph, saying, “Your father left these instructions before he died: **17** ‘This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.’ Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.” When their message came to him, Joseph wept. **18** His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. “We are your slaves,” they said. **19** But Joseph said to them, “Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? **20** You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. **21** So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

We need to read and study God's word if we are going to forgive others. The word of God is the only offensive weapon of the spiritual armor listed in Ephesians 6. (belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, feet fitted with the readiness of the gospel of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, and sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God). Too many believers are going into battle unarmed!!

This is impossible without God! We must:

### **RECOGNIZE THE PAIN**

I am not saying that forgiveness is easy. It is painful because somebody has caused me pain. Think about the pain that Jesus Christ endured to provide the sacrifice for our sins and the avenue to forgiveness. I believe that we do everything we can to escape pain. Nobody likes to go through trials, difficulties, and hurts. Yet, we are willing to endure pain in other areas of our lives. Think about athletics. A few weeks ago, I talked about weightlifting. Do you get stronger by using the same amount of weight and the same number of repetitions? Not a chance! In coaching running there are some days that the workouts are meant to be more difficult than other days. What Joseph went through was painful, but do we believe that God can use our pain for His glory and to accomplish His purposes? Think about the times that you grew the most spiritually. Were they the easy times?

**Romans 5:1–5** Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, **2** through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. **3** Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; **4** perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

**James 1:2–4** Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, **3** because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

God wants to conform us into the image or likeness of His Son, and this will involve some painful circumstances. God is not the author of sin, but He can and will use each and every circumstance in our lives. This includes those we call good and those we call bad.

How can I possibly forgive? This is Impossible (don't attempt this without God: prayer & Scripture); Recognize the Pain (God will use this in my life to conform me to the image of His Son)

### **GIVE UP MY RIGHTS**

You may be sitting there this morning thinking, "I have a right to not forgive this person! They don't deserve my forgiveness!" Guess what? You are right! Do you remember who is our pattern for forgiveness?

Let's take a look at Philippians 2 and read this together.

**Philippians 2:1-11** If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

So, this is our pattern. Jesus Christ came here from where? He came from glory where He was worshipped. He came as a baby with the express purpose of dying on the cross for our sins and rising from the grave with victory over sin and death. Now, understand He did not give up His deity in coming to earth!

Jesus is the ultimate picture of giving up one's rights. According to Philippians 2 this is the basis for our relationship with fellow believers.

**Philippians 2:2-3** then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

Philippians 2:2-3

*“having:”* present tense participle

*“consider:”* present tense participle

*“better than:”* present tense participle

We read the following account of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

**Luke 22:39–44** Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. **40** On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.” **41** He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, **42** “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” **43** An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. **44** And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

In what ways does unforgiveness help the body of Christ? It doesn’t! Am I willing to seek God’s will and not my own? If I am to forgive, I need to give up my right to hang onto my unforgiveness. I must recognize the pain and believe that God will use even the most difficult circumstances to make me more like Jesus. I must understand this is impossible apart from God. I know some of you have been through some horrible things.

### **IF I SENSE SOMETHING IS WRONG, GO**

Have you ever sensed something is wrong between you and another brother/sister in Christ, but you don’t do anything about it because you hope it will go away. Does it usually get better? We may rationalize it saying, “It’s their problem. They need to come to me.”

In the meantime, part of the body of Christ is fractured. How many times was it something that took a short conversation to clear up? We cannot afford to sit back and do nothing about it!

A few weeks ago we looked at

**Matthew 5:23–24** “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, **24** leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

*“leave:”* this is a command!

*“go:”* this is a command!

*“be reconciled:”* this is a command

What stops us from doing this? Fear, pride, the work of the enemy. As we go we need to do so in love and humility. Talking to people is not easy but if we can’t talk to a brother or sister in Christ, who can we talk to?

If somebody has sinned against me what is my responsibility? Should I go and tell others? If it is illegal, dangerous, or a situation of abuse (particularly if it involves a minor) you must tell those in authority. Otherwise, what is our responsibility?

**Luke 17:3–4** So watch yourselves. “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. **4** If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”

One of the commentators (John MacArthur) says this refers to willful, habitual sin. This doesn’t mean that I can’t or shouldn’t forgive those who fail to recognize their sin. If they don’t repent and seek forgiveness the relationship can’t be totally restored from their end. We cannot afford to let sin go, or to ignore fractured relationships.

Gary Inrig in the booklet, *The Risk of Forgiveness*, says: Although forgiveness benefits me in a host of ways, it is not just, or even primarily, about me. It is about “gaining” my brother, the one who wronged me, to bring him back to spiritual health, and about the larger good: the protection of others and the promotion of the community’s well-being.

He continues to share about how it is to be done:

**We should do it privately, not publicly.** “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you” (MATTHEW 18:15).

**We should do it humbly and repentantly, not arrogantly and self-righteously.** “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye” (MATTHEW 7:3-5).

**We should do it spiritually, not carnally.** “Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted” (GALATIANS 6:1).

The final thing I would share is:

### **ALLOW FOR TIME IN THE PROCESS**

I am not saying avoid dealing with the situation or delay in deciding the need to forgive (the Lord makes it clear we need to forgive for He has forgiven us of all our sins) but that it may take time for you to work through it.

As I have said before, you may need to seek biblical counseling. This should drive us back to the Lord in prayer and in His Word, for that is our first counselor. It goes back to the first point I opened with: *this is impossible* without God.

### **SO WHAT?**

Let’s say this together, as we think about forgiveness:

- \*This is impossible  
    Apart from God
- \*This is painful  
    But God will use it
- \*If I sense something is wrong  
    GO!
- \*Forgiveness is worth the risk

### **Forgiving others**

The German philosopher Schopenhauer compared the human race to a bunch of porcupines huddling together on a cold winter’s night. He said, “The colder it gets outside, the more we huddle together for warmth; but the closer we get to one another, the more we hurt one another with our sharp quills. And in the lonely night of earth’s winter eventually we begin to drift apart and wander out on our own and freeze to death in our loneliness.”

Christ has given us an alternative: to forgive each other for the pokes we receive. That allows us to stay together and stay warm.

*Source: Wayne Brouwer, Holland, Michigan. Leadership, Vol. 17, no. 2*

Forgiveness: it’s worth the risk!

### **Teenager Experiences Father's Grace after Car Wreck**

As a 17-year-old Anne Graham Lotz, the daughter of Billy and Ruth Graham, was involved in a car accident. Speeding carelessly down a windy mountain road, Anne smashed into her neighbor, Mrs. Pickering. Anne was too afraid to tell her father about the accident, so for the rest of the day she kept avoiding him. When she finally came home, she tried to tiptoe around her dad, but there he was, standing in the kitchen.

Anne tells what happened next:

I paused for what seemed a very long moment frozen in time. Then I ran to him and threw my arms around his neck .... I told him about my wreck—how I’d driven too fast and smashed into the neighbor’s car. I told him it wasn’t her fault; it was all mine. As I wept on his shoulder, he said four things to me:

- "Anne, I knew all along about your wreck. Mrs. Pickering came straight up the mountain and told me—and I was just waiting for you to come and tell me yourself."
- "I love you."
- "We can fix the car."
- "You are going to be a better driver because of this."

Anne says, "Sooner or later, all of us are involved in some kind of wreck—it may be your own fault or someone else’s. When the damage is your fault, there’s a good chance you’ll be confronted by the flashing blue lights of the morality police. But my father gave me a deeper understanding of what it means to experience the loving, forgiving embrace of my heavenly Father."

*Source: Adapted from Anne Graham Lotz, Wounded by God's People (Zondervan, 2013), pp. 155-156*