

How to Forgive and Move Forward

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Hello, my name is Father Taylor Reynolds. It's a pleasure to be with you again today. I'll be speaking today about how to forgive and how to love our enemies. Before we begin with that, let us dive into the heart of God, through prayer.

Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. God, our heavenly Father, you're love itself. You have shown us the meaning of love in giving us your very Son. Lord, we experience what it means to forgive by ourself being forgiven and loved by you. Lord, we pray that this encounter with your love and your mercy, may give us the strength to love and to forgive those in our life. We pray that through the example of Jesus on the cross, we may be able to forgive those who have hurt us, even if they do not know it, even if they do not wish to be forgiven. We ask Lord that our heart hearts may reflect your heart.

We pray together the prayer that Christ has taught us. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespassed against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Resolving with Forgiveness

It's a pleasure to be with you again. And again, I'll be talking about forgiveness. And, as a priest, I've discovered that after the sacraments, forgiveness is probably the most important ministry that our Church can provide. The greatest difficulty that I think the world has is a struggle with forgiveness. Is a struggle with hurts caused by other people and how do we reconcile? As a priest, again, I have discovered that so many problems, whether it be through marriage, whether it be counseling issues, whether it be even psychological and even demonic anomalies can all be resolved. Most of them can be resolved with forgiveness. With learning how to properly forgive and how to be set free from the sins of others, to be free from those things. And how to live as people of love, and how that gives us an ability to go forward in this world, to move in the face of difficulties and struggles.

It's such a great call to forgive, that again, Jesus puts it in the prayer that we pray daily. The, Our Father, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." It's a very great call, but that call and that greatness of forgiveness is in proportion also to the struggle of forgiveness. That forgiveness is hard, it is difficult. And I think any of us can admit and say that it's not easy. It's not easy to forgive, sometimes because what happened is very difficult. The struggle, the pain, it is very hard. It's a difficult reality. Sometimes it's because we just don't know how to forgive. Maybe we've just lived misconceptions about what forgiveness is, and

that's what makes it hard. We just don't know what to do, we don't know what it means. Sometimes we feel it means something far different than what the reality is and it's difficult.

So, I want to work through that, I want to work through today, what does it mean to forgive? How do we forgive, why is it important to forgive? All these questions that we can hopefully answer and can give you skills, give you the tools, again, to move forward in life and to live as Christ tells us. One of the great commands He tells us, is to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute. It's one of the great calls we have as Christians.

Forgiveness Benefits Us

So, the first thing I want to answer is, why? Why do we need to forgive? Why is it important for us personally to forgive? Why do I need to do this? The first reality is that it benefits us. We are benefited when we forgive somebody else. When we forgive, we are set free. Because as much as we don't want to admit it, until we forgive, we are in some way a prisoner to what has happened, what has been said, that person's opinions, we're not free. I think we can all think about that, of times where we've been hurt by somebody, and it changed our whole way of life now.

Now, I don't want to go to this celebration because that person might be there. Or I don't want to risk going to that place because that person may be there. Or no, I don't want to do this thing because it reminds me about what that person. Our freedom is stripped of us. We can't live anymore because of what someone else did because of the wrong someone else did. And that's, I think what God wants us to do, He wants us to be freed from that. And when He says, so many times in scripture, "That forgive us our trespasses "as we forgive those who trespass against us." It's not as much us trying to condition God's heart and say, that God only forgives when we forgive. Of course, we know God is not based on our actions. His ways are not our ways. But we had to say is that, my experience of that, my ability to feel that freedom is very much contingent upon my forgiveness, how I've forgiven that person.

I know stories of people 40 years later, they can still remember all the intricate details of what happened, how they were hurt, what this person said to them. The memory is so vivid, so wild, so strong. That's a hard reality that we can remember that for so long. It's so ingrained us, that, that takes so much energy from us, it's so painful. And so that's one of the first things is that we forgive because it comes right back and benefits us. We ourselves are able to benefit.

Forgiveness Completes our Love for God

The second thing is ultimately that we are able not only to reflect and imitate God most perfectly when we forgive, but we are able to complete our love for God when we forgive. St. Catherine of Siena, she has the whole dialogue of this beautiful conversation she and God had. And one of the most beautiful parts of it in there, she says that God was speaking to her, God, the Father was talking to her. And He says to her, "Catherine, He says, "I wish that you could love me the way that I love you." He says, "but for you that is impossible, Catherine, "because you always love me "because of how I first loved you. "In the sense that you love me because I loved you. "Your love to me is always a thanksgiving, "is always a return. "You are always in a sense "repaying

the love that I've given you." He says, "It's really impossible "for you to perfectly love me the way that I love you." But then He says, "But Catherine, "this is why I place you amongst others, so that you may do to them what you cannot do for me. "In the sense that you can love them without seeking any things. Without having any first inspiration, without having any first impulse or any desire for return." And God, the Father says, " When you love people that way, I'll consider it done for me."

That us loving others in this way, especially loving our enemies. We are able to the greatest, most perfect way to imitate God and to return that love for Him. To imitate that love that is completely self-giving, completely unconditional, completely free. That we love when we forgive, not because of what someone else did, but because of that love, because of what love means. And then we are in a greater way able to experience God's love, I feel. And I'm also going to later on illustrate how that love can heal us. How love is something that heals. When we love it brings about healing and a goodness back to the world. And then it brings this unity to the world. When we love, we become that dynamic instrument of God to bring unity, to bring reconciliation back to this world.

What Forgiveness is Not

So that's a little bit of the why to forgive. The next thing I want to answer really, is what forgiveness is not. I think this is one of the big struggles and one of the reasons why forgiveness can be so hard, is cause we have a misconception of what forgiveness is. So, I want to first go over and say what forgiveness is not. So first of all, forgiveness is not saying that what they did was okay. Forgiveness is not saying that the hurt that I experienced, the pain that they caused me is nothing. It's not discounting that. It's not saying, we'll just blow it off, just forget it. Forgive and forget. That's not what it's saying. Forgiveness is not underplaying at all the wrong that happened.

Then the second thing is, forgiveness is not permission to have it happen again. Forgiveness is not saying I'm going to be a doormat. Forgiveness is not saying, well, I'll just allow myself to be treated this way by other people. Or that as a Christian, we love our enemies, that just means we let them do anything to us. That is not forgiveness, that's not what it means. The third thing is that forgiveness is not an emotion. Forgiveness is not an emotion. It's not us waiting to feel necessarily, this desire. It's not necessarily feeling the rush of forgiveness. It's not an emotion, it's a choice. I'll go into that in a little bit later on.

Fourth thing, forgiveness is not based upon their actions. What I mean is, first of all, it's not based on the fact of them apologizing. Yes, apologies are beautiful. Apologies are very healing and very powerful but, forgiveness does not have to wait for them to apologize. We can experience freedom and forgiveness without an apology. And I encourage you to not wait for that. Because sometimes it will never happen. And that gives us, we can have freedom even without an apology. And the fifth thing, is that forgiveness is not the same thing as trust or reconciliation. It's not the same as trust and reconciliation. When I forgive somebody, and I'm going to talk about this a little bit more in a second. When I forgive somebody, it's not right away saying that I'm going to repair this relationship with them. It's not right away saying that we're going to be reconciled and we're going to have a perfect relationship again. Maybe I will never

even talk to this person again. Maybe I can't, maybe it's someone who's passed away. Maybe it's someone who they're indignant, again and they don't want to. In all those areas, again, forgiveness does not depend on them. Forgiveness does not depend on their actions. And then, the last thing that's still tied with this, is forgiveness is not saying this person is going to change. So again, all of that is saying that forgiveness is not based upon them. It's based upon me.

Ultimately to define forgiveness, forgiveness is giving a gift that I can say the other person doesn't deserve. Now I know that sounds kind of harsh, but it really kind of helps us when we get into forgiveness, and when we get into the particulars of it.

How do we Forgive?

So, having said all that, how do we forgive? Let's now get into that and kind of go through some of those basic ways of how to forgive. The first part of forgiveness is that we really have to touch the pain. I really have to be honest about what happened, how hurtful it was and how I was particularly hurt. If we try to sweep it under the rug, try to forget, try to kind of just push past it without touching it, we're not actually forgiving and we're not actually ever going to find healing. Forgiveness is part of the healing process, and so, we have to first see what the wound is before we can heal it. Any good doctor is going to have to sort of get into the whole depth of the wound, see how much of that wound, what damage was actually caused before a cure can be given, before they can kind of work with it.

And so, it's the same thing with us. To forgive, we have to really kind of be honest. And sometimes we have to do the hard part of going in there and really being honest, that it really hurt and how much it hurt. Sometimes that's really hard for us to do, is to really get to that point. Sometimes that's the part we stay stuck at, is just repeating over and over how hard and how hurtful it was. And this is the part where we say, you have a right to your anger. You have a right to your anger; you have a right to recognize and say this was wrong and it was hurtful. And that's the first step.

So, it is okay to be hurt, to be sad, to be angry, that's part of the process, it's part of dealing with it. But we cannot stay there. Forgiveness is then saying that I desire to no longer be a prisoner of that event. I choose to no longer be held in bonds by my anger, by those memories, by those words, by those things, I want to live free. Ultimately at this point we say, this is where justice and mercy don't contradict each other, but fulfill each other. Justice is that acknowledgement of rights, of things that we're entitled to and how things have been unjust. Have an unjust damage has taken place that you didn't deserve. You didn't deserve to be hurt, you didn't deserve for this to happen. And that's the first stage of justice. And mercy doesn't contradict it, mercy recognizes that, but then says, I'm going to go above and beyond.

And as Pope Benedict says, "I'm not going to give what you deserve, but I'm going to give you something of what I deserve. I'm going to give a gift to you." And so that's that part of saying, "I'm going to choose to give up my right to be angry, to hold this against you, to this right that I have to say, I deserve repayment." That's the second thing, is that I want to make that choice to be free and giving that gift. Is that I want it to be free, I want to be free, I want to let go. And it must be a true and a real decision. And what that means is that I can't just, in my mind think,

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okay, I want to forgive this person. All right, and then I forgave them. Sometimes I'll work with people and they'll say like, "Well, I feel like I forgave that person." Did you feel like you did, or did you actually forgive them? The decision to forgive must be very concrete, must be very real, it must be very intentional. I, again, building on what I've just said, I have to acknowledge that pain. I have to acknowledge that I don't want to live that way. I acknowledge that I don't deserve what happened to me and I acknowledge I want to be freed. And so, then I must make a choice in the face of all that, to say, I'm giving up this right to be angry. I'm giving them this gift they don't deserve.

And that's why I normally say that for it to also be a true choice, a true decision, that it must in some way become a human action. Normally, what I encourage people is when they want to be sure they've forgiven someone, is to vocalize. Now, I don't necessarily mean going to that person and forgiving them, sometimes that will take place and sometimes that is necessary, but not always. And many times, it's not. And I think the first thing though is to bring it to the Lord, bring it to the Lord in prayer. And say, "Lord, I choose to forgive this person." And be very specific, very concrete. Say, "Lord, I choose to forgive who it is." And then say, "I choose to forgive them for what they did." And very much specify exactly what it was they did and what you're forgiving them for.

Then the next part after we've made that choice, which sometimes is going to take multiple times. Especially if you're dealing with a hurt that occurred over a long period of time, it might take more than once to do that action. The next thing is to realize that nature abhorred a vacuum, that just forgiving and just getting that out is not enough. We have to replace ourselves with love and charity. We have to love the person, we have to desire their good, we have to fill the place that was filled with anger, we have to replace with love and compassion. And that's where love begins to heal us, is that now that chasm that was in us that was caused by their pain and their hurt, and their actions is now filled with love, is now filled with the super abundant gift that increases, that grows, that covers a multitude of sins. And so now our heart is filled, is covered not with ourselves but something so alive and vivacious. Then when we are loving, we are richer. We are a richer person.

That's the thing is that to love and forgive requires a surplus, not an excess. I have to have more so that I can give more. In order to give a gift to someone, I have to have more than enough. So, we have to reach that point of praying to God to be filled with that love for our enemies, so we can give because that means we have more, we are overflowing, we are fill to capacity. And so that is then why we're called to love them, to pray for them, if nothing else. And then maybe to see, I am called to reach out, I'm called to reconcile. Maybe I am called to build trust but remembering that reconciliation and trust that requires them. That requires their part to initiate, to cooperate, they have to build trust. Forgiveness is given, but trust is earned. That's the other thing.

The last thing is to recognize in our hearts and just to look and say that many times with forgiveness, there come little caveats, little siblings of forgiveness. Basically, someone hurts me, normally what will come with that is fears, lies, doubts, insecurities. And sometimes it's good for me to go into my own heart and say, what came along with this? What baggage did this wound bring with it? And forgiving can untie those things and we can start getting those things out of

our life. And now all these misconceptions I had about myself, these fears that I've cared about me, these insecurities. Now I realize that those are all false and I can start living free from those things. And that is, again, the process. We can start living in how forgiveness can help us, how forgiveness can give us healing.

Encouraging you to Forgive

So, I encourage you on this journey to pray. Who is it that you need to forgive? Who in your life, maybe from your past, maybe in a very current way, do you need to forgive? And again, maybe dive in there and see what is the wound that was caused me? How am I invited to forgive and to be set free? And so, we ask Jesus who on the cross said those words, that echo throughout the centuries, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." Those words may be in your heart as well. May almighty God bless you. The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. God bless you.