

LESSON ESSENTIALS

FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

LESSON 3: ANGER AND PRIDE

“I had stopped going to church for almost six months because of an incident with a church leader. I was so disappointed that I stopped all activities with the church.” – Nisay, from Cambodia

So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

(Matthew 18:35)

The Lord tells his disciples to be careful to take the log out of their eyes before trying to remove the speck from their neighbour's eyes. That is to say, we ought to carefully and honestly evaluate our own large sin before we get too picky about the potentially smaller sins of those around us.

We need to remember that people are human and fallible. They will disappoint us. They will hurt and offend us. But we need to have grace for them and extend forgiveness to them because we too are sinners.

Many people are quick to justify their own actions. Most of us feel that we are able to explain or defend our decisions and, when those might be indefensible, we are quick to apologize and to ask forgiveness. We expect to receive forgiveness assuming that the person we have offended will agree that our actions are, at least in part, justifiable and therefore forgivable. However, we are not so quick to extend that same grace to others. When we consider their actions and decisions, no matter how justifiable that person may think they are, we are often more quick to see all the wrong, overlooking the same evidence that we would have presented on our own behalf. Why is this?

The Bible calls it pride. We think too highly of ourselves and expect that we ought to be free to live with a lesser intensity of consequences for our bad behaviour. If only others' understood our perspective, they'd be quicker to forgive us, we think. And yet, we often do not try hard enough to see other people's perspective in their actions and decisions.

The Bible paints a vivid word picture describing this. The Lord tells his disciples to be careful to take the log out of their eyes before trying to remove the speck from their neighbour's eyes. That is to say, we ought to carefully and honestly evaluate our own large sin before we get too picky about the potentially smaller sins of those around us. (Luke 6:41-42)

A true example of this comes from a man in Cambodia. "Nisay" was offended and hurt by church leaders. The event was painful enough that he chose to leave that church body. In fact, the wound was so great, that the man left the Church entirely, avoiding the things of God because of the anger and resentment he held towards those church leaders. He allowed his angry unforgiving heart to separate him from the body of Christ. Have you ever been tempted to leave people who love you over a hurtful turn of events?

We need to remember that people are human and fallible. They will disappoint us. They will hurt and offend us. But we need to have grace for them and extend forgiveness to them because we too are sinners. We too will disappoint and fail our loved ones. This is where we find the grace to forgive: by being humbled by the grace that Jesus pours out on us.

In the book of Matthew, Jesus tells a parable of a servant who owed a great debt to his master. The master chose to forgive the debt, setting him free from repayment and prison. Overjoyed, the man left the home of his master. On his way, he encounters a man who owes him a great debt. Instead of extending the same grace and forgiveness that he himself

had just received, he roughly grabbed the man who owed him and threw him into prison until he could pay him back. This is pride! The man could not see that his sin was as great as this man who owed him. He should have, with humility, extended grace as he had just received.

Our pride and anger so often cloud our ability to rightly see the scenario. Our pride says, "My sin isn't as bad as yours so I should be forgiven." Our anger says, "I cannot forgive you until I feel you have earned it and appeased my anger." This is sin.

Nisay experienced this exact scenario. After being so hurt by his church leaders, and after having left the church, Nisay felt justified in his anger. Then, he heard gospel teaching and he said that it was like God himself was speaking to him. Nisay began to reflect on the conflict with his church leader and his proud and angry response to it. He said, "I cried over what I had done and felt God calling me back as one of his children." The Word of God freed Nisay, and gave him the humility to transform, not only his heart, but the relationship with the church leaders. He decided to meet with the church leaders to ask them for forgiveness and also to extend forgiveness to them.

Jesus said that we ought to forgive people 'seven times seventy times' (Matthew 18:22). This is not a mathematically precise number of times: this is a way of saying, 'forgive often, forgive repeatedly, and forgive continually.' It takes humility to extend forgiveness many times. It takes the Holy Spirit working in your heart to free you from the anger and pride that would prohibit you from extending grace-filled forgiveness.

Each of us has received grace upon grace and repeated forgiveness. Pray for the humility to extend that same grace to others.

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IN REVIEW

- We are quick to justify and to defend our own sinful attitudes and mistakes, but are slow to extend that same perspective to others' attitudes and actions against us.
- Our pride and anger are so often the foundational issues to our being able to forgive.
- When we remember the lavish grace of God poured out on our lives, we will be more able to humbly forgive others.

HAVE YOUR SAY

- Is there someone from whom you are withholding forgiveness? Can you see that it is pride and anger that is keeping you from forgiving them? Pray for the Lord to humble you and to give you the courage to seek and to extend forgiveness.

- There are times when an action done to us will elicit genuine, legitimate righteous anger. What is the difference between this righteous anger and an anger of misplaced judgement? Pray for discernment to be able to be rightly angry at sin while being gracious towards the sinner.

- How does Pride interfere with our ability forgive and be forgiven?

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