# Change What You Think About Forgiveness

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00:11 Mark Savage: So I had asked Jill to run an errand, and she totally forgot. [chuckle] I had to forgive. Yeah.

00:19 Jill Savage: Mark was short-tempered after a weekend with the grandkids.

00:22 MS: It was rough.

00:23 JS: It was. [chuckle] But I had to forgive when he answered me in a really irritable way.

00:33 MS: Jill at another time responded to me in a way that felt like she was parenting me and irritable, but before I could address it with her... With you, I had to forgive.

00:46 JS: Yeah. And when I think way back to our crisis, the damage Mark did to our finances, when he had his affair, took years to clean up. And I had to forgive that. If we wanna change our marriage, we have to change what we think about forgiveness, most of us think we understand forgiveness, but the truth is, we don't really.

01:12 MS: No, we didn't. We didn't understand it.

01:15 JS: No, not at all. So what we wanna do is we wanna dive in and really understand forgiveness. We wanna dig into this concept of forgiveness, so here are some principles that we learned about forgiveness that we feel are really important to understand.

01:31 MS: The first principle is that forgiveness is a solo act. You only need one person to go through the process of forgiveness.

01:39 JS: Yeah, and it's huge be... But it's important for us to understand, this is about keeping our heart cleaned up and available to God. You don't need somebody to apologize for you to forgive. In fact, if you wait for an apology to forgive, you will probably have waited too long.

02:01 MS: Right, and then you'll become bitter, and that bitterness is just gonna grow and deepen.

02:07 JS: Exactly. So forgiveness is a gift you give yourself. It happens inside of you, within you. That's important for us to understand. Here's the second principle though...

02:23 MS: Yeah, it is forgiveness is a choice, it's a choice that always includes the crisis of the will.

02:29 JS: Always.

02:30 MS: We never wanna forgive.

02:32 JS: We never feel like forgiving, not at all. [chuckle]

02:36 MS: Nope, nope.

02:38 JS: But we have to choose it, because it's the best thing, the absolute best thing for our relationship. It's the best thing for our heart, and bottom line, we have to do it, because God tells us to. It's obedience. And trusting that God knows what's best for us. That's when we follow His instructions. It's so important for us to understand what God says about forgiveness. So here's just a few. In Ephesians 4:32, God says this, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you."

03:20 MS: And in Matthew 18, Peter's having a conversation with Jesus Christ, and Peter came up to Him and said, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him, as many as seven times? And Jesus said to him, "I don't say seven times, where did you get that, Peter? [chuckle] But I say 70 times seven."

03:43 JS: Wow. That is a lot.

03:46 MS: That's a lot. So it's not a one-time thing.

03:48 JS: And then in Colossians 3:13, this is what it says, "As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive." Now God doesn't ask us to do anything He wasn't willing to do first.

04:03 MS: No.

04:03 JS: I mean, He forgave us. And now He asks us, no, He tells us to forgive others.

04:12 MS: Right. Because really, He modeled it and He showed us how. And He's saying in the same way I did this to you and for you, you go do the same.

04:23 JS: Right. And, man, that's where the crisis of the will comes in.

04:27 MS: Oh, yeah. [chuckle]

04:29 JS: Here's another principle, forgiveness does not rebuild trust.

04:34 MS: And that's always confusing.

04:36 JS: It is. I think that this is hard for us to understand, you see, trust is only rebuilt when changed behavior consistently happens over time. Okay, I want you to think of it this way, I'm gonna paint a little bit of a picture. I want you to think of trust as a bucket full of water, and the water is trust in a marriage, okay, in a relationship. And when trust is broken, it's like the water was dumped out of the bucket, so there's no water in the bucket now and some of us, I think hold off forgiving, because we think that, "If I forgive, it's gonna put the water back in the bucket." But that's not the way that the water gets in the bucket, the bucket is actually re-filled one drop at a time with consistent changed behavior over time.

05:32 MS: Wow, how many drops?

05:34 JS: [chuckle] One drop at a time, which means that you can dump the bucket in a very short period of time, and it's gonna take a long time to fill it up.

05:44 MS: Yeah, we don't think that though...

05:47 JS: No.

05:48 MS: And then we get frustrated, because it's, one, taking too long or that I have to rebuild trust right away.

05:57 JS: Right, right. So in essence, trust can be broken in minutes, but it will take months, if not even years, to rebuild. Now if forgiveness allows the other person to begin to rebuild trust, okay, this is important for us to understand.

06:14 MS: Right, because that's vital.

06:16 JS: Right, so I want you to think of it this way, I've got the bucket, and as long as I'm harboring unforgiveness, I'm holding on to the bucket and you can't even rebuild trust. 'Cause I haven't given you the bucket to start putting drops in. And so that's what we need to understand is it is an important first step in rebuilding trust, but it doesn't rebuild trust in and of itself.

06:45 MS: Right. So, the next principle is that forgiveness does not mess up justice.

06:52 JS: Nope, it doesn't.

06:54 MS: Nope.

06:55 JS: But I think we think it does, because we're afraid that if we forgive, it's saying that it's okay. And really, it doesn't say that what happened was okay. What it does say is, I won't carry the weight of this anymore.

07:08 MS: And what a freeing step that is that no longer are we carrying the hurt and the guilt... Or, not the guilt so much, just the hurt and...

07:19 JS: The pain.

07:20 MS: The pain, and the decision.

07:24 JS: Yes, exactly. It's choosing not to let it tear me up on the inside anymore. And there are consequences that happen when people make choices, God's the judge, we are not.

07:36 MS: And I am so thankful.

07:38 JS: Yeah.

07:39 MS: I totally am thankful.

07:41 JS: So, we have to make sure we don't step into that role. So, forgiveness can help restore relationship, but it doesn't have to. Particularly when we're talking outside of marriage. Okay. It's important, it's an important part of making... It's an important part of... In marriage, it's an important part of making amends and restoring a hurt relationship, but in life, we may choose that there are some people that we forgive, but we might not have relationship with, and that's okay.

08:16 MS: It is okay. And I think that's very freeing, because part of the challenge for people is that if I forgive, I have to immediately trust. If I forgive, I have to immediately have relationship, and both of those two are not correct there, it's very different.

08:38 JS: So, amends happens between two people, but forgiveness happens within one person, that's a big difference. They're not the same concepts at all.

08:50 MS: No.

08:50 JS: So, making amends is not always possible because it involves two people, but forgiving is always possible because it involves only you and your moment of decision, an act of your own will. And this, this is so important. When you forgive, you're deciding that you give up the desire that the past could have been... It could have been different than it actually was. You're making peace with what happened, so it doesn't continue to rip you apart on the inside.

09:23 JS: Now, here's another principle that we learned, that was so important, and that is, forgiveness is layered. It is not once and done. There's different parts of a hurt, and it could be a big hurt. Okay. So, let's say the infidelity. One day, I'm grieved over deception and the deception you're lying to me. And so that is grieving me, and I need to forgive the deception, but not just the deception as a whole, I need to forgive the day that you told me you were gonna be in place A, but you really were in place B. And I need to forgive the time that you lied to me about coming home late from work, those... So, I need to do all of the places where I'm aware that deception took place, that's important.

10:20 JS: But it could be even a little thing. So, we were talking about forgetting to run an errand. So, if I'm... So, if you forget to run an errand and it was to the grocery store, I may need to actually forgive a couple of layers of that because not running that errand maybe is gonna now require that I have to make an extra trip to the grocery store myself, so it's put me out in time. Maybe it means that what I was gonna make for dinner, I can't make now. So, now I have to change my plan, so it's affected me in a different way. So, I need to forgive whatever angle that hurt that you didn't intend to do, but your mistake affected me, and for me to not grow bitter, for me to not harbor anger, I have to take care of those layers.

11:13 MS: Yeah. So, think about that... It's like throwing a rock into a pond. And that creates a ripple, and forgiveness...

11:23 JS: Deals with each of those ripples, doesn't it?

11:25 MS: It does.

11:25 JS: So, one decision, one rock, and then there's all these ripples. So, if it's your rock, I got affected by some of those ripples. And so it's dealing and having to forgive each ripple. That's such a good picture. Alright. So, change how you think about forgiveness and understand those principles, but let's talk briefly about making sure that we understand the process of forgiveness. And we think that there are two very important pieces to this. One is to forgive what you've been harboring for a long time. So, in other words, your heart may be cluttered up with things from the past that you are holding against your spouse, and you need to do a heart clean up. So, that is one part. And then the second is, we need to learn how to then forgive in real time.

12:24 MS: Yeah. And those two are very different.

12:26 JS: They really are. So, let's talk about the first one. The first one is, we sit down and we really examine in our heart what we're holding against our spouse. So, what is it that we are holding against our spouse? What is it that we are saying I won't. We maybe even made a vow, or multiple vows, I will never let him do that to me again, I will never let her do that to me again. I will hold that against. Now, you remember it, you're not saying you're gonna trust them again on this issue, you're gonna say that I gotta clean up my heart as it relates to this. So, the first thing we do is we write down the ripples, okay, the specific things, the specific ways. So, you might do that. I know you love to journal, so you use your journal when you have done a heart clean up. For me, I've used index cards and I've written each ripple, each layer on an index card. Okay, so then, so for instance, when we were cleaning up the infidelity, my stack of index cards was like that, was huge. And then I had to go through each one I had to work through it, had to actually almost pass it off to God, "Lord, I'm choosing to forgive and to let go, I'm gonna let you have this." What a difference that makes, because each time I do that, a little piece of hardness of my heart goes away.

13:58 MS: Yeah, I think what a powerful picture too, because as you're handing that card, that hurt off to Jesus Christ, He's taking it and He's the one who can make a difference with it. And so we're letting go of that piece that's holding us in bondage when we forgive.

14:20 JS: It's a beautiful gift that we can give ourselves.

14:24 MS: Yeah.

14:25 JS: Okay. So, that's the initial heart clean up. Then we learn how to forgive in real time, that's where something happens in the kitchen and you forgive in the kitchen. Remember, it's just between you and the Lord, this is not necessarily happening between you and another person, it's you choosing to not let your heart harden because of what happened. Either it was an intentional offense, it was an unintentional offense, but it affected you. So, you learn to forgive in real time. And honestly, we talk about this in our No More Perfect Marriages book, that forgiveness is a God tool, and it's the most underused God tool that we have, because we need to be using it probably a dozen or more times a day, because we live with an imperfect human being. Sometimes the person we need to forgive is ourselves.

15:21 MS: Right. Because we're imperfect.

15:23 JS: Exactly. So, remember what you think affects what you feel, what you feel affects what you believe, what you believe affects what you do, what you do affects the results that you get. So, let's apply this to forgiveness. When I think I can choose forgiveness, it leads to feeling like freedom is possible, and bitterness can leave. When I feel like freedom is possible, I believe that God actually has my best interest at heart, and this leads me to choose to obey and forgive. And ultimately, it results in me experiencing peace and having the ability to have conversations with my husband that are not all amped up with bitterness and anger and out-of-control emotions.

16:13 MS: And that's a positive thing, because that's what fuels the amends process and reconnects relationship.

16:24 JS: Yeah. So, you wanna change your marriage? Change how you think about forgiveness and start keeping your heart cleaned up, uncluttered and available to God.

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