

Generosity Through Forgiveness

We can't out-forgive God

Luke 7:36-50

Question: Do you have anyone in your life whom you need to forgive? Has anyone hurt you and you have not yet forgiven them? Who specifically is God calling you to forgive before you leave church this morning?"

My assumption is that every one of us has someone whom God is calling us to forgive. We live in a broken world and we will not escape other people's sins. Whether the person is a stranger or a close friend, Satan works to gain a foothold in our lives through the sins of others.

I pray that our time together this morning will loosen the bonds of resentment and anger and bring freedom to your soul. I pray that God's generosity toward you will liberate you to be generous to those who have wronged you.

The key idea behind our series on Generosity is:

"Generosity begets generosity. When we receive God's generosity to us, we possess the capacity for God's generosity to flow through us. Let us release the joy that generosity brings to our lives!"

This morning we begin with God's generosity in forgiving us our sins. His generosity in forgiving us makes our relationship with Him possible. And His generosity in forgiving us empowers and directs us to forgive those who sin against us. We focus upon a story from Luke 7 that highlights Jesus' forgiveness and the change that His generosity makes in our hearts.

A respected religious leader named Simon invites Jesus to formal dinner at his large, ornate home in Galilee. This dinner party is a great, extravagant and public affair. A large, low table is set with fine foods for the invited dignitaries and guests. The invitees arrive and are seated around the U-shaped table. The guests sit on the floor at their reserved seats, reclining on cushions with their feet facing away from the table. Others in the community also enter the house to observe the dinner guests, they are welcome to observe the festivities, but are not allowed at the table with the guests. The uninvited guests stand outside the inner circle.

Simon is giddy with excitement as the party begins. All the important people of the city are in his home! He includes Jesus in this party more out of curiosity than anything else. Jesus is the miracle worker who teaches with authority. Most recently, in the nearby town of Nain, Jesus raised up a widow's son from the dead! Everyone in Simon's circle was talking about this miracle for two reasons: first, this miracle displayed the power of God in pushing back death! But secondly, 800 years earlier, the prophet Elisha raised a widow's son from the death in this exact same area!

That history was not lost on Simon and his neighbors. The people made the connection. The miracle of raising the widow's son communicated not only Jesus' power, but also His authority to speak as a prophet sent from God. Listen to what Luke says happened when Jesus raised this boy to life.

Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!" And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country." (Luke 7:11–17 ESV)

God had not sent a prophet to Israel since Malachi some 400 years earlier. So when Jesus performs this miracle, everyone posts on their social media that a prophet like Elijah and Elisha was now in their midst! God has broken His silence!

So Simon the Pharisee is curious, *"Who is this Jesus from Nazareth? Could he really be a prophet from God?"*

As Simon shows Jesus his seat at the table, he is conflicted inside. He cares what his other honored guests think of him. He knows that most of his fellow Pharisees had already decided that Jesus was NOT a prophet from God. **Most of them called Jesus nasty names like "glutton" "winebibber" and the worst "a friend of tax-collectors and sinners".**

So even though Simon is glad when Jesus accepts his invitation to dinner, he is careful not to greet Jesus too warmly for fear of his Pharisee friends.

For this reason, Simon does not welcome Jesus with the customary kiss or offer to wash his feet or to put any scented oil on Jesus' head.

As the dinner progresses, a "woman of the city", a prostitute, a woman who made a living from selling her body to men, approaches Simon's house with a little alabaster jar in her hand. As she enters the door of the house, eyes of condemnation and rejection meet her. She feels the sting of scorn that surrounds her. Some of the Pharisees avert their eyes in disgust, while others whisper vile names just loud enough for her to hear.

This woman has lived a hard life, but not so hard that she is immune to

the sting of public censure.

With tears of pain trickling down her cheeks, she walks inward to the center of the house where the dinner is being served. **What would embolden her to walk through that house of shame and scorn? Why does she not flee that place for the safety of isolation?**

She smiles as she sees Jesus and Jesus smiles back. She moves along the walls of the room until she comes to the spot closest to His feet. She **holds an alabaster jar and snaps the ceramic top off of it.** Immediately the fragrance fills the whole house! This is a VERY expensive jar of perfumed ointment. It likely represents this woman's entire savings. The sweet aroma interrupts the conversation and everyone now looks her way in silence.

Tears of shame now are replaced with tears of love as she kneels down beside Jesus. Her tears fall upon Jesus' dirty feet, creating streaks through the dust. She is sobbing heavily. She takes the pin from her hair and lets her dark locks fall on Jesus' dirty feet. She washes his feet clean with her weeping and with her hair. **She leans low and kisses his feet over and over and over.** She pours drop after drop after drop of ointment upon Jesus' feet. She does not stop until the little flask is completely empty.

Simon now makes up his mind about the question that prompted his invitation to Jesus. He says to himself, "If this man were truly a prophet from God, he would know who this woman is and what she does. He would not let her touch him if He knew that she is a sinner."

No holy prophet from God would let a sinful woman like this come near Him, let alone touch Him.

Jesus turns to Simon with grief in his eyes and sorrow in His voice, *"Simon, I have something to say to you."*

Rattled, Simon now looks into Jesus' eyes. They are piercing. It was as though Jesus could read his mind. *"OK. Say it teacher."*

A money lender had two debtors. One owes over \$70,000, the other owes about \$7000. Neither of these debtors had money to pay their debt. So the money lender forgives both men their debts.

Jesus asks, *"Which debtor do you think will love this man more?"*

Simon, *"Well, I suppose the one who was forgiven more."*

"Yes!!!" And then Jesus turns to the woman and lovingly, warmly gazes upon her.

Still speaking to Simon though as He takes her hand, *"Simon, do you see this woman?"*

And up to that point, Simon had not really looked at her. He intentionally ignored her the whole night.

"I entered your house and did not do what most hosts do. You did not wash my feet before dinner. You did not even offer me a basin of water to wash my own feet, but this woman wet my feet with her tears and wiped my feet with her hair. You did not give me a customary kiss for a greeting, but she has not stopped kissing my feet from the moment I came in. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.

Therefore, I tell you, her sins . . . which are MANY are forgiven—that is why she shows me so much love. But the one who is forgiven little, loves little."

As Jesus finishes speaking to Simon, the other Pharisees at the table **erupt in exclamation amongst themselves**, "Who is this?!? He claims to even forgive sins?!?"

And hearing them, Jesus looked at the woman and said, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Main Idea: God's generosity in forgiving us our sins frees us to be generous in forgiving every person who sins against us. We forgive because He first forgave us.

Throughout the New Testament, our LORD calls us to forgive as we have been forgiven.

and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (Matthew 6:12 [ESV](#))

Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. (Colossians 3:13 [ESV](#))

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32 [ESV](#))

Jesus becomes our model . . . our motivation . . . our measure . . . our might in obeying His command to forgive those who sin against us.

Let us look at our story in Luke 7:

Jesus tells us the purpose for His coming in Luke 19:10. There Jesus is at Zacchaeus the tax collectors house when he says, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Jesus accepted an invitation to Simon's house because Jesus is in the business of seeking and saving lost people. This leads us to our first truth about generosity in forgiveness.

Truth #1: Generosity Begins with Poverty

Who is spiritually lost in this story? Clearly, the woman who had been selling her body day in and day out to different men is a person who had lost her way spiritually. She was not right with God. She is spiritually destitute.

But what about the respectable religious leaders? They seem to be on the right path with God . . . at least the people in the community thought so. These are the moral people who pray, fast, give tithes and offerings, read their Bible and make honest attempts to live by the Ten Commandments.

Is not that enough? Aren't they right with God? Do they not have some spiritual wealth in their accounts before God?

This story tells us "No. They are just as spiritually impoverished as this woman is!" The only difference between this woman and the Pharisees is the woman KNOWS she is spiritually poor and the Pharisees do not know it.

The Pharisees LOOKED spiritually well-off on the outside, but inside they were full of sinful debt before the LORD.

While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, so he went in and reclined at table. The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner. And the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also?" (Luke 11:37-40 [ESV](#))

For sure, the woman and the Pharisees had different kinds of sin, but they were both UNCLEAN before the Lord.

The woman sinned from her flesh in a way that could be seen by everyone in the community. The Pharisees sinned from their spirit in a way that was hidden from others and even themselves. The woman's sin was sensual; the Pharisees sin was self-righteous. But both stood before God condemned for their sin.

Friend, do you know that YOUR sin is great enough to merit God's eternal condemnation?

Many miss the main lesson of this story. Many wrongly believe that the main lesson Jesus is teaching here in this story is that Simon is wrong for treating this woman with contempt. That is a problem. **But the bigger problem that Jesus addresses with Simon is that Simon does not see Simon's sin.**

Question: Why is it so important that I see my sin as the BIGGEST problem of my life?

Answer: Until we believe we are great sinners, we will not throw ourselves at Jesus' feet for mercy.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:3 [ESV](#))

Truth #1: Generosity Begins with Poverty

Question: Are you poor enough to receive God's forgiveness? Are you poor enough to forgive your brother or sister? Are you poor enough to be generous?

Truth #2: Generosity Receives Before It Gives

The woman encounters Jesus in a dramatic way prior to entering Simon's house that night. **She does not come to Jesus in order to be forgiven, she comes to Jesus because she has been forgiven.**

She anoints Jesus' feet with perfume and cries tears because Jesus had erased her sins, reconciled her relationship with God and had given her a new dignity as a child of the Heavenly Father. She comes with a spirit of immense gratitude to worship Jesus in joy.

Truth: Jesus does not love this woman and forgive her because she loves Him. Rather this woman loves Jesus because He first loves her and forgives her of her sins.

We are not told WHEN she encounters Jesus. But remember the conversation that everyone was having in this area at this time. Jesus had raised the widow's son in the nearby town of Nain. So the people are saying, *"Jesus is a great prophet like that of Elijah and Elisha."*

When this woman hears that Jesus is a prophet, her life is a mess. **She is walking in darkness, filled with shame, weighted down by guilt, hopeless,**

isolated, fearful of eternal condemnation. Somewhere Jesus meets her and offers **her forgiveness if she would simply repent of her sin.**

When she RECEIVES the generosity of Jesus' forgiveness, her heart changes. She does something that she COULD NOT HAVE DONE in her poverty of guilt . . . She gives to Jesus extravagant worship.

Truth #2: Generosity Receives Before It Gives

Truth: No one gives joyful worship to Jesus joyfully until they receive eternal blessing from Jesus.

Notice the Pharisees response to Jesus' generosity:

Verse 49, "Who does He think He is?" The Pharisees are right in thinking that only God can forgive sins. If Jesus is not God, Jesus has NO right to forgive a person's sins. Not our own sins. Not another's sins. Only God has this right.

This woman sees what the Pharisees in that house could not . . . namely that Jesus is God of very God. She believes Him great enough to forgive her sins. She hears Him claim to have the power to forgive sins and she believes Him.

Friend, we will not be able to be generous to others until we receive from Jesus the generosity that only God can give.

Truth #1: Generosity Begins with Poverty

Truth #2: Generosity Receives Before It Gives

Truth #3: Generosity Revels in God's Grace

The woman receives and then revels in the grace of Jesus. After meeting Jesus, she wakes up the next morning a new woman.

She no longer carries the crushing guilt of her sin.

She no longer feels enslaved to the sins that kept her from worshipping the Lord.

She no longer is chained by fear.

She no longer believes that obedience to God will deprive her of her daily needs and that only sin will put food on her table.

She is empowered to live a pure life . . . knowing that she is a daughter of God who is loved by Him. She revels in this. **And as she revels in Jesus' love for her, generosity grows in her heart.**

No one tells her that she **MUST** do something to show her gratitude to Jesus. Her inner desire moves her to do something that will reflect her joy in Jesus' generosity to her.

The only earthly treasure she possesses is a jar of expensive perfume. This has been her security blanket. She knows that if things get really slim, she can sell this perfume and live off the proceeds . . . at least for some months. This perfume jar comes first to her mind as generosity begins to take root. At first, she gives herself some reasons why this gift may be too much to give. But her joy in Jesus' grace grows this generosity into a powerful force . . . so powerful that nothing will stop her from giving extravagantly to the LORD.

I love the part of the story where Simon is thinking to himself: Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, *"If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner."* (Luke 7:39 [ESV](#))

And Jesus responds to Simon's inner thoughts, "Simon, I have something to say to you."

Has that ever happened to you? It happens all the time to me. It often happens in reference to my need to forgive someone who hurt me.

Jesus still calls us by name when He speaks to us. He **KNOWS** us . . . He knows our inner thoughts. And when Jesus says, "I have something to say to you." Hold on. It is going to make you uncomfortable.

In the parable Jesus tells Simon, the moneylender freely cancels the debt of both debtors. He does not demand labor or service or anything else. The cancelation of the debt is a gift of grace. Forgiveness is a free gift from God. Forgiveness cannot be earned or merited. We have not ability to pay even a small measure of the debt we owe to God for our sin.

Notice though that the cancellation of the debt cost the money lender much!! The money lender took the price upon Himself. Jesus paid our debt by laying down His own life on the cross and bearing our sin in His body! Jesus alone could pay that debt!!

Eph 1:7: In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses,

This is much more than sound doctrine. This is the free offer of God to everyone who comes to Christ. Have you received mercy from the Lord?

Truth: It is not the DOCTRINE of God's mercy that creates such joy in our hearts. It is the EXPERIENCE of God's mercy that moves us into surpassing joy. The doctrine provides the foundation of the experience, but the experience is necessary.

Beware of affirming the doctrine of God's mercy without experiencing God's mercy. The Pharisees were a bunch who affirmed God's mercy. They went to "church", they prayed prayers, they sang worship songs, they took part in many religious rituals. But they NEVER experienced surpassing joy in God. Why? Because they were not poor in spirit.

And verse 50, "Your faith in Me as your God and Savior has saved you. Go in peace."

Jesus promised her freedom from her past and a joyful hope for her future. Go in peace.

Go in peace. Jesus said that her sins are MANY! How can a sinful person "go in peace" after living a life that was so shameful? One can hear her tears drop upon Jesus' feet in love for this miracle in her life. She is now clean!

Generosity reveals in grace!

The world would not let this woman forget the disgrace of her past, but Jesus set her free from the shame that inked the skin of soul.

Truth: Past sin does not define the life of the one whom Christ redeems. Jesus gives us a new identity. This woman is now graced with the dignity and approval of heaven. She is free to be generous in her worship of Jesus.

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Truth #4: Generosity Responds to Love with Love.

Obviously this woman's love for Jesus must have been very strong for her to hurdle the obstacles that Simon's House presented against her: the derision, the shame, the rejection, the disapproval, the isolation. All these would have kept any unloved person from getting to Jesus' feet. But this woman was not unloved. She was filled with love for Jesus because she first loves her!!!

Wiersbe comments: "It is worth noting that this woman devoted to Christ all that previously she had used for sin. The harlot used kisses, beauty, and spices to lead men into sin, but the forgiven woman gave all these to her Savior."

Two Applications:

- 1. Receive the grace Jesus offers to forgive you of your sins. Experience His cleansing upon your soul! Have you been forgiven by God? Are you washed clean of the guilt of your disobedience?**
- 2. Respond to Jesus' generosity to you with generosity to those who sin against you. Who is the LORD asking you to forgive?**

Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. (Colossians 3:13 [ESV](#))

I know you have given yourself a thousand good reasons why forgiveness is not necessary or helpful in your case. The wisdom of the world will tell you that forgiveness is foolish.

But here is the immovable principle. If you are in Jesus, God forgave you infinitely more than He asks you to forgive others. He purposes for His generosity to you to free you from your resentments, your anger, your coldness, your self-protection. God loves cheerful forgivers.

Jesus tells a beautiful parable that illustrates how God's forgiveness motivates our forgiveness of others.

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

"Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.

But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.

*When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. **So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.**" (Matthew 18:21-35 [ESV](#))*

Our flesh becomes angry at God's call to forgive one another. It screams, "But why should I forgive this person who hurt me so badly?"

Five biblical reasons to forgive others::

1. **A lack of forgiveness creates misery in your own soul; forgiveness brings joy.** Time does not heal wounds. Only forgiveness does that.
2. **A lack of forgiveness corrupts other relationships; forgiveness heals.** When we bring bitterness into our hearts, the poison will seep out and harm other friendships.
3. **A lack of forgiveness interrupts our fellowship with God; forgiveness brings intimacy.**
4. **A lack of forgiveness keeps us from spiritual growth; forgiveness fuels growth.** God uses the sins of others to smooth and polish our misshapen, rough souls into the likeness of His Son. We hinder that process when we hold on to resentment for wrongs suffered!

5. A lack of forgiveness robs Gods of His glory in His church; forgiveness magnifies the LORD.

Here is the question: Has Jesus been generous to you? Is He worthy of your being generous to those who have wronged you?

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