

How To Make Relationships Last

1. Warm up: What is one of the best and longest relationships you've had in your life? And why do you think it's lasted so long?
2. A famous decades-long Harvard University study has documented that the most important predictor of human happiness is quality, close, long-term relationships. Put simply, if we want to be happy, we have to get really good at cultivating quality long-term relationships. But that ain't easy. The problem with being in relationship with people is that people will inevitably sin against us – and us against them. So if we want to have quality long-term relationships, we have to get really good at forgiving. Jesus himself lays teaches us to do so. Let's read Luke 6:27-36, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. In verses 37-38, Jesus says, "Forgive, and you will be forgiven. . . . A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get." What do you think that means? And how do you feel about it?
 - b. In Matthew 18, Simon Peter asks Jesus, "Lord, if my brother or sister sins against me, how often should I forgive them? As many as seven times?" Jesus replies, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-times seven." Matthew 18:22. What do you think that means? And how do you feel about it?
 - c. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven . . . , forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors." Matthew 6:12. Then at the end of the prayer, Jesus adds, "If you forgive others their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Matthew 6:14. What do you think that means? And how do you feel about it?
3. Jeff told the astounding story of a South African woman who forgave the apartheid crusader who killed her son and husband. Stories like that challenge us to the core of our being. What's one of the most amazing acts of forgiveness you've witnessed or read about?
4. Given how hard it is to forgive, our natural threshold question is, "Why should we?" Jeff offered two thoughts. **First, forgiving others is of enormous benefit to my own body, mind, and spirit.**
 - a. Ron McManus says, "Bitterness is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die." What do you think he means? Do you agree? Why or why not?
 - b. Think of a time when you were really hurt, offended, or angry about something someone did. Describe how you felt while carrying that deep sense of offence.
 - c. Medical studies document that forgiveness is good for our blood pressure, immune system, and heart. It also reduces the instances or intensity of tension

headaches and back pain, as well as anxiety and depression, while raising our self esteem. Why do you suppose that is? Why is forgiving such a somatic event?

- d. Think about an important time when you forgave someone. How did you feel in the aftermath? How did the act of forgiving affect your mind, body, and spirit?
5. **A second reason to forgive is because it's the only way we can experience the blessing of quality long-term relationships – which is our greatest potential source of happiness in life.**
- a. Why are quality long-term relationships so important to our happiness? Can't we be happy without them?
 - b. Jeff told the story of two brothers, Alvin and Lyle Straight, who were estranged for ten years until Lyle had a stroke and Alvin drove his lawn tractor 800 miles to reconcile. When they reunited, their hate and anger melted and was replaced by great joy. Have you ever experienced something similar – someone you were estranged from, then reconciled with? What happened? How did it feel to reconcile?
 - c. Jeff said, "If we're going to sum up in a single sentence why Jesus was so adamant about us forgiving others, it would be: **The more you forgive, the more you can live!**" What do you think he meant? Do you agree? Why or why not?
6. It's one thing to know why we should forgive, and quite another to know how to do it. So Jeff ended Sunday's sermon with five practical suggestions that are reprinted on p. 3. Have someone read them aloud for the group.
- a. Do you agree that forgiving starts with a decision, not a feeling? Why or why not?
 - b. Have you found that once you start to forgive someone, it becomes a process where you keep wanting to return to anger, and keep having to pull yourself back to forgiveness again and again – maybe even 490 times – until it sticks? Why is that? What's going on inside us?
 - c. Jesus said to "pray for those who spitefully use you." Matthew 5:44. Do you find that repeatedly praying for someone you're upset with helps you forgive? Why or why not?
 - d. Jesus also said to "bless . . . and do good to those who curse you." Matthew 5:44. Do you find that doing things to bless someone you're upset with helps you forgive? Why or why not?
 - e. In your life right now, is there someone you need to forgive? If you're comfortable sharing, tell us the situation. Are you ready to start the process of forgiving?

Luke 6:27-38

27 'But I say to you, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you.

32 'If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

37 'Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.'

How Can I Get Better at Forgiving?

1. Remember, forgiving is a decision, not a feeling. If you wait till you feel like it to start forgiving, you'll never get there.
2. Forgiving someone is a process that requires persistent practice. You may have to re-decide to forgive them 490 times before it finally sticks!
3. Each time anger arises within you toward the offender, stop and say a short prayer of blessing for them.
4. Think of some good things you can do to intentionally bless them.
5. Remember that when you forgive someone, you're banking enormous grace *that's going to come back to you* on many waves. ☺