



Ten Habits That Make Your Life Better

Habit Two

Several years ago our church youth group was playing dodge ball and as I stood there watching, the kids asked me to play. I still felt young enough and so I jumped into the circle and before I knew it, the teens on the outside of the circle were pointing at me, organizing to get me out of the game. A few times the ball was thrown at me and I easily avoided getting hit. But then the biggest and strongest of the teens got the ball and he pulled back and threw it as hard as he could. I jumped, thinking I could avoid the ball like previous times, but I didn't. It clipped my heel and in that instant, I fell crumpled on the ground, my Achilles tendon torn. Everyone ran over to check on me including the boy who threw the ball. Clearly I was in a lot of pain and he kept apologizing, "Pastor Greg, I'm so sorry. Please forgive me!" Now how did I respond? First of all, there really wasn't anything to forgive because Mike hadn't done anything wrong. But even if he had wanted to hurt me, I certainly was not going to hold a grudge against him. Forgiveness in this case was quite easy. But it isn't always. Sometimes it seems impossible, especially when what is done to you is cruel and brings lasting pain.

King David was in terrible distress. His third son, Absalom had grown to hate him and raised a great army to take the kingdom from David. Knowing that Absalom intended to have him killed, David fled the capital city of Jerusalem along with his family members, his friends, allies and the men of his army. Already despondent over the terrible betrayal of his son, David shuffled down the hill along with all the others as they tried to escape. Many were weeping as David was leaving but not all were sad to see him go. Shimei, who lived in the city mocked David and threw dirt and pebbles down on him. **He pelted David and all the king's officials with stones, though all the troops and the special guard were on David's right and left. As he cursed, Shimei said, "Get out, get out, you man of blood, you scoundrel!"** (2 Samuel 16: 6-7 NIV) One of David's officers wanted to send some soldiers up and kill Shimei, but David refused to let him make the order. David assumed that perhaps it was the Lord who wanted Shimei to curse him and so he let him go. Later, after David's army defeated Absalom's troops, David returned victoriously. Shimei was one of the first to greet David as the king entered Jerusalem. **When Shimei son of Gera crossed the Jordan, he fell prostrate before the king and said to him, "May my lord not hold me guilty. Do not remember how your servant did wrong on the day my lord the king left Jerusalem. May the king put it out of his mind."** (2 Samuel 19: 18b-19 NIV) David accepted Shimei's plea for mercy and let him go. But at the end of his life, after he turned over control of the kingdom of Israel to his son Solomon, David gave this order to him about what to do with Shimei. **Bring his gray head down to the grave in blood."** (1 Kings 2: 9c NIV)

For years, David's bitterness toward Shimei boiled under the surface and he refused to let go of his "righteous" fury over Shimei's treatment of him. Even though Jesus has said we are to forgive those who hurt us, it isn't easy and sometimes it is painful. However, forgiveness is crucial to having the best life possible. It is habit two of the ten habits that make your life better. Forgiveness is a key to unlocking good health and happiness. It has been discovered through numerous medical studies that forgiveness lowers the risk of heart attacks, improves sleep and even miraculously reduces cholesterol levels. It has been shown to bring down pain levels and lower blood pressure. Chronic anger due to unforgiveness increases your risk of slipping into depression, suffering heart disease, and even developing diabetes. No wonder Jesus tells you, **So watch yourselves. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."** (Luke 17:3-4 NIV) Jesus makes it clear. There is not a limit to the number of times you need to forgive the same person. Forgive and forgive and forgive because it is in your best interest.

Many wonder what exactly forgiveness entails. How do you know you have actually forgiven someone and what are the steps to doing so? It is crucial to get this right as forgiveness is such a stress reliever, a benefit to your mental health and critical to having a close relationship with God. **But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your offenses.** (Matthew 6: 15 CSB) You may not want to forgive that terrible person who really hurt you but don't do it for that person. Forgive for your own sake. Too many people live with grudges, tied in knots by bitter feelings and hurts that they keep bottled up inside. They suffer for that. Ulcers, heart problems, difficulties getting along with others, trust issues, unresolved anxiety, and depression. You are a much higher functioning human being when you develop the ability to forgive. It isn't easy many times, but it is worth the effort.

The Apostle Paul, who himself at times struggled to forgive has rich insight into the mechanics of forgiveness. Exactly what do you do? Here is the way to go when it comes to making your life better by forgiving. **Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.** (Colossians 3: 13 NIV) Let's take a closer look at this. There are two key terms that provide a framework for forgiveness. Both describe a lifestyle rather than a particular experience or relationship. If you want to have a better life, these two patterns of behavior need to mark your relationships. The first lifestyle habit is translated "bear with". It literally means "through things, holding on", or to put it another way, "hanging in there". Nearly every relationship has its rough spots, some worse than others. There are times when you are miserable in a relationship. It is tough for you because you have been treated badly. Forgiveness means hanging in there even when you find things between you and the other person hard to maintain. Holding onto a friendship, marriage, professional relationship is part of forgiveness. You have not forgiven if you give the cold shoulder, cut off communication, avoid the other person.

Let's turn to the second key term. It is translated forgive but it is a different Greek word than what is typically used in the New Testament. Most times, the Bible word for forgive means "to put away". It describes the act of putting away the offence or getting rid of in your heart the sin. Saying good-bye to the sin. Paul is not talking about the sin, but rather how you see the person who has hurt you or mistreated you. The term he uses to describe forgive means "to bestow kindness", "to show grace". When you forgive, you act not out of justice or the right to be angry; you show the same sort of kindness that Jesus has shown you. You have the right to be mad. You probably are justified in being bitter. No one should be treated like you have been. However, the question is not whether you deserve to talk badly about the other person, find some way to get back or just hold in all your fury. What is at stake is your own emotional well-being, your physical health and even your relationship with God. If God has shown kindness to you, He expects you to do the same when you have been mistreated.

There are three clues that you have not forgiven. 1. If you talk badly about the other person. 2. If you continue to think about what has been done to you and bitterness or anger swells up inside you. 3. If you are angry with God for letting it happen. When this is you after you have been hurt, after you have had some time to get over the initial shock and pain, you might need a booster to help you do what is best for you, forgive the wrong. There is a fundamental Christian belief that if you embrace it, you will find forgiveness much easier to do. The world does not have this wonderful promise to give them a bounce to their step when it is rough. No one, not even your worst enemy can take this escape to peace and contentment from you. Because it is true and a certain promise from God, you can, if you give it a chance, smile and quietly relax when you have been wronged and treated badly. Let me share this supernatural lifeline God has provided you. **We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.** (Romans 8: 28 CSB) If you love God, then even the worst trial, worst rejection, ugliest mistreatment of you will eventually be transformed by God Himself for your good. Let me add this. The precise wording in the Greek says, **"We know that all things in the one loving God work for their good or profit...."** Why wouldn't you forgive, show kindness to those who intentionally or unintentionally harm you if it will make things even better for you? Forgive! It is in your best interest!