

Not 7 Times!

SLIDE: HIRING PROBLEMS

Good morning Men of Covenant!

As some of you may know, I'm retired from working 28 years at the Pilot Company and during my tenure there, I was often asked to interview potential executive position candidates. This was due to the importance of making certain we hired individuals that were the "right fit" at these top level positions. Despite, many interviews per candidate, we really struggled to find the right character traits to use as a basis for long term success - once they were hired. At Pilot, we had a very unique, high performance, high demand culture, and it was difficult to understand ahead of time who might thrive and who would struggle once they came on board. Too often, we would discover after hiring them, that they did not get along with people well, had too high of an opinion of themselves, struggled to integrate with the other leadership team members, or were just "not well liked" by the folks they were hired to lead.

After years of trial and error – the President of our company finally found the answer. Once discovered, we changed the entire interview process to reflect questions that would tease out the answers as to how much of this ONE character trait the candidate had vs all others ...

Want to know what it was?

Being Humble

SLIDE: HUMBLE

The best indicator of how successful a new executive would be once joining our team was their lack of Pride!

So keeping that in mind, let's answer a similar question surrounding Christian men.

What character traits are so very different from worldly, unsaved men that they simply scream "Christian?"

What are the signs, symptoms and manifest behaviors we find in a truly saved, Holy Spirit filled, Christ following, fruit bearing Christian man?

How can you tell if a Christian man will have success in God's Kingdom?

Well ... No one really knows the salvation status of another man. That is between God and him alone, but the bible says there are outward signs:

Matthew 7:20

"Thus you will recognize them by their fruits."

SLIDE: SELFLESS/FORGIVING

Though not the only indicators, TWO of the **most telling** behaviors or FRUITS of a Christian man, are being SELFLESS AND FORGIVING. Isn't it interesting that BOTH of them are just about the polar opposites of PRIDE!

If I see a man consistently BEHAVING like this, giving to others of his time, treasure and heart in service to the Lord and forgiving others in ways that show he understands his forgiveness in Jesus, then I know I'm standing in front of the "real deal", a bonafide, fruit bearing, God loving, Christian man.

Why???

Because a SELFLESS man shows us how he LOVES the world around him, just like our savior Jesus did. He is selfless, because his savior was selfless and his savior has changed this man's heart through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

AND because a FORGIVING man demonstrates how he REFLECTS the gift of God's Grace, given in the form of the atonement of Jesus Christ. He forgives, because he MUST, not in some logical or legalistic manner, but because he is obeying the change in his heart from the Holy Spirit

And ... the opposite of this is also true

Because ... the opposite behaviors reap terrible outcomes

A selfish, prideful person is all about themselves over others ... and this character trait sets up an INTERNAL barrier that gets placed right between God and ourselves. A selfish prideful person is a man that is saying through his behavior, "I reject the Grace of God" – I don't need anybody, anything or anyone to get through this life or the next

SLIDE: JAMES - GOD OPPOSES THE PROUD

James 4:6 - But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

When we, as Christian men, are prideful, and focused on ourselves, James says we are immediately placed into a position of opposition with God.

Proud men are also typically unforgiving men. A person who believes they are to exact justice when they have no judicial standing ... sets up an EXTERNAL barrier between God and themselves. An unforgiving person is a man that is saying, through his behavior, "I am God" – I will be the judge of all who intersect with my life, and my justice is better, swifter and above Gods.

We need to also understand that these concepts are related. Both feed off each other. When unchecked, each sin can build the other. Pride can drive unforgiveness and Unforgiveness can strengthen the resolve of our Pride.

Why do these matter so much and why do I highlight them so directly?

Because both sins are barriers to our relationship with God and are part of Satan's master plan to slow or stop your pursuit of Holiness. He wants separation from you and God and supports these sins in any way he can to ensure you DON'T produce fruit for the Kingdom – let's go to the bible to see proof:

SLIDE: MATTHEW - UNFORGIVEN

When we, as Christian men, are unforgiving, and more focused on ourselves and the "harm" we have endured, Matthew says we are also unforgiven, the MUCH larger debt we owe – to God himself!

Matthew 6:15 - But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

This morning we will focus on the act of forgiveness, with a goal is to strengthen our resolve to forgive and to remove barriers between God and us so that we may be able to produce Holy fruit for His Kingdom through the power of the Holy Spirit

We'll begin by defining what exactly the act of forgiveness means. We call it the "act of forgiveness" for a very good reason ... the word forgiveness is a VERB. It a word that requires action to be real.

SLIDE: FORGIVENESS (LEFT/RIGHT)

Forgiveness is defined as the deliberate, VOLUNTARY ACT of releasing an offender from: debt, guilt, moral or spiritual penalty of their wrong and ... it doesn't end there, A TRUE release from the aforementioned things also ensures the letting go of the "forgiver" of any existing or future resentment, anger, revenge or bitterness toward the offender.

If YOU have ever been released from a debt, from guilt, from a moral or spiritual penalty for wrongs you've committed – then YOU were the offender in that example and YES, you have been forgiven. For most of the men in the room ... there was a time in our lives where this happened to each of us in a very profound way.

The bible directs us in the area of forgiveness, because the topic is such a large part of the bible story! The bible gives us 2 ways to think about it.

FIRST: The spirit of forgiveness within our Christian character – in other words, the process within our hearts and minds that allows us to forgive ... and the way we ACTUALLY "do it" through and within Christian relationship

Think of it this way. The bible tells us how forgiveness should be part of our spirit and identity in Christ AND it also tells us HOW use that spiritual identity to forgive real people, in the real and sometimes messy relationships we have hear on earth.

SLIDE: one click more ...

The world will tell you to hang on to that resentment and anger ... because they are the offender – they OWE you an apology, amends, compensation, whatever.

Don't listen to the world. Look again at the chart on the screen, let's start on the right side Where do all those nasty emotions live? Where do they originate? Just WHO are they really doing harm toward – that's right US. You won't "make them pay" you will only harm yourself and build a barrier between God and yourself

Now look to the left side of the chart. The world says that person "owes you" and that they did wrong and they must pay well hang on a minute, maybe they do, so let's all start collecting that debt as soon as we've paid off ours! Oh, that's right, we can't ... the only person that was able was Jesus Christ and the VERY THING that he did for us is a PERFECT example of what he expect us to give others in return.

SLIDE: SPIRITUALLY/RELATIONSHIPS

Let's go to the bible to see what it says about our spiritual attitude.

We find our first answer described in Mark 11:25

"And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

Here we find Jesus telling us that we are to have a general “attitude” and spirit of forgiveness and ...

We are to offer that forgiveness to EVERYONE! Saints and sinners, believers and non-believers, friends and enemies. The word ANYONE is very clear. It means anyone and all

In Mark 11:25, we see that forgiveness is NOT defined as a bilateral process. In other words, we don't forgive ONLY if the other person is “sorry.” Forgiveness as defined here by Jesus is UNILATERAL - requiring no repentance by the offending party. It originates from the injured or wronged person and is unconditionally given – it matters not what the other party does in regards to acknowledging or making amends for the offense.

Mark clarifies that this type of forgiveness is a reflection of our own forgiveness by God through Jesus Christ! This kind of forgiveness begins in our hearts and manifests in our character, our attitude, our spirit and in our prayers

SECONDLY: The bible teaches us about how forgiveness works within relationships. Specifically the relationships Christians have with each other. Again, we go to the bible where Jesus himself sets the expectation in Matthew

Matthew 18:21-22

21Then Peter came up and said to Him, 'Lord, how many times shall my brother sin against me and I still forgive him? Up to seven times?' 22Jesus *said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy-seven times.

You probably already know the number 7 has special meaning within the bible. It is a number that references perfection and completeness ... as in, finished, no need for more, it's all done! So when Peter asked Jesus how many times we are to forgive each other, Peter offered what would seem like an extraordinary number. Jewish culture of the time would allow that you offer forgiveness up to 3 times. Peter went for broke and perhaps he was trying to show Jesus that he was a really good student – we don't know. What we DO KNOW, is that Peter offered more than DOUBLE the going “rate of forgiveness” and when Jesus heard Peter's question, with it's implied answer, He may have thought to Himself, “I love you Peter, but you've got a lot to learn about my Kingdom”

Because ... His answer back to Peter was – NO PETER ... NOT 7 TIMES, but 77 TIMES!

SLIDE: NOT 7 TIMES!

That's the title of my message this morning, because it's in this very scripture and at this very moment that Jesus set the new standard for forgiveness – and here it is

UNLIMITED!

His call to action, when you've been wronged, slighted, embarrassed, cheated, lied to from a brother in Christ is to ... FORGIVE, PERIOD

What Jesus was saying is NOT up for debate ... the message is clear

RADICAL and UNLIMITED FORGIVENESS is expected from the Christ follower

The answer Jesus gave of “77” was NOT really a number, it was more a declaration of a new way of thinking. Peter asks for a number, but Jesus answered him with infinity! Jesus was telling His disciples

(and us) that we are to have completely changed hearts on this subject and should stop “counting” the wrongs done to us and start to live in a spirit of forgiveness.

If you’re like me, when you read what Jesus said, you immediately feel convicted because of how short you fall from the standard He sets

You know in your heart that there have been times where you’ve NOT forgiven, or not TRULY forgiven someone

Let’s take a test together to see just where we are on forgiveness:

Let’s say a brother told a lie about you to another brother and you heard about that lie, then confronted the liar by sharing what you heard and how much it hurt you that he had lied about you

During that discussion, he repents and says, “man, I am so sorry – I never meant to hurt you and I did not know that what I said was not true – sorry man, it won’t happen again – next time, I’ll just come directly to you.”

Who here would forgive him? Raise your hands

- Now I’m going to ask a few more questions – no need to raise hands
- What if he did it again a week later?
- And again, a few days after that, then the following day, then a week later
- When would I lose you?
- At what point would the forgiveness stop?
- How many times will you have had enough?

I suspect, like me, that the number of times you would offer forgiveness stops short of a handful of fingers.

And, I suspect, that the reason we all get to the breaking point, or the end of our rope on forgiveness is because we don’t understand the impact and of what Jesus was trying to explain to us in Matthew 18.

The recoil and indignation we feel in our minds when we hit the 3rd or 5th “forgiveness” is EXACTLY why Jesus wants us to forgive radically and in an unlimited fashion

Unlimited forgiveness pains us, BECAUSE we make forgiveness about us

We tell ourselves we are losing something when we forgive and every time we forgive we stack up one more loss for the “good guys” and one more win for the “perpetrators”

I also suspect, that some of us, though we raised our hands to agree on that first act of forgiveness, don’t ALWAYS EVEN DO THIS in practice. In other words, we never approach the individual that we feel has wronged us. We never have that “uncomfortable” conversation. We never air the grievance and, thus, we leave the situation unresolved ... and ... unforgiven.

Before we get to far along on the subject, let me remind us of something important that MAY or MAY NOT follow forgiveness ...

Vaneetha Risner, writing for the website “Desiring God,” puts it this way:

“Forgiveness doesn’t always mean reconciliation or restoration. And it does not require restoring trust or inviting the people who hurt us back into a relationship. Reconciliation and restoration are

conditional on the offender's genuine repentance, humble willingness to accept the consequences of his actions, and a desire by both parties to work on the relationship."

SLIDE: FORGIVENESS VS RECONCILIATION

We forgive, because we've been forgiven the unforgivable and Ms. Risner shows us that beyond forgiveness are the topics of relationships where repentance, reconciliation and restoration exist. That is, if both parties want it. Don't conflate or confuse the two! Christian men forgive WITH NO GUARANTEE of restoration, because without it we build resentment and distance between our brothers – and before you know it, we find yourself with thoughts of condemnation, judgment, anger or even hate. We forgive unilaterally and we do it because it RUINS US when we don't.

ALL it takes to forgive is your own personal will (the "ME" you see on the screen), and the driving force behind that willful decision is LOVE. Beyond that moment will involve 2 people the "US" that describes both parties that want to reconcile and the "WE" that represents are completely restored relationship.

It's YOUR initial forgiveness that sets in motion the POSSIBILITY for that person to repent and opens YOUR HEART and YOUR SPIRIT to the process that follows if it happens

Ok ... let's summarize where we are so far:

- Pride is opposed by God and Pride can cause us not to forgive
- BUT ... we know that we can't be forgiven by our Father, unless we forgive
- So we MUST forgive! How much should we forgive?
- Unlimited forgiveness and WHY unlimited?
- Because we have been forgiven the unforgivable!
- AND ... when we forgive, we are relieved of anger, judgment and bitterness
- Forgiveness then allows for potential reconciliation and restoration

but ... WHERE are the lessons in forgiveness in the bible?

And ... WHAT are the blessings God gives as a result?

What can we learn a lot about RADICAL and UNLIMITED forgiveness from these stories and they begin way back in Genesis

SLIDE: BIBLICAL FORGIVENESS

Starting in Genesis 33:4 we find that ...

Esau and Jacob reconcile and forgave each other, and their hate is replaced with kindness

Genesis 33:4 ESV [4] But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.

Can you imagine hating your brother enough to want to kill him? Not just any brother, but your TWIN! Why? Because Jacob stole (by deception) what was the most valuable thing a son could have ... a birthright. It was THE leadership role in the family, and it included a double portion of inheritance AND by rights, it was Essau's.

LESSON: Essau forgave his brother because HIS BROTHER Jacob, prayed in Genesis 31:11 that he would be “delivered from the hand of his brother” – and God answered in an even BIGGER way! Only God can melt away half a lifetime of bitterness and hate but we must PRAY for what we want

Further on in Genesis 45:4 we see that ...

Joseph forgave his brothers and proceeded to then save THEIR lives

"Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you." Genesis 45:4 (NIV)

His brothers tried to murder him, then decided to sell him as a slave, then proceeded to all lie about how he disappeared

But Joseph forgives them, because he can see that God planned all of this, and it was to the benefit of Joseph and he entire family.

LESSON: Joseph is able to forgive, because he sees and he TRUSTS GODS PLAN

Then in Job 42:9 we discover the unimaginable fact that ...

Job forgave his friends, and then prayed for THEIR forgiveness

[9] So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the Lord had told them, and the Lord accepted Job's prayer.

Job prayed for them – even though they consistently placed his unbearable life troubles on Job himself!

LESSON: Job can pray for forgiveness for his friends because his heart is aligned with GOD'S FORGIVING HEART. He would not listen to the world calling for vengeance and retribution.

In the New Testament, we read in Luke 15:32 that ...

The prodigal son returns, he's forgiven, he's celebrated AND fully restored

Luke 15:32 ESV [32] It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

He took a major portion of his father's estate and blew it on wine, women and waste. He brought shame to his father's household name. He likely caused financial hardship to his fathers estate.

Jesus tells this parable to remind us that when we repent and seek Him, we ARE just as forgiven, and God celebrates our move back to Him, not JUST with forgiveness, but with reconciliation and restoration.

LESSON: The Father forgives because he LOVES HIS SON, with the kind of love that GOD LOVES us with. Unbreakable, unshakable ... so glad you're back home! A forever, and unconditional LOVE. WE can forgive when we understand God's love for us.

In John 8:11 the story is told of ...

An adulterous woman who is forgiven, AND given a pardon from execution

John 8:11 says [ESV 11] She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."

She was caught red handed in an adulterous act, and that meant death according to Jewish law. There was no gray area here, it was written and the sentence was death by stoning

This gospel story, highlights why Jesus came. Redemption, forgiveness and salvation

LESSON: Jesus forgives the woman a certain death sentence, JUST in the same way that He commutes our death sentence BUT don't miss His last statement – He expects a changed character when He says "Go and, from now on, sin no more"

CLOSING

I want to close with one of the best known stories in the bible on the subject of forgiveness. It's interesting because in this story, the word FORGIVENESS is never mentioned.

Setting aside the betrayal of Judas, I can't think of ONE other thing that any single disciple did that would be consider unforgivable – but this one thing

SLIDE: MATTHEW 26:70, 72, 74

Peter said, out loud, I don't know Jesus! He said it 3 separate times so the historical record of what happened is unmistakable - Jesus who???? I don't know him!

If you've ever wondered what YOU might do in this situation...you can stop wondering. You're likely in the "denier" camp. Why do I say that? Because, we've all denied Christ by our actions in the flesh.

Ever lied? Taken something that wasn't yours? Puffed yourself up in pride? Been unkind, mean, lost your cool in anger? Me too, and by those actions I deny Christ.

SLIDE: JOHN 21:17

We don't know for sure why Jesus asked him 3 times if "he loved Him" but we might infer that each question corresponds to each denial by Peter on that fateful night when Jesus was betrayed.

Remember that this is the Peter that walked with God incarnate for several years, the same guy who slept next to, ate with and learned from Jesus. Peter had hugged and loved on Jesus in the flesh ... and STILL he said, "I don't know the man!" and what did Jesus (God) do with this guy? What was the price Peter paid for his inconceivable denial? How was he treated for denying God Himself?

Look at the screen ... Scripture says he was given Forgiveness & Restoration

You won't find the word "forgiveness" in this verse, but it is implied by what Jesus said at the very end of John 21:17 – He said "feed my sheep." and just like that with those 3 power words, Jesus restored Peter to a leadership position and did it in front of all the other Apostles so there would be NO question about Peter's role go forward and NO question what OURS is to be ... even when we fail like Peter did.

A modern day translation of this scripture might go something like this ...

"Peter ... go and preach the Gospel AS an official representative of ME, Jesus Christ the Son of the Living God! Peter ... not only are you forgiven, as the prodigal was forgiven, but, yes, you are also restored as the prodigal was restored. I love you Peter because you are my son, and no one will snatch you away from me. Peter, I'm telling you this in front of all the other disciples so they will know and the world will know for eternity that – you're back, you're anointed, you're blessed and you're now commissioned by your love of me to go tell others. Peter, I love you and I trust you."

Listen, we have all denied Christ but ... just as Jesus restored Peter, we repent, confess our love for Christ and, like Peter, we're back working for "team Jesus" – **forgiven and restored**

SLIDE: EPHESIANS 4:32

Ephesians 4:32

"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

This morning we've learned through God's Word, that forgiveness keeps our pride at bay and keeps God close. We discovered that forgiveness is the antidote for bitterness

We are to see forgiveness as a gift to ourselves AND that WITHIN it is the seed to bless others through restoration

The next time you struggle with forgiveness, like I do ... just remember that this is the EXACT SAME thing that has happened to every man on earth.

God forgave you your unforgivable sins, by sacrificing of His Son. He did that because He loves you – NOT because YOU DESERVE TO BE FORGIVEN

Let that sink in for a second because if there's one lesson to take away this morning it's this one

YOU DON'T DESERVE to be forgiven and before Christ YOU HAD NO WAY back to God

Christ was God's rescue plan AND His forever model on how to forgive

- God gave us Christ as FORGIVENESS to us WHILE we were still slaves to sin
- God gave us Christ BEFORE we repented of our sins
- God gave us Christ THOUGH we had not earned His forgiveness

SLIDE: DIDN'T DESERVE IT

We didn't deserve forgiveness, but it was offered anyway

Though not all men will take the gift – WE DO!

We Christian men ... joyfully ACCEPT the gift of forgiveness

and ... When we TAKE it, through Christ, we experience spiritual RESTORATION with God Himself

It works the EXACT SAME WAY here in the lives of men

We forgive because Jesus showed us how to love our brothers in the most profound way.

He didn't love us "IF" ... but rather He loved us "BECAUSE"

Loving with an "IF" brings conditions on that love

Loving "BECAUSE" looks just like God the Father's love ... who loved His son "because" God is love, and Jesus who loved man "because" he loved the Father and Christian men love "because" we claim to be in Jesus and He in us

We don't wait to see if a brother might be repentant, because JESUS didn't wait – we FORGIVE

We forgive in an unlimited way, in a radical way and with a hopeful mind that RESTORATION AND RELATIONSHIP may follow

Gentlemen, if we profess the Gospel. If we are in awe of what God has done through it ... If we accept the unmerited gift of forgiveness given in Christ Jesus, through the perfect and pure love of God the Father, then we MUST forgive others ... because we've been gifted the biggest box of forgiveness ever.

When Jesus said "Not 7 Times" Peter ... it was because forgiveness is meant to be passed on

Amen

<https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/podcast-episodes/til-053-should-i-forgive-someone-whos-not-sorry-they-sinned/>

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/we-cannot-cling-to-bitterness-and-god>

<https://parknearnorth.org/blog/2024/08/27/forgiveness-reconciliation-restoration>