



Forgiveness

When it hurts too much
for a band-aid

Mr. Ron Toews

Pacific Consulting and Training

Brought to you by your friends at

BiblicalTraining.org

and

Oasis Retreats (<http://oasisretreatscanada.com/>)

Copyright © Ron Toews 2014

All Rights Reserved

Used by BiblicalTraining.org with permission

Lesson 1

(26 minutes)

INTRODUCTION

Why do we need to think about forgiveness?

What happens when you choose not to forgive?

What happens when you choose to forgive?

Personal anecdote of Ron's first candidate for forgiveness

Sources of material

- Forgive and Forget, by Lewis Smedes
- Caring enough ... series, by David Augsburger
- Lois Edmunds
- Peers in ministry

Wouldn't leave the seminar with a process of step 1, step 2, etc.

Forgiveness is when God does a Miracle in our lives.

From a logical perspective, forgiveness doesn't make sense. I want vengeance!

What do you want to take away from this seminar?

FORGIVENESS THEMES

1. "Justice"

What I want *for* others when I am wronged

2. "Mercy"

What I want *from* others when I do wrong to them

We tend to polarize between justice and mercy

THE BROAD CONTEXT OF LIFE (TENSE/TIME)

1. Our present

The present is created by making choices and experiencing the impact of past decisions, by following through on decisions that you made.

2. Our future

We make decisions and follow through on those decisions.

Flexibility

3. Our past

The events are there and cannot be changed. The past simply is.

When we run the video of the past through our mind, our system thinks it has been there.

If the memories are good, we feel better.

When I play the video of painful stuff, the reverse happens. I have the experience again. But the videos cannot change.

When we put those negative videos in charge of our lives, they keep playing and we start coming with different responses inside of us.

Chinese proverb

“He who seeks revenge should dig two graves.”

Putting the past in charge of our future is a problem.

NOT TALKING ABOUT ADDING TO YOUR NICENESS

Forgiveness is not a nice thing to do for other people so that things get a little better.

Forgiveness is not something we add to our list of nice things to do.

When we forgive, we say that we are not allowing those events to take me forward; they will not continue to direct my life, to be in charge of my present and my future.

Includes determination so that that tape will no longer be in charge of our present and future.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What have been your experiences of forgiveness not being granted, either by you or by someone else? How did their lives become “common” and “narrow”?
2. What have been your experiences of forgiveness being granted, either by you or by someone else? How did their lives create possibilities for how they can live and what their lives can look like?
3. What is your earliest memory of something that you needed to forgive?
4. Are there any resources you have found to help with the issue of forgiveness?
5. Do you have any experiences when you were disappointed that forgiveness wasn’t a simple and easy process, a A, B, C?
6. What do you want to take away from this seminar? What has brought you here?
7. Do you tend to polarize justice and mercy? Why? What have been the consequences? Are you a “justice” or a “mercy” person?
8. Ron makes a crucial point that we tend to play the video of our past over and over in our minds, but we can’t change anything. Does this resonate with you? How did you react when you heard him say that? Honestly, do you think that remembering the past can somehow change it? I suspect that to some degree we all do.
9. Can you think of times in recalling the past, that good things became better, and bad things became worst?
10. Do you know of any illustrations when replaying a difficult past actually had a negative effect on your body?
11. To be honest, when have you allowed the past to be in charge of your present and future?
12. How is forgiveness not a “nice thing”?

Lesson 2

(21:28 minutes)

WHO IS THE MOST NATURALLY GIFTED LEADER IN THE BIBLE?

Not someone whose life God impacted, but someone who has all the tools:

1. Appearance
2. Good image
3. Discernment
4. People followed him
5. Compassionate heart

He is: _____ (2 Samuel 13)

Ron tells the story of Ammon and Tamar.

Absalom is a nice person, but he lets bitterness led to revenge, which leads to self-destruction.

WHEN WE DECIDE NOT TO HEAD IN THE FORGIVENESS DIRECTION

Outcome is pretty clear

Downhill

Narrow the possibilities in the person's life, and the bitterness and destruction follow.

We have difficult choices that don't make sense if we want to move our life forward.

UNRESOLVED DEBTS

If we let the unresolved debts be past due, they take us over, and they set the direction for our lives.

Those debts take over our present and create our future. Putting other people in charge of our lives is a problem. Putting our past in charge of our present and future is a problem.

WHAT IS FORGIVENESS NOT?

1. Excusing or minimizing

2. Forgetting

3. Smoothing things out
4. Denial of emotional pain when you are boiling
5. Dependent on the choice of someone else, which would put other people in charge
6. Reconciliation

WHEN IS FORGIVENESS NOT RELEVANT?

Just like tools, forgiveness is not the right tool in certain situations.

1. Annoyances
2. Sights
3. Bumps and bruises of life

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Do you know of anyone who had all the “tools” but allowed anger to take over and determine their present and future?
2. What did you think of Ron’s central statement that if we do not forgive, we allow the past to take over our present and create our future? What would that look like for you? For others? This is the main point to learn in this lesson. This is a shorter lesson but this point is essential.
3. What other points could you make about what forgiveness is not? Other possibilities? Perhaps you could share some specific events that were difficult or were not germane to forgiveness.
4. Do you have other examples of when forgiveness is not relevant?

Lesson #3. When is Forgiveness Relevant?

(24:58 minutes)

EXAMPLES

1. Disloyalty
2. Betrayal
3. Heart laid bare to other folks

GREATER RISK

“The more intimate the relationship, the more risk that is involved, the more likelihood that forgiveness is going to be part of the picture.”

We lay our hearts bare, and people use it against us (such as the church prayer chain).

PURELY HUMAN RESPONSE?

What are some of the ways to obtain relief from emotional pain? Audience answers:

1. Chemicals (such as alcohol or prescription medicine)
2. Denial
3. Control environment
4. Pornography
5. Respond out of emotion

How think of pain?

Should think about the emotions as a messenger, not the message.

It is not about "Stop it!" It is about "What does this mean?"

What do we do when we hurt?

1. Pain
2. Irritability
3. Short with people
4. Isolation

Think of anger as a messenger

When we hurt, we react. We need to learn that it is not about calming the pain. It is about recognizing what is going on.

What happens when we tell people about our pain?

Talking not about therapy but relationships, intimacy

What happens when we do this? We are no longer alone in our pain.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE PUT GOD INTO THE EQUATION?

We acknowledge the pain and we acknowledge what has occurred. We experience weakness as a opening to notice God's mercy. We are not alone.

Simple things can be very difficult to do, even impossible, such as inviting someone into your pain.

Questions from the audience about ownership

Image of the tennis ball

Think of a relatively small tennis ball going around in your head. As it does, it fills up a lot of space. That's what happens when we rehearse pain.

Stop “ruminating”

Simple to say you are going to stop ruminating, but very hard to do.

Comments from the audience

Leonard Cohen

"There is a crack, a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in." (The crack is the crisis in our life, and the light of God gets into our lives through those cracks.)

When we admit the pain, we are more ready to hear from God.

Make a commitment to grow not just in the crisis times

Better than complaining that the bad things shouldn't be happening.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Can you give more examples of situations in which you think forgiveness is relevant? They don't have to be personal experiences.
2. What are some of the ways to obtain relief from emotional pain?
3. One of Ron's central points is that we "should think about the emotions as a messenger, not the message." This is key. Reflect on it. How would you go about doing this? What could you see are the benefits from separating emotions as the messenger and not what is really going on?
4. Anger is the messenger, not the message. What do you think about this?
5. Can you share any stories when you shared your pain and it was helpful to not feel alone?
6. What did you think of Ron's illustration of the tennis ball? Can you see how it is true? Care to share any personal anecdotes?
7. God's light shines into our lives through the cracks created by pain. Does anybody like this? Does anybody disagree with it? How is knowing this helpful?

Lesson 4: Emotional Process of Hurtful Events

(28:29 minutes)

INTRODUCTION

Anecdote about Ron's son — focus on right now

The question is, what am I allowing to influence my today, right now?

When people have hurt us, putting them in charge of our life is not the right direction.

Anecdote about hiking friend

Every day you walk the same direction. That's how you get there.

Painful things want to distract us, but they aren't suppose to be in charge of your life.

WHAT HAPPENS TO US INTERNALLY WHEN THESE HURTFUL EVENTS HAPPEN?

Intensity of emotion vs. time

“Time” (horizontal axis):

“Emotion” (vertical axis):

“Even’t: anything that happens

WHEN THE EVENT HAPPENS, THERE IS EMOTIONAL IMPACT

When an event happens, there is emotional impact.

1. Sad
2. Alone
3. Disappointed
4. Anxious
5. Left out
6. Abandoned
7. Put down
8. Minimized

Types of emotional impact

1. Sometimes the emotional impact is absorbed.
2. Other times the emotional impact does not go away and the impact is huge.

WHAT'S NEXT?

1. Fear
2. Anger (a secondary emotion)

Anger is what goes on inside of me only — hurt and pain and emotional impact.

Ron distinguishes between anger as an emotion and behaviors

WHAT DO WE EXPERIENCE AT THE “POINT OF ANGER”?

Physiological impact of anger

1. Tense muscles
2. Short, shallow breathing

3. Intense narrow focus

4. Loss of perspective

Cognitive impact of anger

1. "I don't care anymore."
2. "It doesn't matter."
3. "I've had enough."
4. "It's hopeless."
5. "They're doing this to bug me."

AT THIS POINT, WE HAVE A CHOICE

1. Blast off in behavior

Anger is not behavior.

The question is, what emotions are sitting underneath the anger?

2. Manage my emotions

Not problem solving, but getting settled so I can handle me.

Need to get our intensity down so we can manage my emotions and behavior.

We need to learn how to identify when we are getting close to an 8 or 9.

This is not being about being calm all the time; this would mean not being passionate about anything.

Example of a piano bench.

This is about managing me, so I don't put other things in charge of me, and I need to get the intensity down.

Story of his son

Not saying we shouldn't get angry.

We can have the intensity and live in a passionate way, and be angry about things without the bad behavior.

Part of being mature is learning who to handle the anger

Use words to say what is happening, instead of acting out the behavior.

E.g., take a break

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How does focusing on the right now help us process our anger?
2. The imagery of “walking in the same direction” is powerful. Learning to deal with anger and the message it brings is not learned quickly. How do you think viewing the process as a marathon rather than a sprint help you understand this point?
3. Where do your personal challenges lie? Absorbing too much or too little of a difficult event? Or being impacted more or less than you should?
4. Talk about Ron’s distinction between anger as something that goes on inside and the behavior that is outside. How does that help you understand anger?
5. When you are at the point of anger, what goes on inside your mind?
6. What are some of the ways you have learned to lessen the intensity of your anger so you can deal with it?

Lesson 5: How do we handle the hurt?

(37:25 minutes)

1. GET THE INTENSITY DOWN

1. Change my breathing
2. Get my tension level down
3. Talk to myself differently (what we say to ourselves makes a difference)
4. Increasing the time frame to allow the intensity to drop.

2. THEN YOU CAN COME BACK AND HANDLE THE RELATED EVENT

If we get the intensity down, we can come back and deal with the hurt and the related event (not ignoring it). This is not problem solving.

Illustration of the emotional jug. When we don't come back and deal with the related event, the jug of emotional hurt gets fuller and fuller.

Once we have managed our emotions, we can come back and deal with the hurt and the related event.

QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

1. What if the other person does not want to deal with the event? What if the other person is not safe?
2. Power dynamic

Useful responses

Run

A significant piece for change is how do I position myself in this situation? Includes confrontation.

Using simple words to describe the situation like, "When you do this, this is how it affects me."

RON RETURNS TO STEP 2: HANDLING THE EVENT

Manage your emotion, then coming back to the event

Create a setting where there can be some conversation.

1. “This is what it was like for me.”

This is the emotional part.

This is not gunny-sacking, where you dump everything you want to say to the person. You deal with just the one event.

When you did (or did not do) this, this is what went on with me.

Not attacking, demeaning, name calling. This is so hard.

2. “What was that like for you?”

Instead of listening to the other person, we can sabotage the emotional impact and events by saying:

1. Are you kidding?
2. That’s not how I saw it.
3. You do the same thing.
4. That’s just like your mother.
5. You’re out of your mind.
6. I always knew you didn’t get it.
7. Generalizations

These are all about defense.

This is not about agreeing; it is about understanding.

Confrontation is very difficult, but there is no other way.

“Tell me about it.” Without this, you are not going anywhere. This is foundational, and really hard.

Behavior is the messenger, not the message.

This is not behavior modification. It is about saying the things that are going on underneath.

Don't utilize this skill willy-nilly

You have to know where you are in the relationship. It is about the “level of relationship” (next lesson).

Audience asks a question about shame and intimacy

As we try to listen to the other person's experiences and perspective, we recognize that our own experiences and filters will skew what we hear the other person is saying

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the ways you have learned to lessen the intensity of your anger so you can deal with it?
2. Once the tension is lowered, you are able to come back to the hurt. What would make this difficult to do?
3. How full is your emotional jug with painful residue from past events?
4. How would you pursue forgiveness if the person who hurt you was not safe?
5. What are different ways you could word, "This is what it was like for me."
6. What are different ways you could word, "What was that like for you?"
7. What are all the ways you could sabotage the discussion at this point?
8. Do you think it is possible to truly forgive (and perhaps start down the road to trust) if you do not ask these two questions? Why?
9. What did you get out of the discussion about shame and intimacy?

Lesson #6. Levels of Relationship

(17:18 minutes)

Ron goes back to the topic of risking, coming back to say the event and what the impact was for you. How far you go depends on the level of relationship that you have with the other person.

THREE LEVELS OF RELATIONSHIP

Graph of three levels of relationship. The divider is the dotted line.

Low and high levels of risk.

1. Facts: Speaking about information

Low vulnerability and risk

“Do you know ... ?”

Acceptance is low

2. Head: Saying what I think

Medium vulnerability and risk

“What do you think about ... ?”

No mutuality

3. Heart: Speaking about what is going on with me (emotion)

High vulnerability and risk

Example: role of small groups in church

Goal is not to get all your relationships to the bottom of the “V”

Need to know where you are with any one relationship

If we have three people at the bottom of the “V,” we are relationally wealthy.

COMING BACK AND DEALING WITH THE HURT

The question is what is the nature of the relationship and what level of intimacy do we have?

Example of Ron's fear of water

Question is asked about "ministry"

What happens if you don't have a deep relationship but you have been invited in to one?

Sometimes you may not want to go deep even if you have been invited.

Key issues is to what level can I risk and still be accepted?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Can you give examples of relationships that fit in each of the three levels: fact; what I think; how I feel.
2. Can you think of examples of relationships that fit in the first two categories in which you have been hurt but you realized the level of intimacy was such that it wasn't really an issue for you?
3. How have you seen people hurt who were in the third level of relationships?
4. How have you seen people in the third level of relationships heal their wounds?
5. Have you ever been invited into deep relationship that you did not want? What happened?
6. How does this lesson help you think about forgiveness?

Lesson 7. Process of Forgiveness

(25:33 minutes)

WE EXPERIENCE HURT, FEAR, AND ANGER

In what direction am I committed to go?

1. Conciliation? Forgiving? Reconciliation?
2. Unforgiving? I am done!

This is your choice.

This isn't about emotions; it is about how I am going to live, about direction.

But it is not a choice to be made at the time of the event.

1. UNFORGIVING

A. Attitude: Vengeance

B. Behavior: Revenge

C. Outcome: Bitterness — a way of life

2. FORGIVENESS

Attitude: Conciliation

How do I position myself in relationship to what happened?

Direction you now travel depends on whether or not the person repents

A. Repentance by offender (behavior)

Repentance (Matthew 18)

B. No repentance by offender (behavior)

You can move in the direction of forgiveness regardless of the person's response.

Example of an accountant cheating on your books.

Boundary setting

Returns to the first option of repentance

Repentance and restitution by the offender (behavior)

Loss of trust in the relationship

Re-establishment of trust takes time and trustful behavior

If the trust returns quickly, it is a miracle. God does sometimes intervene, although this is not generally how he works.

FORGIVENESS IS HARD WORK (LIKE GRIEVING)

1. Aim in the same direction.
2. Be patient with ourselves.
3. Pray for a community of slow forgivers.

Keep facing in the same direction, and you will get there.

Have capacity to hold these things as we face forward, to be in it.

Trust is both an emotion and a decision.

Anecdote of flying

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

This is probably the most important lesson of this seminar, so you need to spend some real time thinking through the issues that were raised.

1. Walk through the chart and make sure it is clear to you. Any questions?
2. What are the challenges of viewing forgiveness as a choice?
3. Have you ever consciously chosen not to forgive? How did it work out for you? Was it the right choice?
4. What kind of boundaries have you set for relationships where there was no repentance? Did you feel guilty thinking that there should still be a relationship? What did you do?
5. Have you ever experienced true repentance, either on your own part or by the person who offended you? Has the trust come back? Should it? Have you ever experienced a miracle of complete restoration?
6. Will you help create a community of slow forgivers? What would it take to do so?