

Commitment: Are You All In?
The Biggest Commitment of All
Matthew 18:21-35
2/11/17

- There was a story shared in the Readers Digest. Do you remember those? The little story was sent in by a woman. It said this, "The speaker at our woman's club was lecturing on marriage and asked the audience how many of us wanted to "mother" our husbands. One member in the back row raised her hand.
 - o "You do want to mother your husband?" the speaker asked.
 - "Mother?" the woman echoed. "I thought you said smother."

- Well, Valentine's Day is in a couple of days and we are going to switch our focus on commitment from family to marriage. If you are married, this is a place you can be honest about if you've ever thought of smothering your spouse!
 - o If you aren't married, the next couple of messages are still applicable to you because they are about relationships. And, whether you are married or not, we all can learn about commitment to the relationships in our lives.
 - o Truly, marriage is where all the relationship stuff is lived out in full force. Marriage is where you find out how high your level of commitment really is. Truly, marriage is the biggest personal commitment that you will ever make.
 - o Yet, as we have seen in our society, the level of commitment of a majority of people isn't enough to sustain a marriage. Many, many people have tried it, but they haven't made it to the end.
 - o Humorist Helen Rowland once wrote, "Marriage is like twirling a baton, turning handspins or eating with chopsticks. It looks easy until you try it." Isn't that the truth. It looks easy, marriage looks like it will be this wonderful thing where we find the one who completes us and where we know we are always loved and cherished, when we get to spend our life with the person of our dreams. It's not always that easy. Those dreams of marriage can turn into dreams of regaining your freedom.

- I heard a story about how couples who have not been able to keep their commitment to one another can do an interesting thing. Divorced couples in Albuquerque, New Mexico, can take advantage of a new business in town. The company is called Freedom Rings: Jewelry for the Divorced.
 - o Founded by jeweler and divorcee Lynn Peters, the company makes custom jewelry out of wedding rings. Each customer at Freedom Rings pays a fee, and the ring-smashing ceremony begins--complete with champagne and music.
 - o Just before the smashing the M.C. says, "We will now release any remaining ties to your past by transforming your ring--which represents the past--into a token of your new beginning. Now take the hammer. Stop for a moment to consider the

transformation that is about to begin your new life. Ready? With this swing let freedom ring!"

- The client then uses a four-pound sledgehammer to whack their emblem of love and fidelity into a shapeless piece of metal. And the ceremony ends.
- The fact that women are pounding their wedding rings into pendants and men are grinding theirs into golf ball markers doesn't surprise me. We've all heard the divorce statistics. Even the divorce statistics of those in the church isn't much better than for those who don't go to church at all.
 - But, then think of how many people stop short of divorce, but would love to make a clean break from their marriage if it were convenient? How many Christian men and women feel the same way?
- Commitment is a HUGE part of whether a marriage lasts or not. Commitment is about being all in – giving all of yourself to something. Commitment fails to be commitment if you aren't all in. You can't be half in and half not in and be committed to something. Half effort isn't commitment at all. It's a hobby.
 - Hobbies come and go. A commitment to something lasts a lifetime. People who aren't all in, who haven't put themselves all in and haven't given all of themselves to their marriage will find that they have a hobby, not a marriage. A hobby is easy to discard and start a new one. That's how too many people treat their marriage.
 - I love the definition of commitment I found. Commitment is being dedicated or bound to something or someone. Another one was "an engagement or obligation that restricts freedom of action." In a committed relationship, you are all in when you are bound to someone, you dedicate yourself to that person and your actions show that you are committed to them, not to yourself." That is being all in.
- Yet, commitment is not just about sticking things out because you are supposed to. I don't believe that is God's design. His design is always for our growth and transformation. It's about being all in to doing the right things so that you grow, mature and become more like Jesus. It's about committing to not just last or suffer through, but to be better than you were before. To accomplish something that you could never accomplish on your own.
 - There is an interesting title to a book that someone told me about. It's called *Sacred Marriage: What if God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy*. The premise of the book is that God didn't design marriage to make us happy, but to make us holy.
- That's a new way to think for most people. It reminds me of a story I read about David Livingstone who was a missionary in remote Africa for years in the 1800s. There was a missionary society who wrote to him and asked, "Have you found a good road to where you are? If so, we want to know how to send other men to join you." Livingstone wrote back, "If you have men who will come only if they know there is a good road, I don't want them. I want men who will come if there is no road at all."
 - Livingstone didn't want people who wanted to reach the lost if it was convenient or easy. He wanted people who were so passionate about and committed to reaching

the lost that they would overcome any obstacle to get to where the lost people were!

- Likewise, marriage is not to be something that merely makes us happy and where the other person makes us happy. It is where we are passionate about and committed to loving the other person as Christ loves so that we will be open to being transformed in the likeness of Christ in order to fulfill that commitment. Commitment, when you're all in, is transformational.

- So, this morning, we are going to begin our section on marriage by addressing the absolute first thing you are going to have to do in order to keep your commitment to stay married. Without this, you will fail. It is the commitment to forgive. More than committing love your spouse, you must commit to forgive them. Forgiveness is the biggest commitment of all. If you don't resolve to forgive, you are not all in.
 - Forgiveness is where it all has to start. Forgiveness doesn't just come into play when the big things arise and your spouse has hurt you tremendously. Every attempt at communication, every attempt at conflict resolution, every decision that you have to make together must involve forgiveness at some level.

- The reality is that the hard work of marriage, or any relationship with anyone, is found in one's ability and willingness to forgive. Forgiveness is hard work. It's hard because you have to do it when you have been hurt, offended, wronged or devalued in some way. But, if we want our marriages, our relationships and friendships to endure and thrive, then we have to be those who do the hard work of forgiveness and commit to it.
 - This hard work can often be a daily thing when the little things arise. And the real hard work of forgiveness is when the big, hurtful things happen – and they will happen.
 - We should go into every relationship with people with a commitment to forgiveness. If you don't have a commitment to forgive, stay clear of relationships altogether because they will fail. That's because people will fail you. People will hurt you.
 - The fact of the matter is that your spouse will probably be the one to hurt you more than any other person has ever hurt you. They will disappoint you. They will say hurtful words and do hurtful actions that cut deep. No one has the potential to hurt you as much as your spouse
 - Even when that happens, are you going to be all in and commit to forgive?

- This morning, do you have people and situations that you can think of right now that have really hurt you? If there is, you can think of it pretty easily. It doesn't take a lot of time. We can think of the last time our spouse hurt us. We can think of the last time a friend or family member hurt us. Those things tend to be seared into our memories.
 - It is within these seared memories or current situations that Jesus has a word for us. It's a word about forgiveness. Jesus spoke about forgiveness quite a bit. More than that, he lived out forgiveness to a degree that most of us will never, ever have to live out.

- In Matthew, he was asked a question about forgiveness. Jesus was all about telling stories to explain something and that's what he does here. Let's read it. It's in **Matthew 18:21-35**. It's the story or parable of the unforgiving debtor.
- Now, the people in Jesus' day often understood his parables far better than we do because Jesus used examples and language that they could readily understand. Today, we have to do a little research to fully understand what he is trying to say because we live in a different part of the world and in a different time in history. So, let's get a little background information to help us understand this story.
 - Peter comes to Jesus with a question, "How many times should I forgive someone?" This isn't a random question. Peter asked it because Jesus had just taught them that if someone offends them, hurts them or sins against them, they are to go to that person directly and talk to them so that they might restore the relationship.
 - So, Jesus was already speaking about forgiveness which made Peter start thinking. He was probably thinking about the people who had hurt him or offended him or did him wrong and how they may have done it over and over. So, he wanted to know what was expected of him.
- The Jews in that day taught that you had to forgive a brother in the faith as many as three times for an offense. If they weren't of the faith, they didn't deserve forgiveness. But, Peter has seen that Jesus has a heart of compassion, so he double the number and adds one to ask, "Should I forgive them seven times?" Peter probably thought he was being super generous with his forgiveness,
 - So, Jesus' answer probably blew them all away because it was much, much more than the Jewish law. Jesus said, "No, seventy times seven." That's 490 times! If you read from the NIV or another version, it might say seventy-seven times. Some of that is just a matter of translation
 - Regardless, both numbers are not numbers that you are going to keep track of. Can you imagine trying to keep track of that? You would have to go around with a big forgiveness notebook or journal with people's names on it, check marking when they offended or hurt you and when you forgave them.
 - So, Jesus' point is that you don't keep score. You just forgive.
- Then, Jesus goes on to share this parable about forgiveness. It's about a servant who owes millions of dollars to a king. If you have an NIV version of the Bible, you will note in verse 24, that they use the term of money that was used in Jesus' time. It says that the servant owed the king 10,000 talents.
 - What is a talent? A talent represented 15 years worth of wages for the common worker. This servant owed 10,000 talents. So, when you do your calculations, this guy owed 150,000 years worth of wages. That's a lot of money! That helps to give us a better perspective on the enormity of this man's debt, rather than just saying he owed millions.
 - It also makes me wonder how he came to owe that much. I doubt that anyone would borrow 150,000 years worth of wages. It could be that this servant was

embezzling from the king. When the king was settling his accounts, or in modern terms, having an audit done, his auditors found out about this embezzlement. So, this man not only owed this, but he obtained it by stealing from the king.

- Now, we don't know that for sure. It makes more sense than that someone would willingly borrow an amount he knew he could never repay or that a king would allow such a debt to be incurred. All we know is that this man was in deep trouble – maybe double trouble – trouble one for owing that much and possibly trouble two for how he got to owe that much.
 - o The king is set to punish this man when the servant fell down before the king and begged for mercy and forgiveness, promising to pay it all back. We promise the most unrealistic things when we are begging.
 - o The king knows that he won't be able to ever pay it all back. Moved by mercy and forgiveness, the king ends up canceling the debt altogether. He doesn't put the man on a payment plan. He doesn't collect interest. He just extends forgiveness.

- Then, this servant, who was just extended a wonderful, gracious, merciful gift, goes out and finds someone who owes him some money. Again, in the NIV version, it gives the actual monetary terms in Jesus' day. In verse 28, it says that fellow servant owed the man 100 denarii. A denarius was one day's wage for the common worker. So, this man owed the servant 100 days wages, a little over three months worth of wages.
 - o After being forgiven for an astronomical amount, the servant isn't willing to set aside his anger over a small amount. You would think that this man would have been so happy to have received pardon and forgiveness for his debt and possible crime, that he would have been dancing in the street, not hunting down someone who owed him so little.

- In this parable, God is the king and who do you think is the servant? All of us. This parable answers Peter's question, but also a big question for us. It's the why question. We know that forgiveness is hard and we know people who need to be forgiven. But, why is it so necessary? Why should I forgive? Let's look closer at the story.

- Jesus is telling us first that we should forgive because Christ forgave us. We all represent the servant. How? Well, if you were to add up all of things, all of the sins, that you and I have done to hurt the Lord or embezzled from his glory or taken advantage of his blessings and his kindness and his patience, my debt, your debt would be huge. Limitless. At least 150,000 years worth.
 - o The king in the story is much more angry about the servant's lack of forgiveness toward a fellow servant than about the sin and possible crime against the king. The king, God, extended forgiveness to the servant, us, and expected that the servant would extend forgiveness to others. When he didn't do that, that's what caused the king to go off. The king was so upset about it, that he not only threw the man in prison, but ordered he be tortured while in prison until he could pay the debt.

- How we treat others matters a great deal to God because it is a reflection of how we treat him and how we treat the forgiveness that we have received from him.
 - Jesus is saying that when we stubbornly, selfishly refuse to forgive, we spit in the face of the extravagant, limitless forgiveness we have been given from Christ.
- The second reason why we should forgive is to block Satan's trap. 2 Corinthians 2:10-11 says this, "When you forgive this man, I forgive him, too. And, when I forgive whatever need to be forgiven, I do so with Christ's authority for your benefit so that Satan will not outsmart us. For we are familiar with his evil schemes."
- Satan has an evil scheme for your marriage because marriage was designed by God himself and so he hates it. Satan has an evil scheme for any relationship that you have that might bring glory to God.
 - One of Satan's great schemes is to keep us feeling justified in not forgiving someone. It's to keep us justified in our anger and continued hurt. It's to keep us dwelling on how badly someone hurt us and how they don't deserve our forgiveness. It's to keep track or keep score of the wrongs done to us.
- When we don't forgive, we are shutting the door to God working in in our lives and instead opening the door to give Satan a stronghold in our lives. God is not the king of unforgiveness. Satan is. Therefore, if we are harboring unforgiveness in our hearts, guess who is ruling us? That should be a disturbing thought.
- Here's the thing, Satan knows that if he can keep us in unforgiveness, that he can control our hearts and destroy our relationships both with God and with others.
 - Those who are married, Satan is gunning for your marriage. He's gunning for it because marriage is the closest relationship we experience on earth that is most like the relationship we have with God. He does not want you to have that kind of relationship. When you harbor unforgiveness, you give Satan control of your marriage.
- Knowing that Satan wants our heart and to destroy our relationship, that leads us to the third reason to forgive – to guard the condition of your heart and your relationship.
- Let's talk about the condition of your heart. The truth is, when you refuse to forgive someone, they own you. You hesitate to go anywhere where you think you might encounter them. Your blood pressure goes up every time you think about them. The reason we don't want to forgive is because we want to hurt the other person. But, the reality is, we are really hurting ourselves more than the other person.
 - Then, because we are really hurting ourselves, unforgiveness grows and takes on a whole new life. It leads to anger. It leads to bitterness. It leads to hatred. Have you ever known someone who was so consumed by anger or hate that they couldn't think rationally? Anger was their primary emotion.
 - They aren't that fun to be around. Their heart is all twisted. They don't enjoy peace and joy. Peace can't exist with bitterness and anger.
 - You forgive in order to guard your heart so you don't become one of those twisted, angry, bitter, hate-filled people. Oh, you might not be one now. But, keep refusing

to forgiven and it will happen. God can't reside in a heart where those things reside.

- The condition of your heart directly affects the condition of your relationship. If you want to guard your relationship, you have to guard your heart by forgiving.
 - o This is why Jesus showed us his love through coming with the sole purpose to forgive us by his sacrifice. If there was no forgiveness, it would be impossible for the imperfect sinful nature that is found in us to be in relationship with a perfect and holy God.
 - o During the offering, we played a song. I hope you read the lyrics. Maybe you've heard that song before and were wondering why in the world we were playing it. That song came out in the 80s by Don Henley. It's called "Heart of the Matter."
 - o The song is about a relationship that ended. The woman in his life left him. He worked too much, he neglected her. He was prideful and jealous. She found someone else to fill her needs. As he is reflecting on this failed relationship, he realizes what their relationship was missing: forgiveness. Further, he realizes that if he doesn't forgive her for leaving him and for not loving him anymore, it is only going to hurt him in the end.

- When Wil and I were going through pre-marital counseling, our counselor warned us about having a winner – loser mentality in arguments. One of things he told us to ask ourselves and we remember it to this day is, "Do you want to be right or do you want to be married?"
 - o The heart of the matter is forgiveness – not winning arguments, not getting your way, not even being right or respected. It's forgiveness that will guard both your heart and your relationship.

- Finally, you must realize that you need to be forgiven too! Sure you might not need to be forgiven 10,000 talents worth of something, but I bet that all of us have a few hundred denarii of things we have done that need to be forgiven by someone.
 - o My husband has to forgive me for hurtful things I have said or done. I will confess my own. I have a lot of words. Words are my weapon of choice. I can out-word Wil in an argument easily. When I'm angry, words can come out with machine gun rapid force. I've needed forgiveness for my words.
 - o What is your weapon of choice? We all have at least one. Maybe you walk out, leaving the issue unresolved and people not knowing when you will return. Some people clam up and refuse to speak for days. Some are passive aggressive. Some get intimidating in their anger. Whenever we pick up one of those weapons, we need forgiveness.

- So, those are some of the reason to forgive. Let's get to the how. How do you become a seventy times seven forgiver?
 - o In order for the how to really be successful, you have to pray through them. You can't will yourself to forgive. You have to pray that God will also change your heart and give you his heart for forgiveness while working on the how steps.

- How to forgive – first you have to make a decision to forgive. All big things come with a decision that needs to be made. You realize that you have come to a crossroad and you decide to do something. You have to decide that forgiveness is the biggest commitment and you are going to be a forgiver rather than a grudge holder, regardless of the offense.
 - But, you don't just wait for the big things to happen before you decide to forgive. You have to make forgiveness habitual. You do that by deciding to forgive the little things.
 - In order to uncover the processes that destroy unions, marital researchers have studied couples over the course of years, and even decades, and retrace the steps of those who have split up back to their wedding day. What they are discovering is unsettling.
 - None of the factors one would guess might predict a couple's durability actually does: not how in love a newlywed couple say they are; how much affection they exchange; how much they fight or what they fight about. In fact, couples who will endure and those who won't look remarkably similar in the early days.
 - Yet when psychologists Cliff Notarius and Howard Markman studied newlyweds over the first decade of marriage, they found a very subtle but telling difference at the beginning of the relationships. Among couples who would ultimately stay together, 5 out of every 100 comments made about each other were putdowns.
 - Among couples who would later split, 10 of every 100 comments were insults. That gap magnified over the following decade, until couples heading downhill were flinging five times as many cruel and invalidating comments at each other as happy couples. The researchers wrote, "Hostile putdowns act as cancerous cells that, if unchecked, erode the relationship over time. In the end, relentless unremitting negativity takes control and the couple can't get through a week without major blowups."

- Do you know why those put-downs made such an impact on the relationship? Each put-down represented an inability to forgive. Some of those things were probably just little things.
 - Like a spouse who leaves bread crumbs from their toast all over the kitchen counter nearly every single morning. Or, a spouse who consistently puts their dirty napkin on the counter when the garbage is right next to the counter. Those are just things that randomly came to the top of my head. 😊
 - But, little things add up when you won't let them go and forgive and move on. And, if you can't forgive the little things, you will never forgive the big things.

- You also have to decide to forgive repeatedly. Forgiveness is like peeling an onion. When I forgive, what remains? More onion – more to be forgiven, more anger to be set aside.
 - So, I forgive and then something comes up. Particularly when you are in a relationship like a marriage, something else always comes up. Another argument. Another unresolved issue. More hurtful words or deeds. Something that reminds me of what that person did and I get mad again. I have to forgive again.

- When you forgive, realize that you may have to forgive the same offense more than once – not because the offense needs to be forgiven multiple times, but because you need to set aside your anger multiple times.
- In order to set aside your anger, another how to forgive step is by saying the words. Saying, “I forgive so and so” is powerful. There is power in words.
 - When you look at the person who has wronged you and say the words, even just saying them in your head, there is something tangible that happens in your heart because you have released someone from the wrong they have done to you. It opens up your will so that even if you aren’t really feeling the forgiveness, once you make the decision and say the words, your feelings begin to follow.
 - You don’t even have to say the words directly to the person. Bringing up the issues to the person isn’t always the issue. Forgiveness is the issue. Sometimes we make forgiveness far too complicated by stirring up water under the bridge rather than letting the past stay in the past.
- Next, forgive with humility. We are so justice driven. We want people who have hurt us to know about it and to apologize. Then, we can forgive. That’s not the kind of forgiveness that Jesus calls us to. We are still to forgive even at times without confronting the person and even if the other person never apologizes.
 - It reminds me of a story about a grandmother who, on her golden wedding anniversary, revealed the secret of her long and happy marriage. "On my wedding day, I decided to choose ten of my husband's faults which, for the sake of our marriage, I would overlook," she explained. A guest asked her to name some of the faults. "To tell the truth," she replied, "I never did get around to listing them. But whenever my husband did something that made me hopping mad, I would say to myself, 'Lucky for him that's one of the ten.'"
 - She didn’t have to bring them up to her husband. Oooo...that’s so hard, right ladies?? But, she made it to 50 years of marriage because she just forgave in humility.
- Finally, forgive completely.
 - In Colossians 3:13, Paul says this, “Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” This is one of those convicting verse, right? The Lord forgave us willingly, humbly, unconditionally, before we ever knew we needed forgiveness, he laid aside his anger, gave up his right for justice and forgave completely.
- So, this morning, when you think about your level of forgiveness. Who in Jesus’ parable are you most like – the servant or the king. We are all on the spectrum somewhere. Who are you closest to? If I were ask your spouse that question, or a close friend or family member that question, what would they say?
 - There is a book called *Love Dare*. It was written in conjunction with a movie, called *Fireproof*, that was out several years ago. It is all about daring to do the things for your spouse and your marriage that will build your marriage up – even if you don’t

feel like it, even if you are hurt, even if your spouse doesn't deserve it. It's all about the heart of the matter – forgiveness and acting in forgiveness. It has action steps every day to build forgiveness in your heart.

- Maybe this morning, you are struggling with forgiveness in your marriage. I would encourage you to maybe pick up a copy of this book.
- Are you ready to be all in and make the greatest commitment of all?

Prayer

Altar Call

- I would think that this would be one of those topics where we all need some altar time. It's hard to come here. Forgiveness is hard to do. I guarantee you, though, if you come and meet God here, if you humble yourself to do that, forgiveness will come easier. Your heart will meet with the heart of God and he will do his work in you.
 - I realize that in one message, I can't cover all of nuances of forgiveness like forgetting, trusting, and the depth of hurt that can come at the hands of people or answer all of the questions. Yet, I know One who can and he wants to meet with you to begin the journey to forgiveness.