

Tools for Wise Leadership

A programme of TWR-Africa, produced by TWR-Zimbabwe, presented by Rev Dr Roy Musasiwa

Series 10: The Leadership Style of Jesus

Talk 15: Jesus' Example of Forgiveness

Welcome to the programme **Tools for Wise Leadership**. We have so far discussed various important aspects of the leadership style of Jesus, the greatest leader to have walked on this earth. In the last two sessions we dealt with how Jesus handled anger, or anger-producing situations. He was so self-controlled that provocations, humiliations, insults and injuries directed against him failed to provoke his anger. That is because he lived by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit, and was able to interpret situations not in terms of his own hurt but on the needs of those who caused those hurts. The few moments Jesus is shown to have been angry or indignant had to do with protecting the glory of God and the needs of others, when those were trampled on. What a lesson we as leaders can learn from Jesus on how to handle anger.

This naturally leads us to consider the example of Jesus as a forgiving leader. In the midst of the severest pain possible Jesus cried out, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing." There can be no imaginable pain greater than what Jesus was going through at the time he uttered those words of forgiveness.

It is of course tempting to say that such forgiveness could only be offered by Jesus but not by a mere human being like you or me. Ah, but we must not forget that the first believers learned forgiveness through the example of Jesus. In the darkest moment of his life, the first Christian martyr, Stephen, did the same as Jesus had done. As the heavy stones struck him, taking away his life, Stephen prayed, "Lord, do not lay this charge against them."

Now is it easy to forgive those who have hurt you? O no. Try asking a girl who was maliciously gang raped and you will appreciate how hard forgiving can be. Or try asking someone who suffered rejection as a child? Or a leader who has been betrayed by her subordinates. These things hurt, and forgiveness is not easy. If we are to forgive, we need answers to three questions. What is forgiveness? Why should I forgive? How should I forgive? Let's address these questions one by one.

Firstly, what is forgiveness? Well forgiveness is coming to a place where you hold nothing against a person who has wronged you, and you give up the right to revenge or get even with that person. Biblically as we have seen, forgiveness even wishes the guilty person to be forgiven by God as well. Jesus and Stephen showed that it can be done.

The second question is why you should forgive. Particularly why forgive a person you are convinced does not deserve to be forgiven? Well here are some convincing reasons.

Firstly we forgive because we are ourselves forgiven sinners. We were not just forgiven on the day we became Christians. We continue to ask for and receive forgiveness from God. We often unthinkingly pray: Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. But do we really mean it? What if God really answers our prayer by saying: I will only forgive you to the same measure that you forgive others? How much forgiveness would God render to us? Or would we be found to be like the unforgiving servant in Jesus' parable. He owed his master thousands of dollars that he could not repay. He begged for forgiveness, and his entire debt was cancelled. Then the same forgiven man meets a fellow servant who owed him just a few dollars. And he would not forgive him. He made sure that this poor fellow would be arrested and jailed until he could repay all

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the money. When the Master heard of this cruelty, he summoned the unforgiving servant and promptly cancelled his forgiveness of him. You would not want God to cancel his forgiveness of me because you cannot forgive others, would you?

The second reason for forgiving is that we are commanded to forgive. The New Testament is full of exhortations to forgive one another. If we do not forgive we are in fact being disobedient to our Lord. And if we are disobedient to the Lord, our relationship with him is affected. We even hinder our own prayers through harbouring unforgiveness.

The third reason for forgiving is that we do ourselves a favour by forgiving. There is too much of a price to pay for unforgiveness. We get eaten up by the acid of bitterness, and the result is that we invite on ourselves diseases such as ulcers, high blood pressure and other conditions associated with bitterness. In other words by not forgiving we make ourselves prisoners of unforgiveness. While the person against whom we may be bitter is perhaps enjoying themselves somewhere, we are denying ourselves sleep and appetite, all because we do not want to forgive. In other words, not forgiving is like trying to fix the other person by taking poison, or putting ourselves in prison. So we come back to the question: What if the person does not deserve to be forgiven? My answer is that even if the person does not deserve to be forgiven, I deserve to forgive them so that I can keep my freedom and my good health. Proverbs 17:22 says a cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

The third question is: how do I forgive? Well firstly, you need to consciously give up bitter feelings against the person who wronged you. Secondly, give up any plan to revenge or get even with the person. Thirdly, verbalize your forgiveness. If the person who wronged you is accessible to you, verbalize your forgiveness to him or her. Even if the person is not accessible, there is still power in verbalizing the forgiveness. At least you can verbalize the forgiveness in prayer as Jesus and Stephen did.

Now I am not suggesting that forgives is just an event that you can get over and done with. Very often it is a process. There is one particular hurt that took me years to get over with. I had been hurt so much by people I had been ministering to. For years I carried this hurt, and kept on telling myself how unjustly I had been treated. This just prolonged the hurt and bitterness, until I started applying the steps to forgiveness that I have suggested in this presentation. Now I find that though I can mentally recall what happened, there is no more bitterness in me towards those people, and I can truly bless them and call upon God to bless them. Under God's power forgiveness is possible.

And of course this forgiveness has to come from heart like it did with Pope John II. On May 13, 1981, Mehmet Ali Agca shot Pope John Paul II, as the pope rode in an open car across St. Peter's Square. The Pope was shot four times - twice in the stomach, once in the right arm, once in the left hand. His life was only saved by emergency surgery. And yet the Pope visited Mehmet Ali Agca as he sat in his prison cell. He spoke to him for 20 minutes and told him that he forgave him. But who was the greatest beneficiary of this forgiveness, Pope John Paul or Mehmet Ali Agca? Well it was the Pope. As Lewis Smedes says in his book *The Art of Forgiving*, "Forgiveness heals our pain and resentment before it does anything for the person we forgive."

Has this lesson on forgiveness any relevance for your Christian leadership? Yes, in every way. One mark of a Christian leader is his or her ability to forgive. When people fail us, we can do no better than to remember the words of Jesus, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing." We can't work with people if we hold grudges against them. So until we meet in the next programme why not start practicing this tool of wise leadership?

Discussion Questions

The *Leadership Style of Jesus* has inspired us. The three discussion questions are a guidelines to process the episodes of *Tools for Wise Leadership*:

Study Question 1: for Personal reflection

What does this episode mean to you personally as a leader?

Study Question 2: for Group Discussion

What does this topic mean you as a group of leaders?

Study Question 3: for applying the topic

What can you apply from this topic in your role as a leader?

Can you have a regular weekly meeting with other leaders to interact on the topics of this leadership programme? Here are the questions for the **Talk 15 - Jesus' Example of Forgiveness**

Study Question 1: Personal reflection

What are some of the negative effects on our being of harbouring unforgiveness?

Study Question 2: Group Discussion

What are some of the implications for the Gospel of Christ if a Christian leader is unwilling to forgive?

Study Question 3: Applying the topic

Leader, how can you today begin to walk in forgiveness toward those who have hurt you?

Please connect with us in response to **Tools for Wise Leadership**. We would love to hear from you!

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