

Healing for Damaged Emotions 2

“GUILT, GRACE AND COLLECTING DEBTS”

So, I'm in my Physical Therapy session on Wed. He's a great PT, but he's working me over. I know, I was warned, "if you're not willing to do the therapy, then don't do the surgery." I'm willing, but it hurts, and I was complaining to him that I was having some good days and some not as good days. He was lecturing me on not overdoing it, and asked me to think back on my days, and see if the pain was in some way related to overusing my arm. (Which it most certainly is) Then as I headed out of the room he ended with this admonition; "Kermit...listen to your pain." We all know what that means, right? Don't over do it, let your pain tell you how much to do, etc, etc.

But I couldn't help think about the journey we've chosen to enter this Lenten season...to explore some of our "hidden-for-years", or "living-with-daily"...damaged emotions. And both of Rick's "friendly reminders" bridged the gap from my Physical Therapy, to our "Damaged Emotional Therapy". And we both know this isn't therapy, this is church, this is preaching; but "Listen to your pain". That's what I'm asking you to do these next few weeks. Revisit some of your painful places, and see if there might be some new way to find some level of healing that has maybe been eluding you, or you've been ignoring. But I must warn you, as I've been warned: "If you're unwilling to do the therapy...then you probably shouldn't do the surgery." I pray, for your sake, that you are willing for both.

Today I want to revisit a subject I introduced last week, because I feel it is one of the most fundamental, foundational things we have to get right, if we want to get well! It has to do with Guilt, Grace, and Collecting Debts. Let me introduce you to a familiar story:

Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. In the process one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. He couldn't pay, so his master ordered that he be sold – along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned – to pay the debt.

But the man fell down before his master and begged him, 'Please, be patient with me and I will pay it all. Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt.

But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment. His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it,' he pleaded. But his creditor wouldn't wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full.

When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, 'you evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?' Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt. "That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart." Matthew 18:23-35

The obvious subject of this parable is forgiveness, but we're going to get to some of the heart of this issue by looking at the issue of "collecting debts". Doesn't sound like a damaged emotion many of us can identify? Well, hang on a minute and we'll see.

1. THE DEBTS WE OWE

In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. Mt. 18:24

Lest we wrongly assume and think that this is just a modern translation's exaggeration of this NT concept of money, it literally was 'millions of dollars'. The amount isn't important, the point Jesus was making is that this guy owed his boss so much money that even with his best intentions, and in the best case scenarios, and with the absolute resolve and desire to do so, this poor debtor, was never going to be able to pay off that amount of debt. There is no question in my mind that Jesus' intent in mentioning the amount he owned, was to demonstrate that there was no possible way it could ever be repaid.

Can you build this spiritual bridge between the ancient text and our modern lives? Each of us has a debt to God, which we'll never be able to repay. Our own sin has rendered us unable to live; our own guilt cripples us to the point of paralysis; but God, in God's infinite mercy and unmerited grace...cancels our debts...and we'll never be able to repay that debt. That is the point of this first part of the parable. One of the debts we owe is that God has forgiven us, and it's a good thing, because without that we'd be goners!

Notice what the guy in the story does though. He begs for more time. What a knucklehead. It's like getting one of those new 79.9% interest credit cards, and begging with the CC Company for more time when we can't make our minimum payments. We're never going to be able to catch up; we're never going to be able to repay the debt. So, asking for more time, patience, is really a waste of time. God has forgiven and canceled our debt. We can't repay it, and we don't need too.

I know that some of you sitting here today have chosen to keep God and this "Jesus stuff" at arms length. You're so aware of your debt, so aware of your sin, so aware of your guilt, you've come to believe consciously or sub-consciously that you are such a sinner, that you'll never be able to be saved; so you don't accept Christ's offer, because you know you can never repay it. That is exactly the point, misappropriated. One of the first steps in being healed of our damaged emotions, is simply receiving this amazing gift of grace that God has given us. We don't deserve it, we can't earn it, we can't buy it, we can't work our way up to it, we can never repay it...we just have to receive it! That's why it's called grace. #2

2. THE DEBTS WE COLLECT

But his creditor wouldn't wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full. Mt. 18:30

What, this story suddenly turns on a misunderstanding, or a misappropriation, or a misapplication or a simply human screw-up. The servant who just had his debt completely and wholly canceled by the king; now sets out to secure what is owed him by his own debtors. He runs from the “grace room” of the king to the “law room” of his own operation, and demands payment. He hears the exact same appeal for more time, which he himself had just uttered, and instead of being gracious, “WHAM”, throws the scoundrel into jail. Thinking he still needs to repay; thinking he CAN repay what has already been forgiven; he demands repayment from some schmuck who owes him twenty bucks!

Let me help you build the bridge this time. Like the 1st servant, we don't get it. The first servant didn't understand the level of God's forgiveness; thought he had been given what he asked for, (more time). What he failed to realize was that he'd been given what he really needed, not what he thought he wanted. Out of this misunderstanding (or willful ignorance) he went out to collect from his debtors, in order to pay off his masters 10 million. When we don't understand, appreciate or accept what God has really done for us, by canceling our debt, then we're likely going to spend the rest of our lives trying to collect from other people, or from ourselves, what we think God still demands of us. We live in a perpetual state of failure and frenzy as we continually seek to “pay off” God!

I see it in some couples who live in perpetual frustration with each other, disappointed because his wife turned out differently than the cheerleader he married, or her husband couldn't remain the macho jock she married. I see it in people whose lives are lived in constant guilt because, though they think with their heads they'll never be good enough to merit God's forgiveness; in their hearts they know that's exactly what they need and want! So this constant bashing reminder that I'm not good enough leads to an endless cycle of doing more, trying to impress more, working harder, beating myself up. Trying to repay a debt that has already been canceled.

I've seen it in young and not so young people who were abused or abandoned, neglected or ignored at some point in their lives. Instead of doing the hard "therapy" necessary, they'd rather choose to be the victim of their past. I know it's not easy, but it begins with this simple understanding that we are forgiven. I know it's just the beginning, but so many have missed this essential step. Now #3

3. THE DEBTS WE FORGIVE

That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from the heart. Mt. 18:35

Is that true? Will our heavenly Father throw us into prison; torture us for the rest of our lives; and maybe beyond? Think of the absurdity of being expected to repay any debt while in prison, and being tortured just for good measure and effect! The point of this passage is that forgiveness must be granted...since it has already been given! Our debt has been canceled; not extended, not delayed, not second mortgaged...canceled! Our stupid attempts to keep collecting in order to repay an unpayable debt, reveals our own level of unforgiveness. We see ourselves as unforgivable, so we keep keeping score of wrongs done to us; thinking our celebrated victimhood will impress God, or get us off the hook. We see ourselves as unforgiven and so we remain unwilling to forgive; and the cycle repeats.

Dr. Seamonds in his book reveals what he thinks are the two root causes of more emotional damage than any other; the failure to receive forgiveness...and the failure to grant forgiveness. An abused child grows up vowing to never abuse his/her children like dad did to him; yet, in spite of his best intentions, his home is a mess, and he/she can't understand why. It may have to do with root issues of forgiveness. Dad may be dead or worse; still abusing, so forgiveness remains a guilt-inducing reward, which is undeserved, and will be reserved for another time! Playing the victim becomes familiar, and soon preferred more than going through surgery, and the subsequent therapy.

I know that forgiving someone who has hurt you is hard...I've been there. But it is an essential part of our "spiritual therapy". I know that some people don't deserve, or even want forgiveness; just remember, forgiving others is not always of greatest benefit to others...sometimes its benefit is for you! Remember what I said last week, forgiveness is not something we do out of obligation (debt-collecting) it's something we do as God leads us to do it. Some folks hang on to unforgiveness for a time while they sort and work out their own 'processes to wholeness. I understand that...but know it can't be forever.

There may well be someone in your life that absolutely doesn't deserve your forgiveness. There may well be someone in your life who has hurt you, or robbed you, or disappointed you, or abused you, or abandoned you, or mistreated you...that you KNOW doesn't want your forgiveness, may not even know how much they've hurt you. And were it entirely up to you...you'd be happy NOT to forgive...then you read this parable, and hear Jesus' heart, and recognize...you're perpetuating this debt-collecting because you think you still own some debt...or you think you still have some debts to collect; then you remember your debt has not been extended; it's been canceled.

My friends, I don't know all your individual situations, hurts and pasts; and I don't need to. But God does, and God wants you to receive the forgiveness you need, and offer the forgiveness you can. Haven't you tried long enough to collect debts that have already been canceled? Are you willing to do the therapy? Then, "Kermit...listen to your pain"; and do what you can to make things right. Receive God's forgiveness, and give it to those you need to. Step 2. Amen

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