



*Steve Diehl*

Steve has ministered to youth and adults for over forty years, serving as pastor of the Walnut Creek Friends Church for twenty of those years. He holds a bachelor's degree in biology from California State University, Hayward. He has memorized over 135 chapters of the Bible including most of the books of the New Testament. Steve is the founder of Forgiveness Ministries, travels extensively giving seminars on forgiveness, and has written the book, *Developing a Lifestyle of Forgiveness*. He and his wife, Becky, have been married since 1980 and have six children, five grandchildren, and live in Concord, California.

*BIBLE READING: 1 John 1:8-9; Ephesians 4:32*

Do you have an emergency kit in your car? I do, but I almost never use it. It can sit for months, even years, without my needing to get it out. After all, you only need an emergency kit when an emergency happens. I find that most people think about forgiveness in the same way they think about an emergency kit; it is a good thing to have, but needed only in emergencies. Consequently they rarely use it.

But forgiveness is God's solution for a problem. He calls it sin, and we are all living in a world saturated by sin. We are bombarded by sin every day, some our own but also the sins of others. The vast majority of them are small. Unfortunately, because they are small and common, we tend to think that we do not need to practice forgiveness. After all, it's not an emergency.

When we think this way we miss out on God's healing. Sin always damages the human soul. Without forgiveness people stay wounded and relationships become crippled. Whenever a sin takes place, whether big or small, both the perpetrator and the victim need to practice forgiveness. God does not want us to use forgiveness like an emergency kit. Rather he wants us to use forgiveness like breathing air. Practicing forgiveness is something we need to learn to do all the time. And then when an emergency does come, we'll know exactly what to do.

*SONG: Breathe (Michael W. Smith)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Heavenly Father, what sins in my life have I overlooked or regarded as not needing forgiveness? Please show them to me so I can practice forgiveness and let you heal me. Amen.*

—Steve Diehl

*BIBLE READING: Ephesians 4:30—5:2*

I remember a poster in a class I took many years ago on computer programming. It said, “To err is human, but if you really want to mess things up it takes a computer.” Of course it was a play on the famous quote from the English poet Alexander Pope’s 1711 poem “An Essay on Criticism” part 2, in which he wrote, “To err is human; to forgive, divine.” I wonder if he knew how profoundly correct he was.

Forgiveness is not natural to human beings. Forgiveness is not man’s idea. It is God’s idea. Forgiveness is God’s plan, God’s work, God’s solution to a problem he calls sin. God establishes forgiveness through Jesus Christ and then offers the gift to humanity. Forgiveness is not something we make happen. God made forgiveness happen two thousand years ago. We are just catching up to what God has already done. For this reason we do not need to do anything to make God forgive us. We discover that he already has and thank him for it. In the same way, we forgive someone else when we discover that God has already forgiven them, just as he did us, at the cross of Christ.

There are many man-made ideas in the world about forgiveness. Many have made their way into the church, but real forgiveness is divine. It is something God defines, God does, and God gives to us. Then he tells us to forgive each other in the same way he has forgiven us. Listening to the world’s ideas of forgiveness really messes things up.

*SONG: In Christ Alone*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, please help me to not rely upon myself, or my own ideas about forgiveness, but to learn from you. Amen.*

—Steve Diehl

*BIBLE READING: Hebrews 9:22-28*

We've all seen the sign posted in a restaurant's window, "No shirt, no shoes, no service." If you're like me you don't have any problem with that. Being clothed appropriately in a restaurant is a necessary prerequisite for cleanliness, health, and decorum. If a person cannot meet that minimum standard then the restaurant is legally unable to give service. In a similar way God could actually put in his window, "No cross, no forgiveness." The Bible tells us that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (v. 22).

One of the reasons people have such a difficult time either receiving God's forgiveness or forgiving others is that they fail to include the cross of Christ in their practice of forgiveness. God forgives us of the penalty for our sin because Jesus died to pay that penalty. And we experience God's forgiveness when we believe that truth. In exactly the same way, we forgive other people when we believe that Jesus died to pay for their sins too. Without the cross of Christ, God would not be able to forgive you. And without the cross of Christ, you would not be able to forgive others. According to God, real forgiveness has a prerequisite: the cross of Christ.

Whenever you confess sin and want to receive God's forgiveness, remember the payment Jesus made for you on the cross. And whenever you need to forgive someone else, remember the payment Jesus made for them, too.

*SONG: Nothing But the Blood of Jesus*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Thank you, Jesus, for paying the penalty for my sin so that God could forgive me. And thank you for paying the penalty for other people's sin so that I can forgive them. Amen.*

—Steve Diehl

*BIBLE READING: Luke 17:3; Mark 11:25*

I have a riddle for you. How can you move to the right and the left at the same time? The answer is at the end of today's study.

When we look carefully in the Bible to see what God says about forgiveness, we discover something very confusing: God's forgiveness is both conditional and unconditional at the same time. But how can this be? It is because forgiveness is like a coin. It has two sides. Every sin is a crime against God, and every crime has a penalty. But every sin is also a stupid act, like putting your hand on a hot stove, causing negative consequences. God unconditionally forgives the penalty for our sins because Jesus Christ has already paid the penalty for all of them. However, God cannot heal a burnt hand while it is still on the stove. God forgives the consequences of a sin only when a person repents and takes his hand off the stove.

When a verse on forgiveness is connected to the cross of Christ, God is talking about forgiving the penalty for sin. He does this unconditionally because Jesus has already met the condition for us. But when a verse connects forgiveness with repentance, God is talking about forgiving the consequences of sin. And that side of forgiveness God can do only when we meet the prerequisite condition—repentance.

Answer: You do it every time in the mirror. When you move to your right, your image in the mirror moves to its left.

*SONG: Only the Blood*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Heavenly Father, thank you for being able to forgive me of both the penalty and the consequences of my sin. Please show me how to receive both sides of your forgiveness and to forgive others in the same way. Amen.*

—Steve Diehl

*BIBLE READING: Ephesians 4:26*

I woke up in the middle of the night and needed to get a drink of water. As I walked through the dark room I tried to keep my eyes shut so as not to become fully awake. I wanted to go right back to sleep after the drink. However, I caught my little toe on the leg of a chair. You know how that felt! I was instantly awake with shocking pain—and then anger. I was angry at the chair for hurting me, so I kicked it. I kicked it because I wanted to make the chair suffer for what it had done to me. Anger can be a twisted form of the heart's cry for justice.

God is a God of justice and he put in every human soul the need to see and feel his justice against sin. This is why we feel angry when we are treated unfairly, when someone hurts us, when someone sins against us. This anger is our heart's cry for justice.

Some people think that forgiveness means disregarding justice or going around it when in fact real forgiveness goes right through the heart of God's justice. God executed justice against sin at the cross of Christ. And when you believe and can feel Jesus paying the penalty for a sin, then your heart's cry for justice will be fully satisfied and your anger will fade away.

*SONG: Jesus Messiah*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord God, teach me to bring my pain and anger to you so I can go with you to the place where you brought your anger: the cross of your Son Jesus. May his suffering and death fully satisfy my heart's cry for justice as it did yours. Amen.*

—Steve Diehl

*BIBLE READING: John 8:31-32*

When I was in high school I learned how to pass tests; I became very good at it. I received almost all A's in high school. However, I wasn't really learning as much as my grades indicated. I was just very good at managing information long enough to put the correct answer on the test, then let that information go. When I got to college I had to take many high school level classes over and really learn what I should have learned the first time.

Jesus said, "If you know the truth, the truth will set you free." But knowing the truth is more than information management. In the Hebrew culture to know something meant to have personal, intimate experience with it. They used this word for sexual intercourse. It is one thing to know the fact that Jesus died for the sins of the world. It is quite another thing to have personal, intimate experience with that truth. And that truth is not without intense emotional realities.

If we want to know the truth of the cross in a way that sets us free, then we need to learn how to feel the heart of God at the cross of Jesus Christ. What was God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—feeling as they paid the penalty for our sin? Pray that you will experience what God was experiencing and you will know that truth in a way that will set you free.

*SONG: Once Again (Matt Redman)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord God, you paid such a high price to make forgiveness possible. You sacrificed your Son, your only Son, whom you love. Please show me how to empathize with you and honor your sacrifice at the cross.*

—Steve Diehl

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 18:21-35*

I'm sure you've heard the statement, "Time heals all wounds." However, this statement is not true and is actually misleading. It is true that healing may take time, but time does not cause healing. A cut on a dead body cannot heal no matter how much time goes by because a dead body has no life. Living bodies heal because there is something in life that causes healing.

Peter was hoping that he didn't really have to forgive everyone every time. So he challenged Jesus with a reasonable question: "How many times do I have to forgive?" Won't the passing of time fix the problem? What Peter didn't understand was that practicing forgiveness is how God heals the human soul of the damage caused by sin. Without forgiveness there is no healing. This is why the unforgiving servant found himself handed over to torturers and in a prison. Torturers and prison are illustrations of the damage caused by sin. Injuries cause pain and limit freedom.

Practicing forgiveness is the way we allow more of God's life into our soul. Every time we confess a sin and receive God's forgiveness, every time we forgive someone else's sin, and every time we sincerely ask someone to forgive us, God is able to release more of his life into us and heal us of the damage caused by those sins. Practice forgiveness every time and let God heal you.

*SONG: Beautiful Things*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Heavenly Father, I need you to heal me of all the damage sin has caused in my soul. Please show me my sins, and the sins of others against me, so I can practice your forgiveness and let you release more of your life in me. Amen.*

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