

## WHEN IT IS YOU

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Series: Life In Community  
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Offender, Forgiveness  
John 18:15-17, 21-35

So we have been doing a short series on living together in community. And if we are honest with ourselves the more you open your heart and life up to people the deeper they can wound you. Yet the more you close people our the less you live. We were wired for community, yet the price of community is conflict.

So we are looking at offence and how to navigate through situations of conflict. And when something happens it could be just an offence, it could be sin or it could be a crime. Sometimes people forget that even in communities of faith, even in the church, sometimes people commit crimes against each other. We do not want to hide our heads in the sand and pretend that it does not happen. It does and it is ugly when it does. You see it on telly every other time.

The first week I talked about how important it will be to forgive. I was listening to a talk by a lady whose mom and brother had been murdered and she really struggled with that as anyone would. One of the things she described in her journey is her frustration with the fact that everyone talks about the importance of forgiveness but no one really tells you how to. It's forgiveness is the like the Nike of the Bible, Just DO IT.

She makes the observation we made on our first week, that withholding forgiveness locks you in a prison and essentially you remain there for as long as. Some people take years even while others even serve a life sentence.

And it is not about just saying the words I forgive you, though, that is useful in the process of forgiving but really working through the issues. Freeing yourself from being defined by one event in your life and not reducing the other person to one mistake in their life.

I am going to borrow some ideas from one of my friends and offer some questions that we could ask ourselves when we realize that we have something in our heart against someone. So in dealing with your own pain, you could ask yourself the following questions

### **1. *Is this the other person or is my own pain?***

The example I gave the other time is that if we have a wounded toe, all of a sudden it appears that everything in the house and everyone is gunning for your toe. Sometimes we have wounds that make us more susceptible to a certain kind of offence or hurt.

And here is how you know. It was the same issue the last several times you were hurt in this way by different people. The last 3 churches you left, the last 2 marriages that fell apart, the last 4 relationships you walked out of. The last 7 jobs you resigned from. If it has always been the same issue, you are a player in it, not just a receiver. Because guess who was present in all of those? Guess they all had in common? You.

Now I am not saying that they are not offending you, I am saying you may have a journey to take within you. And I get it, the whole world could be wrong and you the only one who is right, but hey, it is worth checking it out.

### ***2. Is it a real offence or is it my historic insecurities falling up?***

Is this a one-time thing or is it history? And we all are insecure about different things in our lives. The problem is not being aware of it. Our lack of awareness of our own insecurities will colour the way we look at people around us when they offend us. Not saying that it is still not worth a conversation with whoever hurt us, it just brings a lot more perspective on why we are hurting like we are and how to approach it.

### ***3. Do I have unrealistic expectations of this person?***

And by that I mean expecting of them things that only God can truly fulfil. True Joy, true peace, healing, feeling of being complete. Do we expect that they would be perfect? Or just generally expectations.

See the challenge we all have to deal with is the fact that every time we get into any relationship is we often come with a bag of expectations some of them, cultural some of them from our interpretations of the Bible. Whether those are wrong or right. The challenge is when you give someone your bag of expectations then they owe you.

They are in debt. And when we walk around holding this over each other's heads we miss out on relationship because we are focused on what is owed to us. So, is this offence coming from a place of failed expectation?

Basically, on our journey of forgiveness and even approaching those who have offended and hurt us it is so important to be self-aware. To know what part is yours. To know what part of the pain is overblown by our own state.

There is an interesting story in the Bible of a prophet called Elijah who got so mad with God by the way that he wanted to die, He felt so disappointed and hurt by God that he asked God to kill him. Instead, God made provisions for him to be fed by some birds and then he fell asleep. When he woke up he was not as mad. So if you are very angry, before you deal with the situation, have some food and take a nap. You might wake up better placed to deal with the situation.

So how then do you have the conversation? Invite them into the story. Have you realized that when we are hurt we often have the conversation with the offender in our heads before we approach them?

So if I offended you last week and you have been waiting to have a conversation with me today, you have had 7 days dealing with the issue, I have not had a chance to. So do not start on day 7. Do not start the conversation where you are, instead invite your friend into the whole conversation. Assume I do not know, walk me through it.

Important to remember is what you think they meant by what they said is your interpretation of their words. Interpretation is coloured by our worldview, experience and even our current state.

So instead of accusing, bring them into your story. Use phrases such as, “this is the story I am telling myself?” Or “This is what that made me feel” instead of You did this and you meant this? What you are doing is honouring the person who offended you and not reducing them to the event?

One other thing that we often do when approaching people who have offended us that gets in the way of healing and reconciliation is we brand and label them. We say things like “but you are a liar”. The problem with this is that you stop dealing with the person in front of you and you start dealing with the label.

You can say things like, “I felt lied to.” It does not change the fact that it could be just a matter of interpretation or it could be that you were actually lied to, but it changes the how you look at the person who has hurt you. You are not using one event to define them.

And journeying into forgiveness, you have to really identify what it is you are forgiving. You cannot forgive what has not been done to you. Yet when we are hurt, our emotions can misappropriate the pain. Sometimes we are hurt but we aren’t sure what exactly we are hurt by. This can make it hard to forgive.

For example in Jewish tradition in, say the case of murder, the family of the bereaved cannot forgive the murder because that did not happen to them.

However, the family had a future with their loved one robbed from them. The loved ones loved them and gave them a sense of belonging no one else could. These are things they can forgive because they have been done to them. Unless you are clear about what exactly has been done to you, you might not know what you are forgiving and you might not forgive.

And, as the body of Christ, we can speak the forgiveness of God to people who are walking around with guilt and shame for the things they have done. Actually, after resurrection one of the charges Jesus gave to the disciples is to forgive sin. Here is how he says it

John 20:23

***“If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”***

And it is not because the forgiveness of God is so conditional that you need a letter of recommendation or approval from the church for God to forgive you. Rather, some people are walking around with so much weight of guilt and shame on their shoulders that they cannot hear God’s voice saying they are forgiven, So it is our job to literally walk around and when we meet such people within the church or outside the church and say the words, “God forgives you”

God does not see their entire life as the one thing they did. As a matter of fact and promise, God sees their entire life through the lens of the forgiveness Jesus poured out on the cross.

This is when we are in a position to forgive. How about when we are the offender?

The Magazine the *Times of London* once invited contributions in response to the question “What is wrong with the world?” They sent out the invitations to the brightest minds and a guy called Gilbert K. Chesterton replied in a letter saying

**“Dear sirs, I am”**

What do you do when you get to the realization that this time it was you. Now just like I said, if you stay in community long enough, even here at Trinity Vineyard you are sure to get offended. I know we look like nice people.

Here is the other side of that coin. If you stay in community long enough even here at Trinity, it will soon be your turn to offend. One day it will be you or it has already been you.

I often stand here and use the phrase that everyone gets to play. Normally I say that in the context of work around the church and ministry. There are no special players. We all get to serve, we all get to pray for the sick, we all can. We all should. But in a twisted way, I want you to know that even in offence we all kinda get to play.

And if it is never you, maybe that is because it's always you. If it hasn't been you in your marriage in the last 3 years, maybe that's because it has always been you. Sometimes it's me. Sometimes it's you. Sometimes it's us.

It is hard being in the receiving end of correction but we all need to be sitting in that chair from time to time. We all need to be called out. This is part of becoming who God is making us. Both the one doing the calling out and the one being called out. If you are not taking part in any of these you are missing out on a great part of your becoming. If you are not stepping into boldness and kindness in calling out people you love and if you are not being called out when you are the problem, you are missing out on a great part of becoming who God is calling you.

Some people leave walk away from community the moment they have been offended or called out on something. The idea is to sit through the tensions and let God do his work in us.

And when you have hurt someone rather when someone is hurt by you and you are aware of it, do not ignore it. Here is how Jesus puts it

Matthew 5:23-24

***“This is how I want you to conduct yourself in these matters. If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God.*”**

Listen, unity, reconciliation forgiveness are such important things in the community of faith that you cannot ignore the knowledge that you have hurt someone. And it does not even say, you sinned against them or you committed a crime or you treated them unfairly, it says if you remember that someone has something against you, that takes precedence.

You see sometimes we hide behind offerings. Our lifted hands in worship, our tears or joy or even the gifts of the Holy Spirit when we become aware of the move of God in and around

us. Just because you can prophesy or speak in tongues or whatever other spiritual things, it does not mean that God does not care about your friend's pain. The thing is God does not have to be against you to be for your hurting friend but He surely cares for your friends just as much.

And let us not get it wrong, it is not just about when you come to gather as a church to worship but if worship is a lifestyle then every time we come to an awareness that we are in God's presence, and in our mind we remember that our brother is hurt by us, that becomes the most important thing. In Jesus' view, it becomes more important than the song you are about to sing or the prayer you are about to make.

May I suggest that it is actually the Holy Spirit prompting you to something that has to be done. So this is just as spiritual as any other thing you consider sacred. So drop everything, call your spouse, call your employee, call your colleague, get things right. If you need to skip church for a weekend and get it right with the family. Get it right.

It is not that God is petty and He will snob you for not playing nice. No, the same concern God has for you, he has for the other person. You cannot hurt someone's child and pretend to be okay with them. Also, so many of the promises God makes and the life He invites us to, are in community with each other and with Him. You cannot lose either and expect to experience life in fullness.

You cannot experience the fullness of God's presence if you know too well that your spouse has something against you that you have not dealt with.

So then what to do?

**1. Allow them to speak up. Do Not Interrupt**

You see a big chunk of people's pain lifts when they get the opportunity to say what they feel we need to say. Especially to the one who has hurt them. Hopefully, the other person handles their end of the conversation a little as we talked about earlier. But even if they did not remind yourself that they are hurt and so may be emotional. Keep listening. Do not interrupt, do not correct their story.

**2. Echo back what you have heard from them. Show them you were listening ask if you got it covered**

Because you really want to be able to capture the essence of their pain. You wanna make sure you understand what actually hurt them. Often when people are hurt the pain is covered in so many stories and scenarios. Echo back what you have heard asking the question, "Does this cover it?"

**3. Acknowledge that they are hurt. You do not get to decide when and if people should be hurt**

This is not time to school them. Well, you should grow up, people go through this every day. Well, you should stop being too sensitive. Well, let me explain myself. Whether you are right about them or so you think. Whether there is some sort of explanation to what you did, first acknowledge that they are hurt.

You do not get to decide what should hurt other people. If there is a need for an explanation it only comes after their pain has been acknowledged. And maybe in a different forum. You do not even get to explain yourself until made things right.

If at that moment you have pain too and had been offended, because it always takes two to tango, wait. If it is reconciliation you are after, take your part first. Then once that is handled you switch positions to do the same gracefully.

#### **4. Genuinely apologize for your part. Don't lie about what is not your part**

Genuinely apologize for their hurt. Regardless of whether you think it is legitimate or not, that is not your job to determine. This shows you care about them. It is not a fact-finding mission that is for another forum. Whether that happens minutes after this, days or months, it does not come until you have acknowledged that something about what you said or did not say, or did or did not do hurt them.

After that is handled then you can offer an explanation if any. You can then draw a picture of where you are coming from. I then told you the story they have been telling themselves about the scenario, you can then tell them the story you have been telling yourself.

Just like forgiveness, if you need a bit more time to talk through things it is better than just offering a blanket I am sorry when you do not even believe that you are. The truth is one of the biggest desire for human beings is to be understood and even you want that. So for the things that you actually did that are wrong, be genuinely sorry for them but do not lie about the things you are still not there. This is different from acknowledging their pain. There are no 2 ways around acknowledging people's pain. That you need to. But about the things we own up for in a safe relationship with mutual grace.

Listen this is the reality about community. If you are this is your first time, let me invite you into a community where we want to be real. We love Jesus, we are filled with the Holy Spirit yet we make mistakes and hurt each other. And we are ready to learn how to walk into that place of healing and growth in love.

So let me invite us to respond to the Holy Spirit

*Let's Pray*