

The Power of Forgiveness

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I. Introduction

My name is Clint Guymon and I'm honored to speak to you today. Here's a few things about me:

- I'm originally from a small town in central Utah called Spring Glen
- I'm married to my high school sweat heart Nanci. You all know she's amazing
- I like doing hard things which is one reason I'm a member of this church
- I recently changed jobs to work at BYU and I feel inadequate and much like an imposter. If I compare myself to those immediately around me, it can easily be very discouraging.
- We have two missionaries out, Isaiah and Mason.
 - Isaiah is in Peru and this week had a couple of baptisms near the city of Milagro in Trujillo
 - Mason is in the MTC speaking with a fairly good accent and studying the scriptures and Spanish
- My father, who I was really close to, was killed in a single vehicle accident in Price Canyon just after I was married at 22, now 22 years ago. He had such a strong testimony of redemption and forgiveness.

II. Forgiveness Definition: Release

Bishop Steve Densley asked me to speak on the power of forgiveness. Forgiveness is defined as a conscious deliberate act to release feelings of vengeance or resentment toward another person who may have hurt you or someone you care about. Forgiveness is releasing your preoccupation of your thoughts on perceived injustice and how to obtain justice. Forgiveness is a release.

When I think of release, I think of releasing a balloon. I like balloons filled with helium that float in the air. One of my favorite movies is that movie where the helium filled balloons carry the small house to Paradise Falls in the movie Up.

The balloons I had as a kid had a small single string that was difficult to hold on to. Sometimes the string was tied around my wrist. If it wasn't tied around my wrists, I had to consciously remember to hold onto it while I tried to do other things. If while doing those other things, like walking, and I forgot about the string in my hand, I'd loose the string into the sky.

When I lost a balloon or purposely let it go, there was a sense of loss: what occupied my thoughts and was mine was no longer under my control. After releasing the balloon there was worry and then wonder as it climbed higher and higher. I could look up at it and see it getting smaller and smaller until eventually it was gone. I could not control it nor

could I see or easily find out what happened to it. It was gone.

When you forgive, you no longer focus on the ways you've been injured or how such a scenario could have happened. Your thoughts are changed and you have a different focus. As Christians our new focus, the focus of our thoughts can be on the Savior or how to better follow him or how to serve those around us. Forgiveness is a change of focus. I suggest that our focus inside our heads can be changed from what we resent and the person that has hurt us to the person that can heal us, Jesus Christ.

III. Forgiveness is a Commandment

Jesus is a master healer and lived an amazing life that was full of many many instances of being wronged. He was derided and mistreated and unheeded and injured over and over by people that should have worshiped Him. He was spit upon, He was asked to leave, He was crucified, He was ignored, He was rejected and despised of men. He was misinterpreted and He was nailed to a cross. Each of those events was perpetrated by someone for which he could have easily enacted vengeance or justice. He could have cursed those who mistreated him; He could have brought any number of just measures against the perpetrator.

Despite being wronged repeatedly he kept His focus on His father and being obedient and doing those things that His father asked him to do. Jesus forgave others often. He readily released any feelings of resentment or anger against even the most foul offender. He observed his own teaching of doing good to those that hate us and despitefully use us.

Jesus did not focus on vengeance or bringing justice to the world but quite the opposite. His was not a message of justice but a message of mercy of not focusing on the just response to an action to return that to another person but to always give kindness. His focus was on His father and on the divine potential of those around him. Our focus can be on Him and doing those things that please Him.

The Savior commanded us to forgive. We are to forgive often, repeatedly, and to remain focused on the Savior. He said:

I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men.(D&C 64:8-11),
and

Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.
(Mathew 18:21-22)

The seventy times seven is not a reference to an actual number (four hundred and ninety) but to the meaning of seven or to forgive fully or perfectly. It means here that our focus should never be on vengeance or on justice but on Him.

IV. Ball and Chain

Forgive me for the balloon allegory as oftentimes the things we focus on are more like a ball and chain: a clasp around our ankles with a heavy iron chain with multiple linkages connected to a large heavy metal ball. It is like a ball and chain as the consequences of other people's offenses against us may be long lasting or apparently ever present. In those cases, it may seem impossible to release or grant forgiveness. Balls and chains are made of iron and are heavy and restricting. Carrying around a ball and chain is hard and exhausting as it limits our aptitude by requiring more energy to complete tasks. With the wrong focus, heavy laden, we miss things, we miss opportunities, we miss freedom.

Despite our ball and chains, changing our focus to the Savior and releasing those feelings of resentment and vengeance can be done. We each have the keys to our own personal ball and chains. The key is with us. The key is always in our pocket. It is our God given agency to decide for ourselves what we will focus on.

Our offers of forgiveness does not require acknowledgement of responsibility or guilt by the perpetrator. The Savior's commandment to forgive everyone has no caveats, no qualifications. We are to forgive even if the perpetrator isn't sorry or doesn't regret their actions.

Meditation and mindfulness or imagination and visualization are tools we can use to change our focus. It can be very helpful to visualize letting go or releasing our resentment. We can imagine that release as letting go of a balloon and watching it float away and then turning and looking to the Savior. Or we can imagine taking the key out of our pocket inserting it into the locked clasp, opening it, and stepping out and walking away with a renewed focus on God.

V. Attribution of Happiness

In my case, I have not been seriously wronged by anyone. I have not suffered abuse or neglect or serious bullying or physical harm. However, I have suffered from the common expectation that other people should behave in a way to make me happy. As you all know, it is a very common perspective that if someone or something is not making us happy, it's their fault. We may hold grudges that despite our invitations, or simply our unspoken desires, for family members or friends to change, they refuse. This is one of the most common sources of resentment we might feel. These feelings can be frequent.

Forgiveness in such scenarios also requires us to clearly understand two critical principles:

- 1) First, each person has their God given individual right to agency. We cannot and should not control others.
- 2) and Second, we should not base our happiness or perception of happiness on other's behavior.

Understanding that others have agency is celebrated and understood clearly for the most part. However, not basing our level of happiness (or lack of resentment) on other's behavior is hard. It is hard to see other people make decisions that we know will ultimately result in their sadness (and our sadness). Enoch recorded the weeping of God as evidence of this and the great price of individual freedom: a God who weeps.

We can forgive and release others, especially our family members, from expectations to make us happy. Elder

Holland said:

Think the best of each other, especially of those you say you love. Assume the good and doubt the bad.

We can think the best of each other and instead of focusing on what others should do, we can focus on our individual actions to follow the Savior.

VI. Forgiveness of Self

By far the most common form of resentment that we feel may be against ourselves. Most people are hardest on themselves. Do you often wish you behaved differently or could do more or be more? Are you disappointed with yourself sometimes? If you're anything like me, your answers to these questions would be a private yes.

Our own internal self doubt and too often self loathing is very limiting and offensive to God. Perhaps the greatest frequency of forgiveness we can give, that God would have us give, is forgiveness of ourselves.

Of course we make mistakes, of course, in comparison to others, we come up short, of course, we can improve. Despite these facts, we don't need to worry, we don't need to be anxious, we don't need to run faster than we have strength. Jesus Christ should be our focus. We should focus on what we are doing, the good we have done, and the amazing things that can be accomplished when we work in concert with God.

Our focus shouldn't be on our own happiness. Our focus shouldn't be on the ways we fail. Our focus should be on the Savior, shouldn't it? God said it should be:

Learn of me, and listen to my words; walk in the meekness of my Spirit, and you shall have peace in me.
(D&C 19:23)

He also said:

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.(Matt 11:28-30)

Making God our focus does make our lives easier and lighter. It should feel lightening to know also that God forgives us. Over and over he forgives us as he's said:

Yea, and as often as my people repent (change their focus to the Savior) will I forgive them their trespasses against me. (Mos. 26:30, Mor. 6:8)

As God forgives us, we can forgive ourselves. Often and repeatedly.

VII. Power

As we forgive others and as we forgive ourselves, we will reap the blessings of an increased focus on the Savior and becoming more like Him. He can make more of our lives than we can. President Ezra Taft Benson said:

Men and women who turn their lives over to God will discover that He can make a lot more out of their lives than they can. He will deepen their joys, expand their vision, quicken their minds, strengthen their muscles, lift their spirits, multiply their blessings, increase their opportunities, comfort their souls, raise up friends, and pour out peace.

Another prophet, Mosiah, testified of the benefits of following the Savior and said:

I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness.

I know that the benefits of offering and granting forgiveness to others and to ourselves far outweigh the price. Like repentance, forgiveness is choosing to focus on the Savior. It is releasing feelings of resentment and desires for vengeance. God would have us forgive, to frequently forgive ourselves and others.