**SHAME OFF YOU : LEASHED UP**

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I'll never forget what happened a while back. I was putting gas in my car, right beside a really busy intersection. I'm just minding my own business. And I'm looking, and I see this guy, he's running, and he has this leash, and leashed up to his leash, was a massive Doberman. In fact, seeing this Doberman made Lisa and I buy Dobermans, and raise Dobermans, which we love, but that's a whole notha story.

This guy's running, and he waits until the light is red and everything. So, I'm pumping gas, and I'm watching him cross this busy intersection. And he kind of trots over to the gas station, ties this massive dog to the bench outside of this little convenience store slash gas station.

I watched him do that. He told the dog to sit, and the dog obeyed. Then he went inside. Obviously, to get something to drink, or whatever. So, I'm just pumping gas and looking at this dog leashed up to this bench. Suddenly, I still can't believe this. The dog was startled, turned toward the traffic, because now the light was green. Ran with such torque he jerked the bench out of the cement. Drug the bench behind him, sparks flying. He was making a beeline toward the traffic, and I'm thinking, I am getting ready to see a colossal collision.

As the dog made it into the busy street, cars were skidding, honking. This dog ran through these cars like Derrick Henry running through a defensive line. Yet, he was slinging this bench behind him. Bam. Just trashed a suburban. Bam. He slung it, and trashed a minivan. I was like, "you have got to be kidding me." It was complete and total chaos.

You and I are more like that Doberman than you care to admit. If the truth were known, we are pulling a bench around, and this bench is causing a lot of collateral damage in our lives. It's messing up friends, families, marriages, careers. Basically, we have shame sitting on our bench, and we're slinging shame everywhere, yet so many of us don't even realize it.

I’ve got to ask you, are you leashed up to shame? Moreover, are you leashed up to that thing that, you could call it an entity, that will take shame out of your life? Are you linked up to unforgiveness? Because when the dust settles, as far as dealing with shame, we have to understand, God is a shame off God. God wants everything off the bench, everything. It begins with forgiveness and God's forgetfulness. It's hard to imagine with our limitations. God, in his omniscience, forgives you and me of our sin, our guilt, and shame, and forgets. The Bible says, "As far as the east is from the west," (Psalm 103:12)

I'm just going to ask you straight up once again; do you have shame sitting on your bench? And moreover, usually shame is shoveled onto our lives, or are we shovel it ourselves. Who is sitting on the bench of your life? An ex-spouse. A parent. A trusted relative who took advantage of you. You might be going, "Well, Ed, the person sitting on the bench of my life died seven years ago." Who is sitting on the bench of your lives? Because they represent shame. And it could be yourself because we have to forgive ourselves.

This whole scenario took place that I want to describe to you in Matthew chapter 18. If you have your Bibles, you want to turn to Matthew chapter 18. This text starts off with a question. I think questions are funny. Have you ever heard someone ask a question in a public forum? And you're like, that guy, that girl, they didn't want to really ask a question, they just wanted to show everyone how smart they are. Have you ever seen that? I'm like, "Bro, get to the point. I know you're smart. I know you have an Ivy League education, or you're CEO of whatever. Just ask the dang question."

Well, Simon Peter was doing this. It was the humble brag of all humble brags. "Jesus.", he said in **Matthew 18:21 (NIV-84),** **“Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?”** Rabbis taught, if you forgive three times, that's like monster forgiveness. Simon Peter's going, "Oh, I'll show everybody how great I am. Should I forgive someone like seven times?" He wanted everyone to go, "Wow, Simon Peter, you're so spiritual. You're such a leader. Ooo. Ah."

Before we allow Jesus to answer that question, Jesus launches into this story. When Simon Peter is just bringing up forgiveness, or better yet, unforgiveness. Because forgiveness, he was muddy about it. Forgiveness, he was cloudy about it. Forgiveness is more for the offended than the offender. And he thought, oh, it's for the offender. He thought like I think, and you think. Someone has caused shame in my life. Someone has hurt me. Someone has abused me. Someone has been mean to me. Someone has bullied me. I am going to wait until they crawl back to me and ask me to forgive them. I'm not going to forgive them. Are you kidding me? They hurt me. They are in the wrong.

Who is that person or persons sitting on the bench of your life that you're dragging around, causing collateral damage? Jesus launches into the story, Matthew 18, about unforgiveness and forgiveness. This master, the Bible says, was settling his accounts. (Matthew 18:23-25) So, he's going through his massive portfolio and he's loaned people this and that. There was one guy that owed him $10 million. Now that's no chunk change. $10 million. He brings the servant into his office, and he goes, "Okay, it's time to pay. It is time to take care of the 10 million. I need the money." Well, the servant's like, "Are you kidding me? I can't pay 10 million. I don't have it. I won't have it in a lifetime."

$10 million. Ouch. That's a lot of debt.

Back in this day, sorry attorneys, you couldn't file for Chapter 13 or Chapter 11. You couldn't file for some continuance. If you were the person that loaned 10 million and the person couldn't pay it, you could literally sell them down the river. You could sell their family, throw them in prison. It was not a pretty thing. So, this guy that's like, "Man, I can't pay the 10 million," he gets on his knees and begs his master, "Please give me more time. Please, please, let's work something out." And the master does something that's unbelievable. He forgives the guy, the debt. "Don't worry about it." He's like, "What?" "No, no, don't worry about it. 10 million, boom, gone. You don't have to worry about it at all. I'm good. You're good. Just have a great day." (Matthew 18:26-27)

Now, put yourself in his sandals. How would you feel if someone forgave you $10 million? Someone forgave you of a sum of money that you could never, ever, ever in your wildest dreams pay back? How would you feel? Man, I would feel so good. Skip and jump and yeah. I would just... and you're the same way. We would have a party, wouldn't we?

Well, this forgiven servant, the $10 million man, he goes out, Jesus says, and finds a brother that owes him about $10 or maybe $20, this forgiven guy, chokes him out. The guy taps out, he drags him and throws him into prison. (Matthew 18:28-30)

Woo. I can't believe that. Think about that. You're forgiven. You've been shown mercy and grace. So, have I. And then I'm going to go out, you're going to go out and choke someone out that owes you like 10 bucks. Obviously, he didn't understand what had happened. He didn't understand mercy. He didn't understand what the master had done.

Let's let the Bible unpack it. **Matthew 18:32-35** (NIV-84), **32“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ 34In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.”** And now verse 35, I wish I could delete this verse from the Bible. This is an in-your-face verse. You're not going to see this verse on coffee mugs or T-shirts or bracelets or key chains. It's not going to be there. **35“‘This is how My heavenly Father will treat each of you** **unless you forgive your brother from your heart.’”**

Unleashing unforgiveness is unnatural, isn't it? It flies in the face of every instinct I have. I'm not going to forgive that person. They wronged me. They put shame on me. That situation in my family, that ordeal at school, what that person posted about me on social media, that lady, she robbed me. Do you think I'm going to release them? But Jesus says “yes”. Because when we release them, when we unleash unforgiveness, it's more for ourselves than the perpetrator. Because the people who were lining your bench, they probably don't even know what they've done. Some do, but a lot of them don't.

Who's sitting on your bench, and what do they represent? Maybe there's an inadequacy there. A lot of us feel **inadequate**, don't we? Feeling inadequate is lacking a quality required. In the enemy, the devil himself loves to perpetuate psychological warfare. Now we talk about spiritual warfare, but the subset of that is psychological warfare. If he can get you or me to think about, I'm inadequate, I'm inadequate. I lack the quality required to do and to be who I should be, he's got you and he's got me.

Maybe it's **insecurity**, lacking confidence, or as I say, Godfidence. You matter to God. I matter to God. We have Godfidence because we've acquiesced to Jesus. My security should not be found in what others think of me, although that's always a temptation. It's got to be what God thinks of me. And then I've got to have the right THEY around me to applaud that fact and point me to that fact. You want a great self-esteem. See yourself before God and how God looks at you. God says, you're lovable, you're valuable, you're forgivable, you're capable.

There's another person. Maybe this other person or situation in your life is the **insignificant** feeling that you get. That's a lack of meaning. I don't really have meaning. There's not really a purpose for me. I'm a no count. I'm not that good. I've messed up. You have no idea what I did in the past.

But remember, if we have said "God, will you forgive me.", and pinpoint those issues, God will forgive us, and he will forget. His omniscient, I don't know how he does it, the sin, but too many of us, again, we're just tethered to unforgiveness. Are you living your life this way? Are you slinging shame this way? Unleashing unforgiveness is unnatural but watch this. Unleashing unforgiveness is unbelievable. God wants us to be free. The Holy Spirit of God wants to hear that sound in all of our lives.

Think about it. Jesus was the only perfect person who ever lived perfectly balanced in every realm. His words don't just contain truth, they are truth. So, this is the 411, the deal, the T on how to process a unforgiveness. I know a lot of secular people have written some things about shame and they're good, but they're basing it off of the words of Jesus. The popular author, psychologist, Brené Brown, you've probably heard of her. She basically says, "You deal with shame by being empathetic and vulnerable." Yeah, those are two good things to think about, but those are two little aspects of the big picture of the gospel, the forgiveness, and the forgetfulness that Jesus gives us. That's not going to take you where you want to go. It's good to read and to understand those things, but as the Bible says, “…the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31) And Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life.” (John 14:6)

Now at this point, Simon Peter's going, "Why in the heck did I bring the subject up?" You know he's saying that. "Why did I even talk about forgiveness?" Because Jesus answered the question in **Matthew 18:22, “Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.’”** Seven times seven or 77 times in some translations. You know what that means? Over and over and over. But I don't feel like it. Over and over and over.

What I'm talking about is sanctification. Sanctification, to boil it down is maturing in Christ. It's growing in Christ. We're saved or rescued. We have the salvation experience. Yet there are many layers of our emotions that the Holy Spirit wants and needs to deal with. Some of these emotions, resentment, anger, are a critical spirit, they need to be dealt with each many times and every day as we walk in this freedom.

So, what do we need to do? Well, I'll tell you what we need to say. We out dis bench. Oh, somebody. Come on. You got to laugh at that. That was funny. That was truly funny. Some were like, "I can't believe he said that." We out this bench. Lisa's on the front row and she got it the second time. She goes, "Oh, I got it." That's so sweet. Isn't that funny? Yes, it's not... If you can't laugh, something's wrong with you. Let's just laugh.

Okay. Here's what we need to do. What's going to happen? Most people will not remember anything else that sermon is about. Our pastor said, "We out this bench. I tell you, I couldn't believe it, but he said it. I don't know. That's kind of..." No, just press the delete button on that phrase. Several things we can do right now and next week. We'll, what? We'll wrap this whole thing up. But the first thing I want you to do homework. **LOOK UP.** Now I want you to take the flinch test. That's what it means. Look up, **the Resentment Test.** Is there somebody in your life if I bring their name up, you kind of flinch. Look them up on this bench. Who are they? The Holy Spirit will tell you who they are. You know who they are, but you don't know. I don't know. God does. Leave room for the wrath of God. He's going to take care of them much better than you or I can. Look up.

Number two, **OWN UP**. We live in a land of victims, don't we? **Take responsibility for your life.** If you're like me, I like to have people to blame. I do. People that have hurt me. I like to have conversations with my friends, "Can you believe what that person said about me? Can you believe what that person did to me? Can you believe," blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, and then we have these fantasy conversations, how we're going to tell them off in front of all these people, and they'll give us a standing ovation, "Yeah, Ed, you told him. You told her the deal, man." No, we can't worry about that. We have to take responsibility for it and do the work. You see, we have to work out what by God's grace and mercy, He has worked in. We're saved by grace through faith, period, selah, but we work it out in our sanctification.

The third one is, we **BLOW UP.** Do you find yourself sometimes **reacting** or maybe overreacting at a situation? You're like, "Why did I do that? Wow, that's weird. I wonder why I did that." Usually, you can trace it back to shame, to unforgiveness. I like what AA says, **"It works if you work it, and you work it because you are worth it."**

Go back to me pumping gas at the gas station, the chaos and the Doberman slinging this bench from side to side like Derek Henry going through a defensive line, stiff-arming here and there. His master in the store heard it, opened the door, began to run, spilling Gatorade everywhere, called the dog by name, "Thor, Thor," finally grabbed the leash, unfastened it, and led the dog to safety. Our master, Jesus, is chasing you down and me down. He's calling you by name. Won't you respond and allow him to unleash unforgiveness?

As our heads are bowed and our eyes are closed, Father, I ask that the precious Holy Spirit, your precious Holy Spirit, will move in our lives and just show us the situations, the people that are sources of shame, that we would just unleash unforgiveness. That sound right now is happening in so many lives here and in our various locations. If you're here and you've never ever, ever made the decision to receive Christ, you can simply just say, "Jesus, I admit to you the obvious, that I'm a sinner. I understand my greatest need is a savior. I believe you died in the cross for my sins and rose again for my sins, and I turn from my sins and turn to you, Jesus. I ask you to come into my life." The many different ways that the Holy Spirit works, the many different decisions, God, we give these to you. We ask all these things in Christs’ name. Amen.