

Consumed Part 2

Imprisoned by the Past

The story of Michal's life is both tragic and bitter: tragic because she was faced with unfathomable difficulties, heartbreaking losses, great pain and sorrow; bitter because every difficulty, pain, and sorrow was relived day after day until her present torture was far greater than the pain of the original offense. Michal's life is an example of an important truth: the wife who will not forgive the trespasses of her husband will suffer far more than he.

Unforgiveness is an unwillingness "to let go from one's power, possession, to let go free, let escape."¹ It is an attempt to protect ourselves, and those we love, from future attacks or encroachments. It is an effort to obtain satisfaction for a wrong by punishing the wrongdoer. It is an opportunity to exercise our perceived role as judge by condemning and sentencing. It is the choice to *maintain* our "right" to be angry and demand payment for the wrongs inflicted upon us. Ultimately, unforgiveness is the choice to hold on to that which has caused us the most pain.

Psalm 130:3-4, 7 says, "*If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You... For with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is abundant redemption*" (NKJV).

Merciless

Read Matthew 18:21-35 and then answer the following questions:

How did the king respond to the servant's request for patience (v.27)? _____

How did the servant respond to his gift (v.28-30)? _____

The word "*found*" indicates that the servant went out in search of his fellow servant. Compile a list of evidences pointing to the fact that the servant had no regard for what the king had just done for him. _____

What did his fellow servant owe him in comparison to what he owed the king? _____

"*Ten thousand talents*" is equal to millions of dollars today. According to Matthew 20:2 a man earned approximately one denarius for a day's work. Six-thousand denarii is equivalent to one talent. As you can see, a debt of "*a hundred denarii*" is insignificant in comparison to ten thousand talents!

We can assume that the king's forgiveness of such a large debt quickly became public knowledge. In what ways did the unforgiving servant's actions bring public disgrace to the king? _____

How did the unforgiving servant's choice to exercise wrath rather than mercy adversely affect his fellow servants? _____

How did the unforgiving servant bring shame to himself? _____

How did the king respond to the servant's actions? _____

According to verse 33, what quality did the unforgiving servant lack towards his fellow servant? _____

Amy Carmichael once said, "If I have not compassion on my fellow-servant, even as my Lord had pity on me, then I know nothing of Calvary love."²

Read Matthew 6:14-15. How does this verse further expound the truth in Amy's words? _____

What was the fate of the unforgiving servant? The fellow servant? _____

Which of the two servants suffered more? Why? _____

It is doubtful that the unforgiving servant realized that he was paving the way to his own imprisonment when he threw his fellow servant behind bars. It is certain, however, that his wrath and malice—his desire to see his fellow servant suffer—blinded him to the consequences of his actions.

Read Matthew 7:1-5.

Can you imagine his anguish when he looked over his shoulder to find that he shared a prison cell with the man he deemed unworthy of his forgiveness?

Judgment

Pride reduces our sin and magnifies the sin of others, blinding us to our own condition. The unforgiving servant and the fellow servant were both "debtors" in need of compassion and mercy—a truth we cannot afford to disregard.

To justify withholding forgiveness, wives must assume the role of judge—a place reserved only for God, for He alone has the right and the authority to judge our husband's sin and deem him worthy of forgiveness or condemnation.

Read the following passages and list the reasons why we must not judge.

- Romans 2:1-5, 11 _____

- James 4:11-12 _____

- John 8:14-18 _____

Luke 6:37 says, “Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven” (NKJV).

Unforgiveness is fueled by judgment and judgment is fueled by pride. As was stated a moment ago, pride first blinds us to our own sinful condition and then says, “I am incapable of committing such a sin...”

What warning is given against such self-assurance in 1 Corinthians 10:12? _____

When Peter asked Jesus how often he should allow his brother to sin against him, he didn’t take into account how often *he* sinned against Him. (See Proverbs 20:9, Ecclesiastes 7:20, and Romans 3:10-18, 23.) In reply to Peter’s question, Jesus said (paraphrased), “Forgive him as I have forgiven you.” “...*up to seventy times seven*” (NKJV).

In His illustration, Jesus intended that Peter put himself in the place of the unforgiving servant. What is revealed in us if *we* are unable to put ourselves in his place? _____

“Your brother owes you nothing in comparison to what you owe Me! You have no right to withhold forgiveness from him. I didn’t forgive you because you deserved it, but because you begged, and My love couldn’t deny you.”

Read 1 John 2:9-11.

Limits

Jesus placed no conditions on Peter’s forgiveness of his brother. Did Jesus ask Peter *how* or *how long* his brother had sinned against him?

If these conditions were placed on us, what would that mean in our relationship with Christ?

According to Mark 11:25-26, *what* are we to forgive? _____

Your husband's failure to repent should not be an excuse to withhold your forgiveness. The king in the parable of the unforgiving servant clearly expected his servant to show the same compassion, mercy, and forgiveness he had been shown whether his fellow servant asked for it or not.

Read 1 John 4:20-21.

"Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12, NKJV, emphasis mine). *"As we forgive..."* Can you pray, "Lord, please forgive me in the same way I've forgiven those who've sinned against me."? Why or why not? _____

Phillip Keller said, "The degree to which I am able and willing to forgive others is a clear indication of the extent to which I have personally experienced God my Father's forgiveness for me."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Unforgiveness begins with the choice to remain angry and resentful over a single offense. It becomes compounded as we search for further evidence to justify our position. In what ways are you "looking" to justify your unforgiveness?

2. The more we build up a transgression in our mind, the less it will resemble the original offense. In what ways have you allowed your emotions to magnify, *or* distort your husband's offense?

How does judging his motives further magnify, or distort his transgression?

3. In what ways have you used unforgiveness as a shield to protect yourself or those you love from further pain?

The fear of reliving the pain of an offense can cause you to harden your heart toward your husband. How have you pushed your husband away to keep yourself from becoming vulnerable?

4. Because forgiveness means "to let go free," do you fear that your offender will not be held accountable for his actions?

In what ways have you taken retribution into your own hands?

5. Read Romans 12:9, Hebrews 10:26-31, and 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9. Who will hold your husband accountable for his actions?

6. Romans 14:10-13 tells us that judgment—and *unforgiveness*—will "*put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our [husband's] way*" (NKJV). Why?

7. What truth is contained in the following statements: If your husband is an unbeliever, he will never see Jesus through your wrath, malice, and bitterness. If your husband *is* a believer

and you refuse to forgive, he will see nothing but a hypocrite. Consider 1 Peter 3:1-2 and Ephesians 4:31-5:2.

8. “Withholding forgiveness until an offender understands or acknowledges the emotional pain they have inflicted is a subtle form of revenge. Why? Because it’s hoping that the offender would hurt a little too in order to understand. But this type of revenge robs you of your freedom and allows the offender to keep control of you.”³ How have you subtly taken revenge?

9. Read 2 Corinthians 2:10-11. How does unforgiveness provide Satan the opportunity to take advantage of you?

10. How does your inability to forgive deny what Jesus has done on the cross for you? Read Luke 23:34.

¹ Zodhiates, Spiros, ed. The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992. G863.

² Charmichal, Amy. If: What do I Know of Calvary Love? Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 1938. 13.

³ Lynch, Dr. Chuck. I Should Forgive, But... Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998.