

“THE SEVEN LAWS OF SPIRITUAL SUCCESS”

“Remember to Forget”

Scripture Reading – Matthew, 6:9-15

Jesus said, “This is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one’.

“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins”.

‘You must make allowance for each other’s faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.’

Colossians, 3:13, TLB

This series is based on the book ‘THE SEVEN LAWS OF SPIRITUAL SUCCESS’.

Shortly after his seventieth birthday, Selwyn Hughes sat down to compile a list of the truths the Lord had taught him as he walked with Christ for more than half a century. This original list contained between forty to fifty issues which he felt could be passed on to the Christians of tomorrow. But in asking what was absolutely essential to living an effective and successful Christian life, the writer whittled them down to an irreducible minimum of seven.

Selwyn Hughes decided to call these seven key concepts ‘LAWS OF SPIRITUAL SUCCESS’.

However, this is not a call to legalism but a call to engage with the spiritual laws God has built into his Kingdom, which in turn enable us to experience more of his power and his presence.

Let the Holy Spirit unfold for you the basic laws that govern all spiritual success...

“REMEMBER TO FORGET”

‘The fourth law for spiritual success is ‘REMEMBER TO FORGET’. Spiritual health and success depends on our ability to forget the hurts and injuries that others have given us – not to have them erased from our memory, but to deal with them in such a way that we are not emotionally overwhelmed by them.’

Selwyn Hughes

In his journal, Immanuel Kant wrote: ‘REMEMBER TO FORGET LAMPE’.

Kant never married and lived for many years with his trusted manservant Lampe. One day Kant discovered that Lampe had been systematically robbing him so he dismissed him. Kant missed his servant and struggled with whether it was right or not to dismiss him. He came to the realisation that he had made the correct decision – but still he struggled to forget Lampe.

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‘Jesus said, “If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins”.’

Matthew, 6:14-15, NIV

Jesus gives a startling warning about forgiveness.

If we refuse to forgive others, God will also refuse to forgive us. Why? Because when we do not forgive others, we are denying our common ground as sinners in need of God’s forgiveness. God’s forgiveness of sin is not the direct result of our forgiving of others, but it is based on our realising what forgiveness means. It is easy to ask God for forgiveness but it is difficult to grant forgiveness to others. Whenever we ask God to forgive us for sin, we should ask ourselves: ‘HAVE I FORGIVEN THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE WRONGED ME?’.

Many people today say: ‘I CAN FORGIVE, BUT I CANNOT FORGET’.

So many of us find it hard to forget. Some people say they forgive yet they do not want themselves or those that have wronged them to forget.

Nevertheless, the biggest cause of relationship problems is not things forgotten that should have been remembered, but the things remembered that should have been forgotten.

To ‘FORGET’ according to the ‘MICROSOFT ENCARTA WORLD DICTIONARY’ means:

To be unable to recall something.

To fail to give due attention to something.

To stop thinking about an issue.

Charles Swindoll says that ‘FORGETTING’ in a Biblical sense means:

*Refusing to keep score (see **I Corinthians, 13:5**).*

*Being bigger than any offence (see **Psalms, 119:165**).*

*Harbouring no judgmental attitudes (see **Matthew, 7:1-5**).*

When we decide that we will not keep score of all the wrongs committed against us, and when we determine to put away our ‘hate list’, then God puts at our disposal his divine power to live a life free of bitterness and resentment. He alone can enable us to truly forget...

Consider Joseph and his firstborn son, Manasseh.

As he looked into the face of his firstborn son, Joseph realised that a merciful providence had been at work in his heart. The past had been largely forgotten. He could find no bitterness or sadness in his soul because God had made him forget...

‘Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, “It is because God has made me forget all my trouble”.’

Genesis, 41:51, NIV

Joseph himself is a model of genuine forgiveness.

Joseph was rejected, kidnapped, enslaved, and imprisoned. Although his brothers had been unfaithful to him, he graciously forgave them and shared his prosperity with them. Joseph demonstrated how God forgives us and showers us with his goodness even though we have sinned against him. The same forgiveness and blessings are ours if we ask for them.

"THE MARKS OF TOTAL FORGIVENESS"

Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Make everyone leave my presence!" So there was no-one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence. Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me". When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be ploughing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. Now hurry back to my father and say to him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay'".

Genesis, 45:1-9a, NIV

In his book, "GOD MEANT IT FOR GOOD", R T Kendall lists five lessons from the example of Joseph which he considers to be 'THE MARKS OF TOTAL FORGIVENESS'...

YOU DO NOT TELL ANYONE WHAT THEY DID TO YOU

There was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers (Genesis, 45:1) – and with good reason. Joseph did not want the Egyptians to know what his ten brothers had done to him at Dothan. It was going to be a secret that would not be revealed until well after the protagonists were dead. There would be no whiff of scandal whatsoever.

It is an unforgiving spirit that wants to let the world know your own hurt.

It is hate that wants 'to let the cat out of the bag'. How would you feel if God was to reveal all your sins to everyone today? The Lord has forgiven you a lot, he has the goods on you, but he promises to remember them no more (see Hebrews, 8:12).

How do you react when someone hurts you?

Do you forgive them? — or — Do you keep going on about those who hurt you?

YOU MAKE THEM FEEL COMPLETELY AT EASE

Joseph encouraged his brothers to draw close to him (Genesis, 45:4). He wanted them to know by the look on his face that there was no hatred, no desire for vengeance in his heart. They could see that his eyes were full of tears.

It is an unforgiving spirit that wants to make people feel uneasy.

God wants us to be at ease with him. He even wants us to approach the throne of grace with confidence to find the mercy we need each day (see Hebrews, 4:16).

How do you react when someone hurts you?

Do you forgive them? — or — Do you make them squirm in your presence?

YOU DO NOT ALLOW THEM TO FEEL BAD ABOUT IT

Joseph told his brothers that they should not be distressed or angry (Genesis, 45:5). He knew how they were feeling and did not want them to feel any worse.

Of course, when some people 'bury the hatchet' they leave the handle sticking out of the ground so they can hit you with your misdeeds when they begin to consider how bad you have acted towards them — then they become self-righteous and think that your crime does not even deserve their forgiveness.

How do you react when someone hurts you?

Do you forgive them? — or — Do you hope that they will feel bad about it?

YOU ALLOW THEM TO SAVE FACE

Joseph amazed his brothers when he claimed that God was behind everything that had happened (Genesis, 45:7-8). This knowledge suddenly gave them a sense of dignity, a sense of worth, a way of saving face, a way of coping and an opportunity to look forward to the future instead of wallowing in the past.

Although Joseph's brothers had wanted to get rid of him, God used their evil actions to fulfil his ultimate plan. He sent Joseph ahead to preserve their lives, and prepare the way for the beginning of the nation of Israel. God is sovereign. His plans are not dictated by human actions. When others intend evil towards you, remember that they are only God's tools. As Joseph later said to his brothers, "**YOU INTENDED TO HARM ME, BUT GOD INTENDED IT FOR GOOD TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT IS NOW BEING DONE, THE SAVING OF MANY LIVES**" (Genesis, 50:20).

How do you react when someone hurts you?

Do you forgive them? — or — Do you fail to make a new friend?

YOU PROTECT THEM FROM THEIR WORST FEARS

Joseph instructed his brothers to return to Canaan and bring their father down to Egypt (Genesis, 45:9). He even told them what to say — but they were not required to come clean and tell the old man what they had done all those years before. Joseph's brothers could cope with anything but that!

How do you react when someone hurts you?

Do you forgive them? — or — Do you 'blackmail' them?

And if you do 'blackmail' them, I wonder if you can really justify your actions!

"REMEMBER, THE LORD FORGAVE YOU, SO YOU MUST FORGIVE OTHERS"

"THE NEED FOR TOTAL FORGIVENESS"

Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me', he begged, 'and I will pay back everything'. The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.

"But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow-servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. His fellow-servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back'. But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

"When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant', he said, 'I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow-servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart".

Matthew, 18:21-35, NIV

In 'THE PARABLE OF THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT' (Matthew, 18:21-35), Jesus answered a question about forgiveness by contrasting the attitudes of two debtors and their creditors...


Jewish custom was that you only had to forgive someone three times.

Peter was trying to be magnanimous by more than doubling the prevailing custom, but Jesus had other ideas. **'SEVENTY TIMES SEVEN'** is not to be taken as a literal 490, but as an infinite number of times. Although, if you forgave someone on 490 occasions it would be a good habit.

 **The first servant owed his master 10,000 talents.**

A talent was the equivalent of £240; so, the total owed amounted to a staggering £2.4 million. This is an incredible debt. The total revenues of Judea, Samaria and Galilee in Jesus' day only amounted to 900 talents, so we are talking about just over eleven times this sum. Here was a debt, which was greater than a king's ransom.

How could someone run up such a debt? How could this debt be repaid?

 **The second servant owed his master 100 denarii.**

A denarius was worth about 4 pence in value; so, the total owed was a paltry £4.

Imagine for a moment that both of these debts would be paid in five pence pieces.

The debt of 100 denarii could be carried in a plastic money bag in your pocket.

The debt of 10,000 talents would require an army of 4,300 carriers, each carrying a sack over sixty pounds in weight; and they would form, at a distance of one yard apart, a line over two-and-a-half miles.

The big intrigue in the parable is the magnitude of the debt wiped clean.

How could a slave owe the master millions of pounds? How could a massive debt like this be cancelled in a single moment? It is, of course, intended to show the idea of infinite forgiveness, a beautiful reminder of God's forgiveness to sinners.

'The point is simple. Nothing men can do to us can in any way compare with what we have done to God; and if God has forgiven us the huge debt we owe to him, we must forgive our fellow men the small debts they owe to us. Nothing that we have to forgive can even faintly or remotely compare with what we have been forgiven.'

"THE DAILY STUDY BIBLE", William Barclay

My sin – oh the bliss of the glorious thought –

My sin – not in part but the whole,

Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more.

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

"IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL", Horatio Gates Spafford

'Jesus is saying that because we received such a great mercy, we should pass that mercy on to others. Because God has forgiven all our sins, we should not withhold forgiveness from others. As we realise how completely Christ has forgiven us, it should produce an attitude of forgiveness toward others. When we don't forgive others, we are setting ourselves above Christ's law of love.'

"LIFE APPLICATION BIBLE", Study Notes

The key to forgiving others is remembering how much God has forgiven you.

Is it difficult for you to forgive someone who has wronged you a little when God has forgiven you so much? Realising God's infinite love and forgiveness can help you love and forgive others. The sin of man – my sin and your sin – brought about the death of God's own Son. Surely we must forgive others as God has forgiven us. Otherwise, we cannot hope to find any mercy.

'Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.'

Ephesians, 4:32, NIV

"WE HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN A DEBT THAT IS BEYOND OUR PAYING"

"HOW TO FORGIVE AND FORGET"

'Jesus said "If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins".'

Matthew, 6:14-15, NIV

In other words: 'Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us'.

If we pray this petition (and we do each and every time we pray 'THE LORD'S PRAYER') without forgiving others, we are asking God not to forgive us. If we say, "I WILL NEVER FORGIVE SO-AND-SO FOR WHAT HE OR SHE HAS DONE TO ME", or if we say, "I WILL NEVER FORGET WHAT SO-AND-SO DID TO ME", and then go and take this petition on our lips, we are quite deliberately asking God not to forgive us and not to forget our misdeeds.

'Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.'

Ephesians, 4:32, NIV

If we are to have CHRISTIAN FORGIVENESS in our lives, three things are necessary...

WE MUST LEARN TO UNDERSTAND

There is always a reason why a person does something. If he is impolite and cross-tempered, maybe he is worried or in pain. If he treats you with suspicion and dislike, maybe he has misunderstood, or has been misinformed about something you have said or done. Maybe the man is the victim of his own environment. Maybe his temperament is such that life is difficult and human relations are a problem for him. Forgiveness would be very much easier for us, if we tried to understand people before we allowed ourselves to condemn them.

WE MUST LEARN TO FORGET

So long as we brood upon a slight or an injury, there is no hope that we will forgive. We so often say, "I CAN'T FORGET WHAT SO-AND-SO DID TO ME", or "I WILL NEVER FORGET HOW I WAS TREATED BY SUCH-AND-SUCH A PERSON OR IN SUCH-AND-SUCH A PLACE". These are dangerous sayings, because they make it humanly impossible for us to forget.

WE MUST LEARN TO LOVE

Christian love, 'AGAPE', is that unconquerable benevolence, that undefeatable goodwill, which will never seek anything but the highest good of others, no matter what they do to us, and no matter how they treat us. That love can come to us only when Christ, who is that love, comes to dwell within our hearts – and He cannot come unless we invite him.

Are you having difficulty in this area or remembering to forget?

Has someone slandered you or libelled you or done you a terrible injury? Are you nursing in your heart the hope of revenge? However justified your resentment is against another person, to harbour that resentment is to poison only yourself.

'You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.'

Colossians, 3:13, TLB

If you are to have CHRISTIAN FORGETFULNESS in your life, three things are necessary...

FOCUS ON HOW MUCH YOU HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN

Think how extensive God's mercy has been in your life. You may think you have committed only little sins but, as someone has put it, there are no little sins, just as there is no little God to sin against.

Nothing anyone has ever done towards you is as offensive as what you have done to God over the years by ignoring his claim upon your soul and refusing him admittance in your life. Yet now He has forgiven you, washed all your sins in the blood of his Son, and written your name in the Lamb's book of life.

DEAL HONESTLY WITH ANY LINGERING RESENTMENT

This is always a challenging moment. If you find yourself pulling back over this matter of forgiving then it is probably because the wonder of the fact that you have been forgiven is still in your head and has not reached your heart. Go back over the first point once again and focus on how much you have been forgiven!

Think of the consequences of not forgiving and being handed over to the torturers. Unforgiveness is not worth the misery. God has your best interests at heart when he tells us 'forgive, or else!' Your soul was never made to carry the poison of bitterness and resentment.

ASK GOD TO HELP YOU FORGET

If you accept the responsibility to forgive then God will accept the responsibility to help you forget. You can count on it. You do the possible, God will do the impossible. It is as simple as that!

'If I say, "Yes, I'll forgive but I cannot forget", as though God, who twice a day washes all the sands on all the shores of all the world, could not wash away such memories from my mind, then I know nothing of Calvary love.'

Amy Carmichael

O what a wonderful, wonderful day, day I will never forget!

After I'd wandered in darkness away, Jesus my Saviour I met!

O what a tender, compassionate friend, he met the need of my heart!

Shadows dispelling, with joy I am telling, he made all the darkness depart.

John W Peterson, SASB 371:1

"GOD CAN MAKE YOU FORGET – BUT ONLY AFTER YOU HAVE FORGIVEN!"