

# First and foremost

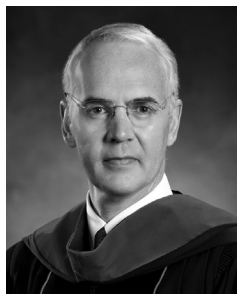
Rev. Dr. Richard Gibbons

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



SUNDAY WORSHIP:  
8:30am and 11:00am (Sanctuary)  
10:45am (*Ignite* Modern Worship)

FirstPresGreenville.org



**“...as we have forgiven our debtors...”**

*Matthew 6:12*

Ten days ago I received a phone call asking if I would comment on a breaking news story which WYFF News 4 was covering. That morning a court hearing related to a multiple homicide case had given the families involved an opportunity to speak directly to the perpetrator who had confessed to the murders and was serving seven consecutive life sentences plus 60 years.

The families responded with forgiveness in the face of a senseless act of violence that was both malicious and vicious. The individuals involved had had extreme grief and pain inflicted upon them, yet they responded in a manner similar to that of the families involved in the 2015 Mother Emmanuel Church shootings.

The emotional and psychological wounds for the families are deep. Lives have been traumatized. It will take a long time for the people involved to adjust to what took place.

A larger question is this: How should you respond when someone has hurt you? How do you live out your faith when a close friendship fractures, and nasty, regrettable things are said? What do you do when you discover your spouse has been involved in an affair, and you feel betrayed and belittled? How do you move on from the wounds of a nasty divorce? How do you recover from the horrors of incest or domestic violence? How do you move on with your life when you have been wounded, and you hurt so badly you feel your pain will never go away? Emotionally you are at breaking point. You wrestle daily with thoughts of bitterness, despair, and despondency.

What do you do when you continue to relive past events in your mind? In your imagination you have lived out multiple times what you really want to do or say to the person involved. You feel angry most of the time, you are powerless to take any action, and you don't know what to do. How

do you live out your faith with integrity in the messiness of daily life when you are emotionally wounded and traumatized?

**Forgive us our debts (*Matthew 6:12*)**

When we pray, “Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors,” what are we really saying? What do we actually mean? On a personal level, let me suggest the following. Forgiveness means to release a person from a debt or obligation. Forgiveness is the intentional choice to release a person from a wrong committed against you.

Let me also attempt to define what forgiveness is not. Forgiveness is not approving or excusing or justifying a person's actions. Neither is it pretending to not be hurt. It is not repressing what took place. It is not refusing to deal with what happened, or pretending it doesn't matter. But it is a conscious choice to release someone from a wrong done to you.

Forgiveness, whether reconciliation takes place or not, is the conscious, intentional, decision by the offended party to release the other person—whether or not they ever become friends again, or do business again, or even meet again.

Forgiveness can be unilateral or transactional. Unilateral forgiveness is when you forgive someone who has not asked for forgiveness. The prayer of Jesus on the cross for those who were crucifying Him is, of course, the supreme example of unilateral forgiveness.

If you are waiting for someone to ask for forgiveness and they never say “I'm sorry,” you may be emotionally held hostage to what has taken place. Perhaps someone has abused you and is now dead; if you are waiting for them to express their sorrow, you are being held captive to what occurred. Unilateral forgiveness is when you take the initiative and make a conscious effort to forgive and move on.

Transactional forgiveness is when a person has recognized the pain they have caused, confessed to their actions, requested forgiveness, and demonstrated repentance for the wrong they have done. As a result of their words and actions, the door to reconciliation is now open.

Engaging in forgiveness as outlined in the Lord's Prayer is a powerful reminder that God has taken the initiative and forgiven your infractions against Him. Because of His love and grace, He has forgiven us.

When you have been wounded, and wounded deeply, you naturally want to take care of those wounds. Yet please be careful not to identify only with the wounds and pain you are experiencing, forgetting to move forward and focus on a life of healing and wholeness required in order to become healthy again.

When something reminds you of the pain, you may find that you are being held hostage to your emotions, to your circumstances, and to a relationship which no longer exists. To live with this level of emotional pain and anger is extremely difficult, yet it is entirely possible to break free from the anxiety and despondency involved.

When Jesus teaches us to pray, “Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors,” He is encouraging us to begin to move on. Emotionally refusing to forgive is like drinking poison in the hope that the other person will pass away. Refusing to forgive is burning a bridge that you yourself will need to cross.

Moving on emotionally begins with a profound trust in Christ in the midst of the pain. It begins with the recognition that you cannot handle the wounds involved on your own. It begins when you hand it over to Him. He can take away the heartache. He can remove the anger. He can heal the wounds, bring peace, restore you, and renew you to be the person He has called you to be.

You are infinitely loved by Him and you can rest in Him. You don't need to take revenge. He will deal with it. You don't need to protect your reputation. He can do that. What others think of you ultimately does not matter. Give it up, let it go, forgive, and begin to move on.

Healing and wholeness comes when we can say with authenticity and credibility, “Forgive us our debts as we forgiven our debtors.” It is not easy, but it is always healthy.