

“FORGIVENESS: For Better, For Worse”  
Lent

Texts: Colossians 3:12-15  
1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Preached: 3/1/15

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Last week we explored God’s answer to “the questions implied in our existence,”



That answer is Forgiveness. God provided a savior in Jesus Christ and through him offers us forgiveness and a new beginning. We are invited to lay down the burden of our sins and accept God’s forgiveness. Our acceptance comes in the form of repentance, a change of heart that results in a change in behavior.

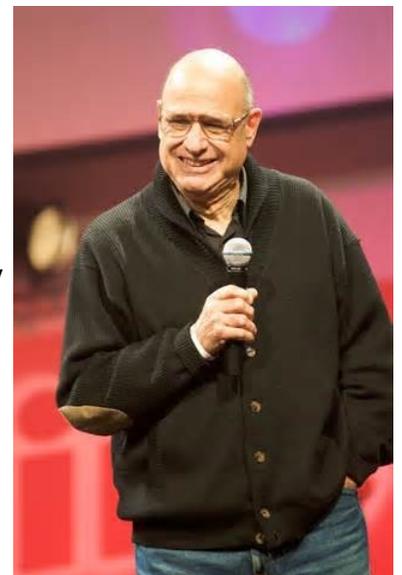
Forgiveness is essential to our lives. Without it, no marriage can survive, no family can stay together, no church can be effective. Today I want to focus on the most significant relationships in our lives – it may be with a spouse, a significant other, a very close friend, a soul-mate.

Let me begin with a word of sensitivity: I understand that only some of us here are married. I also realize that some have been married previously, but are currently single. Others have never been married. Some hear the subject of marriage and it brings up painful memories, raw emotions, complicated feelings. God wants us to thrive in all of our relationships. God meets us where we are and understands our complicated histories.

I have been fortunate to hear the Rev. Dr. Tony Campolo speak on several occasions. He is a passionate Christian professor and media commentator on religious, social and political matters.

Tony tells the story of a time when he and his wife, Peggy, were introducing themselves to a group of strangers. Someone asked how long they had been married. Peggy replied they had been together for 42 good years. Tony got this odd expression on his face and then turned to her – Wait a minute, I thought we have been married 44 years. Peggy responded - yeah and 42 of those have been good! I still chuckle at that story.

While Peggy was partly joking, Tony says, she was also pointing to a reality not lost on most happily married couples – that is, marriage – any committed, long-term relationship really, requires work, and there are going to be rough spots, harder times, challenges that require focus and fortitude.



Falling in love is easy.

Staying in love for a lifetime is, for most people, demanding work. Romantic feelings that bring us together in the first place are really important, but they're not sufficient by themselves. I have a line in most of my wedding sermons that says something like "your love will likely include romance, sacrifice, compromise, disagreement, celebration, sorrow and much change. Your love will sometimes be a feeling, often be an action, and will have to be a conscious decision that you make again and again."

Marriage and all long-term intimate relationships are part determination, part willpower, and a constant willingness to seek out and grant forgiveness.

In the verses from Paul's Letter to the Colossians, the Apostle describes how Christians are meant to live in community with one another.



"Clothe yourselves," Paul writes, "with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience." It's worth looking briefly at each of these qualities individually. This is how we are to relate to others, especially those whom we love. Every morning we put these qualities on as if we were getting dressed to go out into the world.



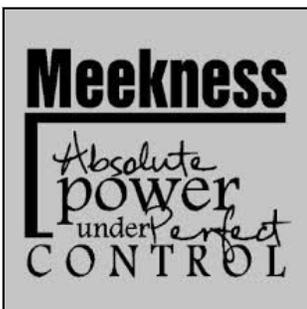
**COMPASSION:** The act of putting yourself in your partner's shoes, of feeling what he or she is feeling. It's the emotion that you feel seeing your loved one suffer and the compelling need to do whatever you can to help.



**KINDNESS:** Performing the thoughtful acts that bless and encourage your partner, with no expectation of something in return. No matter how small, these actions make a difference, especially in the lives of those we love.



**HUMILITY:** Respecting your partner as a person and seeking to put his or her needs before your own. Humility listens before speaking and remains open to feedback, understanding that your loved ones have a unique perspective and can help you be a better person.



**MEEKNESS:** Gentleness. Think of Proverbs 15:15, which says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath." It's important that we be real with our loved ones, that we are willing to be vulnerable. Jesus invited us to come to him, saying, "29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."





But all of us can be a blessing. What a blessing it is to receive forgiveness from the one you love. And what a blessing to extend it.

To begin Lent, I introduced the metaphor of stones, pebbles for small sins, collected and lugged around in a backpack as loading us down, a burden that weighs heavy on us and our relationships. Let's imagine a different metaphor -- from rocks, we move to accounting procedures.

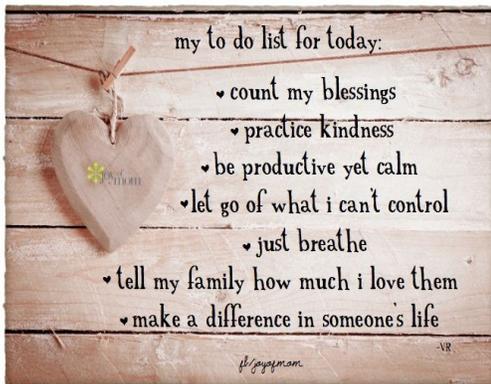
Both partners have accounting procedures.



Each partner keeps a mental ledger for recording credits and debits, and too often in our intimate relationships we stop recording credits, but go right on recording debits. Every time our partner does some little thing that annoys us, there's a harsh mark. "You know, you really are insensitive," we think. Check. "You're just proving that you don't care." Check. "There you go again!" Check.

Debits and Credits Cheat Sheet		
	Account Debit (Dr)	Credit (Cr)
<b>Permanent Accounts</b>		
Assets	Increase	Decrease
Liabilities	Decrease	Increase
Equity	Decrease	Increase
<b>Temporary Accounts</b>		
Expenses	Increase	Decrease
Revenue	Decrease	Increase

If any couple focuses solely on the quirks that irritate them about the other, or assume the other was doing them out of spite, or if neither was willing to address the things that bothered the other, it is almost impossible to maintain relationship.



**Two things that married people, or lifelong friends, can do is:**  
**ONE** – choose not to record each perceived wrong done to us by the other, and  
**TWO** – choose to keep track of the blessings the other does for us. If the accounting procedures in your relationship are focused on keeping track of all the debits and ignoring the credits, you're doomed to a pretty miserable relationship.

What would happen if we just erased the debit column all together?

What if you decided, that when it comes to the small stuff, you're only going to remember the positives?

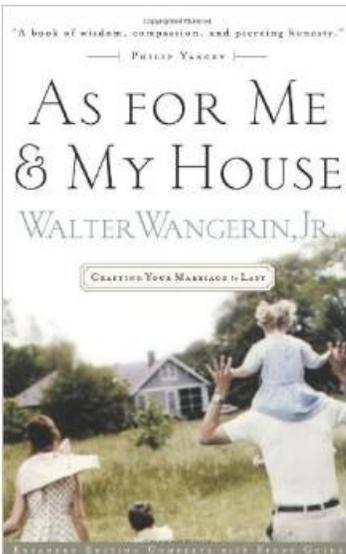
There are three words right at the end of our passage from Paul that are very useful here: "and be thankful." That's a key to successful long-term relationships.

Choose to keep track of the blessings your partner brings into your life. A ledger that is weighed toward the positive is a big help in letting a relationship soar. Remember Paul writes to the Corinthians: "Love keeps no record of wrongs!" When we change our accounting procedures, we begin to find more joy in our relationships.



Refusing to record the wrongs, is part and parcel of forgiveness. As we learn this way of life, as we more and more accept the forgiveness we have in Christ, we become better partners, better husbands, better wives, better friends. We realize this business of love, of committed relationship, is a holy thing.

Walter Wangerin, Jr., Christian author of many books, including one of my favorites, *The Book of the Dun Cow*, which won the National Book Award, also wrote a book on marriage, subtitled “Crafting Your Marriage to Last.” Wangerin counsels:



*Please know that it isn't your spouse's sin which crucifies you, though you might have thought so; rather, it's your loving willingness to forgive.*

*That was the cross of Christ, the cross you take up when you deny yourself and follow him. Therefore, forgiving will not immediately soothe your pain; instead, it introduces a different pain, a much more hopeful pain because it is redeeming.*

*You do 'deny yourself' and die a little in order to forgive. Pride dies. Fairness dies. Rights die, as do self-pity and the sweetness of a pout or the satisfaction of a little righteous wrath....*

*You die a little, that the marriage might rise alive.*



Let us cultivate a “loving willingness to forgive.”  
By so doing we grow closer to God and closer to our people.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.