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Healing for Damaged Emotions: Avoiding Emotional Ping Pong

Based on the book “Healing for Damaged Emotions” by David Seamands

By Matt Hook

Matthew 6:12 & 18:23-35

“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors....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, canceled 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 the man 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 canceled 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.

(Ping pong noise)...It goes on and on, back and forth, back and forth, between you and your coworkers. (Ping Pong...) It goes on back and forth, back and forth, between you and your spouse. It goes on and on, back and forth, back and forth, between you and your inner self. I owe you, you owe me - emotional ping pong. Sometimes it comes in the form of an overhead smash, sometimes it comes as a wicked curve. Some of us play it in every relationship we have, just to get a point up. What is it we’re after? Guilt, Grace, and Debt-Collecting.

2.For now, the unforgiven and unforgiving person is plagued by guilt and resentment. He lives in a prison house where he finds himself tortured by all manner of inner emotional conflicts. Let me ask you to write on your sermon notes page: I feel guilty about... I feel resentment toward...

The world is made for forgiveness; it is made for grace; it is made for love in all of life. The need for these has been built into the structure of nature, of persons. It is in every cell of our bodies, in every interpersonal relationship. We are made for grace and love and acceptance.

Dr. David Belagum, commenting on the claim that up to 75% of the people in hospitals today with physical illnesses have sicknesses rooted in emotional causes, says that these patients are punishing themselves with their illnesses; and their physical symptoms and break-downs may be their involuntary confessions of guilt.”

- Minirth-Meier Clinic define forgiveness as “the act of setting someone free from an obligation that is the result of a wrong done against you.” It is NOT excusing or minimizing the wrong done. Rather it is consciously acknowledging the wrong and purposely choosing to pardon the person who wronged you.

Jesus was the only normal and perfectly sane person who has ever lived. We, on the other hand, have sins as friends. Many of us have tormentors of guilt, “living in the perpetual penance of regret.” (Tozer). Jesus was full of life and joy. He really lived. We, on the other hand, play ping pong and skim through relationships, insulating and isolating ourselves to the point that our only ones who really know us are our sins. Is that you? Have you settled for your sins to be your friends? Are you living in regret?

Listen to what the only normal and perfectly sane person says. Matthew records in 18:23-35 how one time Jesus told a parable about a servant, not realizing he was completely forgiven a huge debt. He thought he still had to go around collecting money from the servants who owed him, so he could pay back the lord a debt – that had been canceled. So he grabbed the first guy he saw by the throat, and said, “Pay me what you owe me. Give me my \$20 bucks.” The lord hears of it and throws him in prison to be tormented. Jesus says “*This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.*” Matthew 18. This is powerful.

God’s mercy isn’t just for more time on the debt. Rather the debt is completely forgiven. Gone. Zippo. Jesus is counseling us to realize that his forgiveness, mercy, and grace is not just an extension of time and patience from God.

We don’t get that you can’t pay grace back. You can’t pay mercy back. So we get stuck on the treadmill of performing, achieving, and striving, playing ping pong, back and forth, back and forth, just to buy more time for ourselves.

What happens is, when we receive Christ, he forgives us completely, 100%, from top to bottom. But somehow we think he’s only forgiven the loveable part of us – the part that is two inches above our gut. We don’t realize he’s forgiven even the really ugly, dark, damaged part of us as well. So we go through life feeling like we still owe, and if we still owe, then we better get what we can from other people.

When we fail to accept and receive God’s total grace and total forgiveness, we also fail to give forgiveness and grace to other people. And this results in a breakdown in our relationships. The unforgiven are the unforgiving.

When it hits me is when I’m doing something like dusting, or vacuuming, which I never saw my dad do. I start thinking “She owes me...” (Ping – pong). And when I have to cook dinner, nobody’s happy! I start thinking in terms of trading off debt.

Do you go around thinking that all the significant people in your life owe you a debt? Those who hurt you, those who failed you, teased you, betrayed you, or rejected you. Are you a debt collector? Is your marriage made up of two takers? Two collectors with nothing to collect? The vicious circle becomes more vicious. (Ping – Pong...) Emotional conflicts and broken relationships are the result.

This parable reveals the 2 causes of most emotional problems among Christians: **1. Failure to understand, receive, and live out God’s forgiveness, and 2. Failure to give forgiveness.**

First, Failure to receive that unconditional love, forgiveness, and grace from God. We’re like that servant. Maybe you’ve misunderstood what God has given you. Maybe you’ve never heard what the Lord gave you. Maybe because you don’t realize this, you, like the servant, have been victim to the hidden tormentors of resentment, guilt, striving, and anxiety, who know how to do nothing but play ping pong. Quit trying to get rid of your own guilt! Quit hating yourself! Quit living in the prison of unforgiveness and regret, never sharing this burden with anyone and letting it become intolerable.

Jesus prayed “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. There’s no forgiveness from God unless you freely forgive your brother from your heart. But what if brother doesn’t just apply to someone else? What if you are the brother or sister who needs to be forgiven, and you need to forgive yourself? God’s already

forgiven all of you who have turned your life over to him and invited him into your heart. You can too. Now let's look at the second cause of most emotional problems.

2. Failure to give forgiveness. When we fail to accept and receive God's grace and forgiveness, we also fail to give unconditional love, forgiveness and grace to other people. This results in a breakdown in our interpersonal relationships.

Jesus showed us in this Parable of the Unmerciful Servant how the vicious circle becomes more vicious. The unaccepted are the unaccepting. The unforgiven are the unforgiving. Emotional conflicts and broken relationships are the result. Think of how you apply this in your own life.

How many people owe you a debt? Parents, siblings, friend, boyfriend or girlfriend, spouse... These people hurt you, let you down, failed you, teased you, and put you down. They owe you affection and love, security and affirmation, but they failed you. And since you see yourself as unforgiven and unacceptable, since you feel indebted and guilty, resentful, insecure, and anxious, you in turn become unforgiving and unaccepting. Ping pong. As you feel tormented, you hurt others.

As David Seamands points out, many married people fail to allow God to do for them what only God can do. Then they ask other people, their spouses, to do what they cannot possibly do. If they work at it (really hard), men make good husbands, and women make good wives. But they make lousy gods. All the promises people make on their wedding day "I promise to love, care for you, cherish you, in sickness and in health..." are only possible when a heart is secure in God's love, grace, and care. Only a forgiven and graced soul can keep such promises. What the person usually means in those vows is... "I have a lot of terrific inner needs and inner emptiness and debts to pay and I'm going to give you a marvelous opportunity to fill my Grand Canyon and take care of me. Aren't I wonderful?" By the way, "I'm great at ping pong." And think of the tragedy when both partners are takers.

We go through life working out this Debt System: (We think we ought and we owe...) Jesus came to destroy the system by showing us how to forgive. We feel we ought to do this or that. We feel that people who wronged us owe us. When we feel anger toward ourselves we think "I must pay in full." Or in anger toward others, we say "He or she must pay."

Think of the years of marital ping-pong some of us have played. Every time you pinged, your partner ponged, or visa versa. What we really specialize in is terrible disappointment, hurt, and real resentment... When you realize your spouse isn't the great one you married, you seize them by the throat and feel as though they owe you a debt, since they deceived you into thinking they were someone they're not. So quit saying "Pay me what you owe me, old man." WE ARE DEBT COLLECTORS. We are grievance collectors. Why? Because we don't realize our debt has been fully cancelled, that it's over. Although God has torn up the note at Calvary, we're still trying to pay. We just wait for the other one to change, and when they don't we think they owe us...

Some of you have been doing this to your kids over the years. – collecting debts, asking them to pay you what they owed you, instead of giving them unconditional love. And what a bunch of hang ups it caused.

The scriptural way of dealing with all these hurts from our past is part of God's miracle. God's way goes far beyond forgiving and surrendering resentment. God takes sins, failures, hurts that happened earlier in your life and wraps His loving purposes around them to change them.

o Look at the cross. There God took from a human standpoint was the worst injustice and tragedy and turned it into the most amazing gift humanity has ever known: the gift of salvation.

o Joseph, so brutally wronged by his 11 brothers, became a ruler in Egypt. He had the chance to make them pay. And the amazing thing was there was no debt-collecting in the end. Instead, he said "*Have no fear; for I*

am in God's place. True enough, you planned evil against me, but God planned it for good, to bring about what today is in fact, the keeping alive of much people." Gen. 50:19-20

○ Are you part of a debt free community of Christians? Is your marriage free of debt-collecting? Your family? Your church? The Master has paid the debt in full, and torn up the note.

Probably the second most well-known Methodist hymn written by Charles Wesley, the brother of John, who together founded the Methodist movement in the 1700s, right after "Hark the Herald Angel Sings" is "O For A Thousand Tongues to Sing." In the 4th verse of the old Methodist hymn "O For 1000 Tongues to Sing," there is a verse that we plow through that I think we need to stop and applaud: "He breaks the power of cancelled sin, he sets the prisoner free, his blood can make the foulest clean, his blood availed for me!" When you play emotional ping pong, you are living under the power of canceled sin! The sin that is powerless to keep you from heaven because of Jesus is running and ruining your life! You must turn to Jesus, the wounded healer, to break that power of canceled sin! Don't you want to be set free? Just put your paddle down. Put the paddle down. Put the paddle down! Amen.