

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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The Gospels

“How Many Times?”

Luke 17:1-4

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BBC NEWS reported some years ago about a test that was conducted at the Institute for Business and Home Safety in Richburg, South Carolina. Researchers constructed two 1,300-square-foot houses inside a \$40 million laboratory and then observed how a simulated hurricane would impact the homes. The first home was built according to conventional standards at that time. The second home included reinforcement straps that connected every level of the building, from the foundation all the way to the roof. Then the researchers turned on giant fans, creating gusts of wind up to 110 miles per hour (equal to a category 3 hurricane). In the first two experiments, which lasted under ten minutes, both homes survived the intense winds. But when they tried a third experiment, turning on the fans for more than ten minutes, the conventional home began to shake and then collapsed. In contrast, the home with the floors and roof reinforced to the foundation sustained only cosmetic damage. Tim Reingold, an engineer working on the experiment, summarized the results with a pointed question: “The bottom line you have to ask yourself is, which house would you rather be living in?” When Jesus’ disciples followed Him, they joined Jesus’ community. Jesus not only modeled for them what God’s community is supposed to look and act like, He also gave them the building plans of how to construct a healthy community that can withstand even the most powerful, destructive storms of sin that can so easily blow apart all relationships.

Luke 17:1-4

One day Jesus said to his disciples, “There will always be temptations to sin, but what sorrow awaits the person who does the tempting! ² It would be better to be thrown into the sea with a millstone hung around your neck than to cause one of these little ones to fall into sin. ³ So watch yourselves! “If another believer sins, rebuke that person; then if there is repentance, forgive. ⁴ Even if that person wrongs you seven times a day and each time turns again and asks forgiveness, you must forgive.”

CAUSE NO SIN

Jesus teaches His disciples the first important ingredient in building a healthy community is to be careful to **Cause No Sin**. Often when Jesus is teaching, He is speaking to the crowds, which included those who opposed Him, others watching out of curiosity, to those who have given up everything to follow Him. In this passage Jesus is speaking only to His disciples. Jesus knows there is no such thing as a perfect community in this world of sin, whether it's a marriage, relationship between parents and children, extended family, friends, neighborhood, coworkers, peers at school, or in the church. Jesus was realistic when He said there will always be temptations to sin.

Every moment of our lives, the devil is working nonstop to tempt us to sin. The reason he is tempting us to sin is because sin is rebellion against God. Sin is anything that leads us away from living according to God's will and instead living according to our own selfish desires. Sin separates us from God and brings all kinds of harm to our lives. We are constantly bombarded with all kinds of temptation to do our own thing instead of living our lives as God calls us to. The reason we find it so easy and often enjoyable to sin is because we are all born into this world as sinners. It is in our broken human nature to sin. King David understood only too well this truth when he wrote in *Psalms* 51:5 after he was confronted for committing adultery and having the woman's husband killed, "*For I was born a sinner—yes, from the moment my mother conceived me.*" David is right, all of us are born into this world as sinners. As such, we are constantly being tempted to rebel against God. We all struggle with our own unique temptations. It is a part of our life as sinners.

With the reality of sin and temptation in mind, Jesus gives the disciples a command to "*Watch Yourself.*" Jesus is not only telling them to watch themselves to make sure they do not give in to temptation and sin, but Jesus is also saying we are not to help the devil tempt Jesus' followers. The word that in the original Greek for tempting others is *Skandalon*, which is where we get our word *scandal*. *Skandalon* refers to any stumbling-block placed in the way to trip somebody up. Jesus says we are not to be a stumbling block especially of His new followers. It is hard enough to overcome all the temptations in our lives; we need to be careful to not make it harder for those in our lives to overcome their unique temptations. Jesus is commanding us to not add more temptations especially to those who are new in following Him, or those who might be more spiritually immature or vulnerable in their faith. When I was in my early twenties, we moved from Florida all the way north of Boston in order for me to attend seminary. Our first summer there I quickly found a job on a painting crew with other seminarians. I soon learned from these seminarian painters what a church key was. One end of a church key is used to open a paint can, and the other is used to open a bottle, most often a beer bottle. I made a conscious decision early on in my life to not drink alcohol because of my family's history with alcohol. Most of the guys on this painting crew did not make that same decision. As a matter of fact, they liked to enjoy a beer on their lunch break. When I didn't join them, it was their opportunity to debate what the Bible

said about alcohol and to pry into why I didn't drink. A few of them just could not believe that I wouldn't and would try to pressure me at times to join them. It was no big deal for me. The problem came when we had a young man join our paint crew who was legally underage, and they began to tease and pressure him to drink. They were tempting him to do something he knew he should not do at that point in his life. They were doing exactly what Jesus said not to do, to be a stumbling block in this very impressionable, young man's life. Being a healthy follower of Jesus and having a healthy community is hard enough with all the temptations and dysfunctions in our lives without adding to it by tempting others to sin. For those who do this Jesus says God's judgment is much worse than tying a several-hundred-pound millstone around their neck and then jumping into a deep lake. Therefore, Jesus warns us to be careful not to fall into temptation and not to tempt others to sin.

CONFRONT SINNERS

The next command Jesus gives His disciples which will aid them in building a healthy community is that they are to **Confront Sinners**. Jesus recognizes none of us are perfect. We are all very susceptible to the power of temptation to sin and so Jesus knows if we are not careful, we will sin and easily stray from the path of following Jesus. If we see this happening to a fellow Christian Jesus commands us to help that Christian by pointing out their sin. Jesus is not giving us a license to have a critical, judgmental, condescending attitude like the hypocritical Pharisees. This is also not a call for us to be nitpicky of others' sinfulness. This is about someone who is straying away from being faithful to God, willfully and defiantly not following God's will in how to live their lives. We are to love them enough by risking confronting them about straying from the narrow path of following Jesus. We are to confront them with the utmost humility knowing that we are not perfect and though we may not struggle with the same temptations they do, we have our own struggles. We also approach them with the utmost love wanting to help guide them back on the right path and not to condemn them. Jesus did not come into this world to condemn the world but to love people back into a right relationship with God.

As Christians, we are part of a community of broken sinners who are all following Jesus together. As such we are in an accountability relationship with each other. We not only are to correct people, but we are also to receive corrections as needed. We have each other's backs and help each other to stay on the difficult straight and narrow path of following Jesus in a world where most people are not following Jesus but only following their own path. *Galatians 6:1-2* tells us how to confront someone going down the wrong path. It says, *"Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself."*² Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ." Noted pastor and author, Gordon MacDonald, shared about the time that someone lovingly and gently took the risk to correct him. He said, "One time, twenty or so years ago, I was in Japan on a speaking

tour with a close personal friend. He was a number of years older than I was. As we walked down the street in Yokohama, Japan, the name of a common friend came up, and I said something unkind about that person. It was sarcastic. It was cynical. It was a put-down. My older friend stopped, turned, and faced me until his face was right in front of mine. With deep, slow words he said, "Gordon, a man who says he loves God would not say a thing like that about a friend." He could have put a knife into my ribs, and the pain would not have been any less. He did what a prophet does. But you know something? There have been ten thousand times in the last twenty years that I have been saved from making a jerk of myself. When I've been tempted to say something unkind about a brother or sister, I hear my friend's voice say, "Gordon, a man who says he loves God would not speak in such a way about a friend." Prophets do that. They remind us of the truth and where we are falling short. If you avoid prophets—and a lot of people do—you do so at the peril of your spiritual journey. You and I need prophets." I would add that this is not just the responsibility of prophets, but all of us to do all that we can to lovingly and gently help others stand under the winds of temptation that come to all of us.

FORGIVE REPENTANT SINNERS

The final, absolutely necessary ingredient of building a healthy, Christ-following community is the command from Jesus to ***Forgive Repentant Sinners***. Jesus knows we are sinners prone to sin and need help from each other to resist the power of sins' temptation. After we have confronted someone about their sin, we are also commanded by Jesus to restore them through God's cleansing power of forgiveness and to leave their sin in the past. Jesus goes so far as to say that even if the person sins and repents seven times in the same day, we are to forgive them seven times. Why seven times? The Rabbis had a saying that if one forgave another person three times, that was considered perfect. Jesus is saying that in a Christian community the new standard is double the expected three times, plus add one more, to make it seven. The greater point Jesus is making is that the Christian standard of forgiveness must immeasurably exceed the best the world has to offer. As Christians our new nature in Jesus as resurrection people who have been forgiven is that we no longer keep score but instead offer forgiveness. This will lead us to forgive beyond our comfort level just as it did for Jesus on the cross.

Colossians 3:12-15 describes how we treat each other in Jesus' new community called the church, *"¹² Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. ¹³ Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful."* A Christ-centered community that acts in this manner is so desperately needed in our churches today. We have a natural

tendency to hold grudges, to show revenge, to never forget when someone has offended us, hurt our feelings, do something we do not agree with, or just generally let us down. How many people have changed churches or no longer are a part of a church community because they or the church did not act according to what Jesus and Colossians teaches?

The German philosopher Schopenhauer compared the human race to a bunch of porcupines huddling together on a cold winter's night. He said, "The colder it gets outside, the more we huddle together for warmth; but the closer we get to one another, the more we hurt one another with our sharp quills. And in the lonely night of earth's winter eventually we begin to drift apart and wander out on our own and freeze to death in our loneliness." Christ has given us an alternative: to forgive each other for the pain our sinful quills inflict. That allows us to stay together and stay warm. It is so easy to hurt one another in community with all our sharp quills of sin. To be a healthy community it is essential for us to continually offer and receive forgiveness just as God has so freely given us in Jesus. I love the quote from Lyn Cryderman who wrote, "The hallmark of a good marriage mirrors the most attractive aspect of the Christian faith: forgiveness." The hallmark of any good relationship, of any healthy community is not that it is made up of a bunch of perfect people, but that of forgiveness as a way of life for everyone in the community. Jesus modeled this kind of forgiveness and commands us to offer the same forgiveness as freely as we have received it. Afterall, didn't Jesus teach us to regularly pray, *"forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us"*?

When Jesus shared communion with His disciples, He knew these men who followed Him for three years were anything but perfect. Jesus knew that the community of disciples that He led was anything but a perfect community. Jesus knew the disciples were going to let Him down soon after they finished their last supper with Him. Yet He did not give up on the disciples but in their holy meal together, Jesus accepted them in their imperfection and offered them God's grace and forgiveness for their past sin and their sin that was still to come. Jesus has an endless number of open places at the communion table this morning where Jesus offers to do the same for us.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES: (Books marked with * are available to be checked-out in the Asbury Discipleship Resource Center)

- *The Holy Bible* (Several FREE copies are available in the DRC)
- *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure*, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
- *Trusting God: Even When Life Hurts*, Jerry Bridges
- *Your Church is Too Safe*, Mark Buchanan
- *Running Scared: Fear, Worry, and the God of Rest*, Edward T. Welch
- *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, Ken Sande
- *Resolving Everyday Conflict*, Ken Sande & Kevin Johnson
- *The Treasure Principle*, Randy Alcorn
- *Don't Waste Your Life*, John Piper
- *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters*, Tim Keller
- *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, John Piper
- *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers*, Dane Ortlund
- *Transforming Grace: Living Confidently in God's Unfailing Love*, Jerry Bridges
- *Trusting God: Even When Life Hurts*, Jerry Bridges

Icebreaker Questions

1. Describe a time when someone's encouragement helped you stand firm during a personal struggle.
2. Without naming names, when have you witnessed forgiveness transform a relationship?

Sermon Discussion Questions

1. Jesus acknowledges that temptation is constant. What practices help you stay alert spiritually so you do not "cause others to stumble"?
2. Scripture calls us to confront sin with humility and love. What barriers make it difficult to correct a fellow believer? How do we overcome those barriers?
3. How do you distinguish between loving correction and a judgmental spirit?
4. Jesus commands forgiveness even if someone hurts us repeatedly in one day. What does this reveal about the nature of Christian forgiveness?
5. How can remembering how Christ has forgiven us shape the way we respond when others fail?
6. In what ways can our church community strengthen its "foundation straps" (practices, disciplines, relationships) so that we stand firm together during spiritual storms?
7. What impacted you most from the sermon? How might you apply this week's sermon to your life?
8. How might this group pray for you this week?