

Oak Hills Stake Relief Society Gospel Study Class
February 28, 2017

Teacher: Catherine Corman Parry

Lesson: **Forgiveness**

We will use Luke 15 and Luke 7:36-50 as our main texts. Please scan the Topical Guide to see where and how the Gospels use the word "forgiveness," and read any or all of the passages that you find.

Hymn: "Count Your Many Blessings"

Questions:

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Thoughts:

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Experiences:

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Quotes:

"During the past eighteen months there has been a division of the Latter-Day Saints upon national party lines. Political campaigns have been conducted, elections have been held, and feelings, more or less intense, have been engendered in the minds of brethren and sisters upon one side and the other.

"We have been cognizant of conduct and have heard many expressions that have been very painful to us and have grieved our spirits.

"We know they have been an offense unto the God of peace and love, and a stumbling block unto many of the Saints.

"We feel now that a time for reconciliation has come; that before entering into the temple to present ourselves before the Lord in solemn assembly, we shall divest ourselves of every harsh and unkind feeling against each other; that not only our bickerings shall cease, but that the cause of them shall be removed, and every sentiment that prompted and has maintained them

shall be dispelled; that we shall confess our sins one to another, and ask forgiveness one of another; that we shall plead with the Lord for the spirit of repentance, and, having obtained it, follow its promptings; so that in humbling ourselves before Him and seeking forgiveness from each other, we shall yield that charity and generosity to those who crave our forgiveness that we ask for and expect from Heaven.”

(Quoted in James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord*, Chapter VI: “The Great Temple at Salt Lake City, Utah Historical”) Wilford Woodruff, George Q. Cannon, and Joseph F. Smith comprise the First Presidency who issued this missive on the 18 March of 1893.

Resources:

- *Teachings of the Presidents: Heber J. Grant*, Chapter 16: “Forgiving Others.”
- James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord*, Chapter VI: “The Great Temple at Salt Lake City, Utah Historical”)
- [LINK TO THE POWERPOINT PRESENTATION](#)

Notes:

Slide: “**490**” Why the number 490? Because seventy times seven equals 490. Peter asked the Lord, “how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?” The Lord responded, “I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven” (Matthew 18:21-22). This may see like a petty question to us, but the Mosaic Law prescribed forgiveness three times, so, Peter was generous by suggesting seven.

Slide: Gravestone reading “Still waiting for apologies from the following people...”

Slide: The word “forgive” goes back to Old English (forgiefan), and beyond. “For” probably means “completely,” and “giefan” means, “to give, grant, allow, remit (a debt), to pardon (an offense), to give up, to give in marriage”[1]

Slide: D&C 64:8-10 “My disciples, in days of old, sought occasion against one another and forgave not one another in their hearts; and for this evil they were afflicted and sorely

chastened. Wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin, I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men.”

Wait, the greater sin remains in me, when that person committed the offense? How can that be?

Several scriptures say that as often as a brother repents, we should forgive. I didn't choose any of those for the slide because they might give us wiggle room: do we not have to forgive, if the person who offended us doesn't repent? D & C 64:8-10 simply says, “Forgive everyone.”

Slide: “forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12) As you recall, the Lord includes this phrase in his example of how to pray. After he finishes the prayer, he immediately takes up the topic of forgiveness: “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15). Jesus declares clearly here that our own forgiveness depends on our forgiving others. That's a challenging doctrine. Why might we be required to forgive in order to be forgiven?

Comment: It's fair. But I guess God's purpose is for us to become like him. So, if you learn to forgive the other person you're more like him, but if you hold a grudge you're not like him.

True, God doesn't hold grudges.

Comment: Forgiveness has to start somewhere.

It does. Someone has to forgive, or you end up in a never-ending cycle of grudges and revenge.

Comment: He's forgiven us so much, but we have trouble forgiving even small things, like someone who is gossiping about us. Consider someone whose husband has been murdered and she is able to forgive the murderer, but then she talks to her friend, who can't let go of something her mother said, or something else small like that. I think that is maybe what he's saying.

Comment: When I forgive, it's comforting for me. When I don't forgive and it festers, I'm not a very good person and it shows.

Surely, what forgiving does for us must be an aspect of why the Lord commands us to forgive.

Comment: We also have to forgive ourselves. Even if the Lord forgives us it does no good unless we forgive ourselves.

Yes, we are among the people we need to forgive. There are people who forgive others easily but carry a grudge against themselves for a very long time.

Comment: I always see this issue as—we all agreed to come here to this earth, and we all agreed to experience many things that we didn't fully understand at that the time. When we forgive others, we accept certain truths about human nature: we accept faults and difficulties. We're saying "we trust you, Heavenly Father, we accept your plan. We are going to be hurt in this life, but the commandment to forgive will help us get closer to you."

Comment: it's an interesting paradox that we're asked to be as perfect as Christ but we're asked to have patience and forgiveness of ourselves.

In our discussion of repentance a couple of weeks ago, we listed some characteristics of a repentant person. One of these was willingness to forgive others their trespasses. A person

that is not ready to forgive is also not fully repentant. We must be willing to let go of the offenses against us, in order to receive forgiveness for our own sins.

Comment: I'm really big on justice. The reason it's hard for me to forgive is because I worry that Heavenly Father might forget what someone did to me, so I have to take care of it myself. But in the end, when I stand alone before Him face to face, He will care only about my sins, not other people's. Not forgiving will only hurt me.

Yes, I know the feeling that justice should be done for offenses against me, and it should be eternal, vengeful, justice. Letting go of that feeling is difficult; sometimes we don't even want to let go of it.

Comment: I think feeling hurt, and wanting to see justice, and then that justice not coming immediately forces us to go before the Savior and place it before him, and say "make me better."

Yes, the whole point is to bring us to the Savior.

Slide: Matt 18:21-35: "Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain King. . ." The Lord tells this parable in response to Peter's question, "how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?" Its point seems to be that God forgives us vastly more than we will ever need to forgive each other, and He expects us to follow His example by forgiving everyone who sins against us. If we do not, then we jeopardize even the forgiveness we have already received from Him.

In the parable, the first debtor owes the king an impossibly large amount of money: 10,000 talents, or roughly 6 billion American dollars.[2] Clearly, the Lord made this a debt so large that we would see the debtor could never repay his creditor, no matter how hard or how long he worked. So, what does the king do? He simply has compassion on the man, and forgives him

the entire debt. Since the king is the Lord, we are the debtor, and the debt is our sins, we understand the impossibility of “repaying” our “debt” for the Atonement, and the enormity of the Savior’s gift to us in providing for the remission of our sins. Are we surprised, then, when we read further in the parable, that the forgiven debtor finds one of the servants who owes him a pittance of money, and instead of taking the lesson from his Lord, orders the man and his family to be sold to raise money for the debt? The friends and neighbors who saw this were outraged, partly because they knew about the king’s generous forgiveness. They complain to the king, and the king delivers the man to the tormenters until the full amount of his original debt is paid. Because this man did not forgive the debts owed him, the king invoked the penalties that would have been in place originally.

Luke 7:36-50: In this narrative, Simon, a Pharisee, invites Jesus to dinner at his home. When Jesus sits down to eat, a woman in the city brings an alabaster box of ointment, and “began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.” Simon recognizes the woman as a “sinner,” and says to himself, “This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.” Note that Simon only thinks this, he doesn’t express the sentiment out loud. Nevertheless, Jesus, who knows hearts and thoughts, answers by saying, “Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee.” He then tells a short parable about two creditors who owe their lord money, one a lot, one a little. When they can’t pay, their lord forgives them both. So far, the story sounds similar to the parable of the king and the two debtors; the point, however, is different. Jesus asks Simon which of the two debtors will love their lord more: the one who was forgiven much, or the one who was forgiven little. Simon responds with the obvious answer, “I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most.” The lord then explains how the parable fits Simon and the woman. It was customary to provide an honored guest with water to wash away the dust of travel, and with oil for their feet, hands, or hair, to counteract the sun and dry climate. Simon, who thought of himself as righteous, had offered none of these things to Jesus. Nor had he given the Lord a friendly kiss when he arrived. The

woman, however, who knew she was a sinner, had given Jesus all of these things, along with her humble service and love. Therefore, “Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.”[3]

Does this remind you of Luke 15, in which we saw the Pharisees and scribes murmuring against Jesus for associating with publicans and sinners?

Comment: Justice, and how Simon thought the woman should be treated a certain way, made me think about how sometimes we are treated badly and think the offenders should be treated in kind. But maybe justice isn't necessary, maybe the offenders didn't mean to offend, and didn't know they had. It may be useful to practice empathy along with forgiveness.

That's a good point. There are plenty of times when it may be useful to think less in terms of forgiveness, and more in terms of not passing judgement.

Comment: My brother is slightly less active. He often goes only 2 out of 4 Sundays to church but when he prays, he has a close, tender relationship with the Savior and knows Heavenly Father and the Savior as real people.

Comment: I really believe in how we benefit from forgiving. I was raised by a loving stepfather, but my birth father was not a good, upright man. I spent my childhood in between wanting his attention and never getting it, and not wanting it. The result was that I really got to emotional indifference. I thought that was complete and I was done. Several years later I needed some copies of my birth certificate, and on the way there, I realized I was really anxious; I didn't want to get the certificates. As I thought about it, I realized that I didn't want that birth certificate because it had my birth father's name on it. When I looked at his name, I realized that he was exactly the same age when I was born as my

son was that very day. I could forgive my son anything; could I forgive my father? So, forgiveness finally was complete for me. Sometimes it takes more than one try to forgive.

Thank you; that was a beautiful example of forgiveness. Some of us don't have all that much to forgive—just the petty offenses of daily life—but others have a great deal to forgive. People among us are deeply wounded by things which are not their fault; others of us are wounded through our own agency. The Savior will take all of those burdens on himself, forgiving and strengthening us to forgive, if we will let him.

Comment: My mother experienced abuse in her childhood. She told me that the Atonement covers not just what you do, but what is done to you. She said it also covers what should have been done for you, but wasn't. She struggled with feeling that she should have been protected from the abuse, but wasn't. Turning to the Savior helped her cope with these feelings.

And that's not a doctrine I remember from my youth. I heard many lessons about how the Atonement will free us from our sins, but none about how it could strengthen us, enable us, take away the pain caused by others. The first time I heard that doctrine was here, in this building, from that pulpit, when a woman spoke of the Savior helping her fight the emotional pain caused by sexual abuse when she was a child. I had never thought of the Atonement in those terms. I am grateful we now teach that the Lord's love and sacrifice are all-pervasive, that we can look for his help with every kind of burden we bear.

Forgiveness changes us. I suspect that is at the core of the Lord's seemingly severe requirement that we forgive to be forgiven. It seems to me that if we aren't able to forgive, we can't be whole, though it is important to remember that forgiveness is a process—often a long process—that may not come immediately. Or maybe it will. Corrie Ten Boom tells of meeting after a speaking engagement, one of the cruelest guards from Ravensbruck concentration camp where she had been imprisoned during World War II. In the intervening years he had become a

Christian, and he extended his hand to her and asked for her forgiveness. She didn't see how she could find the charity to forgive, so she put out her hand and prayed silently to the Lord to supply the necessary feeling. He did.[4]

Let's return to the Parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15, starting with verse 22. We stopped our discussion of this parable a couple of weeks ago before we go to the part with the elder son. This section has more to do with forgiveness than repentance. The elder son, as you remember, is angry that his father is celebrating the younger son's return. He points out that while the Prodigal was off wasting his money with harlots, he, the elder son, has served faithfully for many years, "neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment." The words here remind us of what Jesus *could* say to the Father—because he alone never transgressed his Father's commandments—but this angry, jealous brother isn't Jesus. Then the father acknowledges, "son, you are ever with me," but also declares that it is appropriate to rejoice.

The father also reminds the elder brother of his relationship to the former prodigal. In his angry complaint, the elder brother said to his father, "as soon as **this thy son** was come . . . thou hast killed for him the fatted calf." Note that he says, "this thy son," distancing himself from the younger son by emphasizing the father's relationship to him, and not his own. The father, pointedly but gently, corrects this by reminding the elder brother of his relationship to the younger: "It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for **this thy brother** was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

The father then tells the elder son that he will inherit all that the father has. I've known people who interpret this to mean that only the elder son will inherit the father's estate, and all the younger son gets is a good party. But won't the repentant younger son also inherit all that the father has? If we repent, forgive, and obey, won't we ALL inherit ALL that the Father has? It's a paradox. The inheritance will not be divided between our Father's deserving children, but we each will inherit all.

Slide: Heber J. Grant manual, chapter 16—Heber J. Grant tells of a prominent man who had committed grievous sins, was called before the Council of the Twelve, lied to them repeatedly, and was finally excommunicated when evidence was found that convicted him. A number of years passed, the man repented and applied to be re-baptized into the Church. The prophet, John Taylor, said he could be, provided there was unanimous agreement among the Twelve. The first vote was 7 to 5, against. He applied again, it didn't pass. The third or fourth time it was 11 to 1, and Heber J. Grant was the one holding out. He tells the story in these words:

“Later I was in the office of the president and he said: “Heber, I understand that eleven of the apostles have consented to the baptism of Brother So and So,” naming the man, “and that you alone are standing out. How will you feel when you get on the other side and you find that this man has pleaded for baptism and you find that you have perhaps kept him out from entering in with those who have repented of their sins and received some reward?”

“I said, “President John Taylor, I can look the Lord squarely in the eye, if he asks me that question, and tell him that I did that which I thought was for the best good of the kingdom. ... I can tell the Lord that [that man] had disgraced this Church enough, and that I did not propose to let any such a man come back into the Church.”

“Well,” said President Taylor, “my boy, that is all right, stay with your convictions, stay right with them.”

. . . I left the president's office. I went home. ... I was reading the Doctrine and Covenants through for the third or fourth time systematically, and I had my bookmark in it, but as I picked it up, instead of opening where the bookmark was, it opened to:

“I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men; but he that forgiveth not his brother standeth condemned before the Lord.” [See D&C 64:9–10.]

And I closed the book and said: “If the devil applies for baptism, and claims that he has repented, I will baptize him.” After lunch I returned to the office of President Taylor and I said, “President Taylor, I have had a change of heart. One hour ago I said, never while I live, did I expect to ever consent that Brother So and So should be baptized, but I have come to tell you he can be baptized, so far as I am concerned.”

. . . The Prophet of the Lord [President Taylor] said:

“My boy, never forget that when you are in the line of your duty your heart will be full of love and forgiveness, even for the repentant sinner . . . You can know the difference between the Spirit of the Lord and the spirit of the adversary, when you find that you are happy and contented, that you love your fellows, that you are anxious for their welfare; and you can tell that you do not have that Spirit when you are full of animosity and feel that you would like to knock somebody down.”[5]

I’d like to take a few moments now to read a message from the First Presidency about forgiveness:

“During the past eighteen months there has been a division of the Latter-Day Saints upon national party lines. Political campaigns have been conducted, elections have been held, and feelings, more or less intense, have been engendered in the minds of brethren and sisters upon one side and the other.

“We have been cognizant of conduct and have heard many expressions that have been very painful to us and have grieved our spirits.

“We know they have been an offense unto the God of peace and love, and a stumbling block unto many of the Saints.

“We feel now that a time for reconciliation has come; that before entering into the temple to present ourselves before the Lord in solemn assembly, we shall divest ourselves of every harsh and unkind feeling against each other; that not only our bickerings shall cease, but that the cause of them shall be removed, and every sentiment that prompted and has maintained them shall be dispelled; that we shall confess our sins one to another, and ask forgiveness one of another; that we shall plead with the Lord for the spirit of repentance, and, having obtained it, follow its promptings; so that in humbling ourselves before Him and seeking forgiveness from each other, we shall yield that charity and generosity to those who crave our forgiveness that we ask for and expect from Heaven.”

This is relevant advice for our current situation, but it was not given by our current First Presidency. This was sent to the Church in March of 1893, by President Wilford Woodruff, George Q. Cannon, and Joseph F. Smith, who were urging the Saints to prepare themselves for the dedication of the Salt Lake Temple. I came across the quotation in James E. Talmage’s, *The House of the Lord*.^[6]

Comment: That reminds me of Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address, “with malice toward none...” I wish the media would read that.

I do want to clarify that by encouraging forgiveness in a charged political atmosphere, I am not making a political point, but a doctrinal one. I don’t in any way mean to quash political activism on one side or another. Citizens have the responsibility to act according to their conscience, and to hold their elected leaders to standards of moral and Constitutional integrity. In this effort, we will always disagree with each other. I urge, however, that we recall not just good manners in dealing with each other, but our duties to love and forgive one another. We need to forgive our loved ones’-- and those who need to become our loved ones’--political “transgressions” as much as we need to forgive their other offenses against us. I pray that your heart, and my

heart, can be softened by turning to our Lord, so that we will forgive what needs to be forgiven.
In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

- [1] <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=forgive>
- [2] I found the currency conversion here:
<http://text.watv.org/english/qna/view.html?idx=1573>
- [3] Of course, Simon didn't really need less forgiveness than the woman; he just thought he did.
- [4] This story is republished online here:
<https://www.guideposts.org/better-living/positive-living/guideposts-classics-corrie-ten-boon-on-forgiveness?nopaging=1>
- It was originally published in *Guideposts*, November, 1972.
- [5] From *Teachings of the Presidents: Heber J. Grant*, Chapter 26, "Forgiving Others."
- [6] James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord*, Chapter VI: "The Great Temple at Salt Lake City, Utah, Historical."