

Good morning. We are right to vote the middle of our short series here the called indebted and what we've been talking about the last couple weeks and will continue in the next couple is the reality that as we go through life certain debts are created in our hearts because there is an imbalance in our relationship with others. In one way or another for one reason or another person A ends up owing person B. This usually comes about because of some kind a wrong committed or perceived to have been committed by person B against person A and last week we set out that every wrong committed by one person against another person could be restated in the context of a theft and that the person committing the wrong has actually taken something from the person who is being wrong. It could be money and goods. Or it could be something less tangible like pride and respect; your confidence and trust; it could be something like love or affection; and it could even be something as simple as a hope or dream. When something is taken then something is owed and a debt is formed. And that debt real or perceived lodges itself in our hearts and it just kind of sits there and ferments there for a while. Then it grows and it roots down deep into our heart and it begins to control our actions, and direct our thoughts, and it colors our words, and it shapes our hearts.

So that's kind of what we've been talking about the last several weeks. Last week we talked about the first at the debt of "I owe you". I end up owing you because it at some point I have intentionally or carelessly or maliciously or absentmindedly or insensitively wronged you in some sort of way. And a product of the heart debt is a feeling called guilt. As always is the case the weight of that debt is based on my perception of what is owed. You may have thought that the offense was really no big deal but if I perceived that it was a really big deal then the weight I carry is equally as large. Although God's forgiveness is always freely extended to us if I want to escape my guilt then I have to do whatever I can to make things right with you.

Now guilt is a tricky business and it's extremely difficult to talk about guilt without coming across as I'm trying to make you feel guilty. Now I did my best to do that last week but it's not an easy task. You see every example that I give you about what guilt like, what guilt is, what causes guilt, what guilt does to you - although it given as a simple description can very easily be received as a guilt trip in and of itself. So you see my dilemma. As I stand up here and try and talk about some of these things this morning, I thought I would begin with the disclaimer before we go further in the series: I'm not trying to make you feel guilty. That is my disclaimer. Nor am I going to try to make you feel any of the other heart debts that were going to be covering in the next few weeks. Odds are, I'm pretty sure, that if any of those debts exist in your heart you probably feel them more than strongly enough already. You don't need me to come up here and try and make you feel them more. Our goal here in our morning sessions together is to figure out how to try and pay off some of those debts and get back to feeling free.

Maybe some of you have got to the point in your life where you are able to have a mortgage burning. Where your mortgage on your house was finally paid off and so you got to take that piece of paper and then and symbolically throw it in the fire to symbolize the your house is finally yours, you own it free and clear. Or maybe you've had the pleasure of making the last payment on your car - hopefully it still runs at that point, but anyways. You get to celebrate that was my last payment on my car. Or perhaps you've had the experience of finally paying off debt credit card. That credit card that you been paying ridiculous high interest on for years and years and you've been really disciplined and worked and worked and paid it off and finally you call the credit card company and they say the balance on your card is \$0.00. Maybe you've experienced that. And when you do have any of those kinds of experiences you get excited! You want to celebrate! You want to rejoice! Have some kind of party! You want to gather all of your friends together and go out or have a big fancy dinner or something - just don't charge to your credit card, that kind of defeats the purpose.

But that's the kind of feeling that we want to be going for here on our Sunday mornings. At the end of our series together I want you to feel like you're at least headed in the right direction and that you have some of the tools to work your way free of what ever heart debt you are carrying. And that's why guilt was our first topic to be covered so that you know that as we cover the rest of our heart guilt in the next couple weeks: you owe me, I owe me, and God owes me, you won't be tempted to feel guilty about having those heart debts in your heart. So that you will know that I'm not trying to convince you that you are terribly horrible person because you have those

things in you. So that you will be able to take each week's lesson not an increased burden but a roadmap to freedom. So that whatever guilty feelings may be stirred up as were talking here together on Sunday mornings, as we discuss these topics you'll understand that the solution to eliminating those feelings is to start doing what you can to make things right. As a wise scholar once said "Remember I'm pulling for you. We're all in this together!"

Now I'm not an avid comic book reader, but every now and then there is a great line that comes out of comic book stories. Probably one of the best lines to ever come out of any comic book story is the one that says, "With great power comes great responsibility." Of course that's out of out of the Spiderman comics and movies and its a line that has been repeated dozens and hundreds maybe even thousands of times - and that was just in the first movie! But it is a great line. It is very memorable and inspiring and profound. It is a wonderful quote to contemplate and think about.

One of the worst comic book quotes that I've ever come across is from the Incredible Hulk. The Hulk is all about this mild-mannered scientist to accidentally douses himself with gamma radiation and kind of turns himself into a modern-day Dr. Jekyll / Mr. Hyde kind of thing. Most of the time he's just a regular old Bruce Banner but when he gets upset he transforms into this monstrous muscular menace that just reeks havoc on everything else around him. And often before he Hulks out, Bruce will caution the person inciting his rage by saying "Don't make me angry. You would not like me when I am angry." Now is that not the most ridiculously redundant line ever uttered? My initial, and I'll admit somewhat sarcastic, response is "Okay, good to know. I will take you off that ever so long list of angry people I love to be around." Of course I would never say that to the Hulk's face or he would squash me like bug. But seriously ever wants to be around someone who is angry? Do you go around trying to make people mad because they are just so much fun to be around when they are angry? Do you poke and prod people so that they will lose their temper because it's just such a good time when they explode? I don't even like being around myself when I'm angry, I don't want to be around someone else when they are!

Take away the enormous size and the emerald complexion and most of us aren't that different than the Hulk. There probably isn't one person in here who couldn't honestly speak the words "you wouldn't like me when I'm angry." And even if you don't recognize it I guarantee that the people around you probably do. They will verified it by saying things like - "She's no fun to be around when she's angry," or "You don't want to be standing by when he blows his top," or "When they're angry the best thing to do is just get out of the way in lay low until it blows over."

Well, believe it or not I know what makes you angry. I know what it is that really gets your blood boiling and makes you hot under collar. What makes your voice bellow, your face turn red and steam shoot out of your ears. I know what it is that makes you angry because it's the same thing that makes me angry. It is the same thing that makes everyone else angry too. I get angry when I don't get what I want and so do you. Consider that for a moment. Think back to a time when you got angry work and your way to the core of that anger and see if at the heart of it there isn't at some point, for some reason, in some way you didn't get what you wanted.

Admittedly sometimes what I want is selfish and indulgent and inconsiderate but there are times when what I want is truly good and well deserved and fair and justified and really just not much too ask. But either way I get angry when I don't get what I want and probably even more angry when the things I want are justified or something I think I deserve. But in the end it still boils down to me not getting what I want. And that's how it works for all of us:

When a person doesn't get a job promotion they applied for before and frankly were far more qualified for then the slacker who actually did get it - they might get angry

When a person wants to continue driving in the lane unimpeded at their current speed but someone just cuts in front of them and then slows down to a snail's pace - that can make them angry

When the person wants a friend who will always be there for them, who they can trust implicitly and then they discover that the person they thought was going to be that friend for them has just stabbed them in their back - that can make them angry

When a person wants a job or a marriage or family or a life or health to be a certain way and it turns out it's not - that can make them angry

When a person wants a pristine and orderly house where everyone cleans up after themselves and they don't have to spend all day long cooking and cleaning and washing clothes and on and on and on and all they like is just a single moment sit down and read a book in peace but they can't because the mess surrounding them just reminds them all the work still needs to be done – that can make them angry

When a person just wants to be able to pay their bills and make the occasional modest purchase without stressing over whether or not they can afford to do so – that can make them angry

When a person just wants a little extra time to spend with their family or their friends or to take a trip or enjoy a hobby or just do all those other things that they never seem to have any time to do - that can make them angry

When a person wants the last piece of cake and someone else beats into it – that can make them angry

Anger is what happens in my heart when I don't get what I want. Anger is the heart debt that is created by my belief rightly or wrongly, justifiably or not, my belief that somehow somebody owes me. I'm owed a promotion, I'm owed a clear driving lane, I'm owed trustworthy friendships, I'm owed the life I desire, I'm owed a clean living space, I'm owed a decent bank account balance, I'm owed enough time to do it all and most importantly I am owed that delicious piece of cake! And when I don't get it, when I don't get what I think I'm owed my heart gets angry.

The natural response to the heart debt of anger is revenge. We think if you owe me, I'm going to make you pay. And even if you can't give me the thing I wanted I will find some other way of taking back from you to even the score. That way may be a blustering tirade where I rant and I yell at you or I lay on my horn and I tailgate you an inch behind your bumper. Or maybe I'll just ignore you and exclude you all give you the cold shoulder and the mean stare. Or maybe I'll take my revenge back from you by telling everyone else how horrible you are. Or maybe my revenge will be to just continue to do my job or clean the house but I'm going to do it in a way that makes sure that you know how unhappy I am about it. Or maybe it's as simple as you hurt me so I'm going to hurt you.

We all kind of like payback in the short term because sometimes pay back feels pretty good. And besides people should pay what they owe right? And if we let them off the hook they won't learn anything, but a good dose of payback will certainly make them think twice about doing that same thing again! The problem with payback is doesn't work. Some debts can never be fully repaid. Most things can't be undone. Many things can't be completely made up for. That car that cut you off, unless it is a DeLorean, cannot go back in time and not cut you off. Once you've eaten that cake there's no way I'm getting it back - least not in the shape that it was originally in. It just can't happen time lost is lost. Hurts can be healed but not erased. Wrongs can be amended but not undone. Consequences can be mitigated but not eliminated. And if we continue to wait for repayment of a debt that can never be repaid we condemn ourselves to living with anger indefinitely. Long after the incident is over; long after the time to fix things is passed; long after the opportunity to be repaid is gone - our hearts still carries our anger. And that anger takes root and it grows. You heard the expression "one bad apple spoils the bunch" well a little bit of unaddressed anger in your heart can overtake your entire heart.

Have you ever caught yourself getting angry and you're not entirely sure why? Or maybe you're getting angry and you surprise yourself as you feel your temperature rising at an extremely rapid rate or disproportionately to what

is going on at the moment. Or perhaps you know one of those people who seems to be angry all the time and even when there's nothing to be angry about they still seem to be angry. You dread going anywhere near them or doing anything for them because we know that no matter what you do they are not going to be happy. Well, odds are that that person somewhere along the way something happened that made them angry. Someone owed them something. And that debt sat in their heart and it festered for days and for months and maybe even for years. And it captured every other little bit of anger that entered their heart and now they have accumulated so many "you owe me" heart debts that they are convinced that everyone owes them. Which is why no matter what you do they still think you owe them. You owe them something different, something better, something more.

You don't want to be that guy. You don't want to be that woman. You don't want spend your whole life hopelessly trying to even to get even or get back at everyone you think owes you something. And you don't want your life to be controlled and corrupted by your anger. You want to be free of it! You want a heart filled with joy and peace. The question is how are we going to get there?

As is often the case the answer to the question is simple but not necessarily easy. You see the remedy to anger is forgiveness. That sounds pretty straightforward, but if you've ever tried to forgive someone you know that it's not always as easy as it sounds. Andy Stanley says this "Whenever I speak on the subject of forgiveness there always seems to be three kinds of people in the audience: The first group believes that they ought to forgive but can't seem to muster the courage to do it. The second group feels like they would be letting the offender off the hook and that just doesn't seem right. The third group claims that have gone through the motions of forgiveness but those old feelings and memories keep coming back leaving them to wonder if they'd ever really forgiven and at all. Do you find yourself in one of those categories? I have probably been in all three of them at different times with different people. I'm pretty sure I may have been at all three at once occasionally. Forgiveness is not always easy - nonetheless forgiveness is the only way out of anger. My anger exists because I perceived that a wrong has been committed. You have taken something from me and I therefore I didn't get what I wanted. And the only way to get rid of that anger is to get rid of the debt. Payback can never truly even out the account. Your best efforts to can never fully undo what was done. The only option that remains is for me to cancel the debt.

And that's what forgiveness is: cancelling the debt. When a student goes to University often they have to apply for student loans to help pay their tuition. And when school is done sometimes, if they're very lucky, they can apply to the government and have a portion of their loan forgiven and they get part of their debt cancelled. Or consider the greatest act of forgiveness the world has ever seen. When Jesus died on the cross he paid the price for all our sins effectively cancelling the debt. The apostle Paul knew firsthand how toxic anger can be to the heart. I wonder if thoughts of his personal crusade to round up Christians and throw them in jail or put them to death came to his mind as he wrote the church in Ephesus and warn them:

Ephesians 4:31 (NIV & NLT) Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, along with every form of malice.

That is pretty complete list. Paul says get rid of feeling angry, getting really angry, anger, things you say to people when you're angry, things you say about people when you're angry, and oh yeah just in case I missed something our anything mean you might do out of anger. I'm paraphrasing a little bit but you get the point. Paul says you've got to get rid of every ounce of this stuff. It is poison. It is toxic. It is deadly.

You may say okay I get it anger is bad, but that's easy for you to say Paul. You are all saintly and godly and stuff and it's not nearly as easy for us regular folks. Besides if you had to deal with what I have to deal with; if you had to put up with the people I have to put up with; if you'd been treated the way I have been treated; if you have been dealt the cards that I have been dealt – you would go a little easier on this whole get rid of all anger and malice thing.

Well bear in mind that when Paul wrote these words he probably didn't write them - he most likely dictated them because his eyes were too bad to see well enough to write. And he did so he was sitting in a Roman prison. He

had been arrested unjustly extradited to Rome and been awaiting trial for over a year and if his trial ever came it would be in a place where Christianity was viewed with both suspicion and hostility. And yet his message to the church is you've got to get rid of your anger. Paul doesn't leave us hanging there he goes on: Ephesians 4:31 - 32 (NIV & NLT) 31Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, along with every form of malice. 32Instead, be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as in Christ God forgave you.

The secret of getting rid of your anger is forgiveness and not just any forgiveness but forgiving as Christ forgave you. Now think about what that means: Christ's forgiveness is unwarranted unmerited undeserved unrequested unconditional unlimited unbelievable and Paul says if you want to get rid of your anger you've got to learn to forgive like that.

A while back I had a conversation with a friend and I was telling him about something which in hindsight was really small thing. But at the time it was really getting under my skin and bothering me and so was I laying out my case as best as I could how I was irritated with this other person because they were doing this thing and they kept doing it over and over again and they didn't learn not to do it and apparently it didn't bother them in the least that it bothered me so much that they were doing this thing. And I could go ahead and do it for them but if I did that then of course they'd be off the hook and they wouldn't learn anything and they just keep doing it over and over and I have to keep doing it for them over and over and that just wouldn't be fair! And my friend said to me "Well do you want to try to win or do you want to be happy?" And you know I think were always given that same choice when it comes to our anger. I could try and win, I could seek my revenge, I could make them pay, I could teach them a lesson, but when I do anger takes root in my heart. Or I could be forgiving and cultivate an anger free heart instead.

Forgiving like Jesus has forgiven seems to be a tall order to be sure. In fact forgiving like Jesus has forgiven us is insane, it's impractical, it's implausible, it's impossible, unless you've experienced forgiveness by Jesus first. Brad read for us the parable of Matthew 18 earlier. Jesus tells his followers the story and it's all prompted by Peter's question of "Okay seriously how many times do I have to repeatedly forgive this guy over and over again?" In the story Jesus tells he says there was this guy who owes more money than he could ever pay back - millions of dollars. More money than he can never pay back in a whole lifetime. And so the master ordered that he be sold along with his wife and his kids and everything in the own to pay back the debt, but even if that had been done the master would have only recovered a fraction of what he was actually owed by the man. The man begs the master for little more time he says "if I can have some more time I can pay it off" which isn't true because he could never pay that much money off. When he begs the master the master has compassion on him and says "you know what? Instead of giving you more time I'm going to forgive your debt entirely." And so man is very excited man runs out and the first thing he does he find someone who owes him a small amount of money - an amount of money that could possibly have been repaid over time - but instead of showing the forgiveness his master had showed him he let his anger take over him and he demanded the second man pay what he owed right then and there. And when the man couldn't do it he threw him in jail and said "you're going to stay here until you pay every last cent of what you owe me." When the master found out what did he do? He brought that man in and he said "you should have learned from me, you should have followed my example" and then something startling happens: the master sends that man to prison until he had paid his entire debt. And that sounds harsh and severe and we may try and write it off as just some extreme hyperbole that Jesus was using to make his point. And perhaps you could make a case for that if Jesus had not ended the story with this line Matthew 18 verse 35: Matthew 18:35 (NLT) 35"That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart."

Jesus challenges his followers to learn to forgive like he does and warns them what might happen if they don't. You all are probably familiar with the passage of Scripture known as the Lord's prayer. There is a line in the Lord's prayer that says "forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors" and following the Lord's prayer Jesus adds these words he says "for if you forgive men when they sin against you your heavenly father will also forgive you but if you do not forgive men their sins your father will not forgive your sins." Again Jesus suggests we learn from

experiencing his forgiveness, that we are empowered to forgive others by experiencing his forgiveness to us and he warns that wilful refusal to forgive others could have dire consequences for us.

If you're like me even when I know that I should forgive, even when I feel compelled to forgive someone, even when I really want to forgive someone, forgiveness - especially forgiveness like Jesus forgives - is not always easy to muster. So I'm going to give you this morning four simple, but not remotely easy steps, on how to free your heart from anger by embracing forgiveness. And the next time you feel yourself getting angry go through this process in your mind. And if you see in yourself with a little bit of an angry heart in general think back through your life and see if there are some "you owe me" debts that you are still hanging onto and see if perhaps we can liberate those as well. Here the steps:

Number one: identify who you are angry at. That sounds obvious but you might be surprised sometimes it's not so obvious. I want you to do some soul-searching to discover who is in the crosshairs of your anger. Ask yourself questions like: Who do I not want to see or speak to? Who do I avoid in the hallways or screen their calls? Who do I have those imaginary arguments with sometimes? Who do I wish I could dish out a little bit of payback to? Who do I want to see get what's coming to them? Who do I secretly hope to see fail?

Number two: Identify who you are angry with and then determine what they owe you. Literally come up with a specific tangible thing that you feel they owe you. It doesn't have to be practical or realistic or even possible. Decide in your mind exactly what you think they took from you, what they prevented you from getting. Ask yourself what would it take to undo what has been done - even if you know it's never going to happen. This does two things: First of all it gets you to forgive specifically instead it generally. General forgiveness is good but it often leaves us with that unresolved feeling from time to time. But specific forgiveness is much more clear and much more concrete. But more than that it helps you see that if you are holding out for the other person to completely pay off this debt you are going to be waiting for a very, very long time. Perhaps the rest of your life.

Number three: Now comes the hard part, cancel the debt. For some things it might be just a matter of deciding in your mind and say to yourself "the debt's cancelled." For other things you might want to do something more tangible and symbolic. Maybe write the debt on a paper and burn it. Or writing it on a rock and throw it in the lake. Or carve it into jello and watch it melt. I don't know whatever works for you but do something, whatever it takes so that you know distinctly in your heart that whatever debt this person owed you is now paid off - just like your debt was paid off by Jesus.

And finally: Let it go. Case dismissed. Jury adjourned. Done deal. Now that doesn't mean that those old feelings won't well up inside of you from time to time but every time they do just keep reminding yourself "he doesn't owe me that anymore. She doesn't owe me that anymore." I knew a couple who once told me that after they have a "discussion" they would always verbally agree that they would put that discussion and the whole incident in their hypothetical slop bucket. A slop bucket, if you don't know what a slop bucket is, it is a disgusting swill of all kinds of nastiness. It looks bad. It smells bad. It tastes bad - or at least I assume it does. No one would ever dip into a slop bucket and take a big swig. And that was their way of saying that this discussion, this whole issue is over and done and neither one of us will bring it up again. And that's what you have got to do with your cancelled debts. Not that you forget what was done; and not that it doesn't still take time for your hurts to heal; and not that it justifies what happened or excuses their behaviour. But if you really want to be free you have to hold steadfast to your conviction that person doesn't owe you any more.

I've of made up some very simple cards that have those four steps on them. I want you to take one put it in your wallet, put it in your purse, somewhere and the next time you start feeling angry pull it out and work your way through the steps. All week I've been obviously extra conscious of all of this and so I've been doing my best to put it into practice and it's been an interesting experience. I suggest you start with something small - you know those little irritants that come along in life, whether someone steals your parking spot or your spouse leaves lit off the toothpaste things like that. Start little and work your way up. I don't know if I'd say it is counterintuitive

necessarily , but it certainly is counter instinctive and counter impulsive. It is not what you naturally want to do or feel like doing but the bottom line is it brings you to the place you want to be.

The reality of this world is that people will continue to wrong one another sometimes you're going to get hurt. On occasion you will actually take from others. Debts will be created. Some debts can never be repaid. Some broken things can never be completely fixed. Some damage can never be restored to brand-new condition. But we can still live with our hearts free of anger by following Paul's advice, he says:

Ephesians 4:26 - 27 (NLT) 26And "don't sin by letting anger control you." Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27for anger gives a foothold to the devil.

Colossians 3:12 - 14 (NIV) 12Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.