

Out of the Darkness and Into the Light

Part Three: *Letting Go*

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Outline:

1. Jesus owned his pain, not blaming, justifying, or complaining.
2. Jesus surrendered his will so that he might honor God's will.
3. Unforgiveness is thinking, "You owe me!"
4. Forgiveness shifts the focus from lamenting what your offender took from you to anticipating how God can restore you.

Download Remy's book: STUCK...how to overcome anger and reclaim your life.

- Go to Google Play, or the Apple Appstore, and download the Kindle Reader (free).
- Open the app and click on "Kindle Store."
- Search for STUCK by Remy Diederich
- It should be listed as free until April 18th. Click purchase.

Going Deeper: use the following questions for personal reflection and/or to discuss with family, friends and small group.

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how big of a complainer are you? (10 is the worst). Why is that?
2. On a scale of 1 to 10, how easily do you forgive big offenses? Why is that?
3. Read through Matthew 26 taking note of every time Jesus is offended. What strikes you about what Jesus said and didn't say? Contrast this with how you would typically respond in that situation.
4. What was it about Jesus that enabled him to respond with such a clear head and not retaliate? How might you do the same?
5. How did Remy define forgiveness?
6. Think about some of the big offenses in your life. Do you still have a feeling of "YOU OWE ME"? Why is that?
7. How does unforgiveness keep you stuck in the past?
8. What did Remy say might help you to let go and forgive?
9. Consider downloading Remy's book STUCK and reading it with others.

Message

We are spending these weeks leading up to Easter following Jesus to see what we can learn from him about handling pain and hardship. Some of you are probably in that place and I want to help you. I want to help you move out of the dark and into the light.

I started two weeks ago looking at the pain of Jesus' betrayal. I know it resonated with some of us. Betrayal is just a part of life. We trust people with our money, and our future, and our

hearts and sometimes they let us down. Worse than that, they might even turn against us. That's painful.

Or maybe your betrayer isn't another person. Maybe it's your health, or your finances, or your career. Maybe one of these let you down.

Or maybe YOU are the betrayer. Maybe you are the person who let others down. You've hurt people and that awareness now hurts you. You wonder if you can ever find forgiveness and restoration. And you wonder if you can forgive yourself.

No matter how you've been betrayed, you might be in a dark place today. So how do you handle the pain of betrayal? Or the pain of hardship? Well, over the last two weeks, we've looked at some solutions, involving turning to God and turning to other people. Today we are going to look at turning to face your betrayer, whoever that might be.

First I want to look at how Jesus talked about, or talked to, his betrayers. We are going to focus in on the encounters Jesus had in Matthew 26.

...Jesus... said to his disciples, "As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified." Matthew 26:1,2

That's all he said. He didn't add anything about how wrong it was. He didn't whine or complain. There was no rant against his persecutors or any attempt to elicit pity from his followers. Jesus owned his pain and chose to walk the path set before him.

Maybe that's why his disciples didn't take him seriously. I mentioned last week how James and John ignored what Jesus said about crucifixion and made their move to get Jesus to promote them in leadership. Jesus was so matter of fact, and understated maybe they didn't realize what he was saying.

Let's drop down a few more verses. Now Jesus was sharing the Last Supper with his disciples.

When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?" Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. Matthew 26:20-23

Again, Jesus simply stated the truth without making any derogatory comments. No accusations or incriminations or condemnations. He didn't call out Judas in front of everyone and shame him or humiliate him. That would have been so tempting. Jesus just said to Judas, go do what ya gotta do.

I'm sure the disciples all breathed a sigh of relief knowing that they weren't the ones who would betray Jesus. But before they got too comfortable with that thought Jesus told them they would all abandon him...

Then Jesus told them, “This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: “ ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.” Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.” “Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” Matthew 26:31-34

But notice, even with the revelation of their eminent abandonment, there were no sermonettes about how disappointed he was with them. No lectures on their unfaithfulness. No frustrated words saying, “HOW COULD YOU... after all that I’ve done for you?” Nope. Nothing like that.

You know, as I observe the world today I think we are living in the age of outrage. It seems that almost everyone is upset about something or someone and they feel compelled to let others know about it. People jump on facebook or twitter in hopes of taking down their foes with tirades of disgust. But Jesus never did that. He trusted that God would defend him.

Then Jesus took his disciples out to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. Let’s listen to his prayer:

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” Matthew 26:39

Jesus showed his humanity here. He wasn’t above the pain that he knew was about to be his. But he didn’t complain to God about it. He didn’t get mad at God. He didn’t ask, “Why me?” or tell God how unfair it was.

As painful as his life was, Jesus showed that he was totally surrendered to God’s will. He was willing to do whatever it took to do the right thing to honor God.

In all of these encounters that we just read, the common theme is trust. Jesus could face the worst possible scenario and not freak out or meltdown because he trusted the love of his Father. He trusted that God would make good of his pain. And that’s the message of Easter. God can make good of your pain.

This is the place where we often break down spiritually. We look for the easy way out... some kind of shortcut... to spare us from any more pain. We cease to be concerned about doing the right thing or honoring God. We just want out. We want the nightmare to end. We might offer up a brief prayer to God... basically, God, get me out of this mess. And when nothing changes immediately, we hit the eject button.

Doing the right thing isn’t our priority because doing the right thing might mean confronting someone and having a hard conversation. Or doing the right thing might mean losing a lot of money, or selling something that you really want to keep. Doing the right thing might mean forgiving someone and passing on a chance to offer some payback.

And we just don't think we are up for it. We fear that "doing the right thing" will only lead to more loss and pain. But it all boils down to whether or not we trust God. Do we believe that God rewards those who do the right thing?

For Jesus, doing the right thing meant being nailed to a cross so all humanity could be restored to God. He was able to sacrifice his happiness in order to honor God and help people. And he trusted that God would reward him for it.

Judas was certainly someone who had trouble doing the right thing.

Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. Jesus replied, "Do what you came for, friend." Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Matthew 26:49-51

Jesus referred to Judas as his friend. He didn't resist arrest. And we start to see why Jesus was so cool when he said this:

"Put your sword back in its place," ..."for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? Matthew 26:52,53

Jesus was totally comfortable in the situation because he knew that God was in control. He knew that submitting to the arrest would put him on the cross, but he trusted that God would deliver him.

I wonder... if you are facing some kind of pain today... are you confident that God will deliver you? Jesus' story is here to encourage us that we can trust God with our pain. Delivering you doesn't mean that he's going to solve all your problems. But Jesus wants you to know that God can use your pain for good.

Let's read one more encounter here in Matthew 26:

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward and declared, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'" Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" But Jesus remained silent. Matthew 26:59-63

Silent. When I was a much younger believer this really bothered me. I wanted Jesus to protest. I wanted him to list all the reasons that what they were doing was unfair. It seemed like such a sellout to say nothing.

But this is where we can really learn from Jesus. You know, as I observe the world today I think we are living in the age of outrage. It seems that almost everyone is upset about

something and feels compelled to let others know about it. People jump on facebook or twitter in hopes of taking down their foes with tirades of disgust.

You know, expressing your outrage might give you a degree of satisfaction but it's most often at the expense of someone else. And it shows a total lack of trust in God.

But I don't smell any hint of that in Jesus. His accusers were outraged with him, but Jesus refused to lower himself and engage in their petty drama. He operated out of a different play book. He didn't need to answer their questions.

And so my first lesson for us this morning to help us move out of the dark and into the light is to put your trust in God. Rather than complaining about what happened or blaming people who caused it, ask God what he wants to show you about YOURSELF. What comes to the surface because of your pain? What kind of attitudes? Resentment? Bitterness? Revenge?

And then, ask God what he wants to show you about HIMSELF. Ask God to use the pain in your life to make you more like Jesus... to create in you a heart of humility and submission to his will.

Now, if you have some valid concerns about your situation that you believe needs to be voiced, that's fair. But then take your concerns to someone who can do something about them. Go to the source. Your offender. If that's not safe then go to a counselor or a trusted friend to vent and get perspective and direction. You might even need to call the police or see a lawyer. But don't spew your outrage to anyone that will listen. That's not helpful.

The second lesson today that will move you out of darkness and into the light is to forgive those who have hurt you.

I think it's plain to see from the verses that I've already quoted that Jesus didn't hold anything against anybody. To hold unforgiveness in your heart means that you believe someone owes you something. You may not say those words, but that's what you feel... "you owe me!"

The problem with believing that someone owes you is that you can never be paid in full. Even if someone could pay you back, they can't undo what they did. They can't take away the hurt they caused you.

So, it's imperative that you find a way to get paid back without looking to your offender to do it.

If you think about it, the world owed Jesus. They owed him its love and worship. They gave him neither. But he didn't demand their worship or hold their sin against them. Jesus never put anyone under a sense of obligation.

You could reject Jesus without any fear of retribution because he didn't depend on people for his self-worth. His sense of worth came from his Father. That's why Jesus was able to forgive so easily.

Jesus was most famously quoted on the cross for forgiving his accusers. After he was hanging on the cross he prayed,

“Father forgive them. They don't know what they are doing.” Luke 23:34

I've had many people tell me, “I could never do that. After what's been done to me, I'll never forgive.” They say that because unforgiveness is a form of passive punishment. It's their way of getting back. But it is also their self-protection. Their offender made them feel belittled...devalued...shamed. And so they vowed to never let that happen again. That's too bad because when you shut down like that you lose a part of yourself. You might be able to protect yourself from more harm but you also prevent yourself from healing.

But Jesus would say, Look, no one can take any value from you unless you give it to them. Your worth comes from God and God only.

I mean, think about this. Unforgiveness makes no sense. Wasn't it bad enough that someone hurt you? So, now you are going to “get back” at your offender by carrying the weight of unforgiveness throughout your life? It's bad enough that you were hurt, but unforgiveness only continues to throw salt in the wound, over and over again and the irony is that now YOU are the one causing your own pain.

Lewis Smedes put it like this:

Recall the pain of being wronged, the hurt of being stung, cheated, demeaned. Doesn't the memory of it fuel the fire of fury again, make it hurt again? Suppose you never forgive, suppose you feel the hurt each time your memory lights on the people who did you wrong. And suppose you have a compulsion to think of them constantly. You have become a prisoner of your past pain; you are locked into a torture chamber of your own making.

Time should have left your pain behind; but you keep it alive to let it flay you over and over. Your own memory is a replay of your hurt; a videotape within your soul that plays unending reruns of your old rendezvous with pain. You cannot switch it off. You are hooked into it like a pain junkie; you become addicted to your remembrance of past pain. You are lashed again each time your memory spins the tape. Is this fair to yourself; this wretched justice of not forgiving? You could not be more unfair to yourself.

You see, unforgiveness paints you into a corner. You want your offender to make it right. They OWE you. But what if they can't pay you back? What if they can't make it right? Or what if they don't want to? Now what? You're stuck. You need to find a way to free yourself from that trap. That way is called forgiveness

Some people say they can forgive the little things but not the big things. But it's the big things that need forgiveness. The little things you forget about in time.

The big things you'll never forget.

You'll never forget being abused.

You'll never forget being rejected or abandoned.

You'll never forget that ugly divorce.

So how do you get separation from what happened? You forgive.

To forgive means giving up the right to get even. That means you won't retaliate. You won't do what they did to you. You won't speak bad about your offender or even lay awake nights ruminating on what they did to you. But it doesn't mean you will necessarily trust the person again.

Unforgiveness keeps you stuck in the past. It's like walking into the future backwards, focused on some past hurt. Suddenly your entire life is defined by your past. That's not good. You can't live the life that God has for you by clinging to the past. You need to detach from the past and turn your sight forward. Learn from the past, yes, but then give today and tomorrow your full attention.

I don't know if I've shared this diagram with you before but this wedge represents your hurt. It represents the loss that you incurred. The unforgiving person looks at the loss and points to their offender saying, "You owe me. You have to fill this back up. I'm not going to rest until you fill this up."

Now, I think it's fair to ask someone to repay you if they can in some way. But if you insist on getting every last penny from them you are sentencing yourself to a life of pain and bitterness.

So let me suggest taking a different approach. Instead, bring the loss to God. Say to God, *God, I've a big hole in my life. This person caused it (or I caused it) but it's broken and they can never fix it. Please forgive me for insisting that they could. I will no longer look to them to fix me, heal me, or repay me. You are my healer. I know you, and you alone, can restore me. So please, God. Make me whole again. Fill up my loss. And while you are at it, help me release the person who did this to me and not hold it against them. Please work in their life too. Draw them to you. Help them to see what they did and want to be a better person.*

Now, the Bible tells us to forgive, but it doesn't tell us how. There's no instruction manual or users guide. What we really need is a coach to walk us step by step through a process. I'd love to be that coach for you, and so I want to give you a book that I wrote called **STUCK... how to overcome your anger and take back your life**.

I've made STUCK free this week on amazon.com on Kindle. This is how you can download it to your phone, tablet or computer:

1. Download the Kindle Reader app to your phone or tablet or computer.

2. Click on "Kindle Store." Put in "STUCK, Remy Diederich."
3. Download the book for free through this Thursday.
4. Read it
5. Answer the questions after each chapter.

Prayer: Father, please help us to find our identity in you and not in what we do or in what people think of us. Help us to believe that you can turn our ashes into joy. And help us to bring closure to our past hurts so we don't miss one opportunity that you have waiting for us. Amen.