

Series: WHEN YOU JUST CAN'T LET IT GO - May 13, 2007

GIVING YOURSELF GRACE AND SPACE
Philippians 3:12-14

I. INTRO

- A. Several weeks ago at our staff meeting, we talked about what we were going to do to make Mother's Day and Father's Day memorable. When it came to Father's Day—and came up with all kinds of cool suggestions. We decided to have guys bring in their hot cars and hot bikes and other favorite toys. I said something like, “for a guy, part of the fun of having a great toy is showing it off to other guys! So, for Mother's Day, what do women have that they like to show off?” There was this stunned silence in the room. I sensed that my question **could** be taken the wrong way! The answer was—well, they couldn't **think** of an answer. We all had a good laugh over that one!
1. The one thing I came away with was that a lot of times guys just seem free to just enjoy their toys, enjoy their friends—guilt-free. To be a woman is to often feel pressure. To feel, well, less care-free than guys tend to be. To be more worried—about what others think, about how you appear; about being safe—and especially about child-bearing, child-rearing—and then **balance**. No one **tells** you to worry—but sometimes you do!
 2. It doesn't seem fair, does it? And it's not fair that a guy should be speaking to you on Mother's Day, either! I'm one of...**them!** But I promise, today I'll feel guilty—just for you!
- B. I tried to think about the **best** gift I could potentially give to women on Mother's Day. I don't own a spa. I gave away all my fudge last week. I can't make the men in your lives—whoever they might be—have less toys or less fun or more guilt.
- Given our theme—**Forgiveness: When You Just Can't Let It Go**—we thought, “What if women could have an **inner** spa? A comfortable place to be in your pajamas or sweats; to relax, to be free from guilt and worry and pressure—to just be free to be **you?** Inner peace?
- I always have to be careful when I speak for God—but I'm pretty sure that's what **He** wants for you—and my prayer is that, besides all the other stuff you'll receive today—accolades, cruises, pink Corvettes, life-time spa memberships, back-rubs, foot-rubs, flowers—okay—how about dinner and a nice card—that will be God's gift. Not just for women—but for us all!

II. SPACE WHERE YOU NEED SPACE

- A. One of the questions several of you asked in the **Hey Ken** cards was, “How do I forgive myself?” That's a pretty heavy question. We've all wandered down wrong streets, sometimes done stupid things we regret or missed great opportunities that could've been ours. And sometimes we need to let go of what **we've** done—not what someone else has done to us. But forgiveness is **specific**—and we can't remember specifics—just this vague, depressing sense of guilt and regret. That we're incomplete; that we're not doing a decent job of life.
- So, I'd like to deal with the **vague** stuff first. It's possible that you don't need forgiveness—you just need to give yourself some **space!** To let go of your sense of obligation to be perfect; to do everything well. Let me explain. When I think of women who are struggling with some of the tensions of having a career, children, a home,

marriage, in-laws, out-laws—I think of a line from City Slickers where the guy says something like, “It seems that life has become this list of **have-to’s**.” Can anyone relate to that?

-How many of you remember a 70’s **En Joli** perfume ad that went like this: “**I can bring home the bacon, fry it up in a pan, and never never never let you forget that you’re a man...cause I’m a wo-o-o-man!**”

1. I personally think this mentality—and it comes from a **lot** of directions—reflects one of the most destructive myths in our culture. That you, as a woman, can have it all and do it all. That you can...and should...work like crazy, cook gourmet meals, raise amazing children that you are always available for, have a great love life—oh, yes, and get enough sleep and actually **have a life!**
 -If you’re willing to listen, the world system we live in will tell you what you should look like, dress like, feel like—what body fat percentage you should have—what your kids **should** be like, what your house **should** look like--and it’s absolutely insane! You can’t have it all—at least at the same time. Paul, early church leader and writer from the Bible says this:
Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. (Romans 12:2 Msg).

 -If you let our culture pressure you into what to value, how to raise your children, what activities you should have your family in, what you should look like, dress like, think like, and value—you’re crazy! Know why? It’s fake. It’s based on superficiality. In other words, it’s fickle. Tomorrow—or next year—it will change again. And this is your **life!**
2. Sometimes our list of **have-tos** come from our parents when we’re growing up. Please remember—this is not **bash parent** time! This is Mother’s Day! Most of us are growing up in a totally different age than our parents. My Mom was a stay-at-home Mom. That’s what most Moms did back then. If I were a Mom (and I’m not) and tried to live up to her standard of cooking and cleaning and all the other stuff—I’d be dead. I remember asking Lori early in our marriage if she was going to iron the sheets. Believe me—I **never** asked that question again.
 -What I’m trying to say is that you have to be careful to examine the expectations you feel, the **have-tos** you feel and ask, “Why? Who’s stuff is this—and do I need to own it and do it like a little trained pony?”
2. Anyone here ever had the feeling that you just don’t quite measure up? You’re not quite good enough? Again, you have to see where this comes from, because it can be very destructive. Sometimes it comes from teachers. Sometimes parents, who really are trying to inspire their children to do their best, kind of “over-inspire” them—and this becomes a driving force in life. Wherever it comes from, you need to know that God is never behind this kind of stuff.
3. There’s something else that can steal your peace. It’s the inner pressure that comes from comparing yourself to others—especially your friends. And it’s very easy to look at the thing they’re **really good** at—and think we should be too. Anyone here have a friend who’s Mr. Fix-It? Or loves to clean the trim in their

bathroom with a toothbrush? Or is a health-nut or exercise freak? Or has kids that always seem to be at the top of their class and the top of their game?

-That can create a **lot** of pressure—and it probably has more to do with **you** wishing **you** could be more like them than **God** wishing you could be more like them. I think sometimes God might say, “You know, I love you as you are! Sure, improvement never hurts—but **chill out!**”

4. One more source of pressure in life. Guilt from a church you used to attend—maybe as a kid, or maybe more recently. I say this stuff cautiously, because I love the church. I lead one! But sometimes, unfortunately, churches have been known more for guilt and rules than grace and space. When I was a kid, we went to church 3 times a week, wore suits, didn’t run or goof off (in front of my parents)—cause it was **God’s** house! Or swim—or fish on Sundays. Anyone here ever experienced a few rules growing up in church? Name some! Hair, dress length, dancing, cards, tattoos, make-up, bathing suits?

-You know, some of this was just part of the era, maybe—but the biggest problem is that no one ever seemed to ask, “Did **God** come up with these rules—or was it **people?**” Sometimes rules can seem quite spiritual. Did you know that the Bible has something to say about this stuff? Paul, the Apostle wrote:

So why do you keep on following the rules of the world, such as, “Don’t handle! Don’t taste! Don’t touch!”? Such rules are mere human teachings about things that deteriorate as we use them. These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline. But they provide no help in conquering a person’s evil desires (Colossians 2:20-23 NLT).

-If you find yourself feeling guilty about stuff, you’d better check your sources! It could be **false** guilt—in other words, guilt that steals your space, your freedom and your life—and has nothing to do with God—or even what’s best for you!

- B. If you find yourself running out of space, breathing hard, trying to keep up, working hard but feeling like a failure—do you mind if I ask a very pointed question? **Who are you trying to impress? Who are you trying to please?**
- If you’re still trying to please parents you could never please—give it up! If you’re trying to impress a culture that demands that you do it all—**don’t let yourself get stuffed into that mold!** If you’re trying to live by some list of old rules that someone gave you—check your sources!

-My sense is that there’s only One worth serving. One audience. It’s God. He understands where we find ourselves. He knows who He has created us to be—and it’s **not** to be squished into some mold someone else handed to us. God doesn’t just give us freedom to do whatever we feel like doing—that would destroy us. But He does give us **total and absolute freedom** to be the person He’s made us to be. Women, what beautiful, amazing person has God made you to be? Crack the mold! Break open the cocoon! Let that person out

-Give yourself some space—space to live and breathe and be free! Give yourself some space to figure out where you need space!

III. GRACE WHERE YOU NEED GRACE

- A. Sometimes you and I just need space. But sometimes we really, **really** need **grace**. Forgiveness. It’s not easy to forgive yourself, is it? And maybe that’s good. If we could just blow off wrong stuff we’ve done, it might mean we’re just excusing ourselves. If the

place where you need forgiveness involves hurting someone else—there's another question that haunts us. Do I really have the right to **do** something like that and then just forgive myself for doing it? And forgiveness, by its very nature takes **two**. One to hurt and one to forgive.

1. And that gets right to the core of our uniqueness as humans. We're the only beings on this planet that are self reflective. Several years ago, I was out running on a crescent near us, and this huge German Shepherd broke it's chain, and came running right at me. Scared me to death—and bit my leg, too! So, I reported it and they quarantined it. Now, I can't imagine that dog sitting in quarantine, living with self-regret. "Gee, I shouldn't have done that. Poor guy—he was just running by the house. I **hate** it when I do stupid things like that." Nope. If I'd have come by again, and if his chain would've been broken—he mighta had me for lunch. He had a taste, after all!

-But with us, it's like we have this strange ability to stand outside of ourselves. We see the person we want to be...**could** be...and then compare ourselves with who we really are. And it makes us feel really, **really** bad inside. We accuse ourselves; talk to ourselves; lie to ourselves; tell the truth to ourselves; feel sorry for ourselves; and, sometimes, forgive—and **free** ourselves.

-When we do something wrong—especially that hurts someone else, there is this internal split between the part of us that does the blaming and accusing, and the part of us that feels blamed and accused. Every hear someone say, "It's ripping me apart inside!" ***That's why! We feel like two people—one person we don't know or understand, and the other person pointing the finger, distancing themselves from the guilty party.*** Blaise and Karen, in their comments as they read through my message said to me, "Most women don't have a problem feeling bad about themselves." That's why the solution to this problem is ***forgiving yourself. Reconciling these two people in a forgiving embrace.***

2. Now, here's the dilemma we find ourselves in. It would seem that only victims can forgive. What right does the perp have to forgive himself? A couple of weeks ago, I was coming to work along Bur Oak, and I came upon the scene of an accident where a woman had run a stop sign, and hit a girl on a bicycle. The girl's laying very still on the ground, sobbing quietly. The driver was frantic—scared to death. Fortunately, the girl was okay, but can you imagine the driver saying to the girl's parents, "Yep! I ran the stop sign and clobbered her, but it's cool. I've forgiven myself." ***Bad idea!***

-Lewis Smedes puts it brilliantly: "Does a murdered have the right to forgive himself for cutting someone's throat and then expect congratulations for his triumph of grace?" People **can't** just go around forgiving themselves for all the hurt they do to other people. Someone has to validate it. It either has to be the person we've wronged—or God.

-The first step in forgiving yourself for what you've done is to sincerely apologizing to the person we've hurt if you can. When we ask someone to forgive us, we are asking for permission to forgive ourselves.

-So, what if you are truly remorseful. You'd give anything to undo what you've done—and you've come begging forgiveness, and they tell you to pour your tears into the toilet and flush twice. What then?

3. That, friends, is where God steps in. See, the Bible teaches us that when we do something to one of the people God loves, we do it to Him. David, King of Israel around 1000 B.C., writer of Psalms, man after God's own heart, ancestor of Jesus the Messiah—is this huge star in the Bible. Talked about more than almost any other person. He was a legendary leader, warrior, follower of God.
- And yet one day he's not where he's supposed to be, looking at a woman bathing that he's not supposed to be looking at. And he takes a disastrous detour in life. He calls the woman over in a moment of passion, has sex with her, and gets her pregnant. Her husband is a good friend of his—one of his 30 greatest warriors. And David starts on this scheme to hide his sin, make it look like it's her husband, Uriah's baby. But it doesn't work—and in cold, calculating manner that is **so** uncharacteristic—David has Uriah put on the front lines where he's sure to be killed. And he is.
- One day his pastor, a prophet, stops in—and points his finger **directly** at David—and says, "God knows what you've done." I can imagine the tension. David could have **him** killed to—but his heart breaks, and he humbles himself—cries his way back to God. His prayer is **very** interesting. Listen to it:
- Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin. For I recognize my rebellion; it haunts me day and night. Against you, and you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight (Psalm 51:1-4a NLT).**
- David's sin had a huge impact on his family. His sons followed his example, rather than reading his poetry. The message was, "If you want something? Take it! If someone gets in your way? Kill them." One son raped his half-sister. Her brother murdered him—and tried to take the throne from his dad—and was executed—it was a mess. Horrible.
- But God **forgave**. I have great news—something David didn't know. God has made a way for us to be forgiven—even when the people you've hurt won't. It was by the **Son** of David, God's Son—Jesus. He gave his life so ours could be redeemed. Restored. And friends, **that's** what makes forgiving yourself more than a trick you play on your conscience!
- B. If you're going to use something as important as forgiveness to heal your heart, it's very important to ask the question, "What do I need to forgive myself for?" There are some things you **can't** forgive yourself for. Let me explain.
1. First, you can only forgive yourself for what you **do**, not who you **are**. If you feel like a failure for some reason—you can't forgive yourself for that. You have to forgive yourself in **verbs**. For failing to... **what?** And you can't forgive yourself for how you look, or how badly you did in school, or for not being as successful or popular or talented as someone you have your eye on is. Do you get what I'm staying? Don't confuse **forgiving** yourself with **accepting** yourself.
- By the way, one of the best gifts you can **ever** give yourself is to see yourself as God sees you. He doesn't gloss over failure and sin and brokenness—not at all—but He sees the gold, the worth, under all the dirt and stuff on the outside. And He sees you as you could be with His power working through you—what you could do, the difference you could make.

2. Be specific. If you don't forgive yourself for specific things you did that were wrong—your sense of forgiveness will be vague as well. What did you do that needs forgiven? When did you do it? Where did it happen? Get specific.
-And this takes courage. At this point, self-forgiveness may get worse before it gets better. But without this ruthless moral self-assessment--**owning** and **facing** and **acknowledging** what you've done, you can't find the forgiveness your heart craves.
 3. Third, you can only be forgiven for things you **deserve** to actually be **blamed** for. What I'm saying is that if didn't meet your parents expectations, or if you are trying to be super-woman, or super-Mom, or super-girl—and it ain't workin'—you need space, not forgiveness. You need to be realistic—you're not God, you're not immortal, you're not all-knowing—you're **human**. And that's a **really good thing!**
-Something else I think Mom's, in particular, agonize over. And I want to be really sensitive here. It's when their children struggle; who get off track; who suffer socially. I'll bet a whole **bunch** of you Mom's have cried yourself to sleep at night. Had this ache inside for months—**years**--thinking, "Where did I go wrong? Maybe I was away too much? Maybe I should've seen it and gotten help? I was too strict...I was too lax...I was too busy. Truth is—you're not a perfect person or a perfect Mom. And **God doesn't expect you to be!** You gave it your best shot.
-By the way, did you know that it's only recently that parents—especially Mom's—have started blaming themselves for everything? Our culture is into that—but I don't think God is! Kids make choices too. Bad ones. Stupid ones. If being a good parent meant that all your kids do well, become the shining star, never screw up and make you proud—that means God isn't a very good Father. His kids sure create problems, don't they!
 4. Remember what you have to do to forgive? You have to blame. You can only forgive yourself for the things you can **blame** yourself, hold yourself responsible for. I read this great quote: **A person without the courage to blame himself is like a paramedic with an unlisted telephone number (Smedes).**
-Now, don't stay too long there, cause if you do, it will crush your heart. But admit that you did it—whatever it is, that you did not **have** to do it, that what you did was **wrong**, and that you wish to God you had **never** done it. And **then** you're ready to forgive yourself.
- C. How **do** you forgive yourself? Well, the same way you forgive anyone else. One of the great examples from the Bible of someone who **had** to forgive himself was a Pharisee named Saul. Like the legalists he hung with—the religious right of that day—Saul **hated** Jesus and everyone who was associated with him. And his calling in life was to stop them. To do **whatever he had to do, whatever it took**, to root this Jesus' cult out of Judaism.
-The first time we see him is when Stephen, one of he best-loved leaders of the early church was publicly stoned. He stood by and held everyone's coats while Stephen was crushed by rocks—and his blood ran into the dirt.
-When Saul smelled blood—it was like he went into a frenzy and literally ravaged the church. It would be hard to find a follower of Jesus in 40 A.D., who hadn't had either a good friend, or a family member hauled off by Saul to be either tortured, killed or imprisoned. He was one scary man!
-But one day, on a 150 mile trip north to Damascus to haul off even more followers, Jesus stops him in his tracks—knocks him right off his horse. Says, "Saul! **Saul!** Why are you persecuting **Me?**"

-Saul was a changed man. His name was changed to Paul. And most of us here this morning are here because of his heart; because of how he reached out to the non-Jews. But here's the truth—his missionary journeys, his sacrifice, his love for the followers of Jesus didn't change what he'd done—and the massive amount of pain he'd caused; the thousands, maybe tens of thousands affected in some way by his brutality. You can't **change** that kind of stuff by doing good. I think his memories of people pleading for their lives—women pleading for their children and their husbands—**haunted** him. Listen to what he says:

For I am the least of all the apostles. In fact, I'm not even worthy to be called an apostle after the way I persecuted God's church. But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out his special favor on me...yet it was not I but God who was working through me by his grace (1 Corinthians 15:9-11 NLT).

-God's **grace** changes everything. "I was a scum bag, I didn't deserve **anything**—but **whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out his special favor or grace... on me...** And the point is, the grace of God is greater than **anything**—any failure, anything you've ever done, any hurt you've ever inflicted to anyone.

1. So, how **specifically** do you forgive? The first thing you have to do is rediscover your own humanity. Rediscovering your humanity is this brilliant insight that you **have** a good side, you **do** good things, you **have** good instincts—you were made in the image of God. Now, you also have a side that's capable, if given half the chance, of doing things you regret. Even cruel things. It just means you're **really** human. Frail.

-Paul knew what it was like to dream of being beyond hurt, beyond failure, but he was quite realistic. He said:

No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it (i.e., perfection), but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us (Philippians 3:13-14 NLT).

-We've talked about the split we see in ourselves when we fail in some area. There is a **sorrow**, a kind of **regret**, that our sin brings. Paul says that this regret or sorrow can go in one of two directions. He says, **Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death (2 Corinthians 7:10 TNIV).**

Remember how both Judas and Peter betrayed Jesus the night before he died? Peter repented—changed—and did magnificent things because of **grace**. Judas hanged himself. **That's** the difference. Sadness, regret, all by itself is destructive. And that's not what God wants for you!

2. Once you accept yourself as human—as a mixture of good and bad, then you can choose to give up your right to get even. To make yourself **pay** for what you've done, for your failure, for your bad choices.

-People are harsh with themselves for all kinds of regrets. Some feel bad about not finishing high school or university—and just won't let it go. Sometimes we do re-runs of times when we felt we should've taken a stand for ourselves or someone else. Sometimes people feel bad for cheating in a marriage, or using someone, or taking advantage of someone's trust. Or maybe you've been in a lifestyle that's self-destructive.

-And instead of finding grace and hope—you've tormented yourself. Maybe you do that because you feel that you deserve to feel awful, guilty, embarrassed, or ashamed. And I want to tell you this morning to do something Christ begs you to do. **Give up your right to get even; to make yourself pay!**

-Know why you **need** to do that? **Because Jesus paid it all!** Jesus suffered and paid for all the stupid things I've done—so **I don't have to pay for them!** Do I deserve to? Of **course** I do. But He **forbids** me to—cause I've received what Jesus did on my behalf. And **He** gives us the right, as our forgiver, Lord of every relationship on this planet to not just give grace to others, but give **grace to ourselves**. Power to leave something in the past. Power to live, not watching life from the rear view mirror—but through the **windshield! Looking forward! Forgetting what's behind.** Whatever you did, I can guarantee you one thing this morning; what Jesus suffered was **enough! It was ENOUGH!**

3. And the third part of forgiving anyone is finding that you can wish them well. You can wish them grace, success, love. You can think of them without hating them; without getting a gut-ache.

-You know how I said that humans have this strange power to stand apart from themselves—to judge themselves, encourage themselves, soothe themselves, condemn themselves? This is the part, friends, where what's been split apart in you—this part of you that's been loathing, hating, condemning, spitting on the other part of you that failed, hurt people, did awful things—**this** is where those two reconcile. They hug, kiss, cry—like the old man and the prodigal son. And **then** they party. They celebrate.
4. And if you choose **not** to forgive yourself? You will spend your life, your shoulders bent further and further toward the ground—worn out by a load you **don't have to carry!** And all your feeling bad won't change what happened—but it **will** change you. For the worse. The land of regret is a harsh, bitter place to live. And you weren't **made** to live there!

-And remember, this is not a one-shot deal. Will you get reminded of your failure after you've chosen to forgive yourself? Does Imelda Marcos have shoes? Of **course!** So, you will have to tell yourself again and again that **God** has forgiven you and given you permission to forgive yourself. Know why? Because there's a force of spiritual super-evil in this world. He's personal, and he has a name. Satan, or the Devil. His name means, **Accuser**. And **accusing** is his sweet spot—believe me. You **don't** have to put up with it—but if you do, he'll throw you in the sewer. You need to remember one word. **GRACE!** You will probably have to do this again and again.

-There may even be others who don't **want** you to be forgiven. They will be upset if they see you whistling. Happy. Coming up to for communion. Singing with your hands up. Rebuilding your life. That's **their** problem if that's true. Not yours. If they want to drown in their own little tub of bitterness—they can. But they have no right to drown you.
5. Last step. Find a way to celebrate. Do something wild, crazy, extravagant, or blindly generous to celebrate.

-Jesus was at a dinner party held by this uptight religious guy named Simon.

He had been doing his best all night to put Jesus in his place—when this woman crashed the party! Jesus had been teaching earlier—and apparently she found something no one **ever** gave her. **Grace**. So, she crashed the party—and that took incredible courage! Walked right through all the stares and gasps—and totally annihilated the etiquette book. All her shame and self-hatred poured out as the tears poured down her face and dripped on Jesus' feet. And in one extravagant move, she undid her hair—poured the **whole** bottle of perfume she'd rationed out drop at a time—and mopped up the mess she'd created.

-And the fragrance that filled the room was, forever, a reminder of grace. Amazing grace. Grace that covers, washes anything that's stained. And Jesus **blessed**

her. Said, "Go in peace! Your sins are **forgiven!**" They were. And she was.

-And if you will come. So are you. So **deeply** forgiven—that you can forgive yourself. And **that's** something worth celebrating. So, make sure you do something extravagant! received it!

IV. AS MUCH AS YOU NEED

The thing about grace and space is that our world is pretty stingy with both. Not God. He's extravagant! He gives you all the space you need to be what He's called you to be. And **grace?** There's no limit! No one's ever reached the end of it.

So, in closing, I'd like to give you a taste, okay? I release you from having to fulfill any expectations from your parents, your neighborhood, and this weird culture we live in! I give you freedom to celebrate how God has made you—and just be **you**. To not uptight about the stupid things people get uptight about in our world—how you look, what you wear, how smooth your skin is, what size you wear, and whether or not your kids are the shining stars in the class. In Jesus' Name, I give you **space**. And I give you a gift to die for. Grace. Washing, forgiveness, life, and hope! I proclaim you a forgiven child of God. Released to forget the past with its sadness, shame, pressures, bad choices—and released to live the new future Jesus has given you. In Jesus' name, I proclaim you free! So—go in peace!