



FAIRVIEW UNITED METHODIST CHURCH NEWSLETTER

Loving God & Loving Others = worship + missions

FORGIVENESS IS SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Article by Marshall Segal Staff writer, desiringGod.org

Much of our confusion and misery in life is due to our underestimating (or ignoring altogether) the enemy of our souls. Some of us rarely think of Satan and his demons, and if we do, we often downplay their power and influence. Surely, we could overestimate Satan (and many do), but in our day, it seems like he gets less attention and resistance than he deserves.

While the devil is already defeated and his end is sure, he is still “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31), and he still leads “the cosmic powers over this present darkness” and “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). And he rules and corrupts through deception. “There is no truth in him,” Jesus warns. “When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). So, the apostle Paul warns, we must be careful lest we “be outwitted by Satan” or be found “ignorant of his designs” (2 Corinthians 2:11).

What may surprise us is what, in particular, prevents us from being outwitted by Satan. Paul writes, “What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs” (2 Corinthians 2:10–11). Do you want to know what Satan’s schemes are? He wants you to hold a grudge. He wants you to believe vengeance is yours, and not God’s. Forgiveness outwits Satan, and forgiveness subverts his wickedness.

Forgiveness may be the hardest thing many of us do in our lifetimes. I say may, because many suffer and wrestle in horrible ways. But even then, how much of our suffering is owing to someone else’s sins or failures? Because none of us is without sin, forgiveness is simply a given if we want to love and be loved in this life.

“God disarmed Satan and all his armies with costly forgiveness – your forgiveness.”

Forgiveness can be hard because it fights against all the impulses of our flesh: “Did you see how he hurt me? Why would I make myself vulnerable again?” “The pain still feels so fresh and deep – how could I possibly pretend to be okay with her?” “This is the dozenth time he has done this to me. Haven’t I forgiven him enough?” “I’ll never be able to trust her again – how could I possibly forgive her?” What voices keep you from forgiving?

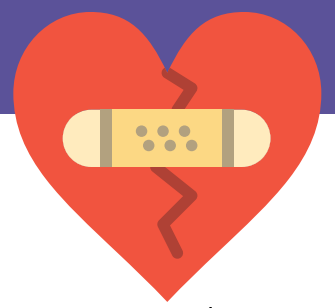
And because forgiveness can be hard, God gives us great reasons to forgive. We forgive because he first forgave us: “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32). We forgive because God crushed his Son for our forgiveness. He canceled “the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross” (Colossians 2:14).

And through that cross (we should not be surprised) “He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him” (Colossians 2:15). God disarmed Satan and all his armies with costly forgiveness – your forgiveness. Knowing who Satan was and what he wants and how he works, God chose to fight instead with a broken body and spilled blood. God chose to forgive. And so we too forgive “so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.”

Satan loathes forgiveness. Forgiveness offends everything he stands for and fights against. He relentlessly accuses – morning, afternoon, evening, and night – hurling our sins, like stones, against us (Revelation 12:10). Accuser is who he is, and therefore forgiveness is his sworn enemy. Forgiveness contradicts his existence. Forgiveness defies his life’s work. To him, forgiveness is hostility.

For Christians, though, forgiveness is an act of peacemaking, purchased and made possible by the cross. Paul writes, He himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. (Ephesians 2:14–16)

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Hostility died on Calvary's hill, and peace grew in its place. Paul was speaking specifically about the hostility between Jews and Gentiles (the fiercest and longest-standing hostility of his day), but this peace is for all who claim the cross. Forgiveness is hostility to Satan because he breeds hostility and despises peace. Therefore, the cross tormented him, a nightmare worse than anything in his wicked imagination. And every act of forgiveness since – every time we defy our flesh and forgive one another in Jesus's name – is another tremor of that glorious trauma.

That means to withhold forgiveness is to play into Satan's hands, to reinforce his war, to join his cause. To withhold forgiveness is an attempted suicide of the soul.

"Maybe the most effective way to wage spiritual warfare today would be for us to more quickly and freely forgive." Jesus warns, "If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14-15). Do you hear the suicide in forgivelessness? If we are too proud or bitter to hold out the hands of forgiveness, God will withdraw his. If we refuse to forgive, he will hold our every sin against us, until we can pay for them all (Matthew 18:35) – and we will never pay for them all. To withhold forgiveness is not only to join Satan in his wickedness, but it is to be left with Satan and his wickedness – miserable, unforgiven, cast into outer darkness.

And Jesus calls us to forgive not just once, but tirelessly. "Pay attention to yourselves!" he warns. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him" (Luke 17:3-4). In the previous verse, he threatens awful judgment for any who refuse: "It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea" (Luke 17:2). Withholding forgiveness, even after having already forgiven someone six times in a day, is a wicked offense to God. So, the wise flee judgment and run to forgive.

When Paul calls the church in Corinth to forgive, he is likely calling them to forgive a false teacher who rose up to oppose him (2 Corinthians 2:5). This is personal, and likely painful, for him. "Turn to forgive and comfort him," he says, "or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow" (2 Corinthians 2:7). Can you see Satan wincing? Not only does Paul forgive his offender, but he campaigns for forgiveness, and even beyond forgiveness, for comfort and love: "I beg you to reaffirm your love for him" (2 Corinthians 2:8).

A previous letter of his had evidently led the rebellion to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:9), but some of the people still felt betrayed and ready to punish their leaders (2 Corinthians 2:6). The apostle, however, saw what Satan wanted. With every reason to harbor resentment and hold a grudge, he denied himself, picked up his cross, and forgave. While Satan iced the waters with bitterness and division, Paul warmed them with surprising, compassionate, forgiving love. He could comfort those who had hurt him because he had been comforted, again and again, by "the Father of mercies and God of all comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). Have you experienced that comfort? Have you been willing to extend it to those who have hurt you?

Maybe the most effective way to wage spiritual warfare today would be for us to more quickly and freely forgive. Counselor Ed Welch writes,

Remember, (1) the flesh has a sinful bent toward self-interest. It is committed to the question, "What's in it for me?" (2) Satan is a liar and divider. Notice that the most explicit biblical teaching on spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6) is found in the book that emphasizes unity. Satan's most prominent strategy is to fracture and divide. And (3) the world tries to institutionalize these tendencies. (When People Are Big and God Is Small, 196)

"We do not wrestle against flesh and blood" (Ephesians 6:12). Instead, we rush to forgive flesh and blood. And we wrestle "against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). The rulers and authorities of darkness trade in angry grudges. The spiritual forces of evil breed bitterness and dissension. But we, those forgiven by God, defy and defeat them by wielding the precious and dangerous weapon of forgiveness.

RESILIENT

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2 Corinthians 4:8-9

We are experiencing all kinds of trouble, but we aren't crushed. We are confused, but we aren't depressed. We are harassed, but we aren't abandoned. We are knocked down, but we aren't knocked out.

"And Are We Yet Alive?" by Charles Wesley (verses 1-4, UM Hymnal 553)

And are we yet alive, and see each other's face? Glory and thanks to Jesus give for his almighty grace! Preserved by power divine to full salvation here, again in Jesus' praise we join, and in his sight appear. What troubles have we seen, what mighty conflicts past, fightings without, and fears within, since we assembled last! Yet out of all the Lord hath brought us by his love; and still he doth his help afford, and hides our life above.

It is easy to feel disheartened in our world. A global pandemic, racial injustice, climate change, economic worries, political divisiveness, family issues, and so much more threaten to steal our joy every day. Yet as people of God, we are people of hope, a hope that gives us strength to rebound even from the most difficult of circumstances. Our faith makes us resilient.

Read or sing, "And Are We Yet Alive"

Written by Charles Wesley in 1749, Methodists have used this hymn during annual meetings ever since. From John Wesley's annual society meetings to our annual conferences today, these words remind us that though life can be difficult, God is with us through it all.

- Why do you think the Methodists have sung and continue to sing these words?
- As you reflect on the words of this hymn, what feelings well up in you? What gatherings does this remind you of? What people do you picture as you sing this song?
- What makes Christians so resilient?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

- The Apostle Paul, the author of 2 Corinthians, was no stranger to hardship. Yet he writes, "We are knocked down, but we aren't knocked out." What hardships have you faced? How has your faith brought you through?
- Paul never makes light of his hardships. He feels them. Later in this letter (11:24-27), he lists some of them: imprisoned, whipped, beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, and a list of other dangers he faced. What has given him strength in the midst of the hardship?
- The primary reason Christians are a resilient people is because we believe in resurrection. Death does not have the final word. Where have you seen resurrection in your life and in the lives of others?
- How does the promise of resurrection give you hope?
- How does your faith help to keep you from discouragement?
- As you reflect on the conflicts and troubles in your life and in the church, what gives you hope? How will you continue to remain faithful, even in the midst of difficult times? How are you a resilient person of God?
- How have you experienced or witnessed resilience in The United Methodist Church's global connection?

Closing prayer

Jesus, in whose resurrection we find our hope, strengthen us in the midst of life's difficulties. Teach us to focus not on the "fightings without and fears within," but instead to lean on your grace in the midst of our trials. Heal our brokenness and make us resilient people of God. Amen.



MEMORIAL DAY SERVICE



Monday, May 29, 2023

9:00 A.M.

Walnut Ridge Cemetery

Bring your lawn chair.

In case of rain,
New Life Church.

Better Together

Wednesday,
May 17, 2023
2:00-4:00 p.m.

The Virginia Community Senior Center would like to welcome all seniors, 55 years and older, to participate every third Wednesday. Please join us at the Virginia United Methodist Church's Fellowship Hall.



OUR STAFF AND SERVICES AT A GLANCE

FAIRVIEW UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

3135 N. Cr 800e
Bath, Illinois 62617

10:00 AM Fairview Sunday School
10:50 AM Fairview Worship Service

Pastor: J. William Werner
Executive Administrative Assistant:
Jess Miller

Pastor's Phone: (217) 883-7199
Pastor's E-mail:
bilterwerner@gmail.com
Church Phone: (217) 452-3534
Church E-mail:
virgnumc@casscomm.com
Website:
<http://www.virginiaillumc.org>