

# **Bridge Over Troubled Waters: Overcoming Challenges**

## **Harmony in Friendships series #3**

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We're finishing up our series today, Harmony and Friendships. I hope you've enjoyed this series. I know I have. The first week was "How to Make Friends." Hello, Goodbye: How to Make Friends. What was last week? I know that's a tough test. It was enduring friendships, having enduring friendships, right? "You've Got a Friend in Me." How many remember that song? We're going to finish up today with "A Bridge Over Troubled Waters," a great song, and "Overcoming Challenges."

How many of you have either seen this done or maybe you've had it happen to you? Two kids get into an argument or a scuffle of some kind. And what happens? An adult comes over, separates them, "What's happening?" He did this. She did that, right? He pulled my hair. She kicked me. Whatever, right? What do the parents say next? "Say you're sorry. Say you're sorry. Now go play." Are the kids sorry at that moment? No! The only thing we're sorry about is that Mom got to us before I got the land one right on the kisser, right? That's the only thing the kids are sorry about. Maybe later we get, you know, we have some remorse, but at that moment, the adrenaline's still going. We're not sorry. How many of you had that happen to you? Somebody made you say sorry and you weren't sorry. Most of us, right? Most of us.

Now, let's think in the Bible. How many times can you think of a story where somebody in the Bible goes up to somebody else and says, "I'm sorry, please forgive me"? Shout them out. Yeah, it's really hard, isn't it? It's really hard. Now, we have some people that repent in the Bible. We see David repenting. We see the whole city of Nineveh repenting. We see Zacchaeus repenting. And maybe when Zacchaeus goes back and pays back what he took what he shouldn't have, maybe he says, "I'm sorry." We don't know that's not recorded for us. Maybe he did, maybe he didn't. But there's not a lot of times where we see somebody in the

Bible saying, "I'm sorry." And it's tough sometimes to do that. It's hard to say, "I'm sorry," to kind of humble yourself and do that. And everything we're gonna talk about today not only applies to friendships but to our families. Okay, and hopefully, we're friends with our families. So there's a lot of crossover here.

And you've heard people talk about dysfunctional families, right? And when that word dysfunctional kind of first came out, it meant, you know, families that were just such a hot mess. They just didn't function at all. There was no functioning as a family. They were dysfunctional. Well, since then, we've kind of come to realize that dysfunctional is a scale, right? And some of us have small amounts of dysfunctionality, right? We all have some dysfunctionality because none of us are perfect. So we were all a little bit dysfunctional. Some of us have a medium amount of dysfunctionality. And some of us have like extra-large grande amounts of dysfunction, right? I mean, the woo-wee kind of dysfunction. And I wanna talk about a family in the Bible that belongs over here in the woo-wee category, okay? And I'm not, I am not making light of anybody who has dealt with a dysfunctional family and had a hard time of it, because that's real, okay? But I wanna talk about them.

And I have no idea why I'm looking at my calendar instead of my notes, here we go. Okay, and so I wanna talk about this family. And this family is maybe the premier family in the Bible, I might say, the most famous family in the Bible. There's about 30 chapters of the Bible devoted to this family, probably more than that. It's the family that was the original family for the Israelites, the founding fathers of the nation, and by proxy also for us. Christianity came out of the Jewish nation. They are founding fathers too, okay? So I'm gonna try and get through this because this is multiple generations. It's like I said, it's 30 chapters in the Bible. We don't have time to delve into this in detail, but I wanna skim through this real quick because I wanna remind you of how dysfunctional this family is because we forget, okay?

So this starts in Genesis chapter 15 where Abraham is promised to be a great nation. The problem is Abraham doesn't have any kids. So Sarah and Abraham, his wife, decide to help, air-quotes, "help" God. Sarah gives him her slave to have a child with, Hagar. And Abraham and Hagar have a child, Ishmael. Of course, later,

God's promises come true and Abraham and Sarah have a son, Isaac, and then there's problems between Hagar and Ishmael and Sarah and Isaac, and the slave gets sent away with her son. But God promises that he's gonna make him a father of a great nation of many people, too many to count. And right there, we see the beginning of the problems we still have in the Middle East. Two people groups, both great nations, both want the same piece of land. And it's been a problem ever since.

But Isaac grows and Abraham sends his servant to go get Isaac a wife from his people. Go back home, find something for my people. The servant brings back Rebecca. Rebecca has a brother named Laban. Remember this? Rebecca comes back, marries Isaac, all is well. They have twins, Jacob and Esau, twin brothers. Now, the oldest one is supposed to get the birthright and the blessing, that's Esau. But God says the older will serve the younger for Jacob. So, it's time for the birthright. Dad, to give the blessing to Esau. But, Rebecca and Jacob "help" God again, air-quotes, and trick Isaac into giving the blessing to Jacob. Esau was heard saying, when dad dies, I'm killin' my brother. Now that's woo-wee kind of amounts of dysfunctional, right? So Jacob flees back to his family. Rebecca says, go find my brother Laban. You'll be safe there. So he does. And Laban has two daughters. Remember their names? Rachel and Leah, right? And Rachel, Leah is the older one. The Bible says she has tender eyes. And Rachel was ooh-la-la. Okay, well, the Bible doesn't say ooh-la-la, but it says she was shapely and beautiful. Ooh-la-la. And Isaac says, well, you know, I can work for seven years for your daughter. So he does, he works seven years. And he gets tricked into marrying the older one instead of the younger one.

Can you imagine that marriage day? The older one is being forced to marry somebody that she doesn't love, he doesn't love her. She's wearing a veil, so nobody knows. I always wonder, where did they put Rachel to keep her quiet? I imagine her like back in the back room, tied up and gagged so she can't tell anybody, right? I mean, he gets tricked into doing that by his relative. His uncle does this to him. Seven more years of working to get the wife that he wants. Then the baby wars begin. And let's see if we can get this right now. Leah bears him four sons, and each time she's like, oh, he'll love me now, here's another son. He'll love me now, here's another son. Rachel has no sons, so she decides to help by

giving her slave, she gets two boys. And then Leah's not having any more boys, so she gives her slave, two more boys. Finally, Leah has a couple more boys and a daughter. And then finally, Rachel has Joseph. You've been keeping track, that's 11 sons.

Now, Isaac has been working for Laban for 20 years at this point. And God has blessed Jacob, God has blessed Laban, but it's causing problems now. So Isaac says it's time to go back home to Esau. Now, he hasn't seen Esau in 20 years. They don't have cell phones. They haven't been keeping up on Facebook. They don't even have a postal service. They haven't written letters to each other. Last he heard Esau wanted to kill him. So he's riding back to see his brother and he's trying to get ready for this and he's sending gifts ahead and he's splitting his camp and he sends a message that we're coming and we come in peace, I've got gifts for you.

And then he gets word that his brother Esau is coming to meet him with 400 men. 400 men! Now, sometimes we tend to think about shepherds as being these lowly little people, they're just humble and meek and we get pictures of them leaning on their staff, looking at the sheep. No. Shepherds were men's men. They knew how to fight. They knew how to protect the sheep from wild animals. They knew how to protect the sheep from robbers. Remember when Abraham puts together his shepherds and goes and defeats the king's army and brings the people back. Shepherds were fierce and here comes Esau with 400 of them.

And he's left some at home to take care of the sheep Esau's got quite an operation going okay, and Jacob goes out for a walk at night and wrestles with God and won't let go. And God changes his name to Israel. He meets up with his brother and his brother tries to kill him. No, his brother is happy to see him. Where have you been for 20 years? Been missing you. And Jacob I imagine when he hears that just about falls over right you've just you think he's going to be just infuriated with. He's bringing 400 men. He's coming to wipe you out. And he's like give me a hug. What a day that must have been.

He says I brought these guys to help drive the sheep on home. Help you out brother. Come on home. Now we know that Leah [Rachel] has one more son,

Benjamin, she dies in childbirth. And uh I'm, sorry Rachel has one more son. Esau goes on to lead out the Edomite nation becomes the leader of a great people and of course Joseph is Jacob's / Israel's favorite son. He grows up to be a brat. Telling on his brothers. He gets the coat of many colors. He has dreams about everybody bowing down to him and he tells everybody about it. You know, some things just too much information, right? Don't say anything.

And Joseph gets sold into slavery, rises to prominence in Potiphar's house, gets accused of something he doesn't do. Now he's in jail. He interprets dreams for the cup-bearer and the baker. They come true. Everybody forgets about him until Pharaoh has a dream. Pharaoh can't remember it. When somebody's telling him what the dream was and what it means? And then they remember Joseph. Joseph can tell us what dreams mean. And Joseph now gets the most amazing promotion of all time. He goes from a slave in prison. And if you can think of any status in society lower than a slave in prison, I'd like to hear it. Because where's down from there? Dead is it, right? He's a slave in prison to second-in-command in Egypt. Egypt's a world power. And he's helping them get ready for the famine. They got seven years of plenty, gonna collect the grain, store it away so they have food during the seven years of famine. In the second year of the famine, his brothers show up. Joseph puts them through quite a bit to test them to see if they've changed or not. And it turns out they have, and we know the rest of the story going on through Israel.

Now, this family, all these chapters in the Bible, I mean, wow, right? We're lying, we're cheating, we're threatening to kill each other, we're sleeping with our slaves, you know? Ugh may... Right? I mean, they're just dysfunctional at the highest level of dysfunction. And this is the premier family in the Bible. Abraham is in the hall of fame for faith. If God can use this family, I'm thinking we're all good. Right? Because I've never met anybody that's as dysfunctional as this family is. Right? We're all good, we got a chance, but we don't see a lot of sorrys in this story. I mean, the only kind of two we see are Joseph and his brothers and Jacob and Esau. And even then it's not recorded if they ever actually said, I'm sorry, will you forgive me? But they make of, kind of the same thing. And so we don't get many sorrys here.

So take out your notes, we're gonna look at a couple things real quick. See, every relationship, whether you're a friend or family, will have disagreements and hence need forgiveness, right? You're gonna disagree. You might disagree with your spouse. Maybe they want to vote, you know, for the other party than you want to vote for. How are we gonna live in the same house together? When Linda and I first got married, I was a hardcore Boston Celtic fan and she was a hardcore Laker fan. We lived in a house with a parquet floor. Guess who won that one? Now we both kind of settled on the Clippers. You what? You what? All right. We need to have forgiveness.

Last week, pastor talked about Matthew 18. We have a disagreement. We should go talk to the person. And if that doesn't work, we take a person or two with us to go talk to him. And if that doesn't work, we treat him terrible and kick him out of the church, right? No, no, no, no. Pastor almost had a heart attack. What are we supposed to do if they don't listen? We treat them like they don't understand the gospel message. We try and put some love on them and teach them what it means to have forgiveness.

Now immediately after that story in Matthew 18, Peter comes to Jesus and says, well, Lord, how many times should I forgive somebody? Like seven times? Now, Peter was being really magnanimous here because at the current thinking of the day was you would forgive somebody three times. So Peter doubled it and added one. Look at me, aren't I righteous and holy? Right? And Jesus responds with, I tell you not seven times, but 77 times. Now some versions there say 77 and some say seven times 70 times. I wondered why it was so different. And I looked through like 25 different versions of the Bible till I finally found one that had a footnote that said, you can interpret that word either way. Depends on whether you're Greek or Hebrew. That word would mean 77 or 70 times seven. And so both interpretations are correct and it really doesn't matter because I would guarantee that nobody in here has forgiven somebody for 77 times, let alone 490, right? I mean, after three you're like, I'm kind of done with you, right? We don't get anywhere near 77. So it really doesn't matter. But you can look at that both ways, okay?

So take out your Bibles with me to Luke chapter 17, verses three and four. Luke 17, verses three and four. Thank you. Keep your Bibles open because we're going to look at a couple different verses here today.

Luke 17, 3 and 4 says, so watch yourselves. If your brother or sister sins against you, do what? Rebuke them. And if they repent, do what? Forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day. And seven times come back to you saying, I repent. You must forgive them. I mean, let's think about it. Seven times in a day, that's like every hour. It's like coming up every hour. Oh, you know, can you forgive me for this again? Can you, you know, around noon, you're like, dude, what's going on? Right? But God says we're supposed to forgive, right? Easily and often, without a grudge, no conditions, right? It doesn't say, you know, tell them not to do it anymore. You just offer the forgiveness.

Now, you could still hurt from whatever's happened. Okay? It doesn't say you have to heal completely before you offer forgiveness. Right? If someone's coming to you seven times in a day, asking for forgiveness, I guarantee you, you haven't gotten over it yet. Okay? And you still offer forgiveness, even though you might hurt. See? Because holding onto grudges will not resolve the issue. When you hold onto a grudge, who do you hurt? You or the other person? You. Are you hurting the other person? Man, I'm so mad at that, Philip, I'm just not gonna talk to him. Philip's at work, minding his own business. There's no idea I'm mad at him. Who am I hurting? Me. Not Philip. Right?

I put this on the text, because this is the amplified version, Proverbs 17:9. I think this version says this verse about the best. It says, he who covers and forgives and offenses seeks love. But he who repeats or gossips about a matter, separates and forgives. intimate friendships. See, when you forgive and cover it and say it's good, I'm not gonna bring it up next week. Spouses, not gonna bring it up next week, right? Forgotten about it, okay.

Turn with me to Colossians chapter three. Colossians 3:13. Colossians 3:13. Give me an amen when you get there. Colossians 3:13 says, bear with each other and forgive one another. If any of you has a grievance against someone, forgive as

what? The Lord forgave you. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. We should forgive like Jesus forgave us.

Okay, don't raise your hands. But how many of us would be upset because somebody comes to us and asks for forgiveness for something for three, four, five times? We'd be angry. What's wrong with this person? They're not a very good friend. And how many times do we go to Jesus asking for forgiveness? Right? Forgive like Jesus forgave us. Right? Forgive like Jesus forgave us.

Turn to Ephesians 4:32. I know we're bouncing around the Bible, but the Bible has a lot to say about this. Ephesians 4:32. Be kind and compassionate to one another forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you. What do we know about the Bible when it repeats something? What? It's important. We just read the same text twice. Two different books of the Bible. It's important. We need to forgive like God forgave us.

Now, this kind of leads us into something because Jesus, like, you know, forgive and forget, right? God says, you know, when I forgive, I forget. We're not gonna look up all these texts. If I put them there in your notes, you can look them up later. Because when God forgives us, it says, he remembers our sins no more. Now, how does a perfect God forget stuff? Right, because like when I've forgotten something, like where the car keys are, I'm not feeling so perfect. So how does a perfect God forget? It's a great question, the kind of stuff that keeps me up at night. A perfect God doesn't forget. A perfect God chooses not to remember. He just puts that someplace where he chooses not to remember it. I've forgotten it, it's not that I'm unable to remember it. I choose not to remember it. That's a great example for us.

You may still hurt, you may still have issues, it may still bug you, but I choose not to dwell on that, not to remember it. Another text that we're not going to look up says he cast all our sins into the depths of the sea Now and today we're like well we can go to the depths of the sea We actually can't we have not been to the deepest parts of the sea yet. Okay, I mean we barely got down to where the Titanic was there's a lot of parts of the ocean deeper than that. He puts it in the

depths of the sea, so does that mean I have to do that? Do I have to do that?  
That's a good question.

There's an article written by Carmen Chai June 2016 And it's entitled why forgiving others will improve your physical and emotional health And this article talks a lot about forgiveness and doesn't mention Christianity, God or any kind of religion one time. This is purely based on a transaction between two people no spiritual implications to this. And it says your spouse cheated on you your business partner swindled you or you had a falling out with a friend and you're profoundly Hurt or betrayed and it may feel like forgiveness is impossible But consider it one scientist says because letting go of a grudge Virtually erases the toll on your mental and physical health Dr. Lauren Toussaint an associate professor of psychology at Luther College in Iowa has been studying stress and Coping with hardships and forgiveness for 15 years in His latest findings to sant learned that those who are most forgiving live healthier Happier lives compared to those who couldn't forgive and let go of painful experiences We found that the people who are most forgiving They tend to forgive for lots of things and to lots of people and it doesn't matter what the situation was and they They showed virtually no relationship between stress and bad health, and we're always asked how we can minimize stress because we live with so much of it. But here's an ancient wisdom. You have to forgive yourself, other people, and the tough situations you're in. When you don't have these resilient virtues of forgiveness, these things that bolster you and strengthen you against a negative life, and you haven't cultivated it in your personality and the person you are, then when stress has its full unadulterated impact on your health. Do you hear what they're saying? If you can't forgive, it affects you physically and your health and the stress that you deal in. God says you need to forgive for your soul. And science says you need to forgive for your body. Forgiveness is good for you. It's good for you. Martin Luther King says forgiveness is not an occasional act, it's a constant attitude. It's not an occasional act, it's a constant attitude. We have forgiveness. Every relationship there's gonna be disagreements. We have to take responsibility for our actions, Holding on to grudges doesn't resolve the issue. And so we have to ask for forgiveness, that we do it for our souls, We do it for our health.

Reminds me of a song though, because we don't like to do this, right? It's hard to go to somebody and say, I'm sorry, I messed up. Remember the song by Elton John? Sorry seems to be the hardest word. Right? One more Bible text, James 5:16. I love the book of James, so much practical wisdom in the book of James. James 5:16, give me an amen when you get there. Thank you. Two people are there. Alright, there we go. Now we're getting there. James a little bit hard to find. It says, Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so you may what? Be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. Don't let anybody tell you science and the Bible don't agree. Scientists tell you ask for forgiveness so it'll do you good. The Bible says ask for forgiveness so it'll do you good. They agree.

Reflection. Are you holding onto a grudge? Is there someone you need to forgive whether they've asked for it or not? Maybe you need to swallow your pride and ask somebody else for forgiveness. Challenges. Forgive somebody this week even if they didn't ask and even if they don't deserve it. Maybe start easy. Forgive the yahoo that pulls out in front of you on the roadway. Just go ahead and say it, yahoo I forgive you. And then maybe work up to something a little more difficult. Okay, practice forgiveness. It's good for the body, it's good for the soul.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for these words of wisdom you give us on forgiving and asking for forgiveness and needing forgiveness and offering forgiveness. Lord, it's something that we don't see modeled in our society very much. It seems like everybody just ducks responsibility. Lord, help us to be different, to be the kind of people you would have us be and to take responsibility and to ask for forgiveness and to give forgiveness freely. It's what you did for us. It's what we would like to do for the people around us. Give us the courage to do this this week, Lord. May us that you be with us, to keep us safe and to bring us back again. In Jesus' name, amen.