

Welcome

Good morning, I am Kelly Tibbitts- the director of Kid's Harbor and one of the elders here at Harbor of Hope. I am excited to share a message with you today. It is hard to believe 2014 is coming to an end. This time of year causes many of us to reflect and look ahead to the next year and perhaps think about some new disciplines we would like to have in our lives.

As I started to prepare for today, once again I began to write a message that God was first speaking to me. When I say disciplines, what comes to your mind? For me- I think of my Doctor speaking to me 2 years ago. I had gone in for a physical and found that I had gained more weight and had less energy than ever before in my life. I thought that maybe I had an issue he could address with medicine- but he looked at me and said a phrase I have not forgotten- "you lack discipline". It was true...I have always struggled with living a disciplined life.

Perhaps you are also looking to be more disciplined in 2015 in an area of your life. Maybe it is a physical discipline like going on a diet, exercising more or getting to bed earlier. Or maybe it is a spiritual discipline like committing to quiet time with God each morning, praying, or giving generously.

The discipline I wanted to talk about today might be one you have never thought of. This morning I wanted to talk about what it would look like if we went into 2015 with a desire to be a people who forgive. Freely. We know that God has forgiven us, and we are called to forgive. Studies have shown that even our health is affected when we do not forgive. Scripture says our hearts need to forgive. So today my desire is to show you that we can trust God when He says He alone is qualified to judge. We can rest in His promises, with His help we can forgive. And finally, I hope to give you some very practical steps to be able to forgive.

(Christmas Story-)

I wanted to start our time in the narrative of Christmas. Christmas is a season in the church and lasts 12 days from Dec 25- jan6 –the day known as Ephianity. Jesus is born, and wise men from the east see a star that tells them a King is born.

They go to the palace of King Herod to see the new King. They leave Herod and promise to return. Matt 2:13-14 says after the wise men had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him." So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt.

I think that in order to be able to forgive, we need a starting point of recognizing who is the King over all, and who is not. I am not. I can't see all that God sees and I can't know all God knows. God knew the evil that was in Herod's heart and in a dream told Joseph to flee to safety.

A simple verse to memorize that helps us find a starting point in understanding the sovereignty of God is Daniel 4:25b

The Most High is Sovereign over the kingdoms of man

It means God is the leader of the world. He is good and fair and just. And we can't see what He sees or know what He knows. He knew to tell Joseph in a dream to get up and move Mary and Jesus out of the area where Herod was King. And when it was time, he told them to return to Israel.

This part of the Christmas Story always leads me back to a different Joseph in Egypt- This one is found in Genesis.

A funny part of my life story is even though I am a Children's Pastor now and grew up in church and even went to Bible college, I was not biblically literate until I had started serving in Children's ministry. God actually taught me while I was teaching others. My three daughters were blessed

to go to a wonderful Christian school when they were in elementary school.

**One of the first verses my oldest daughter memorized was
Genesis 50:20 what you intended to harm me, God intended for good.**

These are the words Joseph of the Old Testament said to his brothers.

To summarize...Joseph was the son of Jacob, who was the son of Isaac, who was the son of Abraham. They are the patriarchs of Israel. Jacob had 12 sons, but loved Joseph the most. Joseph was also given dreams from God and his brothers resented him to the point where they sold him into slavery. Many unfair things happened to Joseph- but they led him to the place where he is used by God to help the Pharaoh see a famine that was coming. Egypt prepared for this famine- Joseph became 2nd in command of Egypt. And when his starving family came to Egypt- the brother they thought was dead had a choice and Joseph said to them...that the plans that the brothers had for evil, God intended for good.

How do we get to the place, where we can trust in the God who made and loves us? How can we stop trying to help God run the world and start doing what He says to do? How can we like Joseph, learn to freely forgive?

This past year I met an amazing young woman from Afghanistan. Although she had polio as a child and walks with braces, and is a woman trying to be educated in a country that does not support it- she is perhaps the most joy filled person I know. Several times she has shared with me how very hard life is, but she chooses to see the good in it and to fight to be the best she can be, so she can return to fight even harder in her country for the right of all people to have an education. Her polio, which makes every day life so hard, is the reason she was allowed to come to America. The thing that could have defined her life, is now what allows her the opportunities she has. I share her story as a reminder to myself- that we do not see all...only God does...and that which we think will crush us often is what allows us to draw nearer to God.

**A Christian song called Blessings by Laura Story shares these truths in a much clearer way than I can- but a favorite line from the song says-
What if your healing comes through tears?
What if a thousand sleepless nights
Are what it takes to know You're near?**

When we look at life through the lense of eternity- our perspective changes. God desires that we live with peace- Christ was born to be the prince of peace.

**A verse that leads my life is from Hosea 4:6
My people perish for lack of knowledge. We have**

been given the gift of the Word of God, which tells us how to live. But often we lead lives based on feelings, emotions and what the book of proverbs calls “our own understanding”.

God calls us to trust him. To know what He says and to do it. As holiday season comes to an end, we often create lists of hopes and dreams for the New Year. They will stay dreams, unless they become a discipline...

I find that to be the hardest part...in all the areas of my life. I understand that to be healthy I should eat healthy food, exercise and rest. It is easy to know it- it is hard to do it.

That is very true of the word forgiveness. We know we should do it- but we do not do it.

Or maybe you truly have forgiven someone, and then they do something new and suddenly all the past feelings of pain and betrayal return.

Sometimes, the Holidays bring up memories of pain and show us where we have not allowed forgiveness in.

As I started to prepare for today, God brought showed me many verses that were meaningful in my life. Today I want to share 1 of them with you.

**Eph 4:32 Ephesians 4:32 New International Version
- Be kind and loving to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.**

This is the first verse my daughter Katie learned in her first Sunday School class. It might be the phrase I used most as my girls were growing up. I loved to remind them to be kind and loving to each other and felt it was our family motto. It is so easy to give advice and so hard to live it. I remember the morning I was praying and God brought this verse to my mind and showed me how important it was for me to live this truth. The end tells us how we can live a life of kindness and be loving. - We must realize that we can forgive only because God forgave me, in Christ.

Perhaps like many of you- I have found that the more steps I have taken toward Christ, the more I realize what I do not know.

About 2 years ago I was having lunch with a friend and sharing some truths of my life. As she listened, she helped me see I needed to forgive. She told me about RT Kendall's "Total Forgiveness". As I began to read it- I realized that I had heard my whole life how important it was to forgive, but honestly, I did not know how to and was not even sure what forgiveness was- I thought it was forgetting- just like God -from the east is to the west is how far he separates our sin from us...but what I found was I was angry deep inside and smiling on the outside. I was doing the opposite of I Cor. 13 where it

describes love. Near the end it reminds us that when we love- we do not keep a record of wrongs –

It could also be said-Do not keep a record of “our times of being right”-

Have you done that? I know it is something that I struggle with – it easy to see where I am right and where others are wrong.

Often we have a choice, we can be right or be in relationship. When I first was married, a dear friend gave me a journal and told me to write every thing my husband did to bless me. And when the times would come when he would do something that hurt my feelings I was to take out the book and look at it. As I started to prepare for today- God reminded me of this. I no longer need the book because it became part of who I am- but I am not sure what my marriage would have been like if she did not encourage me to start this discipline of keeping a record of things Fred has done that were wonderful, and thinking about those things.

We can try to do forgive in our own strength- but we will fail until we realize that it is only God’s great love that allows us to forgive others and ourselves.

We can’t do it in our own strength. But I have seen Christ fill my heart with His love.

Like most of us, Kendall had found himself deeply hurt by people he trusted. In order to come to a place where he truly could forgive- he found he

**needed the daily discipline of reading Luke 6:37-
EVERY single day when he woke up.**

**“Do not judge others, and you will not be
judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all
come back against you. Forgive others, and
you will be forgiven.**

**Jesus shared these words and though there are not
many words to read, there is so much to do. Only
with the power of the Holy Spirit in us can we do it.
Do not judge, Do not condemn, Forgive...**

**What would happen to our lives if this simple verse
guided our days? Do not judge, Do not condemn,
Forgive...**

**In “Total Forgiveness”...Kendall shares 2 points
that help us see why we need to start today.**

- 1. Forgive yourself... “ forgiving your self may
bring about the breakthrough you have been
looking for. It could set you free.”**

**I think of many people I know who struggle to
forgive and what breaks my heart is knowing
where they need to start is by forgiving
themselves. That is why the gospel is what
changes us. The first step is realizing that we are
sinners in need of a Savior. Jesus Christ came for
you and me. His blood has covered our sins.**

Perhaps today is the day for some of us to believe this truth. I am loved, you are loved and we are forgiven. Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

2. Flee from Pride...A second point I found to be true is that when we are emptied of self righteousness and pride, we enable God to move in us and through us,”

Pride is what keeps us from God. Self-righteousness is the opposite of the gospel. It is a way to make ourselves feel better by comparing your sins to others who we find more sinful. But the standard we are measured against is God-perfect and Holy. We all fall short of God’s glory.

The good news, the Gospel is that Christ alone paid for our sins...his blood washes it away... “as if I never sinned” and also perfectly satisfied God’s eternal justice.

I think RT Kendall made a strong point when he said-

“Often fear, that what happened will not be properly punished, rather than anger..is what keeps us from forgiving”.

I think that is a place I struggled for a long time. Can we really let God be the judge?

When we do not forgive- we say that Christ's atonement was not enough... A phrase I have heard that we all want justice for those who injure us and mercy for ourselves.

God is gracious, merciful and compassionate. He longs to have us return to Him.

We will know we have truly forgiven when-

- 1. We pray that God will let the offender off the hook... Romans 5:8 reminds us that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

This is so much more than forgetting- it is choosing to not be the judge and going even further and asking God to forgive them, as Jesus did on the cross.

- 2. We refuse to punish...we give up the desire to see them "get what is coming"**

Today I want us to realize that this is lifetime of daily choices- God is showing me that a disciple lives a disciplined life.

I need to let God be the judge...

That is why Kendall chose each day to remind himself from the book of Luke. Do not judge or condemn, but forgive.

Finally- where I saw transformation of my heart begin

3. We pray for God to bless them...

This is where I have found my heart and life change. If I feel anger and unforgiveness, I am choosing to stop and pray.

God- please bless them, keep them close to you. Make your face shine on them so they can sense your great love. Lord, I ask for peace that passes understanding.

I grew up without emotional and spiritual boundaries. I would be so sad if you leave here today and in any way think I am telling you it is ok to be abused by others. The boundaries in our relationships need to be healthy. So I want to be clear that

Forgiveness is not...

1. Approval of evil or Excusing evil

Forgiveness does not necessarily mean reconciliation.

Reconciliation requires 2 people to both choose to live under the authority of God. You are only able to deal with you. You can choose to be a person who forgives freely.

When we choose to forgive, the power of God in you will allow our bitterness and our human desire

to punish to leave us. It sets us free from being a judge.

2. Forgiveness is not Forgetting...when we forgive, there is not a magic switch that removes the memory of the pain. God can help us *choose not to remember*... if someone has hurt you and it is in written form, like a text or email...hit delete so you do not stay focused on the pain.

Finally Phil 4:8 tell us to trade in a wrong thoughts for right thoughts ...In Kid's Harbor this has been an important verse for the Fall.

It tells us to trade in thoughts about things that harm us for things that give us life. When your heart is in pain, think about things that are good, pure, lovely, excellent, praise worthy. The other night, when I found myself struggling to fall asleep because I was angry and upset, God reminded me of this verse and I began to think about Christ- who is pure, lovely I focused on-who He is and what He has done...my heart began to praise the Lord, and I fell asleep. When I woke in the night, I was once again thinking about upsetting things, so again I focused on Jesus and he brought my soul peace.

So as we spend the last of these 12 days of Christmas, my prayer for all of us is that we will rest in the truth of God's great love and ask for His power to make the discipline of forgiveness part of our lives.

Prayerfully ask God to show you if you're holding a grudge against someone....or if you're refusing to forgive yourself or someone else. With God's help, choose not to judge, or condemn, choose to forgive.

Make a commitment today that you will think about things that are good, pure holy. If you can think of just one person today that you need to forgive, Pray for God's strength to help you take a first step to forgive ...keep a record of right things, pray for God to bless those who have hurt you and refuse to punish- let God be the judge.

Hope has come.

Christ was born, lived a perfect life and shed His blood on the cross for you and me. His perfect love can fill our hearts with love and allow us to take steps closer to Him.

As we enter 2015, my prayer is that with the power of God in us, we will be a people who forgive freely. That He will use us to help people find their way back to God.

