

## **How Sorry Is Sorry?** by Jeff Strite

Matthew 6:9-6:15

OPEN: (We put a picture of a "Sorry" game board on the screen)

How many of you recognize this game board? And how many of you have ever played it?

Amazon.com says the game of Sorry is the #5 best-selling board game on their site. (<http://www.amazon.com/Best-Sellers-Toys-Games-Board/zgbs/toys-and-games/166225011k>)

But Sorry not really an original game. It is one many variations on a game that originated in India called Parcheesi. There are other games based on the same concept and they have names like:

- Aggravation
- Trouble
- Frustration
- And there's even a game called "Wahoo"

As I was researching this sermon I came across a picture of one of the boxes Sorry was sold in and found the tagline on the box called it "The Game Of Sweet Revenge". And I thought at the time... that's an odd phrase to describe a game that's called "Sorry". We don't usually connect the word "Sorry" with "revenge" – but apparently the company that owned it thought it was a great idea.

In fact, in a 1994 TV advertisement for the game (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MAQDpiBNTiw>) that was precisely the idea. Ben Stein was portrayed as a stodgy teacher trying to teach his students about forgiveness. "Always remember to forgive and forget" he says.

But the kids are having nothing to do with it... they're playing Sorry, the game of "sweet revenge". And the voice over of the commercial says "I'll get you for that!"

At the heart of the game is the acknowledgment that saying "I'm sorry" is not quite the same as BEING sorry. And actually that's true.

Did you realize that the Bible never uses the words "I'm Sorry" Or "you should be sorry". I looked it up! But by contrast, the words "forgive", "forgives", "forgiven" and "forgiveness" show up at least 119 times by my count.

But why would that be?

Why would God prefer us saying "forgive me" to saying "I'm sorry?"

Well, because SORRY doesn't call for a response.

(At this point I went down into the audience and used a couple people as part of the sermon)

Let's say, when I drove into the parking lot this morning I ran into Roy's car. And so I go

over to Roy and say "I'm Sorry."

(Pause).

Does Roy have to respond to that? No, he doesn't does he? I have simply expressed that I'm sorry and I'm not looking for him to say anything in return.

But now, let's say I drove into the parking lot and ran into Dave's car here and I say to him:

"Dave will you forgive me?"

(Wait, for a response)

You see, when I ask for forgiveness, I'm asking for a response.

Saying "I'm sorry" is actually the easy way out. Because if I were to ask for forgiveness I'd risk getting an answer I don't want to hear. If I ask Dave for forgiveness what is one of the worst answers I can expect?

"NO!"

Asking for forgiveness exposes me to the potential of being rejected and humiliated. I don't want to do that. So I may be more inclined to say something to you that doesn't ask you to say anything in response. To just slip by by saying "I'm sorry."

Saying "I'm sorry" is just so much easier than saying "forgive me."

And God doesn't want us coming to Him and just saying "Sorry".

Now that doesn't mean that being sorry is a bad thing. In 2 Corinthians 7:9 Paul says "...now I am happy, not because you were made SORRY, but because your sorrow led you to repentance..."

Their being sorry led them to repent.

Their sorrow led them to want to change their lives.

And that was a good thing.

But, too many times people will be sorry but never repent, and never change. That's why God never tells us to just be sorry. That's not enough for Him.

He wants our sorrow to lead us to repent and ask forgiveness.

He wants our sorrow to lead us to want to change our lives.

And if we are willing to ask forgiveness – if we're willing to confess our sins to Him, admit we've been wrong and humble ourselves before Him - then God promises He WILL forgive us.

In 1 John 1:9 we're told "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from ALL unrighteousness."

I don't want to get too technical on the original Greek of that verse, but basically it's saying that as often as we confess our sins, and ask for forgiveness ... God forgives. Every time.

ILLUS: One man explained it like this: Back in college, a bunch of the guys from his dorm floor went out to a nice restaurant before Christmas break to celebrate the end of their 1st semester as freshmen. His roommate, who loved the new policy that restaurants were

adopting back then – unlimited refills on soda – so that night he drank Pepsi and Pepsi after Pepsi.

Now, what he didn't know was that this particular restaurant didn't offer free refills. And so... he was charged for every single one of the drinks he'd received. And he nearly fell out of his chair when the waiter brought his check. (Bob Vale)

You see, his friend was EXPECTING to get free refills.

What he got was a bill where he had to pay for EVERY soft drink he'd had that night.

And that illustrates the difference between how the world does things and how God does things. The world expects that we should pay for every sin we commit. There's no forgiveness of sins in their minds - just a bill at the end for every sin.

But with God, when we ask forgiveness, it's like we've gotten in a on free refills night. Over and over and over again, with every time we confess that we were wrong God takes it off our bill... and we don't have to pay for it.

Isn't that great?

No other religion in the world offers something that comforting, because this is God's offer... not religion's.

But now, there is a caveat here.

There is a condition that Jesus sets on our being forgiven.

Jesus said, when we pray we should say "Forgive us our debts..."

But how are we supposed to have our "debts" or sins forgiven?

That's right "... as we also have forgiven our debtors." Matthew 6:12

In other words, we should expect God to forgive us in the same way as we forgive others. And, just in case we didn't get the point here... Jesus adds at the end of the Lord's prayer these words:

"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father WILL NOT FORGIVE your sins."  
Matthew 6:14-15

(Pause)

That doesn't sound right!

In fact, it sounds kind of harsh.

Why would God make such a demanding statement as this?

Well, there are a few reasons I can think of.

First we should do that for others... because God did that for us.

Remember how great it was to realize that we don't have to PAY for all our sins? That God would forgive us as often as we asked?

At one point in His ministry, Jesus was teaching His disciples about forgiveness and Peter asked Him, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Now, Peter was being generous here.

In Jewish religious circles it was taught that you only had to forgive someone 3 times. After 3 times around all bets were off... and you could shut a guy down.

But that's not how Jesus saw it. Jesus told Peter:

"I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. Matthew 18:22

After the 15th time or so, I'd begin to lose count... and of course, that's the point.

In essence Jesus was saying that His followers needed to get used to handing out "free refills"... just like God does.

If you will, we are subsidiaries and branch offices of God.

We represent him in this world.

And since we serve a God who forgives us, we need to be like Him in this world. We need to model His kind of forgiveness to an undeserving world. Because He forgave us when we didn't deserve forgiveness.

So Jesus corrects Peter's thinking with a short statement... then He illustrates His point with a parable. He said:

"... the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents (several million dollars) was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

"The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.'

The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go."

Well, that was nice.

Wasn't that nice for that king to forgive such a large debt?

Of course it was.

But then Jesus completed the parable:

"But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow-servants who owed him a hundred denarii (a few thousand dollars). He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

"His fellow-servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'

"But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened."

Here this man had been forgiven an astronomical debt but he couldn't forgive the debt of

someone who owed him far less? Well, that didn't go down very well with the King.

"Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow-servant just as I had on you?'

In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." Matthew 18:21-35

That's pretty harsh.

But you can understand how God could be upset with us if we don't forgive.

He forgave us all of our sins.

In fact, whenever we ask for forgiveness - even if it's 7 times 70 a day - we STILL have that promise.

But then He watches some of the very people he's forgiven hold bitterness and anger inside because somebody sinned against them.

No matter what another person has done to you or me their sins against us pales in comparison to our sins against God.

Yeah, I can understand why God would be upset.

Toby Mac once said this:

"Don't let what has been done TO you become bigger than what HE DID for you."  
(repeat that phrase)

So, first I need to forgive others... because God forgave ME.

I can't let what has been done to me become bigger than what He did for me.

2ndly - I need to forgive others... because if I don't it messes with me.

Did you notice the words Jesus said in His parable about the unforgiving servant?

In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be TORTURED, until he should pay back all he owed."

What Jesus was teaching was - if I don't forgive what others have done to me I'll suffer. I'll be tortured. My refusal to forgive will hurt me.

ILLUS: There's been a number of scientific studies on unforgiveness and bitterness in people's lives and these studies have shown some of the more obvious results you'd expect from these kinds attitudes. Folks that harbor unforgiveness tend to be extremely unhappy, filled with resentment, burdened with stress and suffer from depression.

But then there are the less obvious consequences to this mindset:

Folks who can't forgive are more prone to have higher rates of divorce. And they tend to suffer from headaches, backaches, and insomnia.

One study said that unforgiveness leads to a buildup in a chemical called cortisol. Cortisol is not a good thing to have in abundance in your body. It wears down the brain which leads to cell atrophy and memory loss. It also raises blood pressure and blood sugar, and hardens

the arteries and leading to heart disease.

(Bruce McEwen, PhD, director of neuroendocrinology lab at Rockefeller University in NYC)

Unforgiveness tortures those who harbor it.

It hurts us.

And it hurts us in another way as well.

ILLUS: I read about a teacher (I'm presuming, at a Christian School) who once told each of her students to bring a clear plastic bag and a sack of potatoes to school. Then they were instructed to call to mind every person they had a grudge against.

For every person they refused to forgive, they were to choose a potato write on it the name and date, and put it in the plastic bag.

The teacher told them they were told to carry this bag everywhere they went, putting it beside their bed at night, on the car seat when driving, on their lap when riding, next to their desk during classes.

Some bags became quite heavy. And lugging it around, paying attention to it all the time and remembering not to leave it in embarrassing places was a hassle. And over time... what do you think happened to those potatoes?

That's right - they began to stink. They became moldy, smelly, and began to sprout "eyes."

Do you catch what that teacher was trying to get across to her students? She was trying to teach them that unforgiveness is an inconvenient, embarrassing, smelly irritation in our lives.

Now how do you know if you've not forgiven someone?

- You don't want to be in the same room with them.
- The mere mention of their name makes you cringe.
- If you hear about something that has hurt them or made their lives uncomfortable... how do you respond? You're not really sad. In fact, you're feeling pretty good. They've finally gotten just a little of what they've deserved. Good for them! In short, you tend rejoice in their misfortune.
- And one of the chief marks that you've not forgiven someone is that - when you do talk about them - you tend to replay your "story" of how they hurt you. Why? Because you want those who listen to you to dislike that person as much as you do. And you tell those stories A LOT!!!

That's your sack of potatoes

(I brought out a sack of potatoes, and the sack down into the audience and sat down beside someone, making a big show of putting the sack down between the two of us)

Yes sir, that's my sack of potatoes and I carry it everywhere I go. It stinks and it's annoying, but I carry it with me everywhere.

(Turning to the other person) "What do you think of my sack?"

(He moved away from me, much to the amusement of the audience)

(I then got up and carried the potatoes with me to the front of the audience)

You carry it to bed with you and it affects your marriage.  
You carry it to work and set it on the desk or machine you work at.  
You carry it to family gatherings... and plunk it right down in the middle of dining room table.  
Yeah... it makes you a real joy to be around.

ILLUS: I talked with one preacher some time back that mentioned a woman whose husband had cheated on her years ago... and she'd never forgiven him for it. She'd sit there every Sunday in church, and you could SEE the bitterness in her. If you were around her, you could FEEL the hatred that ate away at her soul.

So let's review:

God hates it when we don't forgive others. He won't forgive us if we don't forgive others.  
It hurts US physically when we don't forgive others.  
It damages OUR RELATIONSHIPS when we refuse to forgive someone.

But (stroking the sack of potatoes like it was a treasured possession and giving it a longing look) it is my sack. I deserve to carry it with me. Because after all - that person didn't deserve to be forgiven.

(Pause)

But then neither did you.  
And neither did I.  
But God forgave us anyway.

CLOSE: At the end of sermons people will often tell me "nice sermon" or something to that effect. And I appreciate that. It makes me feel good to know my efforts are appreciated. But this morning I'd much prefer you to tell me "Jeff, I have someone I need to forgive, and I'm going to make the effort to forgive them."  
That's what God calls us to do.

But you can't really know how to forgive others until you've experienced the forgiving power of God's mercy in your own life. That's why we close every sermon with an invitation for you to come forward and lay hold of God's love in your life.