

Our city has faced so many questions and emotions, up and down, over the past week:

- We've cheered on friends who've trained for months to run the Boston Marathon.
- We've watched in horror wondering if anyone we knew was involved.
- We've steamed with anger over who could do such a ruthless evil and why they could do it? The front headlines should've been about the Marathon winners and instead it's about the bombing. What about the winners who deserved praise and recognition? What about those who trained for months and never even got to finish? What about the businesses that have lost thousands of dollars in revenue?
- We've felt compassion, brokenness and sympathy for people who've died and been severely injured (Krystle Campbell in Medford, Costello family and friends).
- We've collectively longed for justice to be brought about in this crime.
- We've watched in fear as we were encouraged to stay home with the suspect still at large.
- We've breathed sighs of relief knowing that both suspects have been captured.
- We've expressed gratitude and praise to many that spent countless hours this week protecting our freedom and bringing about justice (police: local and state, FBI, Fire Depart., nurses, doctors).
- We've watched Boston respond "Boston Strong" with great unity and appreciation.
- Many of us still have lingering questions? Why not me? Will something like this happen again? When? Should I be paralyzed by fear? Where is God in all of this?

It's tempting to try and escape from reality and not face these serious questions about life. Let's be honest, no one likes to think about death but as Ecclesiastes reminds us, times of mourning give us a great opportunity to think clearly and rightly about the meaning of life. My challenge for you today is to take a mirror and place it in front of you and peak into your heart and let God use this tragedy as a sanctifying tool in your life to produce characteristics of growing disciples of Christ.

The Point: Clothe yourself with traits of a growing disciple.

I. Examine your Example (17:1-3a).

We live in a fallen world. This is not the way it's supposed to be (17:1a).

Creation: God is not the author of evil. He made all things good, indeed very good (Gen. 1:31).

Fall: Adam and Eve fell to temptation, disobeyed God, and the result was death. The consequences of sin are devastating:

- Like a virus, sin entered into all creation: sin, suffering, and pain were passed down from generation to generation, including ours.
- All of creation was distorted from its original design (war, poverty, disease, and heinous acts like the Marathon bombings).
- Where is God? Many look at Monday's events and say, "If God were good, he would've stopped that from happening. Therefore, there is no God."
- But, perhaps, the problem of evil is an even greater problem for the unbeliever.

"Could there really be any such thing as horrifying wickedness [if there were no God and we just evolved]? I don't see how. There can be such a thing only if there is a way that rational creatures are supposed to live, obliged to live....A [secular] way of looking at the world has no place for genuine moral obligation of any sort...and thus no way to say there is such a thing as genuine and appalling wickedness. Accordingly, if you think there is such a thing as horrifying wickedness (...and not just an illusion of some sort), then you have a powerful...argument [for the reality of God]" (Alvin Plantinga, quoted in *Reason for God* by Keller, 26-27).

Rescue/Redemption: God made a promise to Adam and Eve of rescue and hope. He promised that one of their descendants would someday rescue mankind from sin (Gen. 3:15). This man is Jesus.

“On the cross he went beyond even the worst human suffering and experienced cosmic rejection and pain that exceeds ours...He had to pay for our sins so that someday he can end evil and suffering without ending us...God takes our misery and suffering so seriously that he was willing to take it on himself” (Keller, *Reason for God*, 30-31).

Restoration: This is not the way it’s *supposed* to be and this is not the way it *will* be.

- The resurrection of Christ and the promise of the return of Christ brings us hope of a new creation where God will make all things right. God will cleanse, renew, and perfect this material world with a new heavens and a new earth. No more earthquakes, tsunamis, pain, broken hearts, war, sickness, heinous acts of violence, and death.
- My hope is not in America, or increased security, or in stronger gun laws. These will not prohibit heinous acts like this one from happening again. These don’t address the ultimate problem.
- The return of Christ also will bring justice: the Great White Throne Judgment.
- “Beloved, never avenge for yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’” (Rom. 12:19).
- Until Jesus returns, sin and temptations to sin will be present.

Examine your doctrine and your life so that you don’t cause others to sin (“Pay attention...”).

- It’s one thing to give into temptation; it’s much greater to be an actual agent and conduit of sin in the lives of others. This kind of temptation can even come from within side the church.
- Who are “little ones”? New disciples who need instruction (cf. Matt. 18:3-4).
- While Jesus doesn’t tell us the fate of such a person, he says that it would be better to drown than to cause someone to sin. A harsh death would be a better deal than what you would get from God. A millstone when hung around the neck would make drowning certain.
- Is there anything in your doctrine or life that is causing someone else to sin, big or small?

II. Eagerly extend Unrestrained Forgiveness (17:3b-4).

Discipleship must be done in community.

- The only way that 17:3b-4 works without destroying relationships is when disciples are *committed* to other disciples that invite this kind of confronting behavior to occur.
- This is why at RHC we value: 1) involvement in a Community Group and 2) Membership.
- Are you committed to a sphere of relationships that can speak truth into your life and you can speak truth into theirs?

Rebuke with Gentleness and Love

- This assumes Jesus’ previous teaching on this subject: first look inwardly to take the log out of your own eye before you take the speck out of someone else’s eye (Luke 6:37-42).
- It should be motivated by love and done with gentleness (Gal. 6:1). At times, it’s beneficial to involve the church so that it doesn’t disintegrate into a personal battle (see Matt. 18:15ff).
- Is there someone in your relational sphere that God wants to use you as an instrument of redemption to foster repentance and restoration?

Repent with Sincerity

- As you grow in Christ, hopefully you’ll be able to see your own sin against others and repent before they have to rebuke you. But, how should you respond to being rebuked?
- True repentance involves more than just sorrow and regret and a desire to just get off the hook.
 - Accept full responsibility for a real wrong committed without downplaying the behavior.
 - Stop the hurtful behavior.
 - Make restitution where necessary.
- Is there a sin that you need to repent of? Is there a person that you need to reconcile with?

Eagerly extend Unrestrained Forgiveness

- In Matthew, Peter asks, “How many times should I forgive my brother?” (Mt. 18:21). In Luke, Jesus simply anticipates this question. Do you ever wrestle with this question?
- Let’s be honest. Forgiveness is hard to do. I can hear the excuses now:
 - But Jon, there are some repeated offenses that no sane person would continue to forgive.
 - But Jon, do you know how hard it is to forgive some people, to forgive certain sins?
 - But Jon, do you know how much this person has hurt me?

In Matthew 18, after Peter’s question, Jesus tells another story (Matt. 18:23-35).

- There was a servant who owed his master, the king, 10,000 talents (1 talent = 20 years wages).
 - This debt is enormous, unimaginable, and unpayable (billions of dollars).
- The servant pleaded with the king and the king forgave him the debt.
- The servant had a fellow servant who owed him 100 denarii (1 denarius = 1 day’s wages).
- The fellow servant pleaded with him in a similar fashion, yet it does not move him to forgiveness.
- His fellow servants responded in disbelief, “How could he do such a thing?” And they report the news to the master/king. The king casts him into jail until he pays the very last penny. He will do this to everyone of you who doesn’t forgive his brother from the heart.
- The point: no one can ever be in debt to you more than you were in debt to God and so no one should ever be excused from forgiveness.

Excuses to extending forgiveness:

- “I’ll never be able to forget what he’s done to me.” Forgiveness is not the same as forgetting.
- “If I forgive him it will minimize the hurt he has caused.” Forgiveness is not a minimization of the wrong that has been done. By definition, an offender has sinned against you in a real way.
- “He deserves punishment.” Forgiveness doesn’t remove the consequences of sin.
- “I don’t feel like forgiving.” Forgiveness is more than a feeling. It’s obedience.

How to have a forgiving heart? See the immensity of your own debts of sin before God.

- “But herein lies the problem: if we don’t know and understand the immensity of our own debts of sin, we don’t have a chance of having forgiving hearts” (Aaron Sironi, 53).
- “For the most part we’re absolutely dull to the height and depth and breadth of our sin. We are unschooled in our own wretchedness, while living under an illusion of our own goodness” (54).
- “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32). God forgave a debt you could never pay, go and do likewise.
- Jesus doesn’t mean that an eighth offense need not be forgiven (cf. Matt. 18:21f). The point is that disciples “must” always forgive; no matter how often forgiveness is requested. Sin is not to be held against someone.

III. Cultivate Genuine Faith (17:5-6; 11-19).

In this third characteristic, I’ve combined two separate passages which both speak to the trait of faith. We’re going to look at the second passage first and then address the other one.

A. The Ten Lepers: Genuine Initial Faith (17:11-19).

- “On the way to Jerusalem” (11): this begins the final movement of Jesus to his imminent death.
- 17:12-13: Lepers were shunned by society. Therefore, they stood at a distance. They wanted to speak with Jesus but knew they couldn’t approach him (Lev. 13:45-46; Num. 5:2-3). They must have known about Jesus and ability to heal. They plea with him for mercy.
- 17:14: The normal procedure for *after* a leper was cured was to go and present themselves to the priest. The priest acted as a kind of health inspector to certify that the cure had in fact taken place

(Lev. 13:19; 14:1-11). Jesus tells them to go to the priest even *before* they were healed. They obeyed and were cured on their way. This is another example of Jesus curing from a distance (see also Luke 7:1-10). Imagine the new life this brought to them; not only physical restoration but social restoration.

- 17:15-16: This miracle is not really about the ten lepers but about the one who returned praising God. This leper rightly connects Jesus' healing with God's work. Notice now how the leper approaches and draws near to Jesus as a result of being healed. When we place our faith in Jesus, we who are far away from God are brought near by the blood of the cross (Eph. 3:13). It is at this point that Luke makes us aware that his leper was a Samaritan. Normally Jews and Samaritans had little to do with each other. One might even would've expected that this Samaritan would've been the last to give thanks to a Jewish healer.
- 17:17-19: Jesus' rhetorical questions imply that he expected some concrete response from those who were missing. He is highlighting their ingratitude.
- The main point of this miracle: disciples must respond with genuine initial faith. Physical healing doesn't necessarily imply spiritual healing and salvation (see Luke 11:24-26).
- Jesus sees in this man faith that results in salvation and sends him away with assurance that it was well with his body and soul.
- God's grace and mercy extends to all people but you must respond and publicly acknowledge God and Jesus. This is the picture of genuine faith (see Rom. 10:9-13).
- Which set of lepers best describes you?

B. The Mustard Seed: Genuine Enduring Faith (17:5-6).

- The disciples had learned that faith was important not just for initial salvation but as a consistent part of life. Jesus responds to their request focusing not on the *amount* of their faith but on the necessity for a little *genuine* faith.
- The mustard seed is a picture for a small bit of genuine faith. The tree Jesus refers to is probably the black mulberry tree (it's vast root system enabled it to live up to six hundred years).
- "Planted in the sea": this is impossible. It's similar to the imagery of a camel going through the eye of a needle (18:25).
- Jesus is not suggesting you spend your time watching trees leap into the sea.
- The point: God can do a lot with a little bit of genuine faith. Nothing is impossible because God is so great. The imagery is a picture that unexpected and surprising things are the product of genuine faith and trust. It is the total absence of faith that prevents results.
- Which promises of God, if you combined with a little bit of genuine faith, would prove transformative in your life this week?

From these two passages we see that genuine faith is necessary for initial conversion as well as the daily walk of a disciple.

IV. Serve with Total Humility (17:7-10).

- Finally, Jesus concludes with a parable only found in Luke to illustrate the ideal attitude we should have in serving God. It is shaped by three rhetorical questions by which he proposes two options:
- Option #1: Does the servant who has worked hard all day get to come home and rest and eat right away? In other words, does the master prepare a meal for the servant to sit down and enjoy? (17:7).
- Option # 2: Does the servant who has worked hard all day come home and immediately prepare supper for his master and then gird himself to continue to serve the meal at the table and only later resting and eating himself? (17:8).
- The implied answer is "No" to option #1 and "Yes" to option #2.

- The question in 17:9 gets to the center of the comparison: Does the Master thank the servant because he did what was commanded? The implied answer is, “No.”
- Let’s be careful not to press the parable into meaning something that it doesn’t. Jesus is not teaching that masters shouldn’t serve others (he himself washed his disciples feet and served them). In fact, we’ve already learned that at the return of Christ God is inviting us to a feast where he will serve us (Luke 12:35-37). The whole point of this parable is found in 17:10.
- Jesus now applies the parable to his disciples comparing its picture to their service to God.
- It is significant that Jesus refers to them doing “all that they were commanded.”
 - What type of attitude can obedience potentially lead to? Entitlement. I’ve obeyed you God, now you owe me.
 - Contextually: when you have avoided misleading others into sin, forgiven generously, and had genuine faith, you’ve only done what was your duty. We don’t serve God in order to be rewarded by God.
- We are only unworthy servants.
 - This remark reflects total humility before God.

“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (1 Cor. 15:10).