

ICEBERGS: UNFORGIVENESS

- We're starting a new series today on the family.
- Specifically we're talking about Icebergs that can sink your family's ship. An iceberg, on the surface looks rather innocent.
- This has even given rise to the saying, "It's just the tip of the iceberg!" Meaning, there's more to this than meets the eye.
- Perhaps the most famous story about icebergs regards the HMS Titanic which sank on April 15, 1912.
- The ship was designed by a man called Thomas Andrews who was a Naval Architect.
- It was constructed in the Harland and Wolfe Shipyard in Belfast, Ireland.
- The ship set out on its maiden voyage from Southampton, UK to New York City carrying 2244 passengers and crew.
- At 11:40 pm the lookout spotted an iceberg and notified the bridge, but by the time they tried to turn it was too late.
- Now, they didn't strike the part of the iceberg they saw!
- They struck the massive part of the iceberg below the surface of the water.
- The ship that was thought to be "unsinkable" sank that day and 1500 people died as a result.
- One of the men who died was Thomas Andrews; he went down on the ship of his own design.
- We see this happening to families all the time.
- They're on cruise control believing that the bad things that happen to other family's won't happen to them.
- They may even see the warning signs (the iceberg tips) but they feel confident that they aren't in danger.
- Like Thomas Andrews, many families go down on the ship of their own design, because they didn't heed the warnings until it was too late.
- That's why we're in this series. To warn our families about icebergs that will sink their ships.
- We're not **JUST** talking about divorce; but these are things that can certainly lead up to divorce.
- We aren't strictly speaking about dysfunctional families; but these things can perpetuate cycles of dysfunction.
- We aren't **JUST** talking about the obvious little things; but the things that lie below the surface.
- Today we're talking about the iceberg called unforgiveness.

Proverbs 17:9 Love prospers when a fault is forgiven, but dwelling on it separates close friends. (READ THAT OUTLOUD WITH ME)

- Family members can go through a lot together in a life time.
- While there are always some happy memories, there are also tough things that all families go through.
- Some families sail through those rough waters rather effortlessly, and some families seemed tossed about by the smallest wave.
- In many homes, unforgiveness is the culprit.

WHAT ARE THE SOURCES OF UNFORGIVENESS?

- This is important to understand. You'll notice we aren't asking the question, "Who's to blame?"
- We aren't even asking, "What happened?"
- We could talk about hundreds of scenarios that might contribute to unforgiveness in a marriage or family.
- But I want to focus on some of the attitudes that foster it.
- So if you are guilty of harboring unforgiveness, how'd you get there? What are the root sources of unforgiveness in your heart?

Anger: You're mad about something. (Jm 1:20)

- Parents can be angry with kids, even when they're grown up.
 - Kids can be angry at parents, siblings can be angry with each other and the result can be unforgiveness.
- James 1:20 "A man's anger doesn't produce the kind of life God wants." (NIRV)
- God doesn't want his people angry, especially angry inside of their own homes. It doesn't produce the kind of life **he** wants.
 - It also doesn't produce the kind of life **we** want!
 - When you're mad you don't want to forgive.

Wounded: You've been hurt. (Pr 17:22)

- There are a lot of hurts and heartaches that go on in families.
 - I remember some of those hurts vividly: Vividly like they were yesterday, and so do you. Harsh words. Anger. Criticisms. Teasing.
 - I remember sharing with a family member that I was getting married; so excited and they said "you could do better"
 - I'll never forget that, and 21 years of marriage later I'm still right and they're still wrong.
 - But you gotta let go of those things. They'll destroy your family.
- Proverbs 17:22 "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones."

- I see a lot of women and children with crushed spirits because of their husbands and dads.
- Author Gary Smalley once wrote that women are like butterflies and men are like buffaloes.
- It doesn't take much for a man to wound his wife and kids.
- If you ever go through the 12 steps in Celebrate Recovery with a group of people, you might be shocked at how many people's adult issues trace back to their childhoods and family.
- Some of those things that happened years ago were never addressed and have affected people for 20 or 30 years or more.
- It's amazing how unpacking that stuff and working through the process of forgiveness can really set people free.
- But as long as you feel wounded you feel justified in holding on to that grudge and refusing to forgive.

Bitterness: Deeply resentful about something. (Heb 12:15)

Heb 12:15 "Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no *poisonous root* of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many."

- That is an amazing verse! Bitterness is a poison root.
- Bitterness sinks roots down deep in your soul. Eats away at you.
- Notices that the poisonous root of bitterness takes hold in you, then corrupting many others. It happens all the time in family.
- My grandmother was kind of known for being a bitter woman.
- On their wedding day, she gave my parents a set of silverware.
- She specifically told my mom that if she didn't like the pattern that she could take them back and exchange them.
- My mom did that. A month or so later my grandma asked about it and my mom said she exchanged them for a different set.
- After that grandma didn't talk to my mom for months!
- There is some whacky messed up stuff that goes on in families.
- Hanging on to that bitterness can destroy families.

Self-righteousness: Seeing yourself as superior. (Matt 7:4-5)

- What happens when you tell yourself that you'd "Never do what they did"? When you say, "I'd never lower myself to their level!"
 - It justifies you hanging on to your unforgiveness.
 - This can be kids and parents, husbands and wives, sibling, grandparents...I see this one all the time.
 - Do you know what Jesus said about that self-righteous attitude?
- Matt 7:4-5 "How can you think of saying to your friend, 'Let me

help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye?

Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye."

-When we are focused on the sins of other people we're conveniently blind to our own.

-When we're so indignant about other people's faults, we fail to see our own.

-And when you're so sure that you're so much better than the other person...you don't want to forgive. They aren't worthy!

-Now we've only identified a few of the common sources of unforgiveness but let's talk about the results.

WHAT ARE THE RESULTS OF UNFORGIVENESS?

-I did a last minute change on this next point so your bulletin won't match. One of the results of unforgiveness is that it:

Strain on yourself: When you have unresolved issues with others it ultimately hurts you first and probably hurts you the most.

-And this isn't just opinion stuff or feel-good stuff; this is scientific stuff; this is according to the Mayo Clinic:

-When you are holding on to unforgiveness it can cause you to:

- Brings anger/bitterness into every relationship/experience
- Become so wrapped up in what's wrong in your past that you can't enjoy the present.
- Become depressed or anxious
- Feel that your life lacks meaning or purpose
- It puts you at odds with your own spiritual beliefs

-According to the same article learning to forgive...

- Lowers anxiety, stress, and blood pressure!
- Fewer symptoms of depression
- Stronger immune system
- Improved heart health
- Higher self-esteem

-I know lots of families that could use some of that.

-Christian author Frederick Buechner describes the person who is holding on to unforgiveness this way:

"To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome

morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back--in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you."

- We feel like we're punishing them for what they did.
- We feel like we're getting back at them for hurting us.
- We feel like withholding our forgiveness is hurting **THEM** but it's ultimately hurting us.

Strained relationships with others. (Matt 22:39)

- Family is a complicated thing. There are people who are holding onto unforgiveness and over some pretty petty stuff.
- There are people holding on to unforgiveness over real hurt/pain
- But the regardless of the reason, the outcome is the same.
- It hurts you, and then it hurts those around you.
- And family members are often the first in the line of fire.
- Jesus said the second most important command in life is to [Matt 22:39 "A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"](#)
- And in many broken homes that exactly what's NOT going on.
- People are bitter and broken and don't even love themselves, and they're applying the same standard to their families.
- Do you think that when mom and dad are bitter with each other, that it doesn't affect the kids?
- Do you think when you kids are always hating on your brothers/sisters siblings it doesn't affect your parents?
- With just a little effort everyone can be hurt, yelling, and hating on each other and no one is feeling any love.
- And while God's people are battling it out in the confines of their homes, does anyone even stop to think what God thinks?
- The second commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves, but the first is to love God; and the two go hand in hand.
- When you're miserable, your family relationships are strained, how do you think you're doing with God?**

Strained relationship with God. (Matt 6:14-15)

[Matthew 6:14-15 "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins."](#)

- When you're sideways with other people you're sideways w/God.

- When you're relationship with God is weak your relationships with others are weak. It's all connected.
 - Unforgiveness, unresolved issues at home can affect your entire life. It's a powerful force from the enemy used to oppress us!
 - This isn't easy stuff we're talking about here.
 - How hard is it to forgive someone who you feel has wronged you?
 - It depends on you, and them, and it depends on what happened.
 - But what doesn't ever change is what God says about it.
- Luke 17:4-5 Even if that person wrongs you seven times a day and each time turns again and asks forgiveness, you must forgive."
- You'll love their response: 5 The apostles said to the Lord, "Show us how to increase our faith."
 - Show us how! How can we do we create a culture of forgiveness in our homes?

WHAT ARE THE REMEDIES FOR UNFORGIVENESS?

- I'm going to give you some starter techniques.
- Some situations are so complicated, have been going on so long, have so many multi-layered components that you may need to get in CR group or go see a Christian counselor.

Have realistic expectations and assessments of others. (Col 3:13)

- I have found that people who are chronically disappointed with themselves and others need to lower their expectations.
- I know that's terribly un-American but it totally works.*
- Lowering your expectations often lowers your anxiety.
- There have been people over the years that drive me crazy, but I've realized that it's because I had expectations for them that they never even agreed to.
- And I've had expectations for them that were too high!
- That's part of the problem with family.
- We have higher expectations for family than anyone else.
- And often these expectations are unspoken. We just expect them to know what we expect of them. Read my mind!!!
- And when they don't meet our expectations, or they make mistakes we get mad, we take it personal, hold onto a grudge.
- Colossians 3:13 "Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others."
- Make allowances means give them some room to be human.
- Be realistic in your expectations, gracious with their failings.

- And Paul points out...you know...God forgave you. (A lot).
- When you find yourself obsessing about what they did or what they should have done...just breathe. Take a step back.
- Realize that all the things you're mad at them for, God has forgiven you for. We're all sinners. No one is perfect.
- This keeps us from letting little things turn into big things!

Forgive them first in prayer! (Mk 11:25)

- This is a new concept for some of you and a normal practice for others. Forgive people in your prayers.
- It's weird how people compartmentalize their relationship with God and their relationships with people.
- If someone has hurt you, offended you, wounded you and you know you need to forgive them...why not pray first?
- Mark 11:25 "But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too."
- That may sound like this, "Father. I'm so hurt by the disrespect my wife showed me, or by the critical spirit my husband showed me, or by the rebelliousness of my child"
- I'm struggling to forgive them, but Father I lay down my right to hurt them even though they hurt me."
- Help me to forgive them and move on.
- It's amazing how much it helps to take our hurts to the Lord first.
- To admit to him that we're struggling to forgive and ask for help.
- It's hard to be outraged about other people's failings when we we're talking to the one whose forgiven all of ours.

Make forgiveness your family's policy! (Eph 4:31-32)

- Eph 4:31 "Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior."
- Actually saying the words is so important.
- "Will you please forgive me?" is a powerful request.
- Half of the healing comes from sincerely asking this question:
- When you ask for forgiveness you are:
 - Humbling yourself before the other person
 - Admitting that you did something wrong
 - Putting yourselves at their mercy
- Saying the words "I forgive you" is a powerful statement:
- It communicates...

- I'm giving up my right to pay you back
- I'm giving you something we both need; healing.

-Teach this to your little kids. Not just "I'm sorry" but "please forgive me and I forgive you.

-You parents with teens; when you mess up go to your teenage son/daughter and ask their forgiveness. Model this for them.

-You kids; when you've been dumb to your parents...say the words, "I'm sorry. Please forgive me?" You'll freak them out!

-You husbands and wives; use these words!

-Please forgive me? I forgive you.

-And then hug it out. These words plus a hug could save families

-It's powerful, life-changing, stuff.

-Imagine that your family is a ship and you're sailing along.

-And then a storm picks up; things are pretty rough.

-But you figure we'll just sail through the storm into better waters

-But after some time has gone by you realize you're aren't getting through it; and you look back to discover that people on your family's ship have been dropping anchors.

-No wonder you're stuck in rough waters!

-You want to sail out of that stormy place but there is something keeping you stuck.

-That's how unforgiveness is in our families.

-God has given us a better way. Through his son Jesus God has shown us that anything can be forgiven, anyone can be forgiven.

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