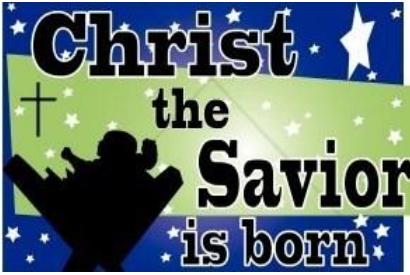


E-Series Poison



9 "This, then, is how you should pray: "'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, **10** your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. **11** Give us today our daily bread. **12** Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. **13** And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' **14** For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. **15** But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. **—Matthew 6:9-14**

Not too long ago, somebody said to me, "My family puts the fun in dysfunction." I commented in a recent sermon that, from what I've seen, that describes almost every family. I've never encountered anybody who doesn't have their fair share of family dysfunction.

After almost a decade in ministry, I have learned that there are some times, more than others, when this dysfunction seems to bubble up. Weddings, deaths, and Christmas are certainly the top three, but in no particular order.

The thing that creates the relational dysfunction of this time of year is **history**. Nine times out of ten family drama is created, or at least exacerbated, by some wrong that has been suffered in the past, some hurt that has been experienced. It is incredibly difficult to let these kinds of things go, even if they have been perpetrated by family.

I guess the thing that got me thinking about this was a conversation I had recently at a Christmas party. A large group of us gathered together for a meal of organically grown vegetables and other heart-healthy foods at Shealy's Barbecue. During the course of a conversation, my wise interlocutor made a statement: "**Holding grudges is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.**" She didn't remember where she had heard it, but it doesn't matter. It's a powerful truth.

As we move toward Christmas, we are moving toward the celebration of God's gift of salvation. God has loved us so much that God became one of us. Jesus came to earth to do for us what we could not do for ourselves—make possible our forgiveness. He has also made possible our freedom from unforgiveness, grudges. In fact, Jesus has told us that our forgiveness from God is contingent on our forgiveness of others.

This Christmas, there might be someone in your family or circle of friends who has wronged you. Perhaps you are dreading that moment when you see each other again. You may say to yourself, "I don't know if I can forgive. How can I ever forget?"

It calls to mind another conversation in the novel, *The Shack*. The main character, Mack, is struggling to forgive the sociopath who abducted and murdered his daughter. God says to Mack, "**Forgiveness is not forgetting. It's deciding to take your hand off the other person's throat.**" When Mack protests that he doesn't think he can do that, God responds, "I want you to. **Forgiveness is first for you, the forgiver...to release you from something that will eat you alive; that will destroy your joy and your ability to love fully and openly.**"

Christmas is about God's gifts of joy and peace, about God wrapping himself in human flesh as the best gift ever. But, how can we ever receive God's gift with open arms if we are holding on to something else?

Loosening My Grip,
Pastor Michael

"Forgiveness is not forgetting. It's deciding to take your hand off the other person's throat." [Click here for a story that Jesus tells in Matthew about someone holding onto another's throat.](#)