

“The Hard Work of Forgiveness”

Some of us will remember the courtroom experience in 2019 when Amber Guyger, who at the time was a Dallas police officer was sentenced for fatally shooting 26-year-old Jean on Sept. 6, 2018. Guyger shot Jean while he was eating ice-cream in his Dallas, Texas, home after mistakenly entering his apartment believing it was her own. She was convicted of murder on Oct. 1, 2019, after a jury unanimously rejected Guyger's self-defense claims in the fatal shooting. She was sentenced to 10 years in prison, which many in the family believe is too short. However, last week she became eligible for parole.

Back on Oct of 2019 Botham's brother, Brandt Jean, 18, said he wished Amber Guyger, 31, nothing but the best. From the stand Jean forgave Guyger in Jesus. Then holding back tears, he asked the presiding judge if he could hug the woman convicted of murdering his brother. Brandt hugged Guyger. Brandt said it was his way of showing her that she is truly forgiven. Brand decided that his way for demonstrating his forgiveness was to show her with a gesture of love, thus the hug.

Many still hold many mixed emotions. There are mixed emotions even by the family. Many still believe that Guyger deserved a greater sentence. The family also believes that the sentence was too light and now feels that she should at least serve the whole ten years without parole. The whole case has demonstrated how hard forgiveness is to practice. By now also, much of the family has followed the lead of young Brandt in forgiving Guyger. They forgive her because Jesus forgave them and because forgiveness sets their hearts free. Brandt particularly said that I didn't want to live the rest of his life hating anyone. Forgiving became the first step in healing. Their was a strong emphasis in a recent interview with ABC is that forgiveness does not mean that Guyger should not be punished to the full 10 years of her sentence.

<https://abcnews.go.com/US/family-man-fatally-shot-police-officer-home-calls/story?id=114348835>

Young Brandt understand better than most that forgiveness is the beginning of a process of healing and the first step toward genuine peace in a way that the world cannot give. Forgiveness is also never given independently of other godly characteristics. Colossians 3:12-17 teaches us this

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ *Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.* ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Right in the middle of a list of qualities is the practice of forgiveness. It's connected to things like humility, peace, love, and most of all to Jesus and a gratitude for the gifts given to us in Jesus. This is the direction Brandt has chosen to turn. He understands that justice will not get him peace. Only forgiveness gives genuine peace a chance.

So, what do we learn about forgiveness so far. To forgive is the beginning of a long process toward peace. But I hope that you will notice what forgiveness is not. Forgiveness is not easy. It's a lot of hard work not to let a sense of injustice cripple our faith. The Jean family will mourn on every birthday, milestone, and moment for son and brother, Botham. One cannot expect to *feel* like forgiving especially when emotions are raw. The deeper the hurt the longer the forgiving process will take. Of course, a parole offer after five years is going to feel unjust. Of course, grace under such conditions seems too good for the crime. Yet, faith says, Jesus' death for my sin was also unjust and unfair and then appreciates what has been given for me and you.

Forgiveness also doesn't pretend that nothing happened. Forgiveness does not suggest that I must forget. If anything it does the opposite. Forgiveness acknowledges sin. Jesus dying on the cross acknowledges our sin and our need forgiveness. Forgiveness eventually can lead to a point when the memory of a crime loses its intensity; something that seeking justice alone cannot do. I didn't say that the crime loses its importance. The intensity loses the hold that it has on our minds and hearts so that grace gets more room to bring us peace. I

also didn't say this was easy. Anyone who has mourned will understand what the Jeans are suffering in their loss. The way in which it happened only makes it harder...but not impossible.

Forgiveness does not excuse anyone's sin. Again, forgiveness acknowledges sin. Forgiving others is always costly. Jesus didn't come to excuse anyone but to cleanse all of us of sin in and through Jesus. It cost Him; Jesus suffered greatly and then gave His life. Psalm 130:3-4 says it plainly. "If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness..." Jesus paid the price and wiped our slate clean.

Forgiveness also doesn't mean that one is released from consequences. The consequences for our sin was put on Jesus. "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us" Romans 5:8. Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord." The famous distinction is wages versus gift of God in Jesus. We earn our sentence of death for sin. But God's gift is the death of Jesus instead so that we may have eternal life. The consequences of our sin were placed on Jesus. Our guilt and sentence were all paid by the Lord. If one has committed a crime, however, and is sentenced to a ten year sentence then Guyer still has a responsibility to serve out that sentence. This is part of true repentance because at some level trust must be earned all over again by demonstrating not only humility but a willingness to do better. By one's actions one will truly reveal their true selves.

Forgiveness also doesn't offer any guarantees that the one who hurt us won't hurt us again. Forgiveness by the Lord is given immediately and completely without asking for guarantees. Human beings will continue to fail other human beings. Asking for guarantees operates on a justice mindset. That isn't going to give us peace. Brandt is exactly right on this one. Forgiveness will set oneself free even of guarantees. We cannot control what other people will do anyway. Guarantees will only frustrate the forgiving process and prevent real peace.

Brandt Jean demonstrated something very hard but also very powerful in that courtroom in 2019. To say that there were strong emotional reactions online is an understatement. As you listen today you may have a strong reaction as well. Forgiveness sounds simple when we go to church and hear the pastor talk about Jesus' cross. Forgiveness is hard. Even after five years many still question the hug, Brandt forgiving Guyer, and the length of the sentence. Five years and the hurt is still fresh for the family. Yet gradually, forgiveness is still the choice the family is making and pursuing. As they pursue this forgiveness they are pursuing the Lord more than their hurt. And that is the key. May the Lord bless us to have forgiving hearts in our own lives.

Pastor Matt Woods
John 3:30