



## THE STONE

**KEY SCRIPTURES:** Colossians 3:12-17

It's Sunday. Today's sermon was about forgiveness. Or unforgiveness, depending on which way you want to look at it.

We were all given these little colored stones on the way into the sanctuary. Any other day they would have just been those decorative gems you often see in vases, or as decorations on a special event table. But today, they were something entirely different.

During the sermon, we heard about forgiveness. We heard about what it is, and what it isn't. And at the end of the sermon, it was explained to us what the stones were for.

They represented our unforgiveness. They represented anything we might be holding on to that would stand in the way of our clean hearts before God.

Our pastor suggested that, like a heart that is holding on to unforgiveness, we would be unable to do anything as long as we were holding on to the stones we had been given. It was a little comical when he demonstrated how awkward it had been to try and shake hands with folks when the stones were in the way, but it was a point well received. Hold a stone, and there is room for nothing else. Hold a stone, and remain unable to give. Hold a stone, and remain unable to receive.

I loved his analogy, because it was so true. Unforgiveness does tend to leave one encumbered, maybe even incapable of living a life that brings God glory.

But then, I thought of one thing I could do while still holding the stone. I could punch someone.

With a clinched fist, I could let someone have it.

And with that thought, the brutality of unforgiveness was driven home for me even further.

(continued)

"...so we can know our value, live with purpose, and make a difference...**In that order.**"



---

## THE STONE Page 2

---

How often have I let a bitter root drive me to choose words that have caused injury to myself and others? How often have I delivered harmful verbal and emotional blows because I was hurt and angry and seeking to receive retribution from someone, anyone who could pay?

We were invited to bring our stones to the front of the sanctuary during the music that played at the end of the service, leaving them at the proverbial foot of the cross along with the unforgiveness they represented.

But I kept mine.

I didn't keep it because I didn't have any unforgiveness to let go of. And I didn't keep it because I didn't want to let go of the unforgiveness I did have. I just wanted to remember.

I wanted to remember that I have been forgiven much. Like my pastor said, forgiveness stings. It's not easy, but neither was the price Jesus paid so I could have my own clean slate.

And it's not something I can muster on my own. I kept the stone so I could remember that I would have to be continually running to God for the strength to forgive. Over and over again, for as long as it takes, until I can look upon my offenders with compassion and grace.

Above all, I kept the stone to remind myself that I cannot stand in the way of someone else's reconciliation with God. As my pastor so beautifully explained, it's not up to me to decide if there will be pardon or punishment for the offenses committed. That's between them and God. I just need to make sure that I'm not trying to fill a role I could never fill. There is one God, and I'm not Him.

I've always been the kind of student who needed a memory aid in one form or another to do well on a test. I've used acronyms to remember lists and silly poems to remember important rules. And now, I will use a stone. Because I want to remember what I've learned about forgiveness. And I want to keep my hands open, open to give and to receive all the goodness God has for me.

©2014 Wendi Miller

Pastor credits: Jerry Harris/Randy Drish

"...so we can know our value, live with purpose, and make a difference...**In that order.**"