

How Can We Forgive Others

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Philemon vs. 15-19
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My name is Curtis. I'm one of the pastors here at Redeemer Bible Church. It is my blessing today to be able to spend this time with you, as we look at the very words of Scripture together.

Um, We're going to be in the book of Philemon, so if you haven't been there for a while, it's right after First and Second Timothy and Titus and right before Hebrews. If you got one of the Bibles from the ushers, it's on page 1101, so that's even easier. We're going to look today at what Paul had to say. This is a very personal letter for Paul to Philemon, and it's what he had to say to a dear friend and a brother in Christ, who had a choice to make. Philemon had a choice. Was he going to forgive somebody in his life who had wronged him or not?

And so If you're able, will you stand as we read God's Word together, starting in verse 15. "For this, perhaps, is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a bondservant, but much more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. If you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. If he has wronged you at all or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand. I will repay it, to say nothing of your owing me even your own self." That is God's Word for today. You may be seated.

All right, well, unforgiveness is bad for your health. Physically and emotionally. According to Johns Hopkins Medicine, forgiving others, believe it or not, lowers the risk of heart attack, improves cholesterol levels and sleep, and reduces pain, blood pressure, anxiety, depression, and stress. In fact, studies have shown that the number one commonality among those who are depressed is unforgiveness. Now, this doesn't mean that every person who's depressed has unforgiveness that they're harboring, but it is a very common thing that people that are depressed share. Unforgiveness ultimately leads to bitterness and to resentment and anger, which hurts us, and it hurts our relationships, including our marriages. With that in mind, it's just simply wise to forgive other people, but if that's our only motivation, then it's actually kind of selfish, because that's really all about us. We should forgive, ultimately, because it honors and it glorifies God. When we forgive, we image God. John MacArthur writes that if God is never more like Himself than when He forgives, man is never more like God than when he forgives.

So how, How do we get to that place? How do we get to the place where we can forgive others for the wrongs that they've done to us? Because, if we're honest, forgiveness can be really, really hard for us to do. It can be very challenging and In my experience, many Christians don't necessarily know what biblical forgiveness is, or what it looks like, or how to do it. To forgive others, we have to embrace the truths of God's Word about forgiveness. We have to know them and understand them, and then embrace them and live them out. So This is what Paul, in this letter, is trying to help Philemon do. He's trying to help him to forgive someone who's wronged him.

So Let me give you a little bit of background. So Philemon's slave, Onesimus, had run away, and while Paul doesn't mention his actual offense, we don't know specifically what he's trying to

address, as a runaway slave, Onesimus was considered a criminal. In running away, he had defrauded his master, Philemon, by depriving him of his services and It appears, from Paul's letter, that he most likely, probably, stole from Philemon when he left, when he fled. Now, one thing you'll notice about Philemon, and you'll notice in our chunk of Philemon today, is that Paul is trying to help a master forgive his slave, but he's not telling Philemon to set Onesimus free. so it seems like a huge oversight to me. So I wanted to address it upfront, because it may to you, as well.

We need to have some understanding of slavery in the Roman Empire in Paul's day to fully appreciate the book of Philemon. Slavery in the Roman Empire, in Paul's day, wasn't like what we normally think of slavery. Slaves were often better off than those who were free. Slaves were assured food and shelter and clothing, and while the poor, and in that day and age, in that culture, in the Roman Empire, often slept in the streets, or they slept in really cheap housing. They could lose their jobs quickly. It could be very, very difficult. Slaves, on the other hand, could be doctors and musicians and teachers and artists and librarians and accountants. Education and training was available to them in all disciplines, or almost all disciplines is probably a better way to say that. Slaves could buy their freedom, and many masters' wills actually granted freedom to their slaves upon their death, or even sometimes a portion of their estate. So It's estimated that slaves waited an average of seven to 20 years for their freedom.

Now, all that being said, none of what I just shared condones slavery in any form, and the New Testament doesn't condone it either. However, Christianity did sow the seeds and does sow the seeds of slavery's destruction. John MacArthur's commentary on Philemon includes this quote from Donald Guthrie, and I think it's helpful, "In one significant phrase in Philemon, Paul transforms the character of the master-slave relationship. Onesimus is returning, no longer as a slave, but as a beloved brother. It is clearly incongruous for a Christian master to own a brother in Christ, in the contemporary sense of the word, and although the existing order of society could not be immediately changed by Christianity without a political revolution, which was clearly contrary to Christian principles, the Christian master-slave relationship was so transformed from within that it was bound to lead, ultimately, to the abolition of the system." And so It's in this context that Paul is writing to his dear friend and brother in Christ, Philemon, on behalf of his slave, who has wronged him.

So Here's a little bit more of the backstory. Onesimus, when he fled from Philemon, he ended up in Rome, and Paul was in Rome at that time. and so we know is that, through Paul, Onesimus comes to saving faith in Christ. He becomes a follower of Jesus. Now you have this slave and this master, who have become brothers in Christ, and Paul knew that their relationship needed to be restored, and so he sends Onesimus back to Philemon to seek forgiveness and restoration. Now, this was really risky for Onesimus, because if a slave was caught in that day, the penalty was pretty severe, and so Paul sends this letter back with Onesimus, but he also sends Tychicus back with him, to give him protection. Now, even just saying Tychicus is like I'm just so thankful that's not my name. Maybe in that culture, that was a really cool name. I have no idea, but I'm just glad I'm not Tychicus. But Tychicus is with him, and he's there to protect. Paul's thinking about Onesimus, wants to get him back there safely, and it's interesting to think that... We don't know this for sure, but it's probable, it's most likely that Philemon is standing in front of Onesimus, reading Paul's letter about Onesimus.

So Let's pick up in verse 15 of this really, really personal letter from Paul to his dear friend and brother in Christ. "For this, perhaps, is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might

have him back forever, no longer as a bondservant, but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord." So What Paul's trying to do here, he's trying to help Philemon forgive Onesimus, and to do that, he's reminding him, in this verse, that God's sovereign, that God is totally in control of everything, and this sovereign God might have allowed Onesimus to flee and to wrong Philemon, so that God would save his slave's very soul. It was because Onesimus left Philemon that he sovereignly met Paul, and when God uses Paul to bring him to Christ, he is transformed, and so Paul's giving Philemon an eternal perspective over what has happened in God's sovereignty. Through the wrong done to him by his slave, his slave is now coming back to him as more than a slave. God has rescued, and He's redeemed Onesimus, and he's coming back to Philemon as an eternal brother. They now share, through Christ, the same Father, the same Creator, the same Redeemer.

So That brings us to point #1) ***Believe that God sovereignly uses the wrongs done to you for your good and for His glory, the wrongs done to you for your good and His glory.*** So God is sovereign. That means He's totally in control of everything. Perhaps the best definition of God's sovereignty in the Bible can be found in Job 42:2, where Job writes, "I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted," which means prevented. One pastor puts it this way, "When we say God is sovereign, we mean He is powerful and authoritative to the extent of being able to override all powers and all authorities. Nothing can successfully stop any act or any event or any design or purpose that God intends to certainly bring about." God is sovereign.

Charles Spurgeon famously said that there is no attribute of God more comforting than His sovereignty. I wholeheartedly agree with that, but if we stop for second, and you think about, what if God was sovereign but also evil? Can you imagine how terrifying and horrific that would be? But, thankfully, the reality is that God is sovereign and He's also good. He's good. Daniel 4:35 says, "He does according to His will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'" At the same time, Nahum 1:7 tells us, "The Lord is good. The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble. He knows those who take refuge in Him." Psalm 145:17 says, "The Lord is righteous in all His ways and kind in all His works."

The good news is that, if you're a Christian, this sovereign, good, righteous God will use everything in your life, and that includes your suffering and the sins done against you, for your good and for His glory. Romans 8:28 assures us of this when it says, "And we know that for those who love God," so that's Christians, "all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose." Again, that's Christians. So This is a promise to Christians. What does all things encompass here? What do you think?

All things.

There you go. All things, right? Everything, okay? Not just the good things in our life that we would look at and go, "Oh, yeah, that's clearly a good from God." Everything. That includes the suffering that we experience and the sins done against us, as well. Paul, by the way, he's not talking about what we might tend to with our sort of American mentality of what good is and how we define that. He's not talking about more money or a better job or more comfort or whatever those things might be that our mind might go to. He actually explains what the good is in the next two verses, in 28 and 29, or excuse me, 29 and 30. He says, "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, in order that he

might be the firstborn among many brothers, and those whom He predestined, He also called, and those whom He called, He also justified, and those whom He justified, He also glorified." It's interesting to note, by the way, Paul, when he says glorified, he uses the past tense intentionally to describe a future event. Do you know why he does that? He is saying our glorification as a Christian is so certain that it's as if it already happened. He writes it in the past tense.

In my opinion, verses 28 through 30 are three of the most hopeful and comforting verses in the Bible. And so The good that Paul's referring to here is that God has sovereignly chosen to save us from before time, and in doing that, He has clothed us with the righteousness of Christ, and through Christ, we have become the children of God forever and brothers and sisters to each other forever. Look back at verse 29. He says, "Whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of God." That is God's will for us. That's the good that He's talking about here. And so Every day, He's making us more like Jesus, and one day, we will be glorified, which means that we're going to become completely like Christ, and we will be in resurrected bodies forever. God causes all things for this glorious good for Christians, and that includes the ways that others sin against us.

So How often, how often, do you think about this when you're sinned against? Confession: I struggle to do it. If someone sins against me, this is not necessarily the first thing that pops to my mind, but we have to have our minds get here. We have to be thinking in these ways. I know, realistically in this room, there's going to be all kinds of ways that you've been sinned against. Your spouse may not love you well, consistently, or maybe your adult child has cut you off, turned their back on you, iced you out, because you, as you stand before God, cannot and will not affirm their homosexual lifestyle. Maybe your friend gossiped about you and slandered you, and that relationship is gone now, and you're grieving the loss of that friendship, or maybe you experienced abuse when you were growing up, and the very people that you were supposed to be able to trust the most are the ones that betrayed you, and so now you go through life thinking, how could I ever trust anybody again? How could I ever forgive them for what they did to me? But a glorious, redemptive purpose is being used by God in all of our suffering, and if we can remember that, it actually will help us to forgive others.

So There is someone who has walked a mile in your shoes, and his name is Joseph. He was one of the sons of Jacob. Joseph knew firsthand what it's like to be sinned against in horrific ways. So He had brothers who were incredibly jealous of him because his father would favor him, and so they finally get to the point, they're so jealous, they're so sick of it, they decide they are going to murder him. They debate. They talk about it. They ultimately said, "Okay, we're not going to kill him. We're just going to sell him into slavery in Egypt," his own brothers. So He gets to Egypt. He ends up in Potiphar's household. He's a slave in his household, and then Potiphar's wife begins to pursue him and try to seduce him over and over again, and because Joseph is a righteous man, he doesn't give in. He doesn't give in. He doesn't give in, until one day she falsely accuses him of rape. Then he gets thrown into prison. and He got thrown into prison for his righteousness, because he was doing things that honored God. He's in prison, languishing for years. One day, Joseph is able to interpret the Pharaoh's dream. What it is, it means that famine is coming, and so Joseph's able to tell him. Nobody else could tell the Pharaoh. Joseph tells him, "A famine's coming, and here's how you can deal with it, so that Egypt isn't crushed." So The Pharaoh says, "Hey, that... First of all, the fact that you interpreted my dream is incredible. Your plan is great. Guess what? You are now the second in command in Egypt. I'm giving you authority over everything in Egypt." So, the famine comes. People are starving. Joseph's brothers

end up looking for food. Where? In Egypt. so They end up before their brother. They're standing before Joseph, the one that they debated about murdering and ultimately sold into slavery. Years have passed.

Let me ask you this question. If you were Joseph, what would you do? I mean, you have the power to exact any kind of vengeance you want on your brothers. You can do anything to satisfy your wrath. They are totally and completely at your mercy. What would you do? Well, Genesis 50:20 tells us that Joseph, with all of the power of Egypt, looks at his brothers, and he says, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, for the saving of many lives." You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good, and so he forgives them. Why? Because he could see God is sovereign, and he could see His good hand upon the events, all of the events of his life, including this. He wasn't bitter because he understood God is sovereign and God is good, and God was redeeming what they meant for evil and using it for good. "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." One writer says this verse ought to be written like a banner over every evil and every sin that's ever committed against us. "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good."

But Too often, I think we're like the disciples, who couldn't see beyond the cross. All they saw was the man that they thought was the Messiah, hanging and being tortured on a cross for criminals. They fled, and they cowered. They couldn't see how God was going to redeem the suffering of His Son at the hands of evil men. They couldn't see that what those men meant for evil against Jesus, God meant for good for the saving of many souls. They couldn't see it, but Jesus could, and do you remember what He said? He said from the cross, "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do," and so we, we need to see beyond the cross, so to speak. We need to be able to see beyond our own mistreatment and the sin that's done to us and believe, really believe, that a sovereign, good God triumphs over sin through His providential power and His grace. If you're here today, and you haven't put your faith and your trust in Jesus, will you believe in Him today? Will you put your faith and trust in Jesus and what He did on the cross? He paid the price that you never could, and He offers redemption and forgiveness in return. Then, if you do, you will experience His power and His grace in your life. Then you, too, can walk in the promise that that God, your Father now, will cause all things to work together for good for those who love Him.

Right after Paul reminds Philemon of this truth, he gets to the whole point of this letter in verse 17. He calls him, Philemon, to be reconciled to Onesimus. To do that, what would Philemon have to do? He would have to forgive him. So Let's look at verse 17, "So if you consider me your partner, receive him," Onesimus, "as you would receive me," Paul. So If you look at the beginning there, he says, "So if you consider me." The so, here, at the beginning of that sentence indicates that everything he has written to Philemon in the first 14 verses is what he's referencing now. It's basically like saying, "In light of everything I've just told you, here's what here's what I'm asking you to do. I'm asking you to receive Onesimus as you would receive me," but Paul also ties his appeal to Philemon to their partnership.

The word for partner here, and it's one you may be familiar with, is from *koinonia*, which means fellowship or partnership among God's people and with God. So The bond between Philemon and Paul was so deep. There was a deep friendship. There was a brotherhood. They had been drawn together for a common cause in the Gospel. and so there's a real partnership there between Paul and Philemon, and he is saying, "As you would receive Onesimus, receive me." To be

reconciled to Onesimus to this degree, Philemon would have to forgive him, and so when he forgives him, he now can welcome him back, not as a slave, but as a dear brother in Christ.

That brings us to point #2) ***Forgive and be reconciled. Forgive and be reconciled.*** So Forgiveness and reconciliation, they're at the core of the Gospel, a Holy God forgiving us and reconciling us to Him through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus. So Forgiveness in the Bible, it's a release. It's a dismissal of something. The forgiveness that we have in Christ involves the release of sinners from God's just penalty and the complete dismissal of all charges against us. Praise God. That is good news. To be reconciled to God means that our relationship has been restored from being His enemy to being His child. Can you imagine? Paul wrote in Colossians 2:13 and 14, that God made us alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses. How did He do it? By canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross. So when the criminals would be crucified, they would put above their head their crimes of why they were being crucified. You guys remember what they put above Jesus, right? The King of the Jews. Well, what he's saying is, when Jesus was crucified, guess whose crimes were really there. Ours. They were nailed to the cross with Jesus. He died for us a criminal's death, and because we're forgiven through Christ, we're now reconciled to God. We are restored to our Creator. Romans 5:10 says, "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life?" Without forgiveness, there can be no reconciliation in a relationship.

Now, I do want to say this. I won't have time to unpack it completely, but I have to deposit this. Reconciliation can look differently, based on the nature of the offense. so There are offenses where somebody ends up in prison. I'm not suggesting you need to now go and be best friends with that person, but you do need to forgive them. That's not me telling you. That's what the Word of God would say. So we have to forgive, but reconciliation, it can look differently based on the nature of the offense, or there are times where somebody who has sinned against somebody, they've passed away. Well, there's no reconciliation possible in that case, but you can still forgive. So God calls us to forgive each other and to forgive others. and Forgiveness, it's not something we can pick and choose to do if we feel like it or don't feel like it. God doesn't give us that option. Colossians 3:13 says, "As the Lord has forgiven you, so also must you forgive," so also... I mean, we must forgive. Ephesians 4:32 says, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

But Again, if we're being real, if we're being honest, forgiveness can be really, really, really hard. I mean, sometimes it's our pride. Sometimes it's fears that, well, if I forgive them, then they're just going to do it again and again and again. I'm just going to be a doormat. Forgiveness doesn't mean that. It doesn't mean that we don't speak the truth in love. It doesn't mean that we don't walk through Matthew 18 and have somebody else come with us, if it's necessary. That's not what forgiveness is about, but we do need to forgive. It's not an option for us.

So if you're sitting here today, and you're thinking, well, but I don't even know how to forgive the person that I'm harboring unforgiveness against. either it was so grievous I just can't even fathom how to forgive, or they sinned against me so many times, and I have so much compassion for that. It really is difficult. It wasn't easy for Christ to go to the cross, but I think, in my experience, those two are probably the most difficult, if it's been a huge sin against you, or if it's just a repeated thing over and over. It's just like, how do I forgive, if they've sinned against me so

many times? Or this is just too big. like There's no way I could... It's not even right for me to forgive them after what they've done.

In general, there's other reasons. Our pride can get in the way. I mean, fear can get in the way. There's all kinds of things that can stop us and so I pray that, at the end of our time today, that if that's you or if that's me, that the Word of God would renew your mind, that you would have a sense of like, okay, this is good, and this I right before God, and I can do this. You can. You can you can forgive them. You really can.

Corrie ten Boom and her family, some of you may have heard her story. They were put into a concentration camp during World War II, because they were hiding Jews and setting them free from the Nazis. Well, they got caught, and so some of her family ended up in a concentration camp. In fact, her father and her sister died in the concentration camp. Corrie ten Boom made it out, and after the war was over, she had just, ironically, finished giving a talk on forgiveness, and who walks up to her but one of her former concentration camp guards. He stands before her, and he says, "I've become a Christian, and I know God has forgiven me." He puts out his hand, and he says, "Will you forgive me?"

She said later that it was the most difficult thing that she had ever had to do, but she also said she knew she had to do it. Now, why? Why did she know that she had to do it? She said, "Because the message that God forgives has a prior condition." so What's the prior condition to God forgiving us? That we forgive those who've sinned against us. So she was thinking of Matthew 6:15 here, where Jesus says, "If you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive yours." So I do want to clarify. what Jesus wasn't saying is that if you don't forgive others, your Father's not going to forgive you, and you're going to lose your salvation. He's not saying that.

If you're a Christian, you will always be a Christian. You will always be saved. Scripture makes that clear. I mean, there's so many passages. Here's a few. John 10:28-29, Ephesians 1:13-14, Romans 8:28-39 just makes it abundantly clear that if we're a believer, God will, He will hang onto us until He calls us home. However, however, God withholding forgiveness from us does have an impact on us. It does bring a distance between us and God relationally, and that's huge. I mean, if you think about a verse like Psalm 16:11, where it says, that God says, "In My presence is the fullness of joy. At My right hand are pleasures forever."

God is the source of joy. Nothing else in this life will bring us joy, maybe up and down fleeting pleasures, but God is where deep, abiding joy lies. so When we don't forgive others, and God withholds His forgiveness, there is a separation relationally. Think about what happens in a marriage. You've youve probably experienced this, where a spouse doesn't forgive, or both spouses don't forgive. What happens relationally? There's a distance there. so The same thing happens with us and our Father.

In fact, in my experience, I have yet to meet a Christian, a professing Christian, who is harboring unforgiveness and has joy in their life and a deep, abiding relationship with Christ, not perfect, but you know what I mean, like a deep, abiding relationship with Christ. What I tend to see, over the years, is that if somebody has unforgiveness, is that they don't have a lot of joy, and they will typically have resentment and bitterness and anger, and they won't be close with Christ, because God withholds that forgiveness. That has a huge impact on us.

The reason that Corrie ten Boom knew she had to forgive her former guard, even though he had done horrific things, was because, and get this, she didn't want anything to come between her and her Savior, Jesus. She didn't want anything to bring separation and distance between her and Christ, and so, as she stands there in that moment, she's thinking, I have to forgive this man, because if I don't, God will withhold forgiveness from me, and I don't want anything, anything, between me and my Savior. She loved Jesus so much that she knew she had to forgive this man. So what did she do in that moment? He's standing before her. His hand's out. He's asking for forgiveness, hardest thing she's ever done. She wrote, "Still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart, but..." and get this. This is... If you remember anything, maybe remember this. "But forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function, regardless of the temperature of the heart." Even though her heart, in that moment, was cold, she could still obey. Here's the problem, I think, a lot of times, for us, as Christians, is that our culture leads with feelings. Everything's about feelings. Now, I'm not diminishing feelings, but as a Christian, we need to lead with obedience, no matter how we feel, and you know what? Our feelings tend to follow. That's what it did for Corrie ten Boom. But here she goes, she doesn't try to do it on her own strength. She says, "'Jesus, help me,' I prayed silently. 'I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling,'" and so this was where her heart was at. "So, woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me." You see, she didn't try to do it on her own strength. She knew she couldn't, and so she cries out to God. She prays, and then she obeyed, no matter how she felt.

If you need to forgive someone, whether today, as you're sitting here, or next week or next month, you can do the same. You can ask for God's help, and you can receive help from a powerful, infinite God. We're going to talk about even more reasons, more ways, that God helps us to forgive, because Paul is not finished yet. In verses 18 and 19, he gives Philemon another reason to forgive Onesimus. He says, "If he has wronged you at all or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand." He's saying, "This is really important. I'm actually writing this." He, a lot of times, had somebody write for him. He wants him to understand, "I'm going to cover whatever the debt is that that Onesimus owes to you." Then he says this, "To say nothing of your owing me even your own self." So Paul cared so much about Philemon and Onesimus reconciling, he was like, "Look, I don't want any debt to stand between you. I'll cover that. I just want you guys to be reconciled. I want forgiveness and reconciliation," but what does he mean by that? "To say nothing of your owing me, even your own self." That's that 's kind of an odd statement, isn't it, on the surface? What is he getting at? To understand that, you have to know that Paul was used by God in Philemon's conversion. so He's saying that if, "Hey, look, Philemon, if anybody owes a debt here, actually it's the eternal debt that you owe to me." As one commentator wrote, "Philemon is turned from creditor to debtor in the space of two verses, and he is loaded with a debt so large, his very self, his own, his very soul, that he is under limitless obligation to Paul." As Paul is trying to move Philemon from unforgiveness, potentially, he doesn't know, to forgiveness, he's pointing him back to his own salvation and the unpayable debt that he owed Jesus. Because Jesus paid that debt; Philemon never could.

That brings us to our final point today: **Remember. Remember how much God has forgiven you.** Remember how much God has forgiven you. I don't think we tend to spend enough time remembering how much God has forgiven us and at what cost. The more that we do this, the more that we meditate on the Gospel, that we meditate on how much He's forgiven us and what it cost Jesus. God cultivates in us a humility, a humble heart. He cultivates a thankful heart. We become more worshipful of Him, and when we do, we are more able to consistently forgive other

people. Part of our challenge in this, I think, is that we struggle to be as in awe and thankful for God's grace and mercy and forgiveness as we should be. and I think the reason we struggle with that is often because it's hard for us to grasp just how horrific our sin really is before an infinitely holy, righteous, perfect God. Think about what it cost Jesus to redeem us, to reconcile us. It cost Him everything.

Isaiah 53 describes what Jesus endured on the cross for sinners. "But He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace. With His wounds we are healed." It took that for God to forgive you. Think about this. He loved you so much that while you were still a sinner, He crushed His own innocent, beloved Son, instead of you, on the cross. Instead of judgment that we deserved, through Jesus He poured out grace and mercy upon us. Paul lays this out in Ephesians 2:4-5, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses," even when we were still sinners, enemies, "He made us alive together with Christ. By grace, you have been saved." If we have any hope of consistently forgiving others, whether it's your husband, your wife, your coworkers, your neighbors, whoever that might be. if we have any hope of forgiving others consistently, these truths, they have to be deeply rooted in our hearts and in our minds. They need to be at the forefront of what we're thinking about when we're trying to forgive.

There's a funny thing that happens. As we focus on how much God has forgiven us, it just totally flips the script. so As we think about, okay, I'm a worthless sinner. God, at the cost of His own Son, perfect, holy, and righteous, He forgives me. He reconciles us. How could I not forgive anybody for anything? Instead of how can I forgive this person? How could I not forgive them for anything, when God has forgiven me? I think Matthew 18:23-35 really illustrates this in a powerful and convicting and humbling way. This this passage that we're going to talk about here is... Every time I read it, I'm just cut to the core. The Spirit just... It's always been one of my favorite passages, and it always, it humbles me, and it reminds me, and it brings me back to that place of how could I not forgive anybody for anything?

Matthew 18:23-35... It starts because Peter asked Jesus, "How many times should we forgive other people?" Jesus essentially says, well, you just keep forgiving them. You just... You don't stop. You keep forgiving them. Then He tells this parable on forgiveness to help His disciples to understand forgiveness more deeply and how we can continue to forgive others. So, here's the parable, in a nutshell. There's a king, and he forgives his slave an unpayable debt, a massive debt. like Think of Elon Musk's approximate fortune of \$250 billion. There's no way this slave was ever going to be able to pay this back, and the king says, "I've wiped it away. I've forgiven your debt. You didn't do a thing for it. You didn't earn it, but I've forgiven you all that debt." That slave goes out to the person that owes a debt to him, and instead of saying, "Gosh, you know what? You're never going to believe this. Here's what happened. like Don't worry about your debt." In the parable, it's about three months' salary. "Don't worry about that. Forget it. I mean, I just got forgiven \$250 billion." But what does he do? He goes to that slave, after being forgiven that much, and he chokes that slave out, who can't pay him back, and then he has him thrown in prison. So guess which character we are in that parable, when we don't forgive? I'll give you a hint. We're not the king. That's Jesus, although sometimes we think we're the king or the queen. Don't want to leave the women out, right? But we're also not the slave that gets choked out. I mean, sometimes we are, but in this parable, we're focusing on the one who gets forgiven, and then doesn't forgive.

That's what we do. When we withhold forgiveness, we spiritually choke out somebody else, relationally, emotionally choke them out, and we will not grant forgiveness. We hold it against them, and we want to punish them, when we've been forgiven so much by the King. So when you forgive, you do have to absorb that sin. That's what Jesus did on the cross. He became our sin. Then, what did He extend to us? He took our sin, and then what did He give us? Forgiveness. That's what we do. We absorb that sin, and we extend forgiveness, like Christ has done for us. So when you forgive, what you're doing is you are making a decision to not hold that sin against them. That's what you're doing. You're wiping it away. But forgiving isn't forgetting. You know that old adage that says, "Forgive and forget." Okay, just can any of you just stop and go, okay, there's this sin that happened today. Hang on. Let me just... Ah, okay, it's gone. That's great. Wait. What was I just thinking about? I have no idea. You go on with your day.

Can you choose to forget? No, we can't. That's not what God's talking about here. He's saying we don't hold that sin against other people and That's what He has done for us. First Corinthians 13:5 even calls us to this, "That in love, we choose not to keep a record of wrongs." That record of wrongs that God's talking about there is like what the accountant would use. so It's like a ledger. We do that in relationships. Hang on. Let me write that down. I might want to turn to that page later, and then go, "Hey, see? See what you do?" That's what He's talking about there. He's saying, no, no, no. Love doesn't keep a record of wrongs. We forgive as we've been forgiven, and then we don't hold it against them. So where is our sin before God? It's as far as the East is from the West. It's at the bottom of the sea and That's what we're to do. We choose not to hold it against others, as God has not held a record of wrongs against us.

By the way, if you're married, aside from abiding in Jesus... To abide in Jesus just means to remain in Jesus. How do we remain in Jesus? We spend time in His Word. We spend time in prayer. We spend time with His people. This is how we abide in Christ, and it's through that, that He fills us, and He enables us, and empowers us to love like He loves, not perfectly. That's why we repent, and He forgives us, but aside from abiding in Christ, that's everything, the single most in my opinion, The single important thing you'll do every day is repent and forgive, that you will keep no record of wrongs. You'll keep a really short account, that you're consistently, right away, you're wiping it clean. You're keeping it clean. I've just seen so many times in marriages, there's just so much unforgiveness and unrepentance. There's anger and bitterness, and it just destroys that relationship. When we forgive, we have now opened the door to begin the process of reconciling. Sometimes reconciliation's like that. Sometimes it takes time. It depends on what's happened and what the sin is. But when there's unforgiveness, that that anger, that bitterness, that resentment that develops and gets worse over time, it corrupts our relationships, and it corrupts our relationship with God.

So just to summarize, as we close here, when you're trying to forgive someone, take some time and pray. Ask God to help you. Remember, remember that God is good, and He will sovereignly cause the ways that people sin against you to work together, believe it or not, for your good and for His glory. Remember how much you've been forgiven. How do you do that? We need to be in the Word every day, really. We need these reminders. We need the living, active Word of God, so read passages, memorize passages on forgiveness. Memorize passages on how much you've been forgiven. Read Matthew 18 over and over and over, and pray that God would cultivate that heart in you.

Read passages about how God has lavished grace on you, how His mercies are new every day, how He doesn't count your sins against you anymore. He doesn't treat you as your sins deserve. Then remember, don't do it based on feelings. Lead with obedience, and your feelings will follow. Remember, Jesus didn't feel like going to the cross. He didn't. In fact, what did He do? He asked His Father, "Is there any other way? Take this cup from me." That's the Old Testament cup of wrath. "Not my will, but Your will." He was face down in the garden, blood coming out of His pores, crying out to His Father. He did not feel like going to the cross. He knew the horror that awaited Him, not just physically, but what He was going to endure as the Father poured out His wrath upon Him. But why did He go? He went because He loved His Father. He led with obedience, and He loved His Father, and He loved sinners, and was going to redeem a people for Himself.

So how did it end with Corrie ten Boom and her former concentration camp guard? When we left off, she had prayed. She was like, I can lift my hand. Woodenly, mechanically, she puts it out into the one that's stretched out to her. Then she writes this. This is the rest of the story. "As I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder. It raced down my arm, and it sprang into our joined hands. Then, then, this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes. 'I forgive you, brother,' I cried with all my heart. 'I forgive you.' For a long moment, we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then." A deeper, more intimate relationship with Jesus is the prize of forgiving. We honor, we glorify God, but Jesus is the prize. I want to pray right now that God helps us, all of us, to forgive. Let's pray.

Father, thank You for Your grace. Thank You for Your love, Your kindness, and Your forgiveness. Father, will You please, please help us to remember that You are the King, and You have forgiven us an unimaginable debt we would never have been able to pay back, and so help us to forgive others, please, Lord. You know how hard that can be for us. Father, help us. We need Your help. We need Your grace. I pray that if there's anybody today that's in here that is harboring unforgiveness, will You let today be the day that they forgive? Please, Lord. If next week, somebody has to forgive and they can't, will You help them to remember Your Word that we talked about today. Help us, Lord. Help us to forgive, and help us to glorify You. I pray that You would help us to grow in our love for You, so that we wouldn't want anything to get in the way of our relationship with You, including unforgiveness. We love You, Lord, so much. Thank You for the forgiveness that You brought to us through Jesus Christ. It's in His name we pray, amen.