

## **“God’s Call to Forgiveness”**

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Scriptural Foundation: Matthew 6:9-15, NIV

### **Prayer (Continued)**

<sup>9</sup> *“This, then, is how you should pray:*

*“‘Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,*

<sup>10</sup>*your kingdom come,  
your will be done*

*on earth as it is in heaven.*

<sup>11</sup>*Give us today our daily bread.*

<sup>12</sup>*Forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

<sup>13</sup>*And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.’* <sup>14</sup>*For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup>But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”*

God commands us, in Colossians 3,

<sup>13</sup>...forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

One of the things we have been learning in the Sermon on the Mount is that authentic Christians love God’s Law. To us, God Commandments are not burdensome weights, but they are as “refreshing streams”. His Commandments are not joyless obligations or impossible standards, rather they are happy truths which restore our soul and mark that path that leads to life. This does not mean, however, God’s Commandments are easy or comfortable to us at all times. No, we find them often to be difficult and we have to engage fierce battle in order to maintain them.

One such difficult Command is the call for us to forgive. It is very often difficult to forgive every and all offenses committed against us regardless of the depth of the pain and the hurt such grievances cause us. The long-standing commitment of Christians toward those who sin against them has been to love them and to forgive them, even in the face of the most egregious assaults.

The Lord Jesus led the way for us in this at the scene of His crucifixion. After being unfairly accused and tried, after being mocked and beaten and spit upon, after being scourged and a crown of thorns pressed against His brow, and finally nailed to that rugged tree, Jesus looked down at His oppressors and He said,

<sup>34</sup> *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”*

“Father, forgive them for they are spiritually dead, blind, and in need of salvation.”

Not long after the crucifixion, Stephen followed in Jesus forgiving footsteps. The Book of Acts tells us that his martyrdom by stoning occurred after he faithful preached the Gospel message. In fury, the mob dragged Stephen outside of Jerusalem, threw him down into a pit and began picking up whatever rocks they could find on the ground and hurling them down upon him, intending to kill him. While stones pummeled his body, opening up wounds upon his flesh, Stephen kneeled down upon his knees, crying out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”<sup>1</sup> He was crying out for blessing for those stoning him, even as they were killing him.

The commitment of forgiveness has been passed down by our spiritual ancestors into this present ere. On Monday morning, December 1, 1999, in Paducah, Kentucky, a dozen Christian students gathered before school to pray. It was their custom each morning to gather in the hallway to pray together, to begin their day talking to their Lord. A

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 7:60

freshman boy with a pistol approached this group and began firing. The students in the prayer circle had done nothing to provoke the boy, and in fact, some of them had befriended him. When it was over three students were dead and five were seriously injured. One of the girls who was injured was fifteen-year old, Melissa Jenkins. As she lay in the hospital, less than a week after the shooting, she was fully aware the bullet had pierced her spine and she would never walk again. While her body was paralyzed, her soul was not. She asked for a message to be sent to the boy who had done the shooting. In that message she said this, "Tell him that I forgive him."

More recently a Sudanese Christian young man had his knees and feet nailed to a board because of his faith in Jesus and he was left to die. When he was rescued, he immediately said to his rescuers that he forgives the man who did this because "Jesus, too, was nailed to a tree and He, too, forgave."

Why do I tell you these stories, and I could tell you many, many more? I tell you these stories to highlight the truth that Christians forgive. That is who we are and that is what we do. Christians forgive! With this in mind, we study Matthew 6 to discover a few truths to help us throughout the week to remember what God is teaching us. We will look, first, at the motivations of forgiveness. Then we will study the meaning of forgiveness. Finally, we will study the manner of forgiveness: why should we forgive; what does it mean to forgive; and how can we forgive.

First, we want to observe the motivations of forgiveness: why is it we should forgive? There are three specific motivations God gives us in His Word to help us and to push us forward in forgiveness. Friends, much is at stake as these three motivations will tell us.

The first motivation is this: God has forgiven us so much. God's merciful forgiveness of our own sin is so great and it compels us to have mercy upon others. In Matthew 6, Jesus is teaching His Disciples how to pray. One essential for prayer is the confession of our own sins. In Verse 12, we read,

<sup>12</sup> *"Forgive us our debts..."*

Jesus is teaching us to pray to God each and every day, "God, forgive us our debts. Forgive us our sins." Unfortunately, the confession of sin is often a neglected element in the prayer lives of believers. We pray for many things, but we often neglect to pray that God would forgive us our sins. It is not because we have no sins to confess. Often times there is no real daily consideration of the waywardness of our own hearts, of the resistance of our own will against God's Will, of the lack of the conformity of our words and of our actions to Jesus' example, nor is there an acknowledgment of the boastful pride of our own desires unto God. The neglect of confession will pull our soul down as a lead weight if we continue in it. This is the reason why Jesus is urging us, as disciples and followers of Him, to confess our sins to God, to do so every day, and cry out each day, "God, forgive us our debts and forgive us our sins."

Friends, this neglect is not a modern phenomenon. It has been around from the beginning of time. Certainly that was true in Jeremiah's day. Listen to what Jeremiah writes as he records God saying to the people, in Jeremiah 8,

<sup>6</sup> I have listened attentively, but they do not say what is right. No one repents of his wickedness, saying, "What have I done?" Each pursues his own course like a horse charging into battle.

God is saying that each continues to go charging throughout life as though there is no sin to stop and repent of, no sin to confess before Him. Friends, is this true; that we have no sin to repent of, that we are silent in our confessions before God? God would tell us, "No, that is not so." We have forgotten that our sins are very serious and they are grave matters before God's throne. They are small things and we pray about those things that are important to us; those things that rest as serious upon our soul, but grievously we do not see our sins as something serious.

Perhaps even more grievously, the modern pulpit is not being helpful as teachers emphasize, instead of the sinfulness of our hearts and instead of our waywardness, the "goodness" of the human heart and the "potential" that is ours. In this we follow those in Jeremiah's day. Listen to what Jeremiah would continue to write, in record of God's Word and of what God is saying of the people of that day,

<sup>10</sup> ...prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit among the people.

How is it that prophets and priests of Jeremiah's day practiced deceit? In Jeremiah 8, we read,

<sup>11</sup> They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious.

They did not talk about sin because they did not think that sin is the real problem and that it is such a serious element in their lives. There were so many other things they considered being more serious they wished to talk about. In this, Jeremiah said the teachers, who were to represent God, practiced deceit and they did not walk in the truth.

Friends, let us number our sins before God daily and seek His mercy for God is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness if we would confess our sin.<sup>2</sup>

Notice there are two requests in Matthew 6. One is explicit and the other is implicit. The explicit request is for God to forgive us and the implicit is that God would aid us to forgive others, for Jesus taught us to pray, saying,

<sup>9</sup> *"Our Father..."* <sup>12</sup> *Forgive us our sins, as we also have forgiven (those who sin against us)."*

In this study, we are going to focus upon the implicit request that God would help us to forgive others. These two are always tied together: our own forgiveness and our ability to forgive others. The motivation for forgiving others is fueled by God's great forgiveness to us. In fact, the connection is so strong, Jesus teaches us we do not have a right to ask God to continue to forgive us our sins if we are unwilling and we refuse to forgive others. This is why Augustine called this, "the terrible petition" because he realized if we pray this prayer, "Father, forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us," with an unforgiving heart, what are we praying? It is a terrible thing we are praying. We are actually praying that God would not forgive us! Yet, this is how Jesus teaches us to pray. An unforgiving spirit is one which treats God's forgiveness with contempt.

This is Jesus' whole point in the story He tells in Matthew 18. Jesus tells of a king, in answer to Peter's question,

<sup>21</sup> "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

<sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, *"I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."*

Jesus is saying an infinite amount. We do not keep track or records.

Jesus says that there was a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants and he found one servant who owed him an infinite amount; an amount so great that he would never be able to pay it: ten thousand talents, an amount so enormous it is almost unbelievable in how large it is. The man foolishly begged for mercy and said, "I will pay it back." He could never pay the large debt. The interest on this debt accumulated faster than he could ever earn enough to pay the principle. He was foolish to suggest he could repay it, but nonetheless, the king was merciful and said, "Go your way. I have forgiven you." But, the servant finds a fellow servant who owes him a tiny bit of money, a small sum. He grabs him and says, "You wicked friend, pay this back." The man begs him, "Give me another day," and the man could have paid it back if he were given another day. Instead of having mercy, the servant said, "No, you wicked man, I am going to throw you into debtor's prison."

All the while the king was looking out, seeing what was happening and this interchange between his two servants in his kingdom, and after forgiving a great debt this man was unwilling to forgive the small debt of his fellow servant. He became enraged.<sup>3</sup>

Who are the people in this story? The king is God. The servant who has been forgiven so much is you and me. The servant who owed the other servant so much are the people who have hurt and wronged you and me. This is God's message to us: the great motivation for our forgiveness is an understanding and an enjoyment of God's great forgiveness of us. God has forgiven us so much.

The second motivation is this: God has given us a new nature. We are now partakers of a "Divine Nature",<sup>4</sup> the Scripture would say. This new nature is free from the enslaving power of the sins of bitterness and revenge; sins that

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<sup>2</sup> 1 John 1:9

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 18:23-34

would weigh down our soul and chain us up and lock our hearts from the liberty of love. This new nature is a nature that forgives others, a nature from God Himself which extends love to those who do not deserve it and to those who wrong us.

We continue, in Matthew 6,

<sup>14</sup> *“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup> But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”*

This is a difficult statement to understand and to interpret. But, because of the difficulty, it is important for us to consider them deeper, for they have something very important to teach us. Before we consider what these verses to mean, let us settle upon what they do not mean.

Do these verses mean we can “earn” Heaven by forgiving others? The answer to that question, from the Scripture, is, “No, absolutely not!” Isaiah 55, would say,

<sup>7</sup> Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

If you and I are to be forgiven, it will be because God is gracious to us and it will be because we have freely received from God something we did not earn and did not deserve. These verses do not tell us if we forgive other people we will have “earned” God’s forgiveness of us.

What do these verses mean? There are two interpretations which have strong support. This support is because they are both taught in Scripture, they are true, and in that good commentators are mixed on this.

The first interpretation is that Jesus is teaching we prove we have received God’s forgiveness of us by our willingness to forgive others. In other words, we have received a new nature and the new nature expresses itself authentically; there is a difference being born again makes in the life of the person which changes him so that, when a person receives the life of God inside of him, their life is affected. One aspect of that is their life is affected by their attitude toward those who wronged them. Forgiveness of another person demonstrates we have genuine faith and we have genuinely received the life of God in us. A lack of forgiveness, a refusal to forgive one, a willful refusal, a rejection of the idea of forgiving another person who has wronged us, is an indication this new nature is not present in the life of the one who is resisting forgiveness.

This idea is very true and it is taught in Scripture. The story Jesus told in Matthew 18, I believe, is the message of that story. At the end of that story Jesus says,

<sup>32</sup> *“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. <sup>33</sup> Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ <sup>34</sup> In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.*

<sup>35</sup> *“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”*

The idea is, if our heart is changed then we will express that change through real actions and one of those actions is the forgiveness of sin of others who wrong us.

Why should we forgive? We forgive, first, because God, in His great mercy and love, has forgiven us. Secondly, we forgive because we have a new nature. If we refuse to forgive, we have to understand our souls are in great peril. 2 Peter 1, encourages us with these words,

<sup>10</sup> Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure.

In other words, this is the way we pursue an authentication of the faith God provides for us and of the new life we have in Christ. We look for aspects of our life which have been changed and this is one of them. If we see in our life an absolute refusal to forgive another person, we ought to be deeply concerned and ask the question: have I really been born again?

One Bible professor would say, “You do not know what is inside a man until he is bumped into. Then you can see what spills out of him.” That is the idea behind this. What happens when we are bumped into? Peter would say that we are to rejoice when we have trials because it is the trials which help us understand our faith is real. The more we understand our faith is real, the more certain we are of the hope of Heaven and the more we enjoy the God who has made the change inside of us.<sup>5</sup>

C.S. Lewis would write, “No part of Jesus' teaching is clearer and there are no exceptions to it. He does not say we are to forgive other people's sins, provided they are not too frightful, or providing there are extenuating circumstances, or anything of that sort. Rather, we are to forgive them all, however spiteful, however mean, and however often they are repeated. If we do not, we shall be forgiven none of our own.”

Why do we forgive? First, it is in light of God's great mercy to us. Secondly, we forgive in light of the fact that we have this new nature and we do not need to be enslaved to the sin of bitterness anymore, and that by forgiving others we give evidence of this new nature and we are all the more able to rejoice in the salvation God offers us.

The third motivation is because God has brought us into fellowship with Himself and the refusal to forgive others robs us of the joy of this fellowship. Remember, I said there were two possible interpretations of Verses 14 and 15. The first interpretation we covered when we prove we are forgiven when we forgive others and we prove we are not forgiven and do not have the life of God inside of us when we do not forgive others.

While I believe that statement is taught in Scripture, I do not believe that is the interpretation in Matthew 6. Instead, I offer a second interpretation: Jesus is not talking about the kind of forgiveness given to us at the initial point of us coming to faith and trusting in Jesus Christ; that removes from us the condemnation of our sin; that removes from us the guilt of our sin so that we need not fear our sins will bring us down into Hell; and that our sins are lifted so we need never fear any condemnation from God. I do not believe Jesus is talking about this forgiveness which removes the condemnation of our sin, but rather He is talking about another kind of forgiveness which is taught in Scripture; the kind of forgiveness a child of God receives when he or she displays a disobedient heart toward God. It is the kind of forgiveness which heals the wounded relationship between us and God when we sin and which restores our joy in walking with God in a daily fashion.

Jesus identified these two types of forgiveness in John 13. He was washing His Disciples feet and he came to Peter, and Peter said,

<sup>8</sup> “No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.”

Jesus answered, “*Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.*”

<sup>9</sup> “Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!”

<sup>10</sup> Jesus answered, “*A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean...*”

What Jesus is talking about is, “Peter, you have already had your bath. You have the forgiveness of justification; the forgiveness which removed the condemnation of your sin, but, Peter, you still need the daily cleansing to keep the joy of your walk with Me engaged and if you do not have this daily cleansing then you are not able to have a daily part with Me. You are not able to be in active fellowship with me.”

Why should we forgive others? It seriously affects the joy of our walk with God. The greatest aspect of our salvation, and the most wonderful act of our salvation, is that we can know God and we can walk with Him and we can talk with

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Peter 4:12, 13

Him every day. We lose this freedom, and the health of this relationship we have with God, when we withhold forgiveness from others.

I believe this is what Jesus is referencing. Why do I believe that? I do because, first, this prayer begins,

<sup>9</sup> *“Our Father in heaven...”*

He is talking about a prayer which people who have been justified and have been forgiven are praying. Secondly, in Verses 14 and 15, He says,

<sup>14</sup> *“...your heavenly Father will also forgive you...”* <sup>15</sup> *your Father will not forgive your sins.”*

He is talking to people who are in a relationship with the Father already. This is a kind of forgiveness which a father gives to his child. It is not a forgiveness wherein if you do not receive it you are kicked out of the family, but it is a kind of forgiveness which marks that family and mark the joy of the relationship within that family, unless it is taken care of.

A lack of forgiveness is very dangerous to the health of our soul. This is the reason why the Apostle Paul would write in Ephesians 4,

<sup>26</sup> *“In your anger do not sin.”* <sup>6</sup> *Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,* <sup>27</sup> *and do not give the devil a foothold.*

Friends, do you know when you hold onto bitterness and you refuse to forgive, the Devil gains a place of opportunity, not only in that area but in every area of your life. So many sins are justified and drawn out of anger and bitterness and a lack of forgiveness; “This person did this to me so I feel a little bit better about sinning against them.”

I enjoyed a story I read about a couple of brothers. One brother sinned against the other and made the other brother angry. He was refusing to forgive. His mom came in and talked to him at night and she read that passage of Scripture to him. She said, “Son, you have to be careful here. Be angry but do not sin and do not let the sun go down on your anger.” The little boy looked at his mom very perplexed when she told him not to let “the sun go down on” his anger. He asked her, “How can I keep the sun from going down?” It was not an option for him.

We have every motivation and every reason to forgive others.

What does it mean to forgive? There is a big help to understanding forgiveness through the term Jesus uses to talk about sin: “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” To forgive a debt means to cancel out what another person owes; to “pay” their debts so they are not in debt to us anymore. In forgiveness we release the debtor from the obligation to pay us what is rightfully owed us.

The opposite of forgiveness is attempting to make the other person “pay” for their sins. Forgiveness does not mean we are no longer angry about sin, but it does mean we remove our anger from the person and we are no longer angry against the person.

Two ideas help us: first, forgiveness is a gift given; it is not a wage which is earned. Often times we are tempted to withhold forgiveness until the person who needs our forgiveness does something to prove they “deserve” to be forgiven. That is treating forgiveness as a wage, “I will forgive you if you do something to merit it.” But, the forgiveness God talks about is the forgiveness of a debt which is undeserved and the forgiveness of a debt which is a free gift to the person. That is how God gives us forgiveness – freely.

The second idea is that forgiveness is always costly to the one giving it and sometimes it may be really costly to us; emotionally, financially, physically, and spiritually. It is costly to us when we have to pay another person’s debt, but friends, when we pay another person’s debt God always gives us back good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over. When we give we always receive back from God one hundred fold.

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<sup>6</sup> Psalm 4:4

It is also important for us to understand when we need forgiveness we do not take forgiveness for granted and we never act as though we, somehow, deserve it just because we have asked for it. We are asking the person from whom we need forgiveness something that is very pricey and we may not even understand the price the person has to pay in order for us to be free.

Forgiveness is a form of suffering God calls us to; we suffer to benefit others, but we also suffer to bring freedom and joy to our own souls.

Thomas Watson, a pastor who preached over three hundred years ago. He was preaching on this passage and he asked the question, “When do we forgive others? The answer is when we strive against all thoughts of revenge; when we will not do our enemies mischief, but instead wish well to them; when we grieve at their calamities. We forgive when we pray for them and seek reconciliation with them and want that relationship restored. We forgive when we show ourselves ready, on all occasions, to relieve them.”

I believe every line in that definition is absolutely biblical and backed up by Scripture itself. We forgive when we resist the thoughts for revenge and we do not seek to do them any more mischief and we hope that evil does not come upon them. When we wish them well we bless them instead of curse. We grieve when they are hurt. We pray for them. We seek reconciliation and friendship with them and we are willing to come to their relief when they are in need.

When I think of the meaning of forgiveness, one person who stands out in the Scripture to me is the person of Joseph. Think of him and how God blessed him because he did not let bitterness grab ahold of his heart. His brothers, out of anger, and because Joseph did not do anything wrong except to be a little foolish in his speech and telling them things he should have kept to himself, sold him into slavery. They not only kicked him out of the family, but they sold him into slavery. He built himself up in Pottiphar’s household after a time of miserable circumstances only to fall into prison and stay there for years. Imagine, as Joseph woke up in the prison every morning in that cold, smelly cell, eating nothing but crumbs and bits of food only thrown to pigs. Imagine how easy it would have been to say, “Why am I here? I am here because my brothers did this to me.” Every day he could think about that, but he refused. Instead, what did he do? The first time he saw his brothers his heart was opened and his heart did exactly what Thomas Watson said; he did not seek to do them mischief. Instead, he sought to bless them. His attitude was this, “Man meant it for evil but God meant it for good. God is in control. Another person’s sin against me does not define what I experience. It is God’s design. As long as I submit to God I am safe there.” Joseph knew that and he was blessed by it.

Forgiveness is a decisive act and it is a process in which we engage. It is a process which may take a long time, but nonetheless we are committed to relieving the person of the debt which is charge against them.

The last issue is the manner of forgiveness: how do we forgive? One Christian may say, “I just cannot forgive. You do not understand how that person has wronged me. I cannot forgive.” The Bible comes back to us and says, “Really. Is it really true that you cannot forgive? Did not Jesus rise from the dead to break the power of sin over your life? Is that not true, and if it is true, will not the power of the resurrection rescue you from the sin of bitterness?”

Friends, you and I can forgive and, in fact, we must forgive if we are to be free. How, then, do we forgive?

I want to give you four encouragements. The first encouragement that helps us, and I believe Jesus teaches it here, enjoy deeply the completeness of God’s forgiveness of your sin. Perhaps the reason you demand others to repay their debts to you is because you are still trying to repay your debt to God. Jesus paid your debt in full and it is not ours to repay to earn it or to deserve it. It is ours to receive and delight in, the gift He has.

Oh be ye glad, oh, be ye glad  
Every debt that you ever had  
Has been paid up in full by the grace of the Lord  
Be ye glad, be ye glad, be ye glad<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Chorus, “Be Ye Glad,” Michael Blanchard, 1980 Gotz Music/Paragon Music Corp.

Friends, I believe one of the losses, when we do not confess our sin, is we fail to be glad for the forgiveness that is ours every day.

Second, meditate upon God's love for you in all of the Gospel. The Gospel is full, rich, deep, broad, wide, and high. The Gospel is that which liberates us and we can walk in love when we know the fullness of God's love for us in the Gospel.

How is it that God loves us in the Gospel? Listen to Ephesians 1,

<sup>4</sup>For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love <sup>5</sup>he predestined us to be adopted as his sons...

Some say these doctrines of election and predestination have nothing of practical value. I say, no, they have everything of every practical value, because when we understand them we stand in amazement that God would love us; that before the foundation of the world He would set His love upon us. Why? I tell you, I have no reason found within myself for why God would love me, only that God, in His eternal counsels of His own will had a pleasure upon me. When I understand and enjoy the depth of God's love for me in the Gospel, forgiveness is enabled to be extended to others. Let us be glad and rejoice in the love God has for us in the Gospel.

Third, pray for the Holy Spirit to empower you to forgive. God sent us His Comforter after Jesus ascended into Heaven. Pray for the Holy Spirit for the power to forgive. In Luke 11, Jesus talks about prayer and He says,

<sup>11</sup> *"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? <sup>12</sup> Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? <sup>13</sup> If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"*

Isn't it great, as moms and dads, to be able to give good gifts to our children? That is such a joy. When was the last time we prayed that the Holy Spirit would be ours in full measure and that we would be filled with the Holy Spirit, and thus filled with the power.

If we are struggling to forgive another, one of the greatest things we can do is say, "God, I need your Holy Spirit to dominate my life."

The last practical step I would encourage you with is to yield your will over to God so that you might obey Him. Understand, forgiveness is not an emotion. Forgiveness is not the feeling of forgiveness. That always falls after the act of forgiveness. Forgiveness is first, and foremost, a commitment. I can relieve a debtor of the debt of their obligation without feeling like it at all. I can say, "You do not owe me that money anymore. You are free to go!" All the while I am saying, "I do not like that. I am still mad at that person for not paying his debt. I am mad at that person for being in such debt to me." All of those emotions may still be there but forgiveness can still happen as an act of the will and as an act of the will, "I am deciding to let you go."

I believe when we yield our will over to God, emotions will follow. But, the first act is an act of decision to forgive.

Have you been forgiven by God. This is the first blessing the Gospel brings to those who call upon Jesus as Savior and as Lord. Do you know that you have been forgiven so you will never be condemned for your sins?

Whiter than snow, yes, whiter than snow  
Now wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.<sup>8</sup>

I would ask you another question: who is God calling you to forgive? I know there is somebody. Who is it? It could be a husband or a wife. It might be a mom or a dad; a son or a daughter. It could be a co-worker or an employer or an employee. It could be a friend. It may be an enemy. Who is God asking you to forgive?

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<sup>8</sup> Chorus, "Whiter Than Snow," James Nicholson, Joyful Songs, 1872



As wonderful and joyful the experience is of being forgiven, and if you have not been forgiven there is no experience in your life that is like it, it is the greatest joy anyone can possibly receive, the joy of the Christian life does not stop there. I believe there is greater joy in forgiving others.

I close with a word from Charles Spurgeon, "To be forgiven is such sweetness that honey is tasteless in comparison with it. Yet, there is one thing sweeter still and that is to forgive. As it is more blessed to give than to receive, so to forgive rises a stage higher in experience than to be forgiven."

Friends, let us follow God for His glory and for our great joy.