

Overcoming the Enemy

by David Ravenhill

Unforgiveness is the greatest single detriment to personal revival, limiting the power of God in our lives and preventing us from experiencing God's forgiveness and presence.

Duration: 57:14

Scripture: Matthew 5:23-24, Matthew 18:21-22, Ephesians 4:32 - 5:2

Topics: "Personal Revival", "Spiritual Forgiveness"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of forgiveness as a key aspect of personal revival. It shares powerful stories illustrating the transformative impact of forgiveness, highlighting how unforgiveness can hinder personal growth and spiritual maturity. The speaker delves into biblical principles, urging listeners to release bitterness, resentment, and unforgiveness to experience God's mercy and restoration.

Transcript

to be here this morning after listening to Jonathan's introduction, I can't wait to hear myself speak. The Bible says beware and all men speak well of you, so I'm not sure what's going to happen. There is a saying that a woman has the prerogative of changing her mind, and since in the body of Christ there's neither male nor female, I've changed my mind this morning.

Or should I say I had it changed for me. I woke up early this morning and felt God lay a particular theme on my heart, and so if you do have your brochure there, you can discard the topic. Because I sense very strongly that God was asking me to speak on the theme of forgiveness.

I don't like it any more than you do when God changes things on you. You get set in your mind what you're going to say and what you're going to speak on, and I don't like sort of last minute abrupt changes, not that it was exactly last minute, it was several hours ago. But before we look into the word, let's just pray once again.

And Father, again we confess our need of you. Lord, we never tire of acknowledging that apart from you we can do absolutely nothing. And so Lord, we ask you to come again and breathe upon your people this morning, breathe life into your word, speak to our hearts, Lord.

Change us as only you can. And Lord, you might be glorified in Jesus' name. Amen.

I am convinced that the greatest single detriment to personal revival is in this whole area of unforgiveness. Let me say that again. I am convinced that this is the one single detriment, the greatest detriment to personal revival.

There is a certain mystery to revival. I have not figured it all out yet, but I do know this, we can have personal revival. That is not a mystery, it is simply walking in obedience to the ways of God, responding to the voice of God.

But I am still convinced that unforgiveness is the one thing that is the greatest obstacle. I had a friend that I had the privilege of working with in New Zealand back in the early 60s. We actually, my wife and I and children, lived in New Zealand on three separate occasions.

But we first went there in 1966. And I worked with a very wonderful man of God by the name of Neville Winger. He has since gone to be with the Lord.

And Neville told me one day the story of a friend of his who was a missionary in Borneo. Borneo is there in East Malaysia if you are not familiar with that particular part of the world. And this missionary was working somewhere around the 50s, 1950, translating the scriptures.

He was in one of the remote valleys, a valley that had been filled with all sorts of bloodshed. There were two sort of rival villages where there had been all sorts of animosity and hatred, bloodshed, rape, and burning down one another's villages over the years. And this missionary was working with a young national trying to work his way through the Word of God, and of course using the national to get the best terminology and the best word to express what the Word of God was seeking to express.

And as they were working their way through, they came to the conclusion of Scripture in Mark 11, verse 25, when it says, When you stand praying, forgive. And the young man came under conviction just at the very mention of that verse, and he said to the missionary, he said, Why don't we do that? The missionary, of course, had no intention on getting into a message, at least at that particular time. He was just bent on trying to get, you know, as much of the Word of God translated as possible.

He was not thinking in terms of the Spirit of God bringing conviction to his local national worker. And so he said, Why don't we do what? He said, Well, why don't we do what that verse says? He said, Well, what do you mean? He said, Well, this verse says, When you stand praying, you have to forgive if you have ought against anybody. And he said, Well, he said, I personally, he said, I have ought against this village.

He says, They've over the years come and pillaged our village and burnt it down. There's been rape and bloodshed and murder and so on and so forth. And he said, I hold tremendous resentment.

And the missionary said, Well, of course, we have to do what the Word of God tells us to do. As a result of that young man going to the neighboring village and publicly asking for forgiveness because of his own hatred and bitterness and the resentment that he held towards them, a revival broke out in that area of Borneo that went on for many, many months. Those two, or at least most of the people in those two villages, were converted to Christ.

Churches established there, and just a wonderful work of restoration, all because one person was willing to walk in obedience to the Word of God. And so I say again that I believe this is the greatest detriment to personal revival. You see, these days we don't resolve our difficulties or our problems.

We simply dissolve them. We move to another church. We move out of the neighborhood.

We go to another home group or change, you know, denominations or whatever it is, and trying to avoid that person that has wronged us, that has stabbed us in the back, maybe in a variety of ways. And we never really do go and do what the Word of God says and put things right. If you have ought against your brother, go to your brother.

We just simply bear a grudge. And of course, we allow that grudge over the months or years, however long it may be, to sort of fester away within us. And as the Bible says, that root of bitterness springs up and defiles many.

Not only defiles you, but of course you defile everybody that you talk to about that brother or sister that has wronged you, that business transaction that never went the way you thought it would, and so on. And we carry around unforgiveness. It's amazing how much unforgiveness is found in the body of Christ.

And I believe it's the thing that single-handedly, again, ties the hand of God from working on our behalf. Here is the God that created the heavens and the earth, created the universe, has got all power, all authority, and yet when it comes to harboring unforgiveness in our own life, we bring God again to a place of powerlessness as far as His ability to help us. We restrain, if you like, the hands of God.

The Bible says in the Old Testament the children of Israel limited the Holy One of Israel. And I believe that we limit the Holy One of Israel again by our unforgiveness. Those of you who enjoy automotive engineering and cars and so on, you know that there is such a thing as a limiter.

And you can have a car that is capable of 180, 90 miles an hour, and you can put that limiter on the engine and that car will not go more than 15 miles an hour, even though it has the capability of going, you know, ten times that speed limit. And we can do that with God. God, with all of His might and power, can be limited because we refuse to release somebody else.

The same gentleman that told me that story, and I've never forgotten that story, had an expression. He says, we are all damaged goods. You know, you go to the supermarket and you pick up a can of beans or something, and you notice that there's a dent in it that the, you know, the boy that was stuck in the shelves during the night when everybody else was sleeping, you know, dropped the case or whatever, and there's a ding in the side of it, and you know, there's just something within you.

You reach for the other one, even though the contents may be perfectly fine. But we're like that spiritually. We're all damaged goods.

Somebody along the line has disappointed us. Somebody's betrayed us. Somebody's stabbed us in the back.

Somebody has wronged us. Somebody has done something that, you know, we've allowed, again, to fester within us. And it may be, again, a business transaction.

It may be a relationship. It may be some rumor that was spread about us that was not right. It may be, you know, some other situation.

But whatever it is, we allow that thing, don't we, that bitterness just to come into our life, and suddenly we wonder why God is not blessing us, why we have no sense of the presence of God in our life, why there's

no anointing upon our ministry, why we don't seem to be making progress as far as our spiritual growth is concerned. All because, again, there is a bitterness there. There is resentment or unforgiveness towards a brother or a sister.

All of us, I'm sure, within the sound of my voice this morning, have been recipients of the forgiveness of God. I think we could begin here and work our way back, and I'm sure all of us could testify at a time when we came to Christ, maybe as a teenager, maybe as a child, maybe later in life, and we can point to the day and the hour when we passed from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, and so on. We can bear testimony to the fact that we've been cleansed, and yet at the same time, we are so reluctant to extend that same forgiveness that God has given to us to a brother or sister.

I can never figure that out. And yet it happens repeatedly. We are capable of doing some unbelievable things, aren't we? A number of years ago now, I was traveling with the Awake America Crusade that was part of the revival there in Pensacola, Florida, and came out of my hotel one morning on my way to one of the sessions, and there in front of me was the USA Today magazine, which is the trend these days.

If you're staying in hotels, they'll put the newspaper at the door. I didn't have time to look at it, so I just picked it up and threw it onto the bed and made my way down to the seminar that I was supposed to be giving. I came back and had a few hours before the evening meeting, and I was just thumbing my way through, and I came across an article.

Here's the actual article itself. I still have the original copy. You can see USA Today.

This was June 28, 1999, and it's a tragic story of a young couple, Ron and Amy. Ron and Amy were going together. They were in love with each other.

They were courting each other for a period of time, and then during their courtship time, or their dating at least, Amy went off on vacation with her parents, and while she was away, Ron's, her boyfriend's father was killed, and he was grieving, of course, the loss of his father, and he called and made contact with his girlfriend and asked her if she would cut short her vacation in order to come back and just be there to be with him and console him a little bit, and he was going through obviously a time of grief, and she didn't feel that it was her responsibility. After all, she was there with her parents enjoying a vacation, and the relationship I guess wasn't quite, you know, that serious at that particular time, and so she said no. Everything seemed to be fine.

She came back from vacation. They resumed their courtship. A little later on, he proposed to her, and some months after that, they were married.

Nine months later, she became pregnant, and she, a few months after that, resumed work at the local supermarket where she was a checkout clerk, and she would come home in the evenings, and Ron, of course, invariably would have, well, sorry, they had a baby, and I think I mentioned that, and the baby was about three months old when she resumed work, and he would take care of the baby. Tyler was the baby's name, and Tyler would be put to bed, and many times she would come home. She didn't have to do anything, simply go into bed.

She was exhausted after a night of working, and of course, get up in the morning, resume her responsibilities. Ron would go off to work, and so she came home the night before Father's Day, and sure enough, the baby was asleep, and she went to bed, got up in the morning, Father's Day morning, went

into the bedroom, and there in the crib was little Tyler. He was dead.

She picked him up, his lifeless body, and of course, was overcome with grief. They called the police, the coroner came, and they certified the baby as having SIDS, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, and that was the end of that. Two days later, or three days later, I'd have to look at the exact details here, but they had the funeral.

It was after the funeral that Ron began to tremble a little bit, and finally acknowledge that he had taken the life of their son, Tyler, and then he told the reason why. Let me just read you briefly. He said it was revenge.

This is the exact quote from the article. He said it was revenge because Amy, before they were married, had refused to cut short a vacation to comfort him when his father died in 1996. Shainabarger, that's the last name, Ron Shainabarger, said he planned to make Amy feel the way he did when his father died.

He married her, got her pregnant, allowed time for her to bond with the child, and then took the baby's life. The article goes on to give us more detail. He went into the baby's room, took Saran Wrap, wrapped it around that baby's face, put the baby down in the crib, went off to brush his teeth, get ready to go to bed, came back a few minutes later, removed the Saran Wrap, left the baby there, the baby now was dead, and went to bed.

He said the thing that haunted him and caused him to turn himself in was just the look on that baby as the death process. He said that baby was blue in the face, rigor mortis was beginning to set in, and so on, and he could not stand it. He actually asked the police when they came to arrest him to shoot him.

I share that with you to show you how far resentment can go. You see, something that was a seed, at least in his heart, of betrayal. His girlfriend, who really had no bond in that sense, had not been there to comfort him, to be with him, and so he planned meticulously, I'm going to marry this girl, and then after I get married, I'm going to get her pregnant, and then after she's pregnant and she gives birth, I'm going to wait a period of time until there is a bond, and once there is a firm, established bond between mother and son, then I'm going to move, and I'm going to take the life of that child so that she will feel the pain I felt.

Amazing, isn't it, how far unforgiveness can take us when we don't deal with it, when we allow it to fester, when we allow it to build, and we begin to, you know, just feed that thing day after day, well he did this and he did that, or she did this or she did that, and so on, and the animosity builds, the hatred builds, and we are capable, believe it or not, of murder. And certainly while we may not do the physical act of murder, we've done it many times in our own mind. We've killed that person, we've killed our affection towards that person, our desire to be with that person, and so on.

Matthew chapter 6, we have the, what we call the Lord's Prayer, really the Disciple's Prayer, you are familiar with that wonderful portion of scripture, Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, and so on. And yet out of that entire prayer, the one thing that Jesus underscored was not the importance of his kingdom, as good as that is, and as important as that is, it was not to honor his name, and we need to honor his name, obviously, but the one thing that he underscored was this area of forgiveness. He said there as part of the prayer, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

And then in verse 14, he goes back and he picks out of that entire prayer, again, not something about the kingdom, not something about the will of God, but he underscores again the importance of forgiveness,

and he says if you forgive men their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions. That's why I say all of a sudden the power of God, the grace of God, the mercy of God towards us is inoperable because we choose not to forgive.

Even though God may want to extend forgiveness and show mercy and kindness and compassion, he says he cannot until we are willing to release that person. And so we see the importance again of forgiveness in Luke chapter 6, verse 37. It says be merciful, even as your Father is merciful, pardon and you will be pardoned, release and you will be released.

I remember hearing a man by the name of John, many, many years ago, he ministered in our church in New Zealand and he took the Lord's Prayer and he said this is one prayer that will be answered. In other words, when you pray, Father forgive me according to how I forgive my debtors, or those that have sinned against me, he said God will honor that one prayer. If he doesn't answer any other prayer in your life, and of course he does, but that is one prayer he will answer.

You see, we're asking God to restrain or restrict his forgiveness of us in a direct proportion to how we forgive or don't forgive others. If we don't forgive, God says okay, you asked me to forgive you according to how you forgive others, you haven't forgiven, therefore I can't forgive. It shows you again the seriousness of this area of forgiveness, how important it is.

And this verse says again, be merciful as your Father is merciful, pardon, you will be pardoned, you will release, and you will be released. Releasing now is letting go. It's the word for divorce, it's the word that can be used for divorce, but to dissolve something, to let something go, it's literally to untie an animal that's been tethered and to release that one.

When I was pastoring up in the Seattle area, I had a number of my people in the congregation going to marriage council to a man who was a Jewish believer, raised in an Orthodox Jewish home and then became a Christian, accepted Christ as his Savior. And he was charging a hundred dollars an hour, and of course I had a lot of people that just could not afford to go pay a hundred dollars an hour for counseling. And so one day I had had so many rave reviews about this man, how wonderful he was, that I picked up the phone, introduced myself, and I said, listen, would you be prepared to come to our congregation on a Saturday morning, and we'll set aside Saturday to have a seminar on marriage.

And I would like you, if possible, to share some of the things, at least the basic sort of values that you're sharing with these various couples that have been coming to you. And he says, well I, you know, I really don't do that sort of thing, I normally just take, you know, people on an appointment basis, one-on-one or couples, but he said I don't often, you know, share. And I said, well, you know, I'd just like you to share some of the basic things that you cover that come up, you know, reoccur in marriages.

And so he said fine. And I said we'll charge the people fifteen dollars each or per couple, and whatever comes in, however many people come, we will give you that. And he said fine, and I forget how much we gave him, but five or six hundred dollars or something for the morning.

And he came and he spent, I would say, he spent maybe three hours on forgiveness. I thought, you know, he was going to give all sorts of deep revelation that, you know, the mysteries of how to resolve marriage conflicts and so on, things that I'd never understood. You know, here he was after all, a hundred dollars an hour, and he said the one single biggest problem in marriage again deals with this area of unforgiveness.

After all, that's the reason for divorce, isn't it? Jesus said because of the hardness of your heart, the opposite of that is be tender-hearted, forgiving, even as God in Christ has forgiven us, according to Ephesians. But I will never forget, he said, you know, Christians really don't understand forgiveness. He said we say we forgive, but we never really get rid of the evidence.

He said we have this file cabinet in our mind with all the betrayals and all the things that our partner has done over the years, and when we get in a sort of a pinch, so to speak, and when, you know, one of them is winning the argument, then we reach into the file, the archives, and we say, but remember when you did this, and we repeatedly bring up those things. He said that is not forgiveness. He told the story, he said I had a car, and he named a particular model, it was a sort of a rare model, I guess, and he said it was my favorite car.

Out of all the cars I've ever had, he said there was something about this car, it was just like an old colt. He said I just really, really enjoyed that car. And he said one day, he said for some reason, financial reasons, he had to sell it.

And he said he just hated parting with this car, it was just like an old friend, and, you know, he just loved this car, I guess partly because of the model and the rarity of it and so on. But he said he sold that car, and then he said it was about three or four months later, he was in a mall somewhere and walking down to the, you know, penny store or whatever, and he noticed that his car was there. There was no mistaking it, it was because of the model and the color and everything else, he knew immediately it was his car, and he said he just had this overwhelming urge to go and sort of sit in it one last time.

He said everything within, he said it was just like seeing an old friend. And he was making his way over to it, and he said all of a sudden, he said, he came to the realization, he said that is no longer my car. He said I took a paper, and I signed over the deed of that car, and I released that car to this other person, and I had absolutely no rights to it again.

He said it was not mine to open the door of, it was not mine to sit in and so on. That was one, he used a lot of other illustrations, but that was one that I will never forget. He said that is what forgiveness is, it's releasing and never going back to reclaim that thing again.

I like to think of it like these modern balloons that you can buy in Hallmark, you know, with an anniversary wish on it or whatever, and full of helium. And you know as long as you hold that thing, it's fine, but once you let go of it, it's gone. It's irretrievable.

I go in churches occasionally, and they're up in the rafters, you know, you see when these things stuck, it's been there for months. Nobody's able to get it down. And really that's what forgiveness is, it's letting go of that thing, and just watching it sail away, knowing that you can never ever reclaim that thing again.

That's really what forgiveness is, release, and you will be released. I have a friend by the name of Winky Prattney, he is a wonderful youth evangelist, although he's just two years younger than me, but he's been in youth work now for thirty plus years. And we were actually there in Burbank, California.

We were living there at the time, working with an organization called Youth with a Mission. And Winky was living there, he was not married at the time, and he used to travel in and out, and so one morning he was there, and we were talking, and as we were talking, he was opening somebody's mail. He'd just gone collecting a bunch of mail, he'd been away for a couple of weeks.

And he began reading a letter to me. The letter began, Dear Winky, you may or may not remember me, but I'm the girl with the two mothers. And then he told me the story.

He had been in a large Bible school in Springfield, Missouri, just a month or so prior to this. He was taking some meetings, and he obviously must have touched on the matter of forgiveness somewhere in the course of his meeting, and at the end of the meeting there were two young girls, students, that came forward, and one girl said she had a problem. She said, ever since I've been in the Bible college here, she said every single morning, exactly two o'clock in the morning, I wake up with the most unbelievable fear that grips my heart.

She said, I'm just absolutely terrified. She said, I can't sleep, I have to get up, I have to notify or, you know, wake up my roommate here. We end up praying together, asking God just to bring his peace, and so on, and she said most of the time I have to sleep with the light on.

She said it's just an unbelievable fear that grips me. And of course she was wanting counsel, she was wanting help, and the more she began to talk, and Winky must have asked her some questions about her life, and she began to just share about how as a child she was given up for adoption, never knew her birth mother, her adoptive mother had not treated her, at least in her eyes, the way that she treated the other members of the family, I guess, and she had expressed a little bit of animosity and bitterness towards her mother, her adoptive mother, and as she began to share, Winky said the Spirit of God spoke to him very clearly, and said, tell this girl that two o'clock in the morning represents her two mothers.

You see, she had a hatred towards her real mother, even though she'd never, her birth mother, even though she had never met her, because why would anybody give up a helpless little baby, and of course that baby happened to be her, and she felt the deep rejection, why was I just discarded, why wasn't I loved like every other family, at least every other normal sort of a family, and so even though she'd never met her mother again, there was this bitterness that had crept in, and then of course the fact that she felt she was not treated the rest of, like the rest of the family, and so she had this two, these two problems in her life, her two mothers, and Winky challenged her, he said, listen, he said, you cannot carry around this resentment, I believe the problems that you're having is a

direct result of unforgiveness towards your two mothers, and she was adamant, he said, that I could never forgive, I mean, the bitterness was so deep, it had built up over the years, she justified in her own mind why, after all, she was the innocent victim, and the mother was the one that had the problem, not her, and she didn't ask to be, you know, given up for adoption, so she felt justified, and of course that's one of the great tricks of the enemy, isn't it, to try and get us to feel that our resentment is based on some sort of, you know, foundation of justice, and I can legally do what I'm doing because they're the ones that wrong me and I'm innocent, and so he had to dash off in order to get a plane back to here in California at the time, and he just challenged her, he said, listen,

forgiveness is not a feeling, it's obedience, feelings may come, they may not, but he said, initially you need to respond to the word of God, you need to forgive that person, ask God for forgiveness, and he said, you need to make contact with your adoptive mother, and as far as your natural mother, obviously you don't know where you are, you just have to say, Lord, I release her, and he didn't see her then, didn't know what the outcome was until we were standing there and he began reading me this letter, dear Winky, you may or not remember me, but I'm the girl with the two mothers, the letter went on to say that the hardest thing she ever had to do was to write a note that night to her mother, her adoptive mother, and release her, he

said, and Winky had told her, he said, don't say that

it's because of this and that, and try and pin the accusation on her, just say, listen, I'm wrong, I've had a wrong attitude, I've had bitterness, she may have been wrong in what she did, I don't know, but he says, you let God deal with that, you've got to take responsibility for your own actions, and so she did that, she wrote a simple letter, I've held a grudge, resentment against you all these years, please forgive me, I'm sorry, and so on, the letter went on to say that as a result of that, her birth mother, of course, had responded to her, and not only that, but had given her the name of her birth mother, and for the first time in her life, she had picked up the phone and made contact with her birth mother, only to find out that her birth mother was a born-again believer, and had

been searching for her for many, many years, her mother had kept that information from her, and they were meeting for the first time in whatever it was, 18 or 20 years, she was going to be meeting her first mother, or her birth mother.

You see, the Bible says, when you release, you will be released. When we begin to cooperate with the Word of God, walk in obedience to the Word of God, God then can set in motion all the resources in heaven which have ground to a halt prior to this. God backs up and said, I'd love to help you, but you asked me to forgive on the basis of your forgiveness, you won't forgive, I can't work.

But once we release, then God is released to work, and God has so wonderfully put this, if you like, humpty-dumpty back together again. She was reconciled with both mothers, and she said from then, the letter climaxed by saying, I have never had another problem with two o'clock in the morning waking up with a fear in my life. You see, there is power in forgiveness.

Nancy here, Ken and Nancy are friends of mine that came from Palm Springs, and, but Nancy was in England a couple of years ago, and I was ministering, and I was ministering on the same message, at least a similar message on forgiveness. And in the evening meeting, I think it was, or the afternoon meeting, quite a large church there in England, maybe about a thousand people. One of the associate pastors came to me and introduced me to a lady.

He said, I want you to meet this lady, it was just prior to the meeting started, and afterwards he told me the details. He said, this lady came to our school, they had a Bible school, and he said, she is not the type of material that normally we would accept as a candidate or a student in the school. Somehow she slipped through the cracks, we don't know how, but she did, but now we look back and we believe it was God, you know, working as only God can.

She was a lady that had had a number of problems in her life, her children, I think, had been taken away from her for some reason. She had developed major arthritic problems, and used to just sort of shuffle around, her hands were sort of gnarled with, you know, as arthritis does so often, and she was on a, some sort of medical, what's the word I'm looking for? She didn't have to work, yeah, disability, thank you. And so, you know, she wasn't exactly the material that they were looking for to put through a Bible school and send out in the ministry.

She had her own sort of baggage, if you like, that needed to be dealt with. But at the end of the meeting, she had gone to this pastor and said to him, you know, I have got a real bitterness towards my mother. And she explained, you know, that she'd carried this for a period of time and so on, and he challenged her, he said, well, you heard the message, you need to ask God for cleansing and forgiveness, and so on.

That afternoon, she wrote a letter to her mother, asking again for forgiveness. And within an hour and a half, he said, she was totally healed. That evening, she came into the meeting, walking normally, even her hands had straightened out, it was an absolute miracle, you see, there is an amazing healing that takes place, not only physically, but spiritually, when we are prepared to walk in obedience to the Word of God.

Now God is a God of forgiveness, who forgives all our iniquities, who heals all our diseases. Even in the Old Testament, you know, we have the understanding that God in the Old Testament was a different God than the New Testament, obviously that's not true, but I think many of us, you know, as young people at least, children sort of struggle with that. We've got this idea that in the Old Testament, God's so wound up and tight, you know, so sort of full of anger, the slightest little mistake, and we get a sort of spiritual backhand from Him, you know, He's like an abusive father almost, and then the four hundred years of silence between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, you know, God sort of got converted, and now we have this happy-go-lucky, you know, sort of soft, mellow sort of God in the New Testament that we don't have in the Old Testament, well obviously that's not true.

And even in the Old Testament, God is a God of forgiveness. And one of the little laws, if you like, that God gave in the Old Testament, which I enjoy, is there in Exodus 23, and you can read it later on if you like, verse 4 and 5, but it says when you are walking along the road and you see your enemy's ox wandering away, you shall take it and return it to your enemy. Now I want you to imagine that, here you are, you're walking along, this is an agricultural scene of course, not, you know, big industrial sites like we have today, you're out here in the country, you're walking along, and sure enough, here is an oxen wandering towards you, and you recognize that oxen immediately as your neighbors, maybe it's got distinctive markings or something, and you think to yourself, I mean, this is the man that hates me, this is the man that, you know, got the best end of the business deal when we went in together and he took all the money and left me without anything, this is the man that spread rumors about me, this is the man that stabbed me in the back repeatedly, and this is his oxen, and you know, it's obviously broken out, wandered away, it's three or four miles from the house, and by the time he wakes up in the morning, this thing's going to be another twenty miles, he'll never find it again, ha ha, vengeance is mine, I will repay, said the Lord God, you know, thank you for taking care of me, type thing.

I mean, that would be the natural feeling, wouldn't it? I mean, I didn't do this, I didn't release the donkey, or the ox, you know, this is the sovereignty of God at work, if you like, and, you know, so I'm just going to stand back and enjoy this, you know, but the Bible says, no, you shall take that ox and take it back to your enemy. Now, you see, really, an ox served a twofold purpose, it was the tractor of its day, and so it was absolutely essential, as any farmer can't get along without, you know, a team of mules, or these days, without a tractor, but it's also his transport, because it would be the means of taking his produce to the market, and so on, I mean, it was an absolute essential quality. The closest we could come to that today would be to, you know, be living in some place like San Francisco, or on some of the hills here, there's not too many homes up there, but, you know, here's your enemy, he lives directly opposite you, he hates you, he's the one, again, that has spread all sorts of rumors against you, and he drives up one day in a brand spanking new car, and he gets out, and he's, you know, he's parked it on the hill, and you think to yourself, why, how can that guy afford, you know, a car like that, and, you know, and you're just, you know, sitting there, looking out of your, you know, window, and you see that thing, and you know what it's like when you get a new car, he jumps out, and he walks a couple of feet, and he looks back, and, you know, maybe goes back, and, you know, rubs a bit of dirt on it, and sort of eyes it a couple of times, and then disappears in the house, and you think, boy, this is really his pride and joy, and you're looking there, and all of a

sudden, you think, it looked like, almost looked like it moved, and sure enough, you know, you notice that car just gradually just sort of lurching a little bit, and you think, the guy never set the handbrake, and here it is, it's on a hill, and you're sitting there, this is your enemy now, and you're just going to enjoy watching this thing pick up speed, and wrap itself around the telephone pole at the bottom of the hill.

Now that would be the modern equivalent, of course, what the Bible tells you to do is jump out, run out of your front door, and go in there, and, you know, set the thing in park, or whatever, and curb the wheels, and so on and so forth. And so God is a God of forgiveness, isn't he? Be merciful just as your Heavenly Father also is merciful. I think one of the most frightening verses in the Bible is in the book of James, where it says, judgment will be merciless to the one that has shown no mercy.

Think about that. Judgment will be merciless to the one that has shown no mercy. To me, that's one of the most frightening verses in the Word of God, to think that one day I will stand before Almighty God, and there will be absolutely no mercy, because I have not shown mercy.

I remember listening to Corrie ten Boone, some of you are familiar with *The Hiding Place*, that wonderful book that was written many years ago now. I have a couple of her tapes somewhere, and she was talking about after the war years, where, of course, she was incarcerated along with her father and her sister there in the concentration camp, because her father, of course, had a hiding place in the house for Jews, and it was discovered, and of course the whole family put in prison, and it was while they were in prison that the father died, and the sister died, all because of the brutality of that concentration camp. They would stand virtually naked outside in the freezing winter cold, and given hardly any blankets, hardly any food, there were lice in the beds, and so on.

They would just have to sleep right next to each other to get any sort of warmth whatsoever, I mean absolutely terrible conditions. And God, of course, was merciful, at least to her, and she was able to get out and resume the wonderful ministry. And years later, she was back in this particular area of the country, and at the end of her meeting, a gentleman came up and he extended his hand, and he said, You're Corrie ten Boone? She said, Yes.

He said, I'm so-and-so, and as soon as he gave his name, she knew that this was the commandant of the concentration camp, where she and her sister and father were incarcerated, and this was the man that was responsible for all the atrocities, this was the man, single-handedly, that was responsible for her father's and her sister's death. He was now a believer, he said. He noticed her name, he remembered her name, and he had sought her out to come and ask for forgiveness, because of what he had done.

And she said, as he extended his hand and said, Please forgive me, she said, in that moment, there was a sudden sort of flashback of all the atrocities, all the torture and the pain. And she said, suddenly, the love of God was shed abroad in her heart by the Holy Ghost, and she said, she put out her hand and said, Brother, I forgive you. She understood, of course, that she didn't have the luxury of holding resentment or bitterness as a child of God towards another child of God, or for that matter, towards anybody.

In Matthew chapter 18, we have a story, I'm sure, that we're all familiar with. Jesus responds to Peter. Peter comes up to the Lord and says in verse 21, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him up to seven times.

I'm convinced that Peter was looking for an A-plus on his spiritual grade for that week. Peter, you know, I'm so proud of you. You mean you're actually up to seven times? This is incredible, Peter.

Well done, good and faithful servant. Jesus wasn't very impressed. He said, Peter, seventy times seven.

In fact, one of the Gospels says seventy times in one day. Luke's account. Seventy times in one day.

You would question a man's sincerity or a woman's sincerity after all those times. I'm sorry, you know, if it happened twice in one day, you'd be questioning, let alone three times, four times. Seventy times in one day.

Now, Jesus was not saying, obviously, that, you know, you keep a record, have your little palm pilot there. This is, you know, 480 times, and seven times is 49, so I've got ten more to go, and then vengeance is mine, you know. No, he was saying that when we do something repeatedly, it becomes a part of our makeup.

It wasn't anything to do with a literal number, seven times seven, you know, seventy times seven, and then, you know, let him have it. No. When you are forgiven repeatedly, over and over and over and over, it has become just a part of your nature.

And so Jesus then said, there was a certain man that had a debtor that owed him ten thousand talents. I looked this up about a year or so ago in Haley's Handbook. According to Haley's Handbook, a talent of gold is about 75 pounds, and I think silver was 100 and something pounds.

But anyway, today's equivalent is 4.5 billion dollars. Let me say that again, 4.5 billion dollar debt. How would you like to have that on your MasterCard or Visa? That's quite some debt, isn't it? And of course, this man knows that someday there's going to come a day of reckoning.

Someday his Master's going to wake up to the fact that this amount has got as large as it is, and he knows he doesn't have anything. He's going to be sold along with his family, his house, and everything else, and I'm sure he dreaded that day coming. Maybe tossed and turned at night.

Maybe he was a nervous wreck for months, anticipating the day when he was going to be summonsed into the Master's office, and sure enough, the day comes, and all he can do is beg for mercy. He gets down on his face and he begs for mercy, and the Master, of course, releases him. Can you imagine what it must have been like to go home that afternoon for the first time in your life? You know, talk about my chains fell off, my heart was free.

I bet he grabbed his wife and waltzed around the room with her. I bet he grabbed those kids, whatever age they were, and cuddled them and spun them around and said, listen, we can stay together as a family. We can stay in this home.

We're going to be together the rest of our lives. I mean, the excitement must have been incredible. But the next day he goes out, as the story says, and he found a man that owed him just a matter of a third of a year's salary, and he begins choking him.

Demands payment. And of course, the slaves, of course, this sort of news would spread. Anybody that's been forgiven, you know, 4.5 million equivalent.

Everybody knew about it. When they see what's going on, they go to the Master and they said, listen, I can't believe it, but the guy that you forgave, 4.5 billion dollars, he's out there demanding just a matter of a few thousand dollars from another slave. And his Master calls him back in.

Verse 32, he summons them and said, you wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. Should you not also have mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy upon you. Now, if that was the end of the story, I think we could learn some lessons from it, obviously.

This is a story. It's a parable in one sense. It's just an illustration.

And of course, you know, we know that we don't build major doctrines around, you know, certain types of themes necessarily, and certainly you can't take every particular parable or story and try and take every little iota of truth and make a doctrine out of it. The general feeling here is, of course, that God is a God of forgiveness. We had a debt that we could not pay.

That debt, again, the equivalent of our sin in the sight of God was 4.5 billion dollars worth. There's no way we can forgive ourselves. God, who is rich in grace and mercy, forgave us and cleansed us.

And one, you know, that's the essence of the story. Now, that would be true if it sort of stopped there. But it goes on to say this.

Verse 35, So shall my heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart. Now let me go back to verse 34. And his Lord moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers, until he should repay all that was owed him.

Now I've been through Bible school and tried to read as many books as I can, but I have yet to find an explanation for this, theologically. You see, if it was just a story where the master said, listen, I know I forgave you the other day, and there's no record of that anymore, it's been totally erased out of my ledger, 4.5 million dollars, after all that's what forgiveness is. And now he calls him in and he reinstates what has been forgiven.

And he says, listen, I am going to put you back in prison now until you pay back. But Lord, you forgave me. No, you now owe that entire amount of money because you were not willing to forgive.

Now if the story ended there, like I say, I'd say, well that's just a story and we don't understand, you know, all of that. But Jesus said that's what God does. Now that's the perplexing problem.

You mean God can actually revoke my forgiveness? My 4 billion dollars worth of sin can actually be revoked? God does that? That's what Jesus said. I don't understand it, never had a satisfactory explanation for it, and so I have to take it at its face value. Jesus could have just said, you know, that's the story.

Peter, we've got to forgive. And that would have been the end of it. No.

Social my heavenly Father, if you do not forgive. Here we see again the seriousness of not forgiving. All of a sudden now I stand before God with all of my sins, backing the ledger.

All I can say is I leave it up to you to examine that and let the Spirit of God show you. As we close, let me take you to a couple of scriptures. You don't need to turn them, if you don't want to, you can just listen.

But in Matthew chapter 5, verse 23, Jesus said, when you're presenting your gift at the altar, and you remember that you have ought against your brother, leave your gift at the altar and go and be reconciled to your brother or sister. Now obviously he is speaking prior to the cross, and most expositors tell us that this is the sin offering. You're coming, you're asking God for cleansing, you're asking God for forgiveness,

and so the only means of forgiveness was to bring with you a lamb.

And here you are lining up maybe with other members of the congregation, and you have your lamb, that spotless lamb representing the Lamb of God. And you're waiting in turn, and as you're waiting in turn there, you maybe see another brother walk by you that's already been to the altar and offered his lamb, and you think, you know, I know that that brother has something against me, or I have something against that brother. But anyway, I'm in line now, so you know, I'm not going to worry about it too much.

You see, you're in line wanting forgiveness. That's the reason you're presenting your offering. And God is saying, listen, I'm not going to give you forgiveness if you're not prepared to forgive somebody else.

And so, if you know that your brother has ought against you, you go to that person first, otherwise I will not forgive you. That's the principle that we've seen established here. If you don't forgive, God will not forgive.

And so, you've got to leave your lamb there, maybe tie it up, go seek out your brother, your sister, apologize, put things right, then come pick up your lamb, get back in line, and then God says, okay, now that you are forgiving, I can forgive you. Now with that in mind, let's go to Ephesians chapter 5, with this principle in mind. And it says in verse 1, be imitators of God as beloved children, walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, gave himself up for us a fragrant, or sorry, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

Just as Christ gave himself an offering and a sacrifice to God. Now Jesus Christ did not bring a lamb, he was the lamb. And he is coming to present a lamb before the Father, his own life, he is a fragrant offering, the sacrifice.

And of course we know what led up to the cross, all the abuse, the ridicule, the embarrassment of being stripped naked. He's been flogged, you know, 39 times, they open his back like a plowed field, literally Romans used to use a whip with nine tails, they would have bits of bone or steel, whatever, in the end of those nine tails on the whip, so while it was one whip, it had nine, you know, little whips going out on the end, and they knew how to sort of bring it down somebody's back, so it would literally just carve furrows. And you imagine 39 times that happening, and then nine times each time, what his back was like.

And then of course they mocked him and ridiculed him, blindfolded him, they spat upon him, they made a crown of thorns, and they put it on his head, and the Bible says they were beating upon that crown of thorns. You know, we have these wonderful pictures of that thorn, that crown of thorns, delicately sort of perched on the brow of the Lord Jesus Christ, it wasn't that way at all. The Bible says they were literally beating upon it, those thorns were running in, and of course blood coming down, then they did what? They took his beard and they plucked out his beard, and the Bible says the Old Testament, his visage or his image was marred more than all the sons of men.

I mean, you never saw a car accident worse than the Lord Jesus Christ, his face would have puffed up like a basketball, it was blood everywhere, blood from his head because of the crown of thorns, his beard literally shredded and ripped out, again his face just beyond human recognition, and then of course they nailed him to a cross, again according to most expositors he was stark naked, put him up there, made fun of him, you healed others, you know, heal yourself or come down from the cross, you saved others, and you know, all the mocking, and the Bible says he was the man Christ Jesus, in other words he knew what it was to be tempted in all points like we are, he knew the rejection, he knew the pain, and you think his brothers had ought against him?

You bet they did, there's a crowd maybe of thousands, cheering, you know crucify him, crucify him, he calls himself the king of the Jews, you know again all these things that were going on, making fun of him, and here he is presenting his offering to the Father, and his brother, many of his brothers, he came unto his own, his brethren have against him, and what does he say on that cross, and the Bible says in the Greek repeatedly, Father forgive them, for they know not what they do, and I was reading that one day, and the Spirit of God at least seemed to indicate to me, that if Jesus Christ had never uttered those words, the Father could have never received the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on your behalf and my behalf, he was bound by his own rules, his own law, if you like, if you

do not forgive, I can't forgive, when you present your sacrifice at the altar, be reconciled, otherwise I can't forgive you, and here he is presenting his life as sacrifice for your sin and my sin, and the Father is saying listen, son I'm sorry, but you died with unforgiveness, you died with bitterness, you died never being reconciled to your brothers that had ought against you, but thank God he didn't do that, Father forgive them, forgive them, forgive them, forgive them, and I came to the realization this area of forgiveness is so absolutely essential, if we don't forgive, God will not, cannot forgive us, we will never move spiritually into any realm of maturity, we'll never hear the voice of God, we'll never be used by God in any capacity, why, because God is totally restrained towards

us, we have the ability to release God by asking for forgiveness, I don't care how deep the wound, I don't care how long it's been there, we've got to go, we can't afford not to go, and say brother, sister, I've held this thing and I've nurtured this thing and I've molded over in my mind and I've done it a thousand times a day, and I'm so sorry that I have not demonstrated the love of God, I've not demonstrated the character of Christ, I call myself a believer, I call myself one that's been forgiven, but I won't forgive you, and so we need to know what it is to simply come and say Lord, I'm sorry, and Lord I'll do whatever is necessary, even this afternoon I'll pick up the phone, I'll write a letter, I'll go to that person, and I say sister, brother, I haven't treated you the way I should

have, I've allowed my own bitterness to spoil our relationship, my resentment, but I'm asking for forgiveness, maybe to sit down, I think there's a time when you need to take communion together, there's been times my wife and I have just simply taken some grape juice and some bread and had communion together, do this in remembrance of me Lord because of your love, because of your forgiveness, because of your cleansing, we forgive each other, bury that thing never to be retrieved again, not putting it in the file cabinet, but releasing it, I don't have a right to bring that thing up ever again, it's gone, again it begins by, not with a feeling, simple obedience to the Lord, I know there aren't many of you here this morning, but I guarantee there's more than one, two or three that have got

somebody, even as I'm speaking, there's a little flag going off in your mind towards somebody, maybe you're abused as a child physically, maybe spiritually, maybe mentally or emotionally or verbally, and you still remember that, you still think, listen I was an innocent little boy or girl at the time, and it was that uncle or aunt, father that came home drunk and beat me up, and so I feel justified, you can't, it's got to go, got to bring it and say Lord, I need your forgiveness, and I need the grace to forgive that person, let's just close in prayer, Father we thank you again this morning for your word, Lord it's your word, it's not the word of man, it's not something that can be changed, it's steadfast, your word is established in the heavens, heaven and earth will pass away, my word

will never pass away, so Lord there's no way we can get around it, there's no way we can modify it, there's no way we can ignore it, you said that the word will judge us in that day, Lord we will be judged according

to what we've heard this morning, and I pray Lord there would not be one single individual here that would go away with any resentment, the Lord by your grace and by your mercy, you would soften their heart, take away that callousness Lord, that thing that leads to divorce, that hardness, that bitterness, and Lord give us a heart of flesh instead of a heart of stone, a heart of compassion, a heart of kindness, a heart of mercy, Lord we don't deserve to be forgiven, if I should mark iniquity who would stand you, your word says, yet God who is rich in mercy, Father put that same

richness in our own lives, towards a brother, towards a sister, towards a mother, a father, a brother, a sister, just while our heads are bowed, I'm going to ask you this morning, if that's you, just as we stand together quietly, reverently, if you need to come to this altar, why don't you come, don't go out of the meeting this morning, carrying that thing any longer, let it go, let it just float up there as it were, release it once and for all, say, I don't have the luxury of holding on to this anymore, it's working something in my own life, you know the real tragedy is, it's not so much what it does to the other person and obviously it can do something there, but it's what it does in your own life, it can literally destroy your life physically, just as that lady was all crippled up with

arthritis, significant of her own crippled condition, why don't we just stand, if you would and just make your way forward, I'm not going to beg you to come, if the word of God can't convince you, I certainly can't convince you, thank you sister, anybody else? you

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