

# God's Formula for Forgiveness

by Jim Van Gelderen

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*To forgive, we must have confidence in the character of God and understand that He can take the sinful choices of others and use them for good.*

**Duration:** 36:36

**Scripture:** Genesis 45:10-11, Matthew 6:33, Romans 8:28, Romans 12:19-21

**Topics:** "Forgiveness", "Gods Grace"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a powerful story of a young man who witnessed his father's suicide at the age of five. Despite the tragedy, God used this experience to shape the young man's life for good, allowing him to speak on suicide in public schools. The speaker emphasizes the importance of experiencing grace and forgiveness, stating that anger and resentment indicate a lack of understanding of grace. He then discusses three key principles for forgiveness: having confidence in the character of God, doing good to those who hurt us, and looking to the example of Joseph in the book of Genesis. The sermon concludes with a word problem illustrating the concept of forgiveness as the cancellation of a debt.

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## Transcript

Okay, here in the book of Genesis, we're going to go to Genesis 45. We're going to start here this morning, I want us to start with a message that deals of course out of the life of Joseph, but it deals with a subject, and I always hesitate to mention the subject because as soon as I do, some of you out here are going to just shut the message off. Not that you won't listen, but you'll say, oh that's nice, but I'm not sure I need this.

And the reason is, is because we are, our heart is so deceitful, and we are so, so easily to do, sometimes do we think that we've got something taken care of. And that is, that's what I want to deal with this, this morning is the subject of forgiveness. Now as soon as I mentioned that, I'm sure many of us think, well, you know, I don't think there's anybody I need to forgive.

And that may be true for some, in fact, undoubtedly for some that is true. But I have found as I've traveled the country, there are a lot of dear Christians who think they've forgiven, but they haven't because they don't understand forgiveness. Now let me illustrate it this way, it was probably about three years ago at a Labor Day picnic with my home church up in Menominee Falls, there was a man who had come, evidently he had come with some people in our church, I can't even remember the family he came with, I just remember he was at the picnic, he was visiting somebody there in the church who was a relative, and he

came up to me and said, Brother Van Gelderen, he said, could I just take a few moments of your time, I've got a situation, I need some counsel.

I said, sure, we won't really do anything else, and of course you try to, by the grace of God, you want to be a help if you can be. And so we began the conversation, and he began to relate a situation where his older brother had wronged him financially, to the tune of \$10,000 or more, so it was a fairly large chunk of money for normal people, and somebody out here may be a little more blessed than others, but anyway, for him it was a large amount of money, and his brother had wronged him out of that amount of money, and there were some other things that had happened, and some things that had been said and done that were very hurtful. And I asked him this question, I said, well brother, have you forgiven your brother? And he looked at me, without hesitation, he said, yes I have.

But as our conversation progressed, I noticed every time he talked about his brother, his lower lip would tremble, tears would come to his eyes, and I looked him in the eyes and I said, brother, I said, you may think you've forgiven your brother, but I'm here, I just want to tell you, I don't believe you've forgiven your brother. Now he was a humble man, and he basically asked, why do you think that, and we began to deal with it. But you know, friends, so many times that's what happens.

You say, well how can I know whether or not I've really forgiven, okay, let's just go over some things before we get into the message to kind of help us understand if we really have forgiven. Okay, let's go on the thought of revenge. Obviously if there's any thoughts of revenge, we have not biblically forgiven.

If you think about how you could get that person back, or how you could hurt them like they hurt you, obviously you have not biblically forgiven. But let me just say that revenge takes on very subtle forms. For instance, are you glad, you would never do anything bad to them, but are you glad when something bad happens to them? It's a subtle form of revenge.

Do you kind of wish that something bad will happen to them? Again, you wouldn't do it, but you're kind of hoping that somebody else will hurt them like you've been hurt by them. That is a subtle form of revenge. Or how about this? When their name is brought up and you're talking about this person, do you kind of throw in some things that put them in a negative light, kind of undermine their credibility very subtly with the person that you're talking to, that maybe thinks higher of them than you do, and so you subtly undermine them.

Friends, I want to tell you that is a subtle form of revenge, and it indicates you've not biblically forgiven. And we could go down the list on this revenge thing, because again, our heart's deceitful and can concoct all kinds of subtle ways that we really are wishing someone as bad or perhaps even contributing to their credibility being undermined. Well, okay, you say, well, I really don't struggle with that one, Preacher.

I think I'm okay there. Well, how about this? Is there still, when you see the person, what happens when you see the person, do you conveniently avoid them? Well, that's an indication that you possibly have not biblically forgiven or when their name is brought up. Like I mentioned a moment ago, is there a rise? Do you like this brother? And the illustration I gave a moment ago, do you find your lower lip trembling? Do you find your, that, you know, that, that, that emotion surging where you almost to fight back the tears that indicates you've not, you're not experiencing the grace of forgiveness indicates for most likely you have not forgiven or, uh, or when the, when their name is brought up, is that same rise there or, or, or whatever.

So, so that's a, that can help us. Now, one of the things that might be a help to, to really indicating whether we're forgiven. And this is a very subtle thing.

And that is, do you nurse the hurt? You know, when we nurse the hurt, we have not forgiven in a moment you're going to see at the end of the message. We'll explain why, but you know, it's, I don't understand it, but we do this as human beings. We have almost a sadistic glee in nursing hurt, keeping it alive.

We don't want the hurt to die. You might be out here and say, preacher, I would never wish them wrong. I would never wish that bad things will happen, but we keep the hurt alive.

Don't we? We nurse it like it is very important to us. We review the hurt. We go over the offense and we have all those emotions come back.

Uh, when we were hurt, I want to tell you, if you are nursing to hurt, you have not biblically forgiven. Now, hopefully this has jarred us out of our complacency and out of our thinking, well, I'm okay. I think I've forgiven everyone because folks, folks, an unforgiving spirit is we're going to see in a few moments is absolutely enormous in your Christian walk.

For if you forgive men, your, their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive your trespasses. But if you forgive not men, their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses friends. It is very serious thing because when you harbor an unforgiving spirit, what God is simply saying is that first John one nine doesn't work.

In other words, as a believer, there is no way to restore fellowship with God. When we sin, we stay out of fellowship with God. Why? Because when we harbor an unforgiving spirit, God says he, he will not forgive us.

It's a very serious thing. It keeps a believer from restoration of fellowship with his God. So understanding that let's look at the life of a man who was wronged very bad, wrongly, very badly, but yet he weathered the storm.

And you know, the amazing thing is Joseph, we're going to see in a moment illustrates new Testament truth. And the amazing thing was he didn't have one book of the Bible. That doesn't mean God didn't reveal himself to him.

God did reveal himself to him. And the reason Joseph knew what to do is because he knew his God. Now with that understanding, folks, let's look at what I'm going to call God's formula for forgiveness.

We're going to know three things out of the life of Joseph here. And before we continue, I want you to ask yourselves a question. Have I been wronged worse than Joseph? Anybody out here ever been unjustly sold into slavery? Can I see your hands please? Okay, that we passed that one.

Anybody out here been framed and thrown into prison? Don't answer that one if you have. Okay, don't raise your hand. I asked that one place and somebody raises their hand.

I said, well, let's leave that one alone. We'll just move along here. Okay.

But my whole point is Joseph was really wronged. Thirteen years of his life were put in very difficult into a furnace of fire, a trial as a result of his brother's wrong choice and Potiphar's wife's decision to frame him and to be dishonest. So we all recognize that Joseph suffered at the hands of human beings who did him

wrong.

And yet we find that Joseph did not get bitter and that you said, well, how do we know that? Because the Bible says throughout it, when he went to prison right after Potiphar's wife incident and when he was sent to Potiphar's house right after he was sold into slavery, the Bible says the Lord was with him. The Bible says that he prospered, which indicates very clearly that Joseph was in a place. He who covers his sin shall not prosper.

So we know very clearly that he was not covering sin. He had dealt with an unforgiving spirit. He was living in victory.

And as a result, of course, he can be an example for us this morning. So we're going to learn three things about forgiveness. Now I'm convinced one of the reasons we do not biblically forgive is not because we don't want to.

In some cases, it's because we really don't know how to. Now let's notice before ever Joseph forgives, there's two things that precede it. And this is our apps or in a certain sense that are in a sense, I should say are a part of it.

Let's look if we could, please, at verse number three. It says, and Joseph said unto his brethren, this is Genesis forty five. And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph, doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him, for they were troubled at his presence.

And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. He said, I am Joseph, your brother.

I love this. Whom ye sold into Egypt noticed human responsibility. Now therefore, be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither.

Now, notice he hinges now for God did send me before you to preserve life for seven. And God sent me before you to preserve your posterity in the earth. Now, folks, don't miss this.

The thing I want you to see this morning is number one. You must have confidence in the character of God. Now notice that Joseph right here.

He very clearly takes human responsibility and he lays it at the brother's feet. He said, You guys made a sinful choice. You sold me into slavery.

But on the same breath, he puts human responsibility at the feet of his brothers. You sinned. He turns around and he says, God sent me to Egypt.

He understood divine sovereignty. You know, the amazing thing about this, you know what, I'm going to do it. I'm sorry about that.

I just good thing the thing fell off. The Lord reminds you from time to time. And sound people, if you forget to turn your microphone on, every sound man has a little bit different technique.

You know, some of them will do jumping jacks. Some of them pray. Some of them hold up a big sign.

Turn your mic on, stupid. But anyway, our brother back there was very discreet and very careful. But when he did move to the soundboard, I figured something's not right.

OK, I was thinking down there, I remember being turned on. But we're all set now. I got to remember where I was.

OK, yes, we're in the middle of human responsibility. Divine sovereignty. You know, folks, you don't amaze me about Joseph.

This guy has unbelievable theology. He didn't get imbalanced on the human responsibility side. He didn't get imbalanced on the divine sovereignty side.

He said, OK, these brothers sin sold me to slavery. And yet God was sovereign at all. And he he had really unbelievable understanding here.

You know, the amazing thing, he had never gone to seminary. Maybe that's why his theology was so good. We'll just leave that one alone, OK? Might get us in trouble, but we'll just leave it alone.

But, you know, Joseph, this is what I absolutely love this because today we are and we are just living in a day when there's so much imbalance here. But Joseph had it. He understood it.

He said, you guys made a sinful choice. But he said, you know what? He said, my God was bigger than your sinful choice. And folks, this is what I don't want you to miss.

God is so great and God is so big that he can take the sinful choices of others that ill affect your life. He can weave them into your life to accomplish the will of God without having anything to do with those people's sinful choice. God is big.

I say that reverently. He is far bigger than we can imagine. He is infinite.

And God, the Bible says very clearly, does not tempt us with evil. You mark it down. God didn't have to have a thing to do with those brothers murders intent to sell their brother into slavery.

He didn't have a thing to do with it. But as far as the sin is concerned. But I will tell you that it didn't take him by surprise either.

He took it and wove it into Joseph's life to accomplish the will of God without having anything to do with those brothers sin. Now, folks, this is the thing I want to challenge you with this morning. You know, you'll never really, I'm convinced, be able to forgive until you take the person that hurt you and put them in the hand of God and see them even with their sinful choices as an instrument in the hand of God to conform you to his image.

Right now, again, we recognize when people sin and it ill affects us. God didn't have anything to do with their sin. But, folks, God is so great.

He'll take it. We even know our life to accomplish the will of God without having anything to do with their sinful act. You know what that teaches me? There's only one person who can get you out of the will of God.

And you know who that is? You. Your mom can't get you out of the will of God. Your dad can't get you out of the will of God.

Your brothers, your sisters cannot get you out of the will of God. Your children cannot get you out of the will of God. Your spouse cannot get you out of the will of God.

The only person who can get you out of the will of God is you. So stop blaming everybody else. See, so Joseph understood that and he understood that God took those brothers' sinful choice and he wove it into his life to accomplish the will of God.

And he came to real rest in that. So, number one, if we're going to have going to be able to forgive, you must have confidence in the character of God. I had a young man who traveled with me.

I've had literally scores, I think, a hundred now, a hundred young men who've traveled with me in 21 years. They travel as team captains in our youth evangelistic ministry that we conduct. And and years ago, I had a young man with me.

And when he was five years old, he heard a huge bang. No five year old should have to see this, but he opened his parents door and his father had just taken his life with a shotgun. He was five years old.

His father made a sinful choice. None of us in this room would all at all debate that. But you know that God is so good and God is so great that he took that father's sinful choice and he's woven into my friend's life for good.

My friend now has opportunity to go into public schools and speak on suicide. He said, Brother Jim, he said, those kids, he said, it's the Lord. But he said, those kids are in the palm of my hand.

He said, well, I tell him about the bloodstained carpet and the fact we didn't have enough money to rip it up and we couldn't leave the the house because my dad didn't leave us anything and how my mom had to take the bed and move it over the bloodstained carpet. He said he said the kids are gripped. Now, friends, that's a tragedy that occurred in that young man's life.

He could have gotten better, but instead he made a choice that God's big enough to work it together for good. And, you know, my friend, God has and I'm sure will continue to. See, the very first thing you must do if you're going to have be able to forgive this morning is you must have confidence in the character of God.

You must believe that no matter how badly you have been wronged, that God is big enough to weave it into your life to accomplish the will of God without having anything to do with that sinful act. And I know there's tension there, but there's always tension between human responsibility and divine sovereignty. That's where the truth is.

And that's we saw Joseph very clearly understood that the tension didn't bother him. So we must have confidence in the character of God, number one. Number two, go back to Genesis 45.

Let's look, if you would, please, at verses 10 and 11. And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, and thou and thy children and thy children's children, and thy flocks and thy herds and all that thou hast, and there will I nourish thee. OK, now, folks, look at this.

Number one, you must have confidence in the character of God. But look at this. These rascal brothers, these ones who caused him 13 years of difficulty, duress and trial.

What does he do? He does them good. You know, it's like he read the New Testament. It's like he understood Romans 12, 19 through 21.

In fact, let's go to Romans 12, 19 through 21. Let's see it. Joseph is illustrating this just absolutely phenomenal.

In fact, we saw just a moment ago that Joseph illustrated Romans 8, 28. He believed that God would work all things together for good. Now let's go to Romans chapter 12.

In fact, we're going to see in the end of the book, here in just a moment, Genesis 50, the Romans 8, 28 of the Old Testament is found. Let's go to Romans chapter 12. Look at verses 19 through 21.

It says, Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath. For it is written, Vengeance is mine. I will repay, saith the Lord.

Revenge has no place in the life of a believer at all. It is not our responsibility to get somebody back or wish that they get somebody hurts them like they hurt you. That is not our responsibility.

God says, I'll take. In fact, the Lord modeled that, as we obviously know. The Bible says when he was on the cross in first Peter, it says he's when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judges righteously.

In fact, Joseph, we're going to see in a moment in Genesis 50, he said, shall not the judge of all the earth do right? Or excuse me. No, he said that was Abraham. He said to his brothers, he said, am I in the place of God? He said, in other words, he's saying that's not my responsibility.

It's not my responsibility to get you guys back. No, that's not my responsibility. Okay.

So see very clearly that revenge has no place in the life of a believer, but notice as a result of the fact that truth, look at verse 20. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, what are we supposed to do? Feed him. If he thirst, give him drink for in so doing now, should he pull the coals of fire on his head, be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with.

We all know this with one. And that is exactly what Joseph did. Now I recognize in the, in the wicked culture in which we live, that there may be some out here and say, you know, preacher, I was wronged in such a way that I cannot be around the person that wronged me.

You know, friends, we are living in such a wicked culture. That is true. Now there are young people who are wronged in such a way that they cannot be around the person who wronged them for their own personal safety.

Back years ago, my wife was counseling a young lady who was a missionary kid and her, um, she had, this is just tragic and break your heart, but on the mission field, another missionary had taken advantage of her and she was very bitter. She said to my wife, she's with clenched teeth. I hope he dies and goes to hell.

Well, we can all understand with her anger, but you know, friends, that's not the answer. We say, well, Rachel, what are you going to do in a situation like that? Well, the Bible does say this pray for them, which despitefully use you. And there's one thing that we all can do when we're hurt.

There's one thing we all can do when we're wronged. In fact, we are commanded to do it. And that is pray for them.

Bottom line, bare minimum. Even if you can't be around the person who wronged you bottom line, bare minimum, we all can pray. If we've been despitefully used, then we can pray.

In fact, we are commanded to do so pray that they'll get saved. Pray that they'll get right with God. Pray that God will work in their life.

Pray that they'll be restored. Pray that, uh, however the situation may be that God will glory will be glorified. It will be turned from, uh, from its evil intent to its, to, to good and all those kinds of things.

But for many of us, that's not the case. In fact, I would assume for most of us out here, the issues of, of an unforgiving spirit are not in that realm. They do not deal with people.

We cannot be around. They may be deal with people that we are around a lot. And in that case, we can do more than pray for them.

Bible says, do good. Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good years ago, my grandmother. And you're going to hear a lot of stories about my grandmother.

That was my father's mother. She was a godly woman. She, um, she was a remarkable woman.

She went home to be at the Lord in 1989. Uh, she could pray like there are few people I've heard pray like my grandmother. And when she prayed, she took you right into the throne room.

I mean, she just, you marched you right in. You knew you were in the presence of God, but anyway, uh, didn't happen overnight as it never does. There's always a growth and part of the growth is a story I'm about to tell.

When my grandmother was in her earlier years of marriage, she lived next to a sister-in-law that was a very difficult to live next to the sister-in-law. I think probably had mental problems. She was off some, she would come into my grandmother's house and she would steal things.

It's not like she'd take them down to the flea market and sell them. She'd put them in her house, unashamedly, just display them. So, you know, my grandmother would come walking through the house.

So, Oh, there's my base. Kind of wonder where that was, you know, that kind of thing. She'd go into my grandmother's garden.

My grandmother was meticulous gardener and, and down in Miami, Florida. And she'd have all these things. And this sister-in-law would come in and transplant some of the flowers and take them next door and plant them in her yard.

My grandmother would get up, you know, walk out in the yard and Oh, wow. Those flowers used to be over here. Now they jumped the fence.

Must be a new species. What do you say preacher? What did she do? She had to struggle. She's a human being like the rest of us.

She did struggle, but you know what a remedy was. When she really began to struggle and she knew she needed victory. She would go into the kitchen and she'd bake a pie.

You remember the good old days when grandmothers knew how to bake pies? There may be a few left in this congregation, but I'm afraid the microwave grandma is almost upon us. But anyway, my grandmother would go into the house and she'd bake a pie and, and you know, it'd be the golden Brown, you know, the pie filling would still be bubbling, you know, the steam coming off. She'd take it next door.

Of course it's Miami Florida. So you don't have to put the, uh, you know, the towel over it. It was hot enough, you know? And so, so she'd, uh, she'd take it next door.

She'd knock on the door, you know, and the sister-in-law would open the door and she'd hand the pie to the sister-in-law. She said, well, I just want to tell you how much I love you. You know, my grandmother never became bitter.

She baked a lot of pies, but she never became bitter. Be not overcome evil, but overcome evil with. You say, well, preacher, I can't even imagine that.

I got such anger toward that person. I just sit. So, you know, friends, you have not experienced grace yet because grace is supernatural.

That's why I brought up all those things that I did earlier on in the message, because if you're, if you have that rise in your heart and that lower lip trembles and those tears come to the eyes, you are not experiencing grace. And when you properly forgive, you will experience grace, supernatural help from heaven by the spirit of grace. Oh, see it clearly.

Number one, you must have confidence in the character of God. Number two, you must do good to those that hurt you. And number three, go to Genesis 50.

Would you do that? Genesis 50. We'll go all the way back to Genesis and let's go to the last chapter. We'll go five or six chapters now into the future.

And Joseph's father has died. And as a result of that, he and his brothers go to the, to, um, the promised land there, they bury him. They returned to Egypt and we're going to read in verse number 14.

What happens when the brothers and Joseph returned and Joseph returned into Egypt, he and his brethren, all that went with him up to bury his father. After that, he had buried his father. And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us and will certainly requite us all the evil, which we didn't have.

Now question. How many people out here think that Joseph was just waiting for daddy to die so he could get back at the brothers? Anybody? Well, we all know. I mean, we're thinking, come on guys.

I mean, good grief. How could you think that about Joseph? Have you ever wondered about this? This, this should puzzle us because we're not thinking this. We're not thinking, oh, good.

You know, Jacob's gone. Now we can get him. No, we're not thinking this.

Why? We know Joseph better than the brothers do. What's the problem here? The problem is folks that we all have a tendency to view life through our own, our own way of thinking. So what this simply means is this is exactly what the brothers would have done if they were in Joseph's shoes.

Yeah, this is exactly what they would have done. You know, sometimes friends were the same way. Are you the kind of person that's kind of always walk around, looking behind your back, thinking who's talking about me? I know somebody's talking about me.

Do you know why people say that? Because they talk about other people. That's exactly what they do. Well, the amens have dried up now.

We blew that one, brother. We just ruined the meeting. Okay.

That's ruined the meeting. But anyway, we'll move that. We'll just leave that one aside.

Okay. And we'll keep going here at verse number 16. And they sent a messenger and the Joseph saying, thy father did command before he died saying, so shall you say unto Joseph, forgive, I pray thee now the trespass of thy brethren and their sin for they didn't know the evil.

And now we pray thee forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. Years later. Now notice Joseph's response and Joseph wept when he spake unto them.

Now we're going to come back to his weeping and what that means in a moment. But notice what Joseph says, because it reemphasizes some of the things we've just learned. He says, uh, verse 18, the brethren also went, fell down before his face and they said, behold, we'd be their servants.

And Joseph said unto them, fear not for am I in the place of God? You see friends, he had committed, he had just like the Lord Jesus, he had committed the issues to him who judges righteously. He said, am I in the place of God? That's God's responsibility. It's not mine.

It is not my responsibility to repay you guys. It is not my responsibility. Exact vengeance.

God will make sure everything comes out. All right. He says, but as for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good to bring to pass as it is this day to save much people alive.

Friends, that's the Romans eight 28 of the old Testament. We all say it in paraphrase. Ye meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.

So there it is. And, uh, so Joseph is reiterating and look what he says there in verse 21, fear not for, I will nourish you. He reemphasizes the fact I'm going to do you good, but let's go back to their asking his forgiveness and Joseph's almost strange response.

He doesn't say, I forgive you. He weeps. Why do you think he wept? Now folks don't miss this.

I'm convinced he wept because he forgiven him a long time ago. He'd crossed that bridge a long time ago. Now we're going to have to deal with, uh, we could please, from what I've understand that I'm not a student of these kinds of things, but I've kind of picked up, there's a little bit of debate among the, on the forgiveness issue.

And I just going to throw out just a few thoughts on it, kind of help us resolve some of the tension. There's one school of thought that says, well, let me, before we get to the schools of thought, let me quote the verse. That is the new Testament verse that kind of we work off of here.

And if you know the verse, would you quote it with me? Ephesians four 32 and be a kind one to another tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, have forgiven you now, friends, God says that we're supposed to forgive others. How, just like God forgives us for Christ's sake. So there's one school of thought and a certain sense.

I understand what they're saying. They'll say, now, listen, we really can't forgive somebody until they ask because God doesn't forgive us until we ask. Okay.

I see. Okay. I see that another says, no, no, you need to forgive or you're going to harbor that bitterness inside.

And so you need to forgive whether or not they ask in your own heart, you need to forgive. You said, well, Richard, what's your thought? Well, obviously there's a little bit of truth in both of them, but there's one, there's one issue that I think sometimes is overlooked and that is we're supposed to forgive like God forgives was only one problem in our understanding. And that is we're finite, but he's infinite.

And the Bible says in Psalm 86, don't miss this, that God is ready to forgive. Yeah, man. Think about this folks.

We can say this hypothetically. Can you imagine today you blow it? You maybe you say an unkind word to someone in your house and you go before the Lord and say, Lord, I was wrong. Would you forgive me? And the Lord says, you know, I'm getting tired of your coming to me and I'm going to have to think about this for 24 hours and then maybe I'll forgive you.

Does God do that? Oh, the devil does that, but God doesn't do that. In fact, it makes us a little nervous to even think it. Here's a lost center going, saying, Lord, save me.

I'm a, I'm a sinner. And the Lord says, well, you are pretty bad. I'll think about it a week, get back to you.

Now, friends, it's almost borders on sacrilege to even think it. Why? Because we know God's ready to forgive. Now, some of us out here, unfortunately, listen far more to the accuser who accuses the integrity of God.

And some of us act like God thinks that way the devil does, and he will accuse you, but God doesn't. He's ready to forgive. You can rest in the fact that God is ready to forgive.

Now, folks, he's infinite and he can be ready to forgive any of us at any time. But you know, we're finite. And the only way I can, if you have anything different, let me know.

But the only way I can figure out how I can be ready to forgive is to cross the bridge. It's the only way I'm going to be ready to forgive. We say, okay, preacher to cross the bridge.

Okay. What does it then mean to forgive? And folks, I want to keep it as simple as possible, because sometimes we say in our hearts, Lord, I forgive that person. But we really haven't.

It's not just the words. You say, well, what do you mean? Okay, don't miss this. God often in the Bible uses concrete illustrations to illustrate abstract truth.

So you tell me, what picture does God use in the parables when he talks about forgiveness? And it always is what? The picture of debt. So let's leave. Can we do a little word problem? Remember word problems.

Some of you in homeschooling and school, your wherever school you go to, you know about word problems. So let me give you a little word problem. Okay, here it is.

If you owed me a million dollars, it's kind of nice word problem, isn't it? But anyway, you owed me a million dollars and I forgave you the debt. How much do you owe me? Well, you know, I can tell us before 12 noon, because I find most people are still on life support before 12 noon. And it's a little earlier.

So let me give it to you a second time. If you owed me a million dollars and I forgave you the debt, how much would you owe me? You wouldn't owe me anything. Friends, don't miss this.

You know what forgiveness is? Forgiveness is saying in God's courtroom, God, I release them of all debt. They don't owe me anything. As long as you say, you know, that person really needs to apologize.

They hurt me and they need to apologize. I want to tell you something, friend. You have not forgiven.

Because when you forgive, you're saying, God, they don't even have to apologize. It's over. I'll tell friends, you know, when you when you forgive, you know what you're saying in the courtroom of God? God, I give up my right to think thoughts of revenge.

Not that we had a right in the first place. You understand. But saying, Lord, I no longer I give away that because if they don't owe me anything, what can I can't think about revenge? They don't owe me anything.

But here's the kicker, friends. It's giving up your quote unquote right. Not that you had it in the first place, but we suddenly think we do.

It's giving up your right. Don't miss this to nurse the hurt. Say, oh, Lord, I forgive them.

They don't owe me anything. That means I can't nurse or hurt that I've forgiven. And many people think they've forgiven and they nurse that hurt and they keep it alive instead of letting it die.

And when you forgive, you're saying, Lord, I give up the hurt. I have no more right to nurse it. The grace of God, I'm giving it up to you right now.

I make a decision of the will to believe you. And I forgive them, Lord, in the courtroom of heaven. I forgive them.

They owe me nothing. That's forgiveness, friends, right now. That's what Joseph did years before, I'm convinced.

And that's why when the brothers came and they asked for forgiveness for the first time after years, he weeps. That was a done deal, folks. God took care of it years before.

Amen. The year was 1947. Corrie ten Boom was giving her testimony at church in Munich, Germany, when she saw him.

How many of you are familiar with the story of Corrie ten Boom in the hiding place? She most of you are, some are not, so I'll just fill in the brief sketch. Her and her sister and father decided to hide Jews during the Nazi occupation of Holland during and before World War Two. Of course, she and her sisters and father, someone leaked to the Gestapo.

They raided her house. They took the father off to one concentration camp. He died within days.

Betsy and her sister, Corrie and her sister Betsy were taken to Ravensbrück concentration camp. There, Betsy died a slow, terrible, agonizing death. While her sister Corrie watched.

After her sister died, Corrie was released on a clerical error. Well, it was 1947, two years after the war, it was the first time she saw a former guard from Ravensbrück concentration camp. She was in a church in Munich, Germany, giving her testimony.

She had just finished her testimony when a man walked up to her in a brown coat and a brown felt tip hat. At first, she saw the brown coat and hat, and then she saw a gray uniform with a gray cap, with a viscid cap, with skull and crossbones. The guard reaches out his hands to hand to Corrie ten Boom and said, a fine message, Fraulein.

How good it is to know that all of our sins are in the depths of the sea. He said, I was a guard at Ravensbrück concentration camp. He said, I did many terrible and cruel things there.

He said, since that time, I have become a Christian and I know that my sins are in the deepest sea. He said, I know God has forgiven me, but he said, I would like to hear it from your lips, too. Fraulein, will you forgive me? And he reaches out his hand.

To shake her hand in a certain sense, to to manifest that forgiveness. And Corrie ten Boom writes so candidly, I stood there and I could not. Betsy had died in that place.

How could he simply for the asking erase her slow, terrible, agonizing death? She said it seemed like hours. She said it only could have been seconds, but it seemed like hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing that I ever had to do. For she writes, I knew I had to do it.

For I knew that God's forgiveness of my sin was contingent upon my forgiveness of others. If you're a heavenly father, if you forgive men, their trespasses, your heavenly father will forgive your trespasses. But if you forgive not men, their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses.

She said, I knew I had to forgive. She said, I realized that forgiveness. Don't miss this, folks, was an act of the will.

She said, Lord, I'll lift my hand, she writes, you supply the feeling, I would have preferred her to say you supply the grace, but I think that's what she meant. She writes slowly, wouldn't Lee mechanically, she lifts her hand, she puts it in that former guard's hand and she said when she did so, an incredible thing took place. She looks at the guard and she says, I forgive you, my lord.

My brother, I forgive you with all of my heart. And she writes, I never felt or sensed God's love so intensely as I did at that moment. Another way to put that, it's called grace.

Oh, hear me, friend. God's formula for forgiveness. You've got to have confidence in the character of God.

You've got to do good to them that hurt you. Number three, you've got to release them of all obligation. They don't owe you anything.

They don't owe you anything. God's formula for forgiveness.

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