

The Urgency of a Forgiving Spirit

by Lou Sutera

The sermon emphasizes the critical role of forgiveness in effective prayer and the necessity of faith in the process.

Duration: 52:32

Scripture: Psalm 103:12, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 18:19-20, Mark 11:22-23, 1 John 3:22-23

Topics: "Forgiveness"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of forgiveness in prayer. He explains that when we are unforgiving, we are sinning and hurting Christ. The preacher suggests that forgiveness is a prerequisite for effective prayer and encourages the congregation to cancel every debt and rise above the societal pressure for vindication. He also emphasizes the need for unrestrained forgiveness, without excluding any category or individual. The sermon concludes with a reference to a book called 'Going the Second Mile' by Mel Blackby, which the preacher recommends.

Transcript

I'm going to come down here and get close to you. Last night we had that tremendous DVD of Jim Simlin and the praying church. And we'd go away and say, wow, what praying can do.

Tonight we heard about Liz and Bert in relation to the praying, and God has brought two of those children back after all that time. How long? And God answers, and there's more to come. And we all can relate to that.

Now tonight I said I want to put some flesh on the bones to what we saw and heard last night. And I want to give two basic premises and then elaborate on them. And I believe we'll appreciate what we saw last night in a greater way.

The first premise is simply this. The priority of forgiveness in relation to praying that God will answer. The priority of forgiveness.

And I'm just going to quickly put this out to you. We won't take a lot of time. And let me just put it like this to you.

You and I know about the Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6, where Jesus told us how to pray the Lord's Prayer. And we go through it and we say, and we pray, Lord, forgive us as we forgive others. Wow, what a prayer.

Forgive us as we forgive others. Now we come to the end of the prayer and we come to the end of the prayer and you know what happens? What happens, I'll tell you, what happens right after that is my Lord goes back into his prayer. He teaches us how to pray.

He goes back into the prayer and he picks on one issue to repeat. And what is it? You know what it is. It says that if you forgive one another, God will forgive you.

And if you don't forgive, your Father in heaven will not forgive you. Now my question is, how come the Lord had to go back into the prayer? He didn't go back in and grab any other issues, but he picked that one. You know, it says to me the priority of forgiveness in relation to answered prayer.

What it says to me is it's an area that we all need to know about. So there it is. Very interesting indeed.

And then I think he's telling no forgiveness and no forgiveness. No forgiveness there, no forgiveness here. That's what it's saying.

So then you go to Matthew 18. The chapter of Matthew 18 is a very interesting one. You know what verses are in Matthew 18? The verses we like to quote.

What shall we pray? This is praying, powerful praying. What shall we bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. What shall we loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Ah, tremendous verse. And then the next verse. Yet I say unto you that where two or three are gathered together in my name, they can ask anything on earth.

What is it? I will do it. And then it goes on to say where two or three are gathered in my name. I am in the midst of it.

We say what tremendous promises in prayer. You know what? It's interesting. Here you are.

I am basically talking about Matthew 18, 19, 18, verse 19 and 20. Isn't it interesting that those three verses, 18 to 20, are surrounded? That means on both sides. About what? About what? Two basic issues of human relationships.

Talk about getting along one with another. Before it, well, I won't take time to go into it, but it's there. And then it comes there, these tremendous three verses about powerful praying.

No sooner gets done, it goes immediately back. Peter wants to know how many times he should forgive. And the tremendous message that's given in Matthew 18 about the unforgiving servant.

So I thought to myself, isn't it interesting here? You have praying, powerful praying, but all the priority on both sides of forgiveness in relation to prayer. So that premise. So I just put it out.

You know, we can take a lot of time to explain it. There it is. Then secondly, I suggest to you that forgiveness and faith have to be priority in relation to praying.

Forgiveness and faith are coupled together in relation to powerful praying. And I want you, if you brought your Bibles, just quickly turn to 1 John chapter 3 and just look at these verses. 1 John chapter 3, the priority of forgiveness and faith.

Forgiveness and faith. 1 John chapter 3. And here it is, verse 21. Beloved.

1 John 3, 21. Beloved, if our hearts condemn us not, then we have confidence toward God. Now we can pray if our hearts are not condemning us.

And then it says, and whatsoever we ask. Here's praying. Whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him.

Why? And it tells us why we're going to get answers to our prayers. Because we keep His commandments. And we do those things that are pleasing in His sight.

Huh. My Lord, you're telling me I've got to do those things that are pleasing in His sight. Some of us folks want a Bible.

There are. Do those things that are pleasing in His sight. My Lord, are you going to tell us what you're talking about? What are those things? God says, I won't leave you out in the dark.

I'll tell you what I'm talking about. And He says, verse 23. And this is His commandment.

What? Two things. One, that we should believe in the name of the Son of God. And say, Jesus Christ.

All right. No, we've got to believe. OK.

But the second thing is. And that you should love one another as He gave us commandment. So, there's the two commandments.

We're talking about praying where God will answer. I'm showing you the premise of believing, praying, forgiveness that relates to praying. Powerful indeed.

So, I suggest to you that if you're going to have believing, praying, you must pray like that. Well, then, you know, we can't talk about this without going to Mark chapter 11. So, we turn to Mark chapter 11.

And look at this. You talk about believing, praying. Isn't this a wonderful portion of Scripture? Mark 11, verse 22.

And Jesus answered and said unto them. Mark 11, 22. Jesus answered and said unto them, have faith in God.

OK. All right. We have to have faith to pray.

All right. Now, listen to what He says. Therefore.

He says, for verily I say unto you, whosoever shall say unto this mountain, be removed and be cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart. See, it's got to be a believing prayer. But shall believe that those things which he says shall come to pass, he shall have what he says.

How do you like that for believing, praying? He goes on to say, and therefore I say unto you, what things soever you desire when you pray, believe that you receive them and you shall have them. What kind of answers to prayer? Mountain-moving prayers. Got any mountains that need to be moved? Are there any mountains in this meeting that need to be moved? It's what He's telling us.

So, He says, when you pray, you better believe. And if you believe, you can move mountains. Now, I heard about a real mountain-moving story in prayer.

It was in Japan. You know what? There was an orphanage for boys and girls in Japan. And right by the orphanage, and the orphanage was by the sea.

And right by, in front of the orphanage, there's a big mountain. And the orphanage, they could not, the children could not see the sea. See the sea.

Got it? Yeah? They couldn't see the sea. And so, they didn't like that. And they were reading the Bible, and they came across this verse.

What a verse. They said, if you pray, you can move the mountains. Have it cast in the sea.

So, these children got praying. You know, we need faith-like children sometimes. And they're praying, Lord, that mountain, can you move that in the sea? And so, one day, the missionary was in town buying some food for the orphanage.

And there's a knock at the door. And the children go to the door, and there's a man at the door. And said, where is the lady of the house or the missionary? Oh, she's in town buying.

And they said to the man, why have you come? Oh, we were just... I'm part of the... I'm on the staff of the community. You know, I'm one of the councilmen and so forth. And he said, we have decided... We were wondering, and we want to get your permission.

We want to get the lady's permission and the permission here of this home. We've decided that the children of our community need to have... They need to have a park near the sea. And we just decided we've got to move that mountain away so they can have a park right near the sea.

What do you think of it? All the children said, go to it. We've been praying for you. We were expecting you to come.

Now, you can never say you haven't heard a mountain moving story because that's what happens when those children pray. But I think there's some mountains in here that need to be moved. Now, that's interesting when we talk about praying like that.

Praying like that. Well, what's that kind of praying all about? I suggest to you that believing praying relates to right relationship praying. Forgiveness.

Because look at the next thing. Lord, I've got a bunch of people here tonight. I've got a bunch of people here who want to be believing prayers, Lord.

Here they are. They're looking at me. I see all those two eyes.

Here they are. Got it? All right. Therefore, now he says in verse 24... In verse 25.

And when you stand praying, forgive. The very first thing he talks about. So, you see the combination, the context in relation to believing praying and forgiveness.

When you stand praying, forgive. If you have ought against any that your Father also which is in heaven will forgive your trespasses. And then he goes on to say, But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses.

Well, interesting indeed. I suggest to you again. Here it is.

The minute you're talking about believing praying, my Lord talks about now we're ready to pray. Forgive. What is it? Forgiveness.

I think my Lord is saying four things when he says forgive there. What is he saying? One, go no further in prayer until this is accomplished. Forgive.

I think he's saying right when he says forgive, I think he's saying write a receipt of cancellation of every debt. That's when he says forgive. I think he says when he says forgive, he is commanding us to rise above the many human pressures toward vindication.

That's what society is all about. Human pressures all around us. Vindictiveness.

And my Lord when he says forgive, he says he's commanding us to rise above all those pressures that would lead us into I've got to be vindicated. And I think fourthly when my Lord is saying forgive, he's saying about unrestrained forgiveness. He says I've ought unrestrained anything which excludes no category, no individual, no person is exempt and no offense is excluded.

I think my Lord is saying all of that men and women. We put up boundaries. We say oh not that.

It's all up to this point but not that. My Lord is saying no such thing. I am just giving you my Lord's word folks.

There it is. So the summation of these two premises simply about praying would be this. And I had the privilege of reading Mel Blackaby's book Going the Second Mile.

What a book. Mel Blackaby, the son of Henry Blackaby. And what he said and I think it's a summation of these basic two points.

He's saying when we allow sin into our lives and disobey God, when we hold on to unforgiveness in our hearts, when we harbor bitterness against any person, when we've broken relationships with a brother or sister in Christ, when we gossip and allow jealousy into our lives, our prayers are nullified. He says when we pray, God hears everything our life is saying. Not what our prayers are saying.

God hears everything our life is saying. And then another place in the book he says, prayers effectiveness is not the result of what we do when we are praying he says, but the result of who we are when we're not praying. The attitudes of our heart and life.

So I just quickly give you that as a summary. Much we can say about it but I just want to put it out. The two premises.

One is forgiveness in relation to prayer. And the second is the premise of believing praying relating to forgiveness before we can be believing prayers simply. So in the light of that, Ralph and I in our meetings, we normally pass out little cards and what we call them expectation cards.

And we have two questions on the card. What are you expecting God to do for you in the revival? Two questions. And the first question there is, what areas do you want God to meet in your life? And one person wrote a better prayer time.

That's what we talked about last night, powerful praying. And the person writes a better prayer time. And then the second question about how do you want God to meet you in your life? And he said, I want to

learn what it really means to forgive.

I thought of myself. The first question, I want to be a better prayer. And the second question, what does God need to do in your life? I need to learn what it really means to forgive.

I thought that person had it right. There is a combination coming together. Now, I suggest this.

If we are to forgive, we better understand what forgiveness is all about. You know, there are many definitions. I just want to give you two of them tonight.

Just two. What forgiveness is not. What it is not.

What it is not. Suggestion. It's not consoling myself to the fact that God will deal with the other person in God's way, in God's time.

I've just got to get it. Sometimes we say, Lord, stick them good. You know, like we say to the dog.

No, but we might not even do that. God will deal with them. And we have a thing.

We forgive them. God will get them. Too often, men and women, we think we've extended forgiveness when all we've done is covered up our resentment.

And we say, God will get them. God will deal with them. Secondly, I say, forgiveness is not bringing myself to the place where I refuse to bring up the past.

Some people have the ability, we have the ability to pull ourselves away. And we say, I just won't bring up the past. That's an interesting one.

It's like burying the hatchet and keeping the handle out where you can grab it any time, right? I will not bring up the past. So, many definitions, but I just give you those two. Let me give you now some definitions of what forgiveness is.

There's so many. Let me just quickly give you a few of them. Here's what is forgiveness.

Not allowing the other person to pay. Good definition, isn't it? Not allowing the other person to pay. Forgiveness is the loving cancellation of a debt.

It's a transaction in which I release the debtor from the obligation to repay the debt. Followed that by a commitment to invest positively in that person's life. That's something we don't do, many of us.

You know, if impossible or inappropriate, some things that we cannot do because of the situation involved in the matter. Every one of us can still invest in that person's life through prayer. Forgiveness.

Forgiveness with love. You know, forgiveness without love is insincerity. One lady came to Ralph at one of our meetings and said, Ralph, I've got a problem.

I said, what's your problem? She said this, a lady and I got together over two years ago and she said she forgave me for something that went on. And she forgave me. I said, well, isn't that wonderful? She said, that's wonderful.

What's the problem? The problem is she hasn't talked to me since. Forgiveness without love is insincerity. I suggest to you men and women, genuine forgiveness, I tell you, runs deep.

It is not a thin surface patch over a relationship. But it's an inner change of heart toward the offender. Wow.

You know what forgiveness is? I give up my right to hurt you for hurting me. That's forgiveness. I give up my right to hurt you for hurting me.

And one person got up in our meetings and said these words, I realize that God never allows his children the painful luxury of getting even. In fact, he doesn't even allow us the pleasure of nursing the hurt that's involved in the situation. Interesting statement indeed.

So, I suggest to you, secondly, forgiveness, giving up my right. Humanly speaking in the world, we have a right. But we give up my right to hurt you back for hurting me.

Godly. Forgiveness is not allowing anything to hinder a relationship. You know, it's amazing.

Especially in smaller communities, I find people, relationships that have been built between families and people over years standing, that have been tremendous appreciation one of another. And one thing comes along and boom, just like that. All of those years of a relationship are wiped out.

Tragic indeed. Tragic indeed. I suggest to you like this.

Forgiveness is a miracle of grace, men and women, whereby the offense is not allowed any longer to separate. Miracle of grace. Some people think that forgiveness is holy amnesia.

I'm not talking about that you forget. People say, well, I must not have forgiven because I can't forget. Well, if you can forget, you're beyond human.

Did you know that? As long as we're human, we'll remember. So, what's forgiveness all about? It's not an experience of holy amnesia. No.

That erases the past. You can't erase the past. The past is there.

But what is it then instead? It's the experience that drains the poison out of that experience. You may recall the hurt because we're human. But you don't have to relive the hurt.

The hornet of memory will fly again and again because we're human. But forgiveness has drawn out the sting from the hornet. No more the sting.

Now we revel in the grace of God that was real to us in that situation. You see? That's what it's all about. Forgiveness partly takes place when love will accept the hurt.

This is forgiveness. You accept the hurt and you drop all charges and the Bible tells us forgive how many times? Oh, you've got it memorized. Seventy times seven.

Amazing. Peter had trouble with that one, didn't he? Remember, Peter had trouble. In Matthew 18, Peter kept count and Jesus loses count.

You know? Seventy times seven. 490. That means when you come to there, 491, you don't have to forgive, right? No.

It's a term of infinitude. So Jesus is saying, I don't keep count. Peter, you want count? I don't keep count.

I'm sure when the Lord said, he said, should I forgive seven times? I'm sure it was getting harder and harder all the time from one to seven. Seven times must I forgive? Now, I want to read a statement from the book on this. I can't say it any better.

And I found today and I thought, oh, wow, about Peter in this forgiveness. In the book, *The Healing Power of Forgiveness* by Ray Pritchard. Listen to what he says about this scripture.

He says, Peter, somebody had done Peter wrong, okay? Sure. And Peter had forgiven him. The same fellow did it again and Peter forgave him again.

He said, he did it again and Peter forgave him again. But this time, Peter got mad. So he comes to Jesus with a question, he says, that we all can understand.

Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? How many times? Peter wanted to know how much guff he had to take from this somebody. When do you quit turning the other cheek? That's what he's really saying. When it is okay to blow your stack.

Right? Now, Peter didn't wait for an answer even. He's asking the question, but you notice he didn't wait for an answer. He gave the Lord an answer.

He was ready to suggest one. He says, how many times shall I forgive? Shall we do it seven times? He suggests an answer. He said, seven times.

You know, we might think Peter wasn't being very generous. How many thought, well, Peter wasn't being very generous? Well, you're wrong. You know why? But in this place, he was.

When he said seven times shall I forgive, he was. Why? Because the rabbis in that day taught that you had to forgive a man only three times. And then you could retaliate.

That was the teaching of the day. Isn't that amazing? So, Peter thinks to himself, you know, Peter. He's this kind of guy.

He said, Lord, I'll just double it and I'll add one extra for good measure. That's seven, right? Got it? To be honest, men and women, forgiving a man seven times is commendable then for Peter. When rabbis said you only have to do it three times, most of us would get frustrated, wouldn't we? If we had to forgive somebody twice, we'd get frustrated.

By human standards, listen, Peter's suggestion to forgive seven times was really extravagant. So, we got him there. But here's what the writer says, Peter's heart was not in the right place.

His heart was in the right place, but his attitude was wrong. He wanted to put a legal limit on forgiveness. See? He wanted a number limit.

A place where he could finally say, no more, Mr. Nice Guy. But look at Jesus' answer. I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.

Then clunk! You hear that? You hear Peter falling over in dead faint? Clunk! Seventy times seven, Lord? And he writes, he couldn't believe his ears. Now, 490 times? Jesus was saying, Peter, you've got it all wrong. You don't count the number of times you forgive someone.

Forgiveness is unlimited. Forgiveness is unlimited. Now, that's interesting.

That's in the book of Matthew. But, you know, when you take the same story in the book of Luke, Jesus said, if your brother trespasses, answering Peter, he said, if he trespasses against you, not just seven times, Peter. Peter already gave the seven figure.

He said, not seven times, but seven times in a day. Wow! Turn again to him. When he says, he comes and says, I repent.

Thou shalt forgive him. Seven times in a day. Surely, he's not sincere.

Seven times in a day? That's not your business whether he's sincere or not. You forgive. I tell you, men and women, what I've done in reading that and going through that, what an amazing contrast.

What? To yours and Peter's policy of forgiveness compared to the Lord's sublime generosity. What a difference. Do we find ourselves? So, what's forgiveness really all about? How can I really understand what forgiveness is all about? I think the best way to do that is find out how my Lord forgave me.

And in the definition of my Lord forgave me because He said, as I forgive, so you ought to forgive one another. So, let me say in just simple words, how did the Lord forgive me? How did the Lord forgive you? Do you know what? Understanding that will give us the real understanding of what my Lord says when He says, forgive. Three ways.

You know what words? There are three words in the Bible relating to what my Lord has done for me. The first one is the word pardon. He has pardoned my iniquities.

First Samuel 15, Saul said, now therefore pardon my sin. And we know what a pardon is all about. A pardon.

When the governor of our state and our country and probably the premier of the province up here, maybe, I don't know who up here. When he offers a pardon. When he offers a pardon.

Do you know what happens to that guilty criminal? Here it is. He is no longer guilty. He has written off as totally clean on his record.

Wow. Not guilty. Have you been pardoned? Any pardoned people here tonight? I mean, not guilty.

Wow. That's the beginning. Well, here's another one.

There's a word that means to clear the debt. Clear the debt. Here it is in Acts 13, 39.

And by him, by Jesus, all that believe. I got some believers here tonight? Oh, yeah. Okay.

So I'm talking the right people. All that believe are justified from all things. A-L-L.

How do you spell it? A-L-L. That's how you spell it. To get the meaning.

All things justified. Now, you know what the word justified means. It means just as if I'd never sinned.

Wow. Wow. Nothing to pay.

Nothing to pay. Clear the debt. Did you hear? Nothing to pay.

Nobody shouting Amen yet? Oh, yeah. I think you need a third one. That's your problem.

All right. Then there's a third one. And that means to remove our transgressions.

Remove our transgressions. Listen. The Word of God says, I, even I am he who blots out thy transgressions for my own sake.

Have you ever realized that? You get in on the blessing, but the Lord wants to blot out your transgressions for His namesake. For His own sake. He loves you that much and He needs you and He wants you that much.

He blots out your transgressions for His namesake. What a tremendous truth. Amazing.

For my own sake. Let me ask you a question. Are you concerned about your past sins? You know what? The devil is good at pulling up our past sins.

What about your past? What have you been through in your past? Are you concerned about those past sins? Even though you have brought them to the cross, even though as Liz talked about the blood of Jesus being applied, through Jesus' death, the blood has been applied, and the devil brings you and makes you concerned about your past sins. Somebody said, through Jesus' death, God says, what sins? What sins? Didn't He say He blotted them out? And you get concerned about them? And He says, what sins? Remove the transgression. Oh, men and women, today in my study, I ran a little statement I want to read to you.

Listen to this. You must forget your past, somebody said. We're often told, or you cannot embrace the future.

Okay. This is true. And biblically, in the sense of not allowing the past to ruin the present.

Now listen. After all, it was the persecutor turned apostle, who's that? Paul. The persecutor turned apostle, he said, who wrote, what did he write? When you read the writings of Paul, what did he write? He wrote, one thing I do.

What's the one thing he does? In Philippians 3. What? Forgetting those things that are past. Forgetting those things that are behind, their past. And here's what the writer says, he said, the Christian must make, here's what I do, when the devil comes, and he wants to throw the past at you, and my Lord says, what sins? But the devil brings them up, and you want to tell God which ones, huh? And my Lord doesn't know what you're talking about, but the devil pulls at you.

He says, the Christian must make a conscious choice, each day, to do what? To bask in the grace of the Gospel, that covers the shame of all those past sins. Every day, just thank God, for the grace of God, and bask in it, that covers all of those past sins, when the devil brings them up to you. And now I say that to say, how many times has Jesus Christ come to you, to remind you of your past sins, that have been forgiven? Never.

Alright? Are we supposed to forgive like He forgave? I tell you then, you should never, never, never, bring up an item, that has been forgiven. First of all, personally, between you and God, and secondly, between you, and another brother or sister. You should not bring it up.

So, here's another one. Psalm 103 verse 12, As far as the east is from the west, so far, hath my Lord removed my transgressions. Where are your sins? As far as the east is from the west.

Now, you folks up here in Canada, got a lot of land, between east and west coast, right? Right? So, I don't know which direction you want to go tonight. So, we start out here from Regina, and let's go, which way? East? Where is the place, as you keep going east, where is the place, where it says you are no longer going east, now you're going west? Where is it? Oh, you went the wrong direction, that's a problem. Oh, start from here, go west, Vancouver, and go west.

Where is the place, where it says you're no longer going west, now you're going east? You know what? In English literature, men and women, in English literature, it was Rudyard Kipling, it should have been Mark Twain, but it was Rudyard Kipling, who said, the twain shall ne'er meet. The east and the west. Somewhere out in infinitude, are they going to meet? And, my God says, as far as the east is from the west, that far.

My God has removed transgressions from me. Well, Micah, here's another one. That's land, you know, go east, go west.

But, there's some people who like to go another way. And, thou shalt cast all their sins, where? In the depths of the sea. Ah, now the people like water.

Here we go. Where are sins? In the water. He says, in the depths of the sea.

He's put our sins, he's cast our sins, in the depths of the sea. Now, that's interesting. When I heard that, I had to figure out where, what sea it's in.

Right? So, I had to figure out, which is the deepest sea in the world. And, I found out, that off the tip of the, southern tip of the Philippine Islands, 34,700 feet, that's, they consider the deepest sea in the world. Now, you know how far that is? You leave here, Regina, leave here tonight, and any distance that you know, is about 11 or 12 kilometers.

Go from here, 11 or 12 kilometers there. And, take that, and turn that around, and put it in the ocean. That's how far down.

Oh, but I found recently, that there's a place even deeper than that. So, I'm getting smart. I just found out this one.

There's a place called the Mariana Streets, off of the, in the South Pacific, it's off of the island of Guam. It's called, what they call, it's the Mariana Trench. And there, it's not 34,000, but 36,000, or 38,500 feet, straight down.

So, there are, we're talking about at least, seven miles, miles, straight down. You know what somebody said? After he buried them there, he put a sign up there, no fishing allowed. And, what are you doing fishing in there? The devil will try, to bring them up.

What a tremendous thing. What a tremendous thing. You know, men and women, we ought to revel in this.

Liz was talking about this tonight. What the blessing of knowing Jesus, and the cleansing, and being forgiven. When are we going to get excited, revel in it? Hmm.

There was a, you know, in my country, I don't know, who matches the Presbyterians up here? Anglicans? I don't know. In my country, you still have Presbyterians? They're people a little pressed, aren't they? They're pressed, a little stiff, huh? Yeah? What kind of starch? Medium starch, or? They're a little pressed. In our country, we consider them a little pressed, you know? They don't say amen in church.

A little bit like you folks here tonight, you know, a little quiet. They don't say amen much. And so, one time, they were going to have a meeting, where the Presbyterian, the big shot of the denomination, was going to preach in the church.

And, they had a brother in the church, he was a dear brother, that would go to church, and every Sunday, a preacher would get preaching, he'd shout, amen, amen, amen, in the Presbyterian church. Now, the people in the church, they got used to him, he was such a dear brother, and they liked him so much, they got accustomed to his amens. But, they knew, that when this visiting preacher came, the district superintendent, or whatever, the head of the whole works, if that brother, if that brother goes to preaching, and if that brother goes to shouting, this guy will be so shook up, his mind will go blank, he'll forget his sermon, we can't let that happen to him.

So, they figured a plan. The pastor figured a plan. And, here was the plan.

The pastor said to the elders, to the ushers back there, he said, if the Presbyterian goes to preaching, and that brother goes to shouting, I'll go to nodding, and you go to tapping, and you take him upstairs, put him in the church library, and give him a book to read. I got it. Right? So, you know, if you plan on it, it's going to happen just like you plan on it.

Preacher went to, Presbyterian went to preaching, brother went to shouting, pastor went to nodding, usher went to tapping, up in the library, gave him a book to read. They thought it was all settled. All settled, it was up there in the house.

And then, in a little bit of time, there was some noise coming down from upstairs, and it was so loud, it was even bothering downstairs. And the pastor went to nodding, the usher, go up and see what's going on upstairs. They went up, and opened the door of the library, and they saw this brother having the time of his life, shouting away.

What's he shouting about now? And they said, what's this all about? He said, well, you put me up here, and you gave me a book to read. And he said, you know what book you gave me? It's a book about Robinson Crusoe, and it was out in the ocean, and the mariners on the boat decided, let's see how deep the water is under the boat. And they put all their sounding equipment over, and let it go down, and it went down, and went down, and down, and then it came to the end of its ability, it couldn't go anymore.

They'd gone as far as the equipment would go, and they still hadn't reached bottom. And he said, when I read that, I said, well, praise the Lord, that's where my sins are, and they don't even know how deep it is. Ah.

You know what it means? Completely gone. No longer guilty. First word.

Nothing to pay. Second word. Completely gone.

Third word. You know, I love it when children pray, because they are so sincere. And one little child, this little guy by the name of Charles, and here's what Charles prayed.

He prayed, I do not think, dear God, he prayed, dear God, I do not think anybody could be a better God. He said, well, I just want you to know, but I'm not just saying that because you're all God already. Hmm.

Tell God there's no better God. No better God. When do we get over our salvation? Revel in it.

Tremendous thing. You know what this is all saying, men and women? Forgiveness is basically then, my relationship with one another, forgiveness then is basically the continuing process, continuing process of treating others the very same way my Lord treated me. Now what is that? Paul said to Colossians 3, 12 and 13, he said, put on therefore, as the elect of God, what? Put on what? Bowels of mercies.

Sounds like a lot. Kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering, not short fuse, but long suffer. Forbearing one another and forgiving one another.

How? If any man have a quarrel against any. How? Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. Wow.

I read an item entitled, The Laboratory for Forgiving and listen to this, just a little paragraph in it. When conflict comes, listen folks, conflict often surfaces in the church. So there is much need for people within the body of Christ to demonstrate the fine art of forgiveness.

People usually expect forgiveness to be a characteristic behavior for true Christians. And people on the outside expect it. It goes on to say, so the failure of Christians to forgive each other in church squabbles, in church squabbles, often discredits the gospel in the eyes of a watching world.

People watch to see whether our professed Christianity makes any significant difference in our attitudes one toward another. This shows up mostly distinct, most distinctly in the church where people have a right to expect a laboratory demonstration of the Christian virtues, especially forgiveness. God intends His church to be a laboratory where Christians learn how to forgive one another by practicing the forgiveness they themselves have received from God.

Do not give the devil an opportunity to work. Wow! What a statement! What a statement! Thus, the basis of my forgiving another is not that the other person is worthy to be forgiven. Oh, we'll see whether he's serious.

We'll see whether he's worthy to be forgiven. That's not the basis, men and women. Why? Your basis of being forgiven by the Lord? Were you worthy? Was I worthy to be forgiven? No.

My Lord forgave me, and I'm supposed to forgive like He forgave. When I was unworthy, He forgave me. On the basis of my unworthiness, I forgive just like Jesus forgave.

In my unworthiness, I will forgive those that don't even deserve to be forgiven. We men and women are to give others a gift they don't deserve. The gift of forgiveness.

And as we ponder the depth of God's forgiveness, we will want to extend our complete forgiveness to those who need it from us. Our prayer ought to be, men and women, our prayer ought to be, Lord, help us to forgive as we have been forgiven by Thee. So finally, in the light of all of this, I believe an unforgiving spirit is an unforgiving, forgetting spirit.

In the light of all that I've said, the tragedy of an unforgiving spirit is it's an unforgetting spirit. The one thing you wish you could forget is the thing you can't forget. It's wrapped up in that thing that you refuse to forgive.

That bitterness that you refuse to forgive. And in the deepest sense of the word, now listen, I just today, I've added this today to these notes because it comes to me in a very unusual way. And I put it in because I believe this is the heart of everything about it.

In the deepest sense of the word, it is an unforgiving spirit is giving pain and anguish to and the crucifying anew, giving to the Christ and crucifying him anew, the Christ that we say we love and worship. An unforgiving spirit toward one another is giving pain to the Christ and as it were, crucifying him anew when we won't forgive one another. That's how important and how deep this issue is all about.

I have never said that before. This is the first time I've said it. And it came to me in an unusual way You ever get an interesting e-mail? I got one.

And I'm wondering whether tonight, folks, it's called the dart test. If whether or not we are willing and ready to take the dart test. Here it is.

The dart test. A young lady named Sally relates an experience she had in a seminary class. She went to seminary.

As her teacher, Dr. Smith, one particular day, Sally walked into the seminary classroom and knew that they were in for some fun that day. Because this teacher, he was very interesting in illustrated sermons and teaching and so on. So she walked in and said, we're in for some fun today.

We're talking about the dart, you know, the dart test. The darts. On the wall was a big target.

And on the nearby table were many darts. Dr. Smith, the teacher, told the students to draw a picture of someone that they disliked. Or someone who had made them angry.

And he would then allow them to put the picture on the wall and throw darts at the person's picture. Wow! Sally's friend drew a picture of someone who had stolen her boyfriend. Another friend drew a picture of her little brother.

Of his little brother. Sally, this girl we're talking about, drew a picture putting a great deal of detail into it. She drew a picture of a former friend and she put every detail in her face, even drawing the pimples on her face.

Sally was pleased with the overall effect. I got it. I got it done well.

She could remember. She could even remember the pimples on the face. She got it there.

The effect she had achieved. She was glad for it, she said. The class lined up and they began throwing darts.

Some of the students threw their darts with such force that their targets were ripping apart. Sally looked forward to her turn. I can hardly wait until I get my turn.

And she was filled with disappointment when Dr. Smith, the teacher, because of the time limits, class was over, asked the students to return to their seats. As Sally sat thinking about how angry she was because she didn't have a chance to throw any darts at her target, Dr. Smith began removing the target from the wall. And underneath the target was a picture of Jesus Christ.

A hush fell over the whole room as each student viewed the mangled picture of Jesus. Holes and jagged marks covered His face and His eyes were pierced. Just like Liz said, I almost shouted, Liz, when you started talking about the vision you had of Jesus like that.

Dr. Smith said, only these words! When they all looked at the pictures. As he quoted the Scripture, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, you have done it unto me. You have done it unto me.

No other word was necessary and the tears filled the eyes of the students focused only on the picture of the mangled Jesus Christ. This is an easy test, folks. We're having the dark test tonight.

Your score is what? Either 100 or 0. It's your choice. What do you want it to be? And that's the first time I never saw it like that. It comes in email like that.

That when we are unforgiving, we are sinning and we are hurting the very Christ that we say we love and we worship. I don't know what's in this meeting here tonight. We saw that video last night of prayer that God will answer.

The first thing my Lord talks about when we say, Lord, we want to pray like that. When you stand praying forgive, if you have ought anything against others, that's where our praying has to start. Where it is in your heart and life tonight.

I have today said, Lord, I want to give this that You, our Holy Spirit, could speak to us on what is in our hearts and lives. Let's start where God starts, men and women. This is where God starts.

We want the world, we want other lives to be touched, but here's where it starts. What is there in your heart, your life tonight? Dark test. Lord Jesus, I thank You for my brothers and sisters and I thank You for Your desire that You have given them to come out tonight.

Lord, give us now grace that would say, Lord, speak to us. Lord, we are willing to be honest with truth. Lord, we want to have praying that gets through to God.

We see where You start. Lord, I don't know what's in this meeting here tonight, but Father, we're starting where You start. And I pray in the name of Jesus, give us judgment day honesty.

Say, thank You, Lord. Speak to us. I pray that people would come night by night and say, Lord, what are You going to say to me tonight? Oh, God, do Your office work in our hearts.

Why don't You take a few moments of silent prayer and You take Your heart before the Lord and forget about anybody else in this meeting, like nobody else here but You. First of all, thank the Lord for the salvation He's given you and thank Him for what it means to be saved and what it means to be forgiven. Thank Him for that.

And then ask Him to show you others that you are withholding that same forgiveness from them and say to You, Lord, forgive me anything, years ago or present. God, I need to ask You to forgive me. Why don't You pray for Your own heart? Let's make this whole room a sanctuary of prayer right now as You pray for Your own heart right now.

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