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Forgive Us

#1332-B

Series: Prayer: God's "Secret" Weapon

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Forgive Us

Our Father and our God,

We come into Your presence with thanksgiving and into Your courts with praise. What a precious God You are, to know, Father, that the very hairs of our head are numbered, and that throughout this world the hearts and lives of every single soul are known to Thee, and for people all over the world, is so rich and so deep that we cannot even grasp it.

And our prayer, Father, is that You would deepen our sensitivity to needs around the world and to needs around the corner, as well. We pray that this morning, Father, You would take Your word and, in spite of the teacher, allow Your Holy Spirit to be our teacher. May He instruct us in the way that we should go.

May we leave here, Father, not simply informed, but transformed.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Well, I suspect that of what everything Jesus had said up to this point, nothing had been more riveting, or arresting than this one statement. It was tucked within the context of a seminar on living the Christian life. It was quite a seminar, incidentally, and the conference had not been without its surprises so far. The accommodations? Well, I don't think we can call it "four star". A group of seekers had gathered on a hillside, and they were sitting on rocks or under trees. There was no elaborate menu to entice people to leave their families for an afternoon of fun, food, and fellowship. In fact, there may have been no food at all.

It couldn't have been the music; at least I don't think so. We have no record that there was any. Somebody may have hummed a tune as they walked up that hillside, but we don't know that there was any sing-along or any warm-up involved.

Then what was the draw? I mean, why would people flee to such uncomfortable surroundings if there were no entertainment, no food,

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to sit on the side of a rugged mountain on jagged rocks for hours on end? It must have had something to do with the speaker. No, it had everything to do with the Speaker.

He was only a carpenter, that's true, and carpenters are a dime a dozen. But there was something different about this carpenter. No one could really describe what it was. His messages were all about God, but they were not so much about keeping the law or how to be a good Jew; they were more about how to walk with God and live with God and make it real.

To say this was practical theology would be an understatement. The great themes were not just justification, sanctification, or eschatology. The themes were suffering, persecution, retaliation, adultery, lust, divorce, the love of money, the sin of worry, the danger of a critical spirit, the foundation you build your life upon. It began with a dissertation on what constitutes happiness, and this in itself just blew into bits every concept ever penned before or since. And it ended with this spellbound crew trekking down that hillside, saying things like: "I'm amazed at His teachings." "He teaches with authority; not at all like our religious leaders."

Authority? What an understatement. You see, what they didn't grasp was that His authority was the result of the fact that every word He spoke was a word from God. That's why the Scripture, even today, when applied to the wounds of everyday life, will always be received with awe and effect transformation. The word of God changes lives, and every word Jesus spoke was a word of God.

So this was no ordinary seminar. It was the beginning of a whole new world order. Oh, not the kind of world order politicians are talking about in our generation, but a world order built on the One who ordered the world.

It was about halfway through the seminar. Now, if you'd been there, you would have thought to yourself, "Oh, the really tough issues are behind us now. I mean, what could be harder? This guy talked about the lust of the eye being adultery, and this never-before heard concept about anger in the heart being murder to God? And then they heard this itinerant carpenter say you were supposed to love your enemies. I mean, what more could be said?"

As I said, it was about the middle of the conference, and I guess, judging from human experience, some of the people may have been getting a little tired or even a little restless by now. Suddenly the speaker changed directions and He began to talk about something

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called “prayer”. Now, prayer was not a totally new thought to the Jewish mind; they had been taught to say prayers, and, in fact, their religious leaders had learned how to make a sideshow out of it. Can’t you imagine what took place in their hearts when He stood up and said, “When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites...” and then He proceeded to describe their religious leaders to a “T”.

He described prayer as something private, something personal, something intimate between a man or a woman and their God. And He went on to say that praying would not be judged on its length, but on its depth. And then, as He had done so masterfully on every other subject, He gave him or her a hands-on workbook of “How to Pray”. He talked to them about how you address God, how you worship God, and how you conform your prayer to the will of God. And then He taught them how to carve your prayers and arrange your life into 24-hour segments that are workable times for faith.

And then it happened: the subject of subjects—the subject that cost Him His life. He began to talk about sin. And more than that, He began to couple this discipline called prayer with something called forgiveness. And then He did the unthinkable. He took this miracle of God’s saving grace, His saving forgiveness, this balm that sets us free, and He coupled it with another kind of forgiveness. It was not the initial act of forgiveness that would save us from the penalty of sin; it was the forgiveness that would set us free from the pressure of sin, and give us a daily, continual, unbroken fellowship with God.

What a surprise! Is it any wonder, then, that the crowds perked up on that hillside and became so quiet? Can’t you imagine it? They were hearing, for the first time, God telling them how to be continually cleansed from sin. And it all had to do with this subject of “prayer”. It must have erupted like a volcano in their hearts as He redefined, in a moment of time, what it meant to have fellowship with God, and...uh-oh...then He coupled it with the relationship we have with each other.

No blending of mercy and obedience, grace and choice, has ever been more earth-shaking than this. This was to be the cornerstone of our walk with God...constant forgiveness of sins. But this was also to be the challenge of our walk with God...constant forgiveness of others. And for some unknown reason—unknown and unexplainable, even by many Bible scholars—He chose to link the two of them together; so that the one (an act of divine grace) was predicated on the other (a choice of the will).

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Legalists have a field day with it, taking it out of context. Others spiritualize it and simply make it useless. Neither has a prayer, so to speak, of making it scripturally acceptable. The truth of the matter is, the forgiveness that atones for the work of our sin nature before conversion is the prelude. It is free, unmerited, and all it requires is to receive God's gift of salvation. But the day-to-day forgiveness that is required to maintain that fellowship is another matter. It, too, is all of grace; you cannot earn it, it's undeserved, and it's free. But God tied a couple of strings to it for our benefit. To be implemented, we have to do a couple of things, and by ignoring those things, we have oftentimes taken the power that's available to us as believers and as churches, and allowed it to dwindle into weakness. Let's look at the passage itself.

The passage itself simply says this:

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:12,14,15)

Hello? What an incredible truth! It takes this word "forgive" to new heights. It takes it beyond the theological realms of our justification with God, and it weaves a safety net around it that can envelop us in love and allow the church to function the way it's supposed to.

Let's examine it this morning: the principle, the progression, the prelude, and the process. (You won't find that in the lesson, it just sounded good to say that.)

The principle: You will find that the principle can be summed up in one word: freedom. Some of you work in the jails, and as you talk to these prisoners, this one word says it all: freedom. Forgiveness equals freedom. It has the connotation of someone being in prison with no hope of release, and suddenly the doors swing open, the guard comes in from out of the blue and says, "Bye! You're free!"

You were in bondage. It doesn't matter how much of your sentence you served. You were in prison, not only for life, but you were to be executed. You were on death row. But God, who is rich in mercy, decided to stay the execution, re-hear the case, and when He did, He found you guilty again as charged. So He paid the penalty Himself. His Son died in your place, and you were set free.

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Not because you were not guilty but because you were. Here's the word, forgiven. It means "to send away, to dismiss, to pardon".

Three pictures come to mind. Blend them together and you have a picture of it. The first one is the one we just described of the prisoner awaiting execution. The second one is someone locked in a room and left to die. The oxygen supply's waning, there's no light, and there's no way of escape. And suddenly, just as you're about to draw your last breath, the door swings open, light comes in, air comes in, and you can breathe again. You have been given life. The third illustration is of someone carrying a load they cannot seem to carry. You've been in third world countries where people carry things on their head, and you cannot imagine it. If that doesn't give Excedrin headache #3000, nothing would. And they're carrying these huge loads on their head, and it would be like you're carrying something on your head and the load was getting heavier and heavier and heavier, and you felt like there was no way you could go on. And suddenly, someone comes up alongside of you and reaches up and takes it away from you, and the load is lifted and you feel years younger. You have been set free.

That's the true meaning of forgiveness. It means to set one free, remove the sentence, and grant a pardon. A second meaning of the word is to send away. Biblically, forgiveness means God not only releases you from the sentence, but He sends the sins away, never to be remembered again. That, Beloved, is freedom.

Now most of us, I think, understand that principle where it has to do with our initial forgiveness of sins when we come to Christ. But I'm not sure all of us understand everything that's involved in maintaining that relationship of forgiveness with God.

Let's continue with the same illustration and you've been sentenced to be executed. The Judge grants you a hearing, sentences His Son to die in your place, and sets you free. No strings attached, you're free to go on. But suppose, once you're out, instead of basking in an aura of gratitude, which leads you to lead an exemplary life, you become presumptuous. You see, the Judge told you that because of the price He paid to set you free, you can never again be sentenced to death. So, with that in mind, you begin to commit petty crimes. Little things to start with and then the little things get bigger.

Most of them nobody ever knows about but you. But the Judge knows. You see, He sent someone alongside you, a kind of invisible parole officer, to help keep you from further sin and to train you on

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how to live this new life of freedom. But because you can't see Him, you pretend He doesn't exist. You just keep on doing what makes you happy, whether or not it pleases the Judge who set you free.

And what happened? You're back in bondage. No, you won't be executed, but this is a self-imposed bondage, because the benefits the Judge had in mind for you as a free person are no longer yours. You chose it. You no longer walk by His house. I mean you don't want to look Him in the eye. You no longer read the letter He wrote to you when He released you. It makes you feel guilty. You're free, but you're no longer living in freedom. And the only way out, Beloved, is for you to appear once more before the Judge and ask Him to pardon you from these new transgressions. Until you do, you're free from a human perspective, but you're in bondage to yourself.

So, don't you see? Forgiveness has two parts. The first is the release from the sentence of death. It takes place at Calvary. It's undeserved and unexpected in such a magnitude nothing you could ever do could pay it back. But the second has to do with the day-to-day bondage you place yourself under because you don't want to face up and 'fess up.

There's one more ingredient in the mix, and that's where we're headed. It's the choice you make when others transgress against you (or you think they have), and you have to apply the same kind of freedom to them God applied to you. It's all wrapped up in this parable, which we'll read in a few moments from Matthew chapter 18. You remember—the one who had been forgiven so much, but he couldn't bring himself to pass that forgiveness on to someone who owed him so little.

Forgiving came into God's plan early. In Genesis chapter 50, you remember, Joseph's brothers came to Joe, and they were scared to death, weren't they?

So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him.
(Genesis 50:17)

Joseph was a man of authority. He had the key to their lives and their freedom. He had the right to execute them, put them in prison, ignore them, or set them free. And he chose the latter. And it was applied to God's relationship with man in I Kings, you remember?

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And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place: and hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place: and when thou hearest, forgive.

Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest unto their fathers.

Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, that thou teach them the good way wherein they should walk, and give rain upon thy land, which thou hast given to thy people for an inheritance.

(1 Kings 8:30,34,36)

Forgiveness was coupled with freedom, a new life, and a new way to live. It was a gift from God, and there needed to be an intercessor, it seemed, to plead on their behalf. And so God created this plan, this interim plan. It was a portrait of that which was to come.

Sacrifice would become the steppingstone to forgiveness. A lamb or animal without spot or blemish could be substituted for the sins of the people, and God would (here's our word) forgive. But there was no really perfect lamb, and this was still something man had to do to have God send away their sins. It had to be done again and again and again. There had to be a better way, and of course, there was.

But this better way would cost God everything and man nothing. God, as He portrayed in His mountain journey with Abraham and Isaac, would "provide Himself, the Lamb". And He did. He is the only lamb without spot or blemish. So you know the story. Messiah came and Messiah died so that man could live forever, so that sins could be "sent away" forever, and man could be restored to freedom.

But even that didn't satisfy God. This once-for-always sacrifice for sins would only be eternal if God Himself would come to live inside of those He died for, giving them constant access to the blood substitute God made for them, and giving them constant access to the Mercy Seat, where later sins could be dealt with. So God provided Himself the Lamb, and He sent the Lamb back to be with the Father, so that His Spirit could enter our lives and be the earnest of our inheritance. And now, Beloved, forgiveness is just a breath away.

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But there are two requirements. And why we overlook those so often is because Satan has moved in and tried to make it so easy. The two requirements are very simple. You can't earn God's forgiveness now any more than you could before. It's still free, it's still undeserved, but now because His Spirit lives in you, you have a responsibility to do two things to invoke that gift of forgiveness.

1- You have to ask. Oh, this is a toughie. If you want to be forgiven, you have to ask. Every time you sin you have to ask God to forgive you. Not because He can't do it without that, but because you would never appreciate it if He did. II Chronicles 7:14 was a prelude, you remember:

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. (II Chronicles 7:14)

There had to be a grief over what the sin cost God, and we had to ask. That's why I John 1:8 and 9 is so important. I'm not sure we understand it. We quote it all the time.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us. (I John 1:8-10)

If we don't confess, we're saying we haven't sinned. That's what that passage says. "If we confess our sins" —it's a conditional promise. It starts out with an "if". And yet we presumptuously assume that God has already forgiven us without our asking, even though He's told us to ask. Why do we do that? Well, I'll give you three reasons:

- 1- We don't want to face them. We think if we ignore them, God will ignore them.
- 2- We assume God already knows anyhow, so why bother telling Him something He already knows?
- 3- We forget, and assume it doesn't matter because God understands how absent-minded His children are.

What fools! Ungrateful fools. Let's go back to our illustration again. It would be likened to that man being released from prison, though guilty, by a loving judge who paid the penalty himself, and

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all that the judge asked him to do was report regularly to his parole officer, whose only interest was in seeing that he lived a productive life. But he said, “Eh, it’s too much trouble. I don’t want to face up to the transgressions. I’ll just forget about it.”

Now, listen. If we were in danger of losing our eternal salvation, we would look at sin differently. But we become so presumptuous because of God’s grace, that we don’t regularly, consistently, continuously confess sins. We’re supposed to confess our sins the moment we’re aware that they happened. You get angry with somebody in the grocery store, and instead of saying, “Oh, dear God, that was a bad attitude. Please cleanse me and forgive me”. Having the freedom restored, and having a realization that every time you confess it, God is reminding you of the gravity of it, you just say, “Eh”. So stipulation number one: you have to ask. Simple, straightforward. But we become so anesthetized to what sin is and what sin does, we just presume upon the grace of God.

Requirement number two is a little more difficult, and that’s what this lesson is really all about this morning. I’ll go back to Matthew 6 again one more time:

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:12,14,15)

Is that clear enough? God never makes the mistake, does He, of making things vague? He loves to make things clear; we’re the ones that make them complicated. I don’t think we take that seriously enough. Let me describe it for you: it is what is called proportionate forgiveness. Proportionate forgiveness means that we’re asking God to forgive us only in the measure we have extended forgiveness to others. Now, you say, “Okay, that’s something God wants me to grow into. When I become more mature, I’ll do that. And I’ve only been a Christian 25 years, so God understands.” You see, sometimes we just don’t want to forgive. Sometimes it’s fun being bitter. And sometimes we think the transgression is so bad God can’t forgive. And sometimes we think, “Ah, that’s not important enough to bother God with”.

But in every case we’re wrong. So God wrote into this contract an exclusion clause. Now, listen carefully, please. It means it’s not an option.

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2- The promise to forgive us is excluded unless we forgive others.

What He said was in this promise, He would forgive us, but the promise to forgive us is excluded unless we forgive others. That's why we're told to pray that way. It's a reminder that unless we have forgiven those who have sinned against us, or we think have sinned against us, we can ask all we want; God says He will not forgive.

Now, I know that's tough. This has nothing to do with your salvation, Beloved. Your salvation was all of grace. He didn't say, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hears my voice and forgives his brothers, I will come in". He didn't say that. He didn't say, "To as many as received Him and has forgiven their brothers, to them gave He power to become the sons of God". He didn't say that. Your salvation is free and unconditional; but, Beloved, this is a conditional promise to Christians. You've accepted God's free gift; you're out of prison. But in order to enjoy your freedom and please the heart of the Judge who set you free, you have to forgive everybody, everybody, everybody, who has ever hurt you, or wounded you, or displeased you, or not appreciated you, or even abused you.

You say, "Well, maybe this is a one-liner in Scripture, and there's an exclusion somewhere else, it's just not in this passage. I think I can find a way out of it". I don't think so. "Maybe this guy just took it out of context." Well, let's look at some other passages. You knew I would say that, didn't you? The best confirmation of Scripture is always to compare Scripture with Scripture. And if you're here this morning and you're struggling with a bitter spirit, please listen to these few passages in Matthew 18:21-35.

Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.

He was reviewing his accounts.

And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.

But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

He was going to turn the whole family into slaves to pay the debt.

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The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

If you have ever been in business you've heard that.

Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

He wrote off the debt—that is what it literally means.

But the same servant [the one that had just been forgiven everything] went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him [a little bit] an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

It was the same story he had given his master but he didn't listen.

And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.

Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:

Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?

And his lord was wroth [angry], and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every [single] one his brother their trespasses. (Matthew 18:21-35)

Mark 11:25,26

“And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions.

“But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions.” (NAS)

Luke 6:37

Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:

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Luke 17:3,4

Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.

And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.

Beloved, Scripture does confirm Scripture. Let's look very quickly at the principles that evolve out of these passages as we close:

1- God will not forgive you, even if you ask, provided you've not forgiven those who sinned against you (Matthew 6:12-15). I know that's tough, but what it's saying is you have erected a huge barrier between yourself and God, and you can claim I John 1:9 all day long, but you're shooting blanks. God says, first, forgive.

2- The issue isn't how many times that person wronged you (Matthew 18:21). You may not change what you do for them, or how you relate to them in some situations, but you must forgive them. You must give them the same kind of grace God gives you. If you confess, He forgives. How many times? Unlimited.

3- The more you've been forgiven for, the more important this commandment may be (Matthew 18:23-33). The one who had been forgiven much angered the king when he wouldn't forgive a little bitty thing. And, Beloved, think about yourself and how you have broken the heart of God, and remember Luke, chapter 7:

When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him more?"

Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have judged correctly."

(Luke 7:42,43 NAS)

4- God actually gets angry when we refuse to forgive (Matthew 18:34-35). See, we live in an age that so elevates the love of God (and well we should), that we intentionally overlook the wrath of God. He's not going to destroy us, He's not going to take away our inheritance; He's long-suffering and of great patience. But if you refuse to forgive someone who harmed you or wounded you, you're standing on shaky ground.

5- There seem to be no limitations (Matthew 18:35, Mark 11:25).

"So likewise shall your heavenly Father do if from your hearts you forgive not every one..."

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Now I think probably if you go into the original language, the phrase “everyone” means everyone. Mark 11 says, “if you have ought against any.” Now most of us can justify forgiving most people, and in fact many of us can forgive almost everybody, and some of us can forgive everybody but... The commandment says without reservation.

6- The forgiveness needed is more than words. God says, “If you from your hearts forgive not every one...” (Matthew 18:35). Remember, God looks on the heart, and He knows the mind games we play. You may go up to that person and hug them and squeeze them and say, “God loves you, and I love you”, and then go back into the quiet of your own room, and the very thought of that person’s name maybe causes anger to well up in your spirit, and it’s impossible for you to pray for them and bless them and do good to them and love them. Beloved, you haven’t forgiven.

7- The best yardstick is your prayer life (Mark 11:25). You remember Matthew 5:23. You’re in the prayer closet and you can’t seem to pray, and the problem is somebody has something against you. Justified or not, you’re supposed to get up, leave your gift at the altar, and run and make it right. Now this verse (Mark 11:25) is the flip side of the coin. Here’s somebody that you have something against, and you get down to pray and you just kind of choke at the possibility of asking God to bless them. God’s saying, when you stand praying, stop what you’re doing and get your heart right.

8- And then finally, there seems to be special emphasis on forgiving those who repent. Not all of these passages specify that repentance is required, so I believe we’re to forgive all who have offended us; but the Scripture says, “If he repents, forgive him.” And maybe he does it again right away, and you say, “I don’t think he really repented.” But the Bible says, “If he asks you again, forgive him again.” Sometimes we never see them again; sometimes they die. Sometimes they don’t even know they’ve offended us. So this is not a requirement for forgiveness, but it’s an added exclamation point.

Well, I’m going to close with this one last stop, for those of you that are still here.

9- God said not only do we forgive, there is a pasage that has to do with how we go about it. There are two Greek words in the New Testament translated “forgive”. The first one is *aphiemi*, which means, “to put away, or send away, or pardon,” and in Matthew chapter 6, that’s the word we’ve been talking about. But there is a second word, “*charizomai*”, which you can tell by the sound of it, probably, that

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it has to do with grace. And it has to do as much with the way you forgive, as the fact that you do. It means, “to graciously, freely, forgive or set free”. It’s used in Romans 8:32:

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?
(Romans 8:32 NAS)

It’s used in Ephesians 4:32 to define God’s forgiveness as a pattern:

And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.
(Ephesians 4:32 NAS)

It is also used in Colossians to define the depth of God’s forgiveness and the relationship between that and our forgiveness:

And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,
(Colossians 2:13 NAS)

Also Colossians 3:13:

bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.
(Colossians 3:13 NAS)

I think the Scripture’s clear, Beloved, and I believe many of us are running with our spiritual engines on three cylinders because we have not taken the time to deal with this passage honestly. We want God to forgive us; we depend on it, we glory in it, we talk about it.

But, Beloved, if you have somebody whose name still stirs up anger, hostility, or a vindictive spirit in your heart, and your prayer life seems shallow, your ability to have victory over besetting sins is weak, and your ability to love other people seems hindered, God may be speaking to you this morning.

It may have been an abusive parent, it may be an ex-husband or an ex-wife, it may be a parent who abandoned you, it may be a dishonest businessman who cheated you, it may be a brother or sister or a friend who took and took and never gave. Don’t you see? The degree of the offense is not the issue. Nothing they may have done to you could even approach what you’ve done to God. You caused the death of His Son. And yet the moment you came to Him and asked Him to forgive you, He did. And now God is saying to you, “You owe everyone who has sinned against you the very same level

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of forgiveness, the same frequency of forgiveness, even the same graciousness of forgiveness.”

Your assignment (should you choose to accept it), is to get away this week alone with God, take a piece of paper and a pencil (and maybe ask your children to do the same), and ask God to bring to mind every person you're still bitter towards. Don't get up from that place of prayer until your heart has been made pure before God, until you've driven a stake in the ground that never again will you allow those thoughts of anger or bitterness to remain. Pledge to God you'll pray for them, love them, do good to them (if they're alive), and bless them so long as you shall live. You say, "Is it going to be easy?" Absolutely not. You say, "Is it possible?" Absolutely. Because the One who lives in you is the same One who forgave you. He longs to free you from bondage as you "send away" forever those offenses, just as He sent away yours.

FORGIVE US

“Oh, dear God, forgive us,”
That's the prayer we pray,
“Take me back into your arms
Give me peace today.”

Then you move into life's race
Having said your prayer,
But the balm that set you free
Simply isn't there.

You asked God to forgive you,
You stood upon His Word,
“If we but confess our sins,
We're forgiven, Lord!”

But softly our Redeemer cries,
“Oh, child, you've asked, that's true,
But you have not forgiven those
Who've hurt or wounded you.”

“They broke your heart, I understand,
the way you wounded Me.
I did no wrong, and yet your sins
Nailed me to that tree.”

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Forgive Us

“I died for you to set you free,
And I said, ‘I forgive’.
Now I’ve sent you out, dear one,
The same grace you’re to give.”

“I’m waiting to forgive you, child,
but still My word is true.
You must first forgive each one
Who’s hurt or wounded you.”

“When you have come back, my child,
Then rush back to Me.
When you’ve forgiven, I’ll forgive,
And you will then be free.”

Forgive Us

Let's pray.

Our Father and our God,

There are so many seeds of bitterness in so many of our hearts and lives, because of things in our past, or circumstances or situations we cannot seem to turn loose of, and we wonder why we don't have the freedom in our lives. We wonder why there's not the power, and we wonder why, when we come to You and ask You to forgive, it seems so shallow and so hollow. And yet You made it so clear not to be legalistic, but to be loving. You told us that in order for us to fully grasp what Your love is all about, You just made it conditional: when we forgive, You forgive.

Some of us, heavenly Father, in this room, need to go away by ourselves this week and get rid of some seeds of bitterness that have been sown in the garden of our lives and left to bear terrible-looking weeds. For some, it may have been a parent that they feel did not treat them right, or was partial, or maybe because of a divorce, they felt that they were neglected. Some maybe even have been abandoned. Others may have been abused. For some, it may be a bad marriage that left scars, and the person within that marriage is still angry and bitter that the other partner did what they did. For some of us, Father, it just may be somebody that did something this week. It may be a friend that let us down, it may be somebody in a store that mistreated us; but instead of really forgiving, we just simply held onto it as though it were a gift that we were supposed to cherish.

This morning, Father, we just want to lay those things at Your feet, and ask Your precious Spirit to cleanse us, free us, and set us on a rock, Father, once again, that we might enjoy and appreciate and appropriate the loving forgiveness that's ours.

In Jesus' precious name we pray,

Amen.

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