

Russell Kelfer

The Grace of Forgiveness

#1352-B

Series: God's Amazing Grace

dtm DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.
INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230 • (210) 226-0000 / 1-800-375-7778 • www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org

The Grace of Forgiveness

King of kings, Lord of lords, wonderful Friend, precious Savior, Comforter, coming One, we worship You. Truly Yours is the Kingdom and Yours is the power and Yours is the glory, forever.

As we gather together, Father, our prayer is that Your sweet, sweet Spirit will descend upon us, cleanse our hearts, remove all the debris that has gathered through the week, and allow us to look into the face of our Savior and be amazed.

Please be our teacher, Father, and please may Your Word penetrate our hearts beyond that which would simply entertain us, or even educate us. Rather, Father, would You transform us into Your likeness.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Imagine someone asking you to forgive that person who broke into your house, stole all of your precious belongings that meant so much to you, and then just trash them. Forgive them? Your answer would be, "How could I?"

Imagine someone asking you to forgive your father, the one who abandoned you when you were ten. "Uh-uh," you say.

Imagine someone asking you to forgive that husband who left you with two little children to raise. "Are you kidding?" you respond.

Imagine someone asking you to forgive that sister who stole your boyfriend when you were in high school and left you with no one, and she did it just for the fun of taking him away from you. You say, "I'll never forgive her."

Imagine someone asking you to forgive that drunk who ran a stop sign and left you crippled and in pain for the rest of your life. Forgive? Not a chance.

The Grace of Forgiveness

Or imagine this. Imagine someone asking you to forgive the one who killed your only child. You could never do that. I understand. *You* never could.

But my friend, if you are a Christian, there lives inside of you something called “grace.” It lives in you because God lives in you. And when God came to live in you, He did an amazing thing. He forgave you for killing His Son. Not only did He forgive you, He actually accepted the responsibility for the crime you committed, offered to die in your place, and reached down and saved you from an eternal hell. That is forgiveness.

Now He expects something supernatural from you. He expects you to allow Him to forgive every single person who has ever wronged you or ever will, the way He forgave you. He’ll do “the doing,” but you will have to ask Him to, and you will have to allow Him to. He wants you to be able to forgive that thief who robbed you, that father who deserted you, that husband who left you, that sister who hurt you, that drunk who crippled you, just as God in Christ has forgiven you.

And if you refuse? Beloved, don’t even think about it. The consequences of refusing, the Scripture says, will affect your ability to grow into the likeness of Christ. Your ability to have peace in your heart. Your ability to love other people. Your testimony. Your prayer life. And most of all, your ability to be forgiven by God.

You say, “Those are grave consequences.” Yes, they are. But that is what will happen if you refuse to let the grace of forgiveness flow through your life. Forgiveness means more than refusing to grit your teeth every time you hear that person’s name. Forgiveness means wiping the slate clean. It means sending the offense as far from you as the east is from the west, never to be remembered and never to be repeated again. That’s what God did. And this is what God said:

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

(Ephesians 4:32 NKJV)

Forgiveness is an expression of God’s kindness. It is evidence of His tender heart. And our forgiving others is motivated by one single thing Scripturally; what God for Christ’s sake did for you.

The Grace of Forgiveness

How did Christ forgive you? That is the way we are to forgive others. His forgiveness was complete, permanent, unconditional, and undeserved.

Now stop for a moment and close your eyes. I know that's dangerous, but I'll get most of you back. Think about that one person, if there is one in your life, or more than one, dead or alive that you despise the most; the one who lingers in your thoughts when you pray. It may be someone similar to the ones we mentioned at the beginning of the lesson, or it may be a neighbor who stole your wife, a boss who stole your integrity, or a relative who stole your reputation. Maybe it's someone who lives to make you miserable. Maybe it's a father or mother who abused you or neglected you or never loved you, and you think most of the things that make you dysfunctional are the result of their abuse. Every time someone says that person's name, or the word father or mother, your face tightens, your stomach knots up, and your heart begins to race. Maybe you wish they were dead, or maybe you're glad they are. Have you ever forgiven them? "No, I haven't," you may be muttering under your breath. "And what's more," you say to yourself, "I never will."

You can open your eyes now, if you will. But remember that person or persons, if God brought someone to your mind. It's your choice. You don't have to forgive them. But ask yourself, who are you hurting? You are breaking the heart of God. You are making your own life miserable, and you are building a wall between you and your Savior; a wall that will keep your prayers from being answered, your heart from being filled with joy, and your loved ones from having an example of what it means to see Christ in action.

You say, "I've tried. But, there's just no way to get rid of the bitterness, anger and hurt." I beg to differ. There is no way *for you to do it*, but God has a package of grace waiting for you, and all He wants you to do is stop today, and begin to understand how amazing that grace is, how available it is to you, and for you to understand that when you get desperate enough to want it, it's yours. The only thing that will make you want it is for you to see how grave a sin it is for you not to want it.

Forgiveness. It is the hallmark of a man's relationship with God; and therefore, the trademark of our relationship to

The Grace of Forgiveness

one another. Without forgiveness, we are no different than the unbelieving world. Without it, we are still in our sins, and we are still at odds with everyone who has ever wronged us. Without it, it's "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" as long as we shall live. "Once wronged, always wronged" will be our eternal conviction. And the concepts that fill the counseling centers of this world, of transferring guilt by harboring anger over some experience or some relationship or some person, will continue to crush us. We will go to our graves without experiencing the joy, not only of being forgiven, but of forgiving others.

To accept God's forgiveness while refusing to forgive others is an affront to God's grace. Matthew, chapter 18. You remember this, I'm sure.

Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" [Surely not.]

Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

Therefore [always look for what the therefore is there for] the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.

And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.

But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made.

The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.'

Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!'

So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.'

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

So when his fellow servants saw what had been done,

The Grace of Forgiveness

[underline that, how our failure to forgive affects other believers], they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. [Good move, that's what you do. You tell the Lord.]

Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me.

Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?'

And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.

So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

(Matthew 18:21-35 NKJV)

Tough subject. I want to talk about some issues that surface out of this passage.

1- Man is looking for exceptions to the rule. There are none.

Peter began his sanctimonious question by trying to create a legalistic set of minimum standards so he could satisfy the commandment and still limit the scope of his forgiveness. Have you ever done that? Of course not. I have. Peter said, "Lord, how many times? Let's get this straight. I want to get it down legally. How many times do I have to forgive the same guy? He keeps asking me to forgive him, and then does the same thing again. At what point can I scratch him off my forgiveness list?" God basically said to Peter, "You can scratch him off whenever I withdraw my grace from you, and I never will." Grace is free, undeserved, sovereign, and eternal. It will never cease to be because it is a gift, and it has nothing to do with our worthiness or our response. If you are looking for a way out, stop looking. Forgiveness is an open-ended offer by God.

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

(1 John 1:9 NKJV)

Our forgiveness of others can be no less inclusive than that. Ouch.

2- Jesus then tied His forgiveness to ours. As He so often did, He told them a story. It was a kingdom story, and it was about a king. This king was looking through his ledgers one day and he

The Grace of Forgiveness

came across the name of one of his servants who had dipped into the till until it was dry. He had borrowed 10,000 talents. I don't know how to describe it to you, but that was not a small amount of money. It was a lifetime of earnings. Some commentaries say it was estimated to be worth more than ten million dollars. I don't know. If the borrower is servant to the lender, this guy was servant indeed.

When the king saw what had happened—that his servant was in over his head—he ordered the servant and his whole family to be sold into slavery. He had the right to do that. He had the right to execute him, throw him into prison, and do all sorts of things.

The servant cried out for mercy. He said, “Just give me a little time and I'll pay it all.” Now, if you have ever been in business, you've had that phone call; you've heard that. And I can honestly tell you, this would be like me running up a million-dollar bill on my Master Card and calling the bank and saying, “Just give me one more month. In one more month, I couldn't even pay the interest for that month.

But this king was filled with mercy. This man deserved nothing. The king gave him everything. He not only gave him more time; he forgave the debt entirely. Here was a man who owed an amount equivalent to the national debt one minute, and the next minute, he had no debt at all. Instant forgiveness; a brand-new life. He had been destined for bondage; now he was free. He was facing extinction; now he and his family had a new start, a new beginning, a new life. Doesn't that sound familiar? Doesn't that sound like you and me the day Christ set us free?

Having received that kind of forgiveness, it only stands to reason that he would be so filled with awe at the king's mercy that he would pass it on to the first person who came his way. Right? He was free. He was free to forgive. He had been forgiven.

But a funny thing happened on the way home. He ran into an old buddy of his who owed him about \$17. That's what it translates to. He grabbed the guy by the throat, and began choking him. He said, “Give me my \$17.” Now this is the guy who had just been forgiven millions threatening to kill someone who owed him \$17.

The one who owed the \$17, fell down and pled for mercy just as the king's servant had done a few minutes before. “Please be

The Grace of Forgiveness

patient,” he begged, “I’ll pay it. I’ll pay it.” But the one who had been much forgiven forgot what forgiving was. He grabbed the man, threw him into prison, and said, “You stay there until the debt is paid.”

Some of the other king’s other servants observed it—interesting thought. They went and told the king. That’s what you’re supposed to do. The King will take care of it. Vengeance is His. He had forgiven a lifetime of indebtedness to this man, and immediately he who had received such mercy showed none. And this guy owned him just a little bit!

The king sent for the unforgiving servant and said, “Oh, you wicked man. I forgave you for everything. Could you not forgive your brother a debt that by comparison, was nothing?” So, the king threw him into prison. And Jesus said,

“So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”

(Matthew 18:35 NKJV)

3- Jesus describes the extent and intent of forgiving others.

The extent was to be seventy times seven, unlimited forgiveness. It was to be without boundaries. Jesus said, “If ye forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses.” And it was to be sincere forgiveness, not game playing. He said, “If from your hearts you forgive not everyone.” Man looks on the outward appearance; God looks on the heart. No matter what games you play, if in your heart you still hold that offense against someone, you have not forgiven them, and God knows that.

His flow of mercy into your life and through your life will be blocked to the degree to which you hold in your heart anger, bitterness, or a vengeful spirit toward anyone. Jesus said so in Matthew 6.

Give us this day our daily bread.

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

And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

“For if you forgive [it’s a conditional promise] men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

The Grace of Forgiveness

But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

(Matthew 6:11-15 NKJV)

“And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.

But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.”

(Mark 11:25,26)

I know what you are thinking. *You say that too often. You don't really know what I'm thinking. Well, I think I know what you're thinking. I think you may be thinking what I'm thinking when I'm thinking about this verse. I don't understand it all.* That's fine. But there are some things we do understand. Let me tell you what they are.

1- God's flow of forgiveness into our lives and our ability to receive, appropriate and enjoy that forgiveness on a day-to-day basis, is affected and hindered by our own willingness to forgive others. We know that. He just said it.

2- When we truly forgive others, God is free to pour out His grace upon us and set us free from the burden of our own guilt. He just said that.

3- This passage was written to believers and was a warning against an unforgiving spirit affecting our relationship and fellowship with God. It has nothing to do with salvation.

Those three things we know. More than that, we may not understand until we get to heaven. But what we do know, beloved, is enough that we ought to be rushing to the altar of forgiveness this very moment, and laying aside any semblance of bitterness or anger that we hold on to against that person or situation, or to God, Himself, for allowing it to happen, so Satan cannot hold us in his grasp.

If we look at the issue of forgiveness and the grace of forgiveness, there are several Hebrew and Greek words that are translated forgive, forgiveness, or forgiving. The first Hebrew word is: **נָסָא** {naw-saw'}.

It is used 600 times in the Old Testament. It is literally translated “to bear up and carry away,” “to carry something off.” Sixteen of those times it is translated “forgive,” such as in

The Grace of Forgiveness

Genesis 50:17, where Joseph's father was talking to his brothers. He said:

Thus you shall say to Joseph: "I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you. [They were guilty. No argument.] Now please, forgive [carry away, send-off] the trespass of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

(Genesis 50:17 NKJV)

The second Hebrew word is: כַּפַּר kaphar {kaw-far'}.

It is used 102 times in Scripture; 71 times it is translated "atonement." It literally means "to reconcile," "to pardon," or "to forgive." Its primary definition is "to cover over something so it can no longer be seen." It has to do with our sins being covered over or a pardon being issued as they are buried by some kind of atonement. It speaks of the act of atonement many times in Scripture, such as in Exodus 32:

Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin" [that it be forgiven].

(Exodus 32:30 NKJV)

The third Hebrew word we find used in the Old Testament, is: סָלַח calach {saw-lakh'}.

This word is used 46 times, and 32 of those times it is translated "forgive" or "forgiven." It also means "to pardon." Oftentimes it was used regarding the corporate sins of the nation of Israel, such as in II Chronicles 6.

And may You hear the supplications of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and when You hear, forgive.

(II Chronicles 6:21 NKJV)

As we come into the New Testament, there are two Greek words used in Scripture that blend together, that are translated, "forgive" or "forgiven." The first word of those Greek words is used 146 times in the New Testament. It is translated 47 of those times as "forgive." It means "to send away," "to let go of," or "to abandon." It is the word, ἀφίημι aphiemi {af-ee'-ay-mee}.

It is the word used in the Matthew 18 and Matthew 6 passages we read earlier. It is also translated "to leave" in verses such as:

The Grace of Forgiveness

What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying?

(Matthew 18:12 NKJV)

So, it means to “leave something alone,” “to go away from it,” or “to send it away.”

The second Greek word is: χαρίζομαι *charizomai* {*khar-id'-zom-ahēē*}.

It is a cousin to the word “grace” as you can probably see. It means “to freely forgive,” “to graciously restore,” “graciously give,” or “graciously forgive.” It not only describes an act, but an attitude. You’ll find it used 23 times in the New Testament. It’s the word that was used in Ephesians 4:23, that we shared at the beginning of the lesson. It’s also found in Colossians 2, where we read:

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you [or graciously pardoned you] all trespasses,

Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

(Colossians 2:13,14 NKJV)

Basically, the words come together and paint a picture of a loving God who joyfully, willfully made atonement for our sins. He covered them over; He sent them away. He brought about total reconciliation. And now, beloved, he expects that same process of sending away even so much as a remembrance of them, to be carried over into our lives in forgiving anyone and everyone who has ever seemingly wronged us. Real or unreal, if in our spirits we consider it an offense, it must be forgiven.

The basis for our forgiveness is one of grace. We have been forgiven even though we are undeserving and even though we can’t pay for any part of that atonement. So, there is no transgression that can ever take place between you and anyone else that is not covered by the blood of Christ, or that can ever be held against anyone again.

The reason, I think, that Jesus used such extremes in the parable of the relationship of the two debtors, is because He

The Grace of Forgiveness

wanted us to grasp how meager any act of forgiveness on our part is compared to His forgiving our sins. Think about it. We were totally guilty. We had no hope. We were without merit and always would be. We owed Him much more than the equivalent of ten million dollars. We owed Him everything. And not only did He forgive us, He paid the debt we owed.

Imagine, if you can, someone who has ruined your life, and you not only forgive them so that the anger is gone, you go out and sell everything you have and give the proceeds to that one who ruined your life. As you do so, you know that you will live in poverty and he will live in wealth the rest of his life with what you gave him as an act of forgiveness. Hard to think about, isn't it? That's just a glimpse of what God did for you.

That's what happened on Calvary, and until we grasp that; until we see that, we will continue to harbor resentment and bitterness toward others, even toward God, Himself, over circumstances, that in the light of Calvary, might be incidental. You say, "Boy, this wasn't incidental in my life." No, it wasn't. But think about it. In many cases God uses that very rejection, that very hurt, that very abuse, that very catastrophe to bring you to a place of knowing you have need of Him. Can you get angry with God or bitter over something He actually used to bring you to eternal life? In the light of His forgiveness, the most heinous of offenses against us is only a \$17 crime compared to the Cross. How dare we fail to forgive anyone for anything. That's what Jesus just said.

Let's define forgiveness for those of you who are still here; and I appreciate the two of you staying. For the sake of those on tape, I am joking. Let's define forgiveness. We know this much from looking at these words, and then we will apply the principles to forgiving others. We know that when God forgives us:

1- Our sins are buried, covered, and sent away. They are not hidden anywhere where they can be recovered. They are non-accessible. The Scripture says they are as far as the east is from the west. And folks, that is as far as it gets. That's what we are to do with every and any offense that anyone has ever committed against us.

2- It is an act of divine choice. God is omniscient. He knows

The Grace of Forgiveness

the beginning from the end, the future before it happens, and the past as though it is today. Therefore, the only way God can forget anything is to choose to. The Scripture says they are never to be remembered anymore. It's a choice.

3- It is also an act of grace. Literally defined, forgiveness is the gracious sending away of offenses.

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace;

(Ephesians 1:7 NKJV)

4- It is a permanent act. It cannot ever be rescinded. It has been done by divine decree; it's been recorded in God's Word as absolute. The Scripture says, therefore, what can separate us from the love of God? Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. And because the word of God abides forever, that decree cannot change.

Based on that, let's define forgiveness: an act of grace whereby you release, once and for all, and send away forever, every and any offense that exists between you and someone else just as God in Christ has forgiven you. And that's with the knowledge, beloved, that your failure to do so will affect God's future ability to forgive you. Hard stuff, I know. Remember the story of the woman taken in adultery?

Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst,

They said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act.

Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?"

This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear. [I love that phrase. You could spend a week on that phrase—as though He heard them not.]

So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first."

(John 8:3-7 NKJV)

The issue isn't the gravity of the other person's sin in your eyes. You say, "You'll never believe what that person did to me." Beloved, that isn't the issue. The issue is, that only one who has never sinned has the right to cast the stone. Even if that person

The Grace of Forgiveness

is guilty and even if that sin is inconceivable from a human perspective, it is not as grievous as killing the Son of God. Unless you can come to God as sinless, you have no right to come to God and claim the right to harbor a vengeful spirit.

“Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.

(Romans 12:19 NKJV)

The problem is, once again we come to the inescapable conclusion that there are those of us trying to live this Christian life, and for years—and for many of us it’s been years and years and years—there has remained in our hearts, secret thoughts, a storehouse of unforgiveness, little pieces of bitterness that we have spiritualized and covered over with acceptable behavior. But if our secret thoughts about that person or that incident, were to be magnified and broadcast, they would bring us and the name of Christ great shame.

Why is it we cannot seem to have victory? It’s an issue of grace. Forgiveness is an act of the grace of God. The only way God could forgive us was by grace. We did not deserve it, didn’t appreciate it, couldn’t earn it, can’t repay it. It was a gift from the heart of God to man.

And that’s the only way you can forgive that father who abandoned you, that wife or husband who was unfaithful, that drunk whose carelessness ruined your life, that person who murdered your loved one. They could never, you surmise, deserve forgiveness. They probably wouldn’t appreciate it. They surely couldn’t earn it. They could never repay it.

The same grace that cleared the ledger on your account in heaven, now flows down from heaven and into your heart through the Holy Spirit. When you are willing to ask for it and not impede its flow, you can actually forgive others with the same grace God used to forgive you.

Now, let’s get practical. How can we put into practice the forgiving grace of God on a daily basis. Let me give you a few steps.

1- Focus on what Jesus did for you at Calvary. I don’t believe it’s possible otherwise. Before you can access the grace of God to forgive others, you must go back to the Cross and see the majesty of what He did for you. We take it for granted. We forget

The Grace of Forgiveness

what life would be like had He not forgiven all our sins. We forget what death would be like had He not forgiven all our sins. We must take an hour or a day, whatever it takes, and go back and revisit Calvary. We must stand at the foot of that Cross and let our hearts break as the Sinless One takes our sins, yours and mine, and watch the agony as He is separated from the Father by those sins. Watch the veil as it is torn in two. See the way into the presence of the Father made real by His forgiving death.

2- We need to see that our unforgiving spirit is a greater offense than any sin anyone has ever committed against us.

I say that for four reasons:

a- It is our responsibility. We can't be responsible for what that other person did, but we *are* responsible for whether or not we forgive them.

b- What they did to you has been paid for in full at Calvary. You accepted full payment when you accepted Christ. Your rights to right treatment never existed and when God freed you of your sins, He took total responsibility for repaying all of the debts owed to you. How He repays them is His business. That you accept it is yours.

c- Your failure to forgive now becomes a matter of choice. And because the Word is true, you are willingly choosing to limit God's forgiveness of you, and choosing to quench the Spirit of God in your life.

d- You are willingly becoming a stumbling block to the unbelieving world who is looking to see what Jesus is like. And you are willingly becoming a stumbling block to other Christians who will run to their King and say, "Did you see what he did?" Failing to forgive is a far greater sin than any sin anyone has ever committed against you. You think about it. The stakes are high.

3- Remember the wonderful concept of turning the curse into a blessing. Every time Satan resurrects that anger or whispers in your ear, "Do you remember what she did to you? Do you remember what he said? Do you remember what has happened in your life because of that person?" you take it and use it as an opportunity to go to God and ask Him if you have offended anyone else. Satan hates that! He hates it. Use the very tool Satan is trying to use to destroy your walk with God, and turn it into a

The Grace of Forgiveness

tool to keep close accounts with God. Meditate on these verses:

Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there rememberest that your brother has something against you,

Leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.
(Matthew 5:23,24 NKJV)

The emphasis now is on whether or not you have offended anyone else, not if anyone has offended you. If you are offended, you give it to God and thank Him that vengeance is His; He will repay. You return love for hate, joy for bitterness, grace for anger. The rest is up to God. But you can use the very needle Satan uses to quicken your anger, to quicken your sensitivity instead to sin. Satan hates that.

4- Begin to meditate on Scripture every time you are tempted to have an unforgiving spirit. Ephesians 4:32, Matthew 18, Matthew 6. Put a string of verses together and make them into a praise song to God. Let the Word of God dwell in you richly. Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, in ever increasing splendor, from one degree of glory to another.

5- Finally, pray often and sincerely, asking specifically for the grace of forgiveness. If you keep on asking the Scripture says, you will receive. Beloved, that kind of forgiveness is not natural, so you need grace. Do you remember what grace is? Grace is the ability to do supernaturally what you cannot do naturally. So, you have to ask for it, and then be willing to accept it on God's terms. Let me remind you, God's terms may well be, that person you forgive may never seem to appreciate it, and they may continue to hate you, even though you expected them to fall on their face in awe at how spiritual you have become. God is responsible for them. You are responsible for you.

Let me tell you what will happen. The power will return to your life. The freedom will be restored in your life. You will have instant, awesome forgiveness when you confess your sins. Your relationship with God will have seen a huge boulder moved, and the sunlight of the Son's light will fill your heart with a kind of cleanliness, and the anger and bitterness will be gone.

It's called the grace of forgiveness. It's a gift from a forgiving God that sets you free and sets Him free to be Himself in you. And only God in you can make it happen. But He can do it. He

The Grace of Forgiveness

can actually fill your heart with an incredible kind of love for that very person you have hated all of your life. He can fill you with a desire to pray for them, to bless them and to do good to them. He can cause you, like Joseph, to see victory come from trauma, and joy from defeat. Like Joseph, you can say, “He meant evil unto me, but God meant it unto good” (Genesis 50:20).

Once you begin to let God’s forgiving spirit flow through your life, your eyes will be opened, and you will see how God used even that tragedy, even that misunderstanding, even maybe your anger which was not of Him, to create in you a need you never would have had, and thus to find your strength where you never would have found it—in God.

The Grace of Forgiveness

Oh, the grace of forgiveness;
It is strictly a gift from above.
Only God’s Holy Spirit
Can replace hatred with love.

Only the power of His mighty grace
Taking total control,
Can turn an angry, bitter heart
Into a gracious soul.

But how can we not desire it?
How can we not be set free?
How can we not cry out, “Oh, God,
Look what you did for me?”

And seeing the depth of what He did
As He died on Calvary’s hill,
How can we let any offense
Linger in our hearts, still?

Oh, beloved, it must not be!
If we are to honor the Son,
And He has completely forgiven us,
Must we not forgive every one?

“Forgive us our sins,” we daily pray,
“Lord, as long as we shall live.”
May we pray “Oh, God forgive me,
But only as I forgive.”

The Grace of Forgiveness

Let's pray.

Our Father and our God, You know our hearts. And you know, Father, there are many who are struggling even this moment perhaps, with the absence of a forgiving spirit; with the inability to turn loose incidents, relationships or traumas.

We pray, Father, that Your sweet, sweet Spirit would begin to open our eyes that we might behold the grace that is ours in Jesus Christ. And having seen and understood that grace, to claim it for our own and have the forgiveness that You have given to us, flow through us and into the lives of people who perhaps we have not been able to forgive for years and years. Set us free, we pray.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

A Challenge to Further Study

1- Write out Matthew 18:21-35 in your own words, putting it in the setting of today's society. Look up the key words as you go. If you like to write, write a short story, using this account as a backdrop. What lessons did you learn from this story?

2- What was Peter's problem? Do you ever struggle with forgiveness? With forgiving the same person over and over? How do you think God feels when you fail in the same area again and again? Do you take I John 1:9 for granted, and then refuse to apply it to those who sin against you? Why do we do that?

3- What do you think Jesus meant when He said that "Likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."?

4- Reread the Lord's prayer and explain verses 14 and 15.

The Grace of Forgiveness

A Challenge to Further Application

1- Is there someone or some ones who have so offended you that the last thing on your mind is forgiving them? Do they sometimes come to mind when you are praying? Why do you think that is? Does your unwillingness to forgive them from the heart have an effect on how God responds to your pleas for forgiveness? How do you know?

2- Do you honestly see your failure to forgive as a greater sin than whatever offense that person might have caused you? Ask God to make it plain to you. Ask Him to forgive you for holding a grudge against or having animosity towards anyone.

3- Try turning the curse into a blessing. (Page 14) Every time Satan tempts you to focus on that person or those people who have offended you, use it as a time to ask God to bring to mind those whom you might have offended instead. Honor Matthew 5:23,24 and go immediately and ask their forgiveness.

4- Ask God for the grace to forgive. As you do, ask Him for the faith to believe that He will give it to you. He will.

A Challenge to Scripture Memory

Memorize Ephesians 4:32

dtm DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230
210-226-0000 or 1-800-375-7778

www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org • © Russell Kelfer

(08.16.22.dvd)