

Matthew 18:21-35 "Forgiveness"

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[0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Well, good morning. Happy Memorial Day weekend, especially in a town like this where so many serve. Those of you who may be grieving through the Memorial Day or someone that has made the ultimate sacrifice, I want to say thank you. Thank you for those of you who serve to give us the opportunity to do something like preach in a free country.

Memorial Day is the time of year where things kind of end as well in school, right? We've got a lot of graduations going on. We've got high school. We've got kindergarten. We've got kindergarten graduations that look like college graduations.

And we have college kids coming back home and figuring out what they're going to do with their life. And we are so happy to have all of you here, and I hope you feel welcome this morning. But it's also a time where we work on our house, isn't it?

About a year ago, my wife noticed that we had a small water stain on our ceiling. So I went to the attic. I located it. I saw that it was dry above the ceiling there.

[1 : 1 5] And then I narrowed it down to the gutter that was outside that part of the house. So one Sunday, I decided to get up on the roof and check out the gutter to see if it was backed up, you know, and causing water to come in right there.

So I get my wife to hold the ladder, and I get up there. When I'm about halfway up the roof, I realize that this is a very steep pitch. This is steeper than any roof I've ever been on in my life.

And I'm deathly afraid of heights. Jumping out of an airplane does not conquer that height. I've done it. It does not work. It's still there. But the distance between me and the ladder, which, you know, the ladder's down here, it was so high.

And I had the choice of figuring out how to get back down to that because it was not going any higher. But if I had just slid, my feet would have hit, and I would have flown off face first off the roof, which is a two-story house.

And I didn't want to do that. So I was sitting there stuck thinking, how am I going to keep myself from flying off here? And how can I get back down to that ladder with the least amount of pain?

[2 : 2 0] So my wife, Anna Catherine, she was freaking out a little bit. And she's saying things like, I need to call a man to help you, Derek. And I said, well, I am a man.

I think. Last time I checked, she said, well, I need someone else here to help. So I literally sat there a minute. I prayed. I was stuck. I was shaking a little bit. Then after a while, I just kind of chilled out.

Neighbors start walking by. There's a walking path. I was exposed to the neighbors there. I'm just sitting there. Hey, what are you doing, Derek? Well, I'm just trying to figure out how not to break my neck. Just go on. And this is very embarrassing, right?

And so I decided the best way down was to slide on my side. And I did. And just let my flesh rip. And that to keep me from getting too much hurt.

That hurt was better than the greater hurt. And that's what I did. And I can laugh about that now. My leg and my arm, though, this whole side of my body were bleeding and raw. And it hurt bad.

[3 : 18] But why do I tell that story? Well, much like on that roof, the words of Scripture expose us. And sometimes they make us feel very stuck. Much like my leg and my arm, it shows us where our lives are raw and our souls are bleeding.

It shows us the true pathway to safety. But there's always a risk involved. And today, these words that we read are ultimately going to be about forgiveness, one of the greatest risks.

Where we risk our reputation. We risk our pride. We risk our relationships of comfort. But for what? And it's for authentic life, I do believe.

These words were written by Matthew that we're going to read this morning. Words of Jesus. He's speaking to his disciple, Peter. Who's just asked a very targeted question. How many times do I actually have to forgive someone who keeps hurting me?

And remember, like all of us, he's struggling to understand exactly what the kingdom of God is. That kingdom that turns this world upside down. When really, it's our perspective that needs to be turned right side up.

[4 : 26] And that only happens when we encounter the word of God. So when we talk about forgiveness this morning, here's the term I mean when I say forgiveness. The freeing of a person from guilt. The freeing of a person from consequences, including punishment.

It's usually an act of favor, compassion, or love with the aim of restoring a relationship that's been broken. Okay? There are so many different ways to discuss forgiveness.

It could be from the practical, here's how you do it, to the microscopic analysis of what is it. This morning, I want us to swim in the waters of the core, the seed, the root, the being of what is forgiveness.

And today's parable teaches us that true forgiveness at its core is authentic, never-ending, and transformational. First, true forgiveness is authentic.

And actually, I'm going to stop and pray just for a second. I'd like to do that if you don't mind. Lord, I stand here as sinner, just like everyone in this room, before you, only accessing your throne of grace by the blood of Jesus.

[5 : 31] And I pray right now you would speak your word by your spirit through me. You would touch the hearts of the people here where they need to be touched. And Father, that you would mend our souls together in a way that only you can.

Thank you for your word, and thank you for the truth, Jesus, that you are alive. It's in your name I pray. Amen. So first, true forgiveness is authentic. You can't give what you don't have.

And so before we jump into just reading the parable, I think it's important to focus on the foundation of authenticity of a relationship first. Like, have you ever been in an interaction with somebody?

It starts off one way. And it ends up another. It seems like one thing at the start, and by the end of it, it's a completely different thing. Here's an example.

I had one of these interactions on Facebook. So this guy texted me. I thought he was a friend of mine from D.C. because he had a flag behind his profile picture. But then after I accepted it, I get this text.

[6 : 30] I'm the one in blue. How are you doing today? Doing well, thanks. You? I'm fine. Are you female or male? How do we know each other again? What do you mean?

You friended me. I said, oin. Don't hate. You friended me, oin. Facebook. But how do we actually know each other? Well, I'm just searching for a friend on mine, and I cross your beautiful face, and I add you as my friend so that we'll can know more about ourself here in Facebook.

Are you female or male? I'm out. Creep on somewhere else. Okay. Are you female? So that Facebook ends up being a complete waste of my time, right?

It's not authentic. That is not an authentic relationship, but it even masquerades under the term friend. Have you ever thought that sometimes that's how we practice forgiveness?

Perhaps we call forgiveness something that really forgiveness is not at all, and it's just masquerading as such. Many times we call forgiveness, when something we call forgiveness is just a way for us to really manage somebody else's opinion of us.

[7 : 40] When true forgiveness is never possible, if all we're going to do is use that word as a means to manage your opinion of me or you. And it goes something like this. Somebody offends you, and the Christian thing to do is to quickly forgive, because we've heard that in sermons.

But in reality, we're so quick to say, no, no, no, no, I'll forgive you. You've got to say forgiveness, son. Say forgiveness right now. Go to forgiveness. Right? That we don't sometimes take the time and the work necessary for us to even really offer anything that resembles forgiveness.

Because we just have this knee-jerk forgiveness or lip service. And those are not the bricks used to build the kingdom of God. He calls us to something that's authentic. And authenticity is of the heart.

And it requires time. It requires thought. It requires the ability to point the finger right back at our own hearts first. And in the Bible, Will said so great last week when he defined the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God is wherever Yahweh is worshipped, trusted, and obeyed. Where his reign is active and people submit to him as king. So we as a church seek to see his kingdom advance in our hearts and our lives here and everywhere.

[8 : 51] People more and more trusting and following the king. And it's also used to talk about eternity when you hear that word. When the rule of King Jesus will be fully, finally established in the new heavens and the new earth.

And in the kingdom of God, true forgiveness is authentic. But you can't give what you don't have. When I say it's authentic, I mean it's original. It looks different. It sparkles a bit. It catches your eye because it's so completely opposite from the way that our world functions.

But it's exactly how the kingdom of God functions. And it only functions this way because it's made up of people who have first received something authentic. If we look at verse 21 here.

Then Peter came up and said to him, Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times? Guys, this is the beginning and I think the makings of an authentic relationship.

Authenticity, what we all long for in our relationships with each other. The safest people are those that are real with us, right? That have a heart of love. That have the real conversations with us.

[10 : 04] Those are the relationships that take time. And the most important relationship that you'll ever have is the one between you and God. That relationship is going to then become the foundation of all other relationships.

And a relationship with God is built on the foundation of authentic forgiveness first. That forgiveness is found, though, through a relationship of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

You've heard about these things. You can't give what you don't have, though. And in verse 21 here, that relationship portrayed between Peter and Jesus is authentic. Notice it's based on trust, safety, love.

Peter clearly has the freedom to be real. He asks a very tough question. And Jesus doesn't respond by shaming him, does he? Is that the sort of relationship that you have with Jesus?

Or do you perform for him and fear his judgment all the time? Do you stay busy doing Christian things all the time so much that you don't have time to really spend with him?

[11 : 07] Are you so busy with life that you don't know how to even think about a relationship with Jesus right now? Or do you struggle with believing that his words have any significance at all in this day and age?

None of those descriptions I just said are depicting the sort of relationship with Jesus that's healthy or biblical or that he wants with you. Jesus is not burdensome.

His yoke is easy, he says. He promises rest for your soul. He promises life. He promises purpose. He promises meaning. And in this passage between Peter and Jesus, we see that interaction.

It's free. Free to take questions. It's free to take burdens. It's free to take frustrations. And then it's reciprocated with truth, guidance, and words of life from Jesus.

Where differences are welcomed. Where true unity is possible. It reminds me of Hebrews 4. That we can always approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and find help in our time of need.

[12 : 07] Jesus is our king. We owe him due honor. But he's a king who's our brother. That's what faith does. It transforms. Which we'll get to later.

So does forgiveness. Jesus has never been a phony. He doesn't want a relationship with you that is phony. In fact, he wants all of your heart so that he can recreate your heart.

And allow you to be a partner in renovating the earth. One relationship at a time. Renovating the world with authenticity. Don't run from these types of relationships with people.

And don't give up on this type of relationship with Jesus if you're struggling with it. In fact, go the extra mile to create them with the people in your life. Martin Luther said it this way.

After faith in Christ, loving and forgiving others should be our primary concern. If we are unwilling to forgive, we can be certain that we won't be forgiven ourselves.

[13 : 04] Anne Lamott said this way. Not forgiving is like drinking rat poison and then waiting for the rat to die. Now, you can't give what you don't have. Are you longing for more than just that passerby conversation with God?

Maybe it starts by revisiting your relationship with God today. And this is a safe place where you can do that. And these are people that you can do that with.

True forgiveness is authentic. True forgiveness is also never ending. It goes on and on and on. And in Matthew 18, 21 through 35, we'll jump into the parable now.

Jesus is telling us a story also known as a parable. And parables are fictional stories or illustrations in language that's easy to understand. And they're used to communicate deep concepts.

And I love how even Jesus' fiction or parables have factual outcomes. He's the master teacher. And this parable teaches us about what true forgiveness looks like.

[14 : 10] So, let's take a moment to read these verses. I'll read them for us. Then Peter came up and said to him, Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times?

Jesus said to him, I do not say to you seven times, but 77 times. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. And when he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him 10,000 talents.

And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold with his wife and children and all that he had and payment to be made. So, the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, have patience with me and I will pay you everything.

And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him 100 denarii.

And seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, pay what you owe. So, his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, have patience with me and I will pay you. He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.

[15 : 16] When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed. And they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.

And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you? And in anger, his master delivered him to the jailers until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

Well, that's a lot. And I'm going to restate kind of what's going on because it's a lot of information and getting the characters and the story and the plot.

And in this parable, there's a king who has many servants. One of them owes a lot of money. It said 10,000 talents. Now, one talent was the equivalent of 20 years' salary.

So, I've heard it said that in this particular account, that's like \$7 million in today's money that he owed. So, he owes this king \$7 million. And he doesn't have it. So, what happens?

[16 : 21] The king orders for him to be sold and all that he has, including his family, in order to pay that debt. So, the servant falls on his knees and says, please give me some time. I'll get you the money.

And then the king has mercy on him. Why? Because he has pity for him in the situation. And because he pleaded. So, he understands why he doesn't have the money.

And rather than require him to get the money, he says, don't worry about it. You're free to go. And in that sense, he's forgiven the debt. Well, then later, that same servant goes out. He has another servant under him who owes him 100 denarii.

That's about 100 days' worth of wages. So, if we're using the \$7 million figure, then he owes about \$100,000. So, these workers have high-paying jobs.

It's easy to overlook that. What happens? The servant who owes \$100,000 pleads for mercy in the same way that his master, who was forgiven the \$7 million debt that morning, had pleaded for mercy.

[17 : 18] But instead of forgiving his debt, which was so much less, right? \$100,000 as opposed to \$7 million, he grabs him by the neck, chokes him, and then throws him in prison. Well, the king finds out, calls him back in, and says, you wicked servant, I forgave you, and you should have forgiven your servant.

So, he threw him in jail until he could get the money. And if you read between the lines, he's never going to get out of jail because he can't pay the money from jail. So, he's going to pay it through his life in prison.

But before that story was even told, did you catch what happened? Jesus had just finished teaching about forgiveness. Peter walks up to him and says, hey, about that forgiveness stuff.

Let's say I want to do that thing. I want to forgive my brother. How many times do I actually have to do that? Like, seven times? It's as if he's saying, how many times do I have to show favor to people who persecute me, cause me harm, yet ask for forgiveness?

Because it doesn't seem very beneficial for me, Jesus. And Jesus looks at him and answers 77 times. That's his way of saying, there is no limit to the amount of times that you should forgive those who do you wrong, if they're willing to ask.

[18 : 35] Because true forgiveness is never ending. It goes on and on and on. And there is no limit to the amount of times that God will forgive you if you're willing to ask.

Willing to ask is what we call repentance. Acknowledging our need of a Savior. Confessing our sadness over trying to do this life alone, apart from him. Asking for relationship repair from him.

To heal that broken relationship. To give it, though, we've got to remember over and over who we've given it to. And to be able to give it, we have to receive it. And if we've truly received that gift of forgiveness, we realize that its results are forever.

It's never ending. And only for that reason, we're able to give it over and over again. And to do that, though, you've got to remember it over and over again. And Jesus promises to forgive all your sins, past, present, and future.

Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, as the Lord's Prayer says. Think of a ticking second hand on a clock. I work out at the gym, and I do the plank. And I see that second hand, and it's painful.

[19 : 42] You're waiting on it to go around for 30 seconds. Well, every time that clock ticks, you have to think about the people you've forgiven and remember them. It's not this one-time thing that then you move on with your life.

It's a one-time thing with ongoing consequences. Ongoing life change, if you're a better way of saying it. You ever wonder why we're called sheep in the Bible? Because sheep are some of the most forgetful creatures on earth.

So Jesus says 77 times, Peter, but we want our metrics, don't we? Just like Peter. Tell me how many times. Tell me my morality checkbox so that I know that I'm making progress in my Christian life, that I'm managing like a portfolio, Jesus.

I need to know that. Jesus flips the script. He turns it around, doesn't he? And he's reminding us that God wants surrender. He wants true repentance. It's less about performance, which is religion, which is what most of the world hates about church.

And it's more about surrender, which is about faith, a change of heart and an acceptance of what someone else has done. And the difference between Christianity and every other religion is the difference between two words, doing and done.

[20 : 52] In Christianity, all has been done on your behalf. I think if you asked an apple tree what it worries about the most in an orchard, what do you think it'd say? How good its fruit looks and tastes so that it's everyone's favorite tree in the orchard, and then it'll have a long life, unlike the trees that don't produce fruit, that are uprooted and thrown out and burnt.

But in reality, that apple tree should be less concerned about its fruit and be most concerned about water. Because without roots in the right places, there's never going to be any fruit.

And without roots in the right nourishment, we're going to turn forgiveness into performance just like Peter was doing. And this is precisely what Jesus is warning us against.

The servant begs for mercy. He receives mercy. Then he creates the situation for someone else that he's just been freed from. And rather than forgiving his servant, he leaves unchanged. His roots weren't in the right places.

His forgiveness was fake, and it was about performance. He received it just to get something for himself. And I fear many times that we treat forgiveness in the church like a business transaction instead of a life-altering relational practice that leads to transformation.

[22 : 07] And I don't know. Maybe that's why so many people in churches are afraid to be themselves. It reminds me of James 1.24. I think we've got that verse.

If anyone's a hearer of the word and not a doer, he's like a man who looks intently at his natural face in the mirror, for he looks at himself and he goes away. At once he forgets what he was like.

I was visiting with a counselor a few years ago by the name of Andy Garner, and we were discussing something called generational sin. For example, if somebody grows up in an environment where they've been abused or in a home that was filled with anger or pessimism, chances are much higher that they're going to create that environment for someone else unless something happens.

And he said that the only way for that cycle to change generationally in families, he's seen it over and over, is when someone says, I don't want to do this or be this way anymore. But for that to truly happen, it requires a power outside of that person to see it accomplished because they are not strong enough to do that on their own.

Well, Jesus is that difference for us. He is that well. He is that nourishment that we must rest the roots of our souls in.

[23 : 21] He's providing himself, his people, and his church as the family of support to restore a decaying us in a decaying world. And when we live authentically, the results are never-ending.

And we become like light, shining forgiveness in the darkness of this performance world. He offers us forgiveness that we can never attain on our own so that we can stop and say, I'm not going to continue the cycle of this destruction anymore that's left because of sin.

I'm going to live as an ambassador of Christ. I'm going to surrender to Jesus, which is about identity. It's about letting go of ourselves and completely trusting the power of another, trusting one truth above all others.

Jesus says he is the truth. Are we here today accepting the forgiveness of God, yet holding others in debt to us? That's prison, and it gets deeper.

Or are we surrendering to the one who gives it? Corrie ten Boom says, Forgiveness is like setting a prisoner free, only to realize that the prisoner is you. It's freedom from our prisons forever.

[24 : 31] We have to talk about the prison. The word calls me to talk about the prison. It's not just simply us feeling bad and being angry. There's a temporal prison, meaning in this time zone, in this time frame, in our life, space, and time.

There's also an eternal prison. So if you don't forgive someone, you are going to get, as Bruce Hornsby says, you keep carrying that anger, it'll eat you up inside. And true forgiveness is letting you out of that prison, but Jesus here is talking about something much larger than that.

He's talking about hell. He's talking about eternal punishment. He calls it the lake of fire. If we haven't received the forgiveness of God through faith in our King, we remain in that prison forever.

In that way, we've chosen to pay our own debt through eternal life in prison. That's why it is so important to understand. Jesus offers you the forgiveness of every debt that you could ever owe God that is left by sin in this world.

And that freedom is the foundation for you to forgive the debt of others. And living that truth will transform not only you, but it will transform the world around you. That's why true forgiveness is transformational.

[25 : 48] It changes us and the world around us. And in this parable, Jesus tells us the story of a servant who walks away completely unchanged.

And in fact, he does the opposite of what he's supposed to. In doing so, he becomes a hypocrite. We all say that we hate hypocrites. Hypocrites are stage actors. That's what that meant in the Bible terms.

And in the case of forgiveness, and in this parable, hypocrisy looks like this. We're willing to accept something for ourselves and our own selfish gain, but we're not going to give it to someone else if it costs something of us.

That's performance. That is man-centered religion. That's a mere business transaction. But Jesus calls us to surrender. And he turns the tables on us, and he teaches us here about serious forgiveness.

If we don't give it, do we really have it? That's the question that he causes us to ask ourselves today. Have we accepted the forgiveness of God?

[26 : 46] If we have, it is transformational. It will show up in our lives, in our thoughts, and how we treat others, but it starts with the root. It doesn't start with the external fruit.

I don't know about you, but when I'm hurting, the last person I want to talk to is somebody that doesn't understand hurt. The person who gives me a list of things to do when I hurt, and actually tells me why I'm probably hurting in the first place immediately while I'm hurting.

That's like the equivalent of going to a child who's just skinned his knee and saying, think of all the other people with skinned knees you're going to be able to help while he's crying. It is not helpful in that moment. I just want to cry and be held.

Yes, I am the female in our relationship, and I love that about women. You bring out the truth in life many times, and there's some of us men who are also tender like that.

So, I don't know about you, but when I'm hurting, that's what I want. And that's because God's wired all of us for empathy. To quote Brad Griffin, he's author of a book called Growing Young, empathy is feeling with others.

[27 : 52] It's sitting on the curb of somebody else's life, journeying with them, celebrating their dreams, grieving alongside them in their despair. And through Jesus, God empathizes with us, doesn't he?

This is one of the reasons that Jesus wept before he raised Lazarus from the dead. We have a great high priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses. When we've experienced mercy and forgiveness, then we're able to empathize with others who need forgiveness from us.

We can identify those that are hurting, and we can surrender to Jesus in those moments as we offer them his love through offering our forgiveness. forgiveness. It's countercultural to live that way, and it costs something.

It's a risk. But the results of living this way are transformational, because true forgiveness is transformational. It changes us and the world around us. I've not really shared this story with anyone, but I'll share it today.

About, I guess it's probably 15 years ago, there was someone who worked for me, and they left, they were doing a really, they were struggling with some things, and they ended up leaving staff.

[28 : 55] And they blamed me for a lot of stuff, including went to superiors and stuff like that. It was very painful. Well, fast forward, like 15 years later, I'm in a situation where I'm experiencing some of the things they said that they experienced.

And I thought to myself, you know, I didn't really cause that for this person, but if they're experiencing 1% of even what I'm experiencing 100% of now, I owe them a phone call.

But I didn't want to do it, right, because it costs something. And I called them after I was in a spin class. My wife teaches spin, and there was this song where the streets have no name by U2, and I was just praying.

Whatever reason, God just hit me in the face, and he said, you need to call that person. You need to call them when you get out of this class. And I'm like, no. Absolutely not.

And he's like, you're in prison. Don't you want to be free? And so I get out. I even had to text someone to get their number. Miraculously right. They always text right back.

[30 : 04] I'm like, oh, they won't get back with me. Bam, they get the number right back to me. I call this person, and they couldn't talk. I left them a message. Hey, no, we hadn't talked to Trevor.

I need to talk to you about something. You can be called. This is awkward, right? They call me back later that day, and I said, hey, this may not make any sense, but I owe you an apology.

I'm not sure what I did, and I definitely didn't try to cause harm to you, but I think I did, and I'm sorry. I need to ask your forgiveness. And it was just silence on the other end of the phone. And then I hear this voice that says, thank you.

You have done the thing that I've wanted to do for 10 years, for 10 or 15 years, but haven't been able to do. And every time I take communion at church, I think about how we're unreconciled.

And then we talked. We caught up. I said, it's like we've pushed reset on the Nintendo. The game is now set. You know, it's a new game. We couldn't even remember what we did to each other, but we knew that we needed to have that discussion.

[31 : 06] And so then I get this text this last year. Hey, thanks for your call last Easter. I'm grateful for it often. Hope you're all doing well and happy Easter.

You as well. I'm grateful for you. That's their name. And I'm thankful for forgiveness. I hope you're well and happy Easter to you. Loving Christ, Eric. Agreed. Thanks so much and loving Christ to you and your family. That's a year later.

You know, I didn't talk anymore with them, but in that moment, who do you think felt more free? It was me. I walked out of that temporal prison only in the strength of Christ, who's freed me from my eternal prison, and he's now renovating the world through me and through you, one relationship at a time.

Christ bought us by paying for us, by paying our debt, to set us free. And when we experience true forgiveness, only then are we able to give it. Religion says the problem's other people.

The ability to change comes from within. I need a God who's going to make my life pain-free, give me blessings all the time, and fulfill my desires. And the person who needs to be in charge is me. Relationships, surrender, repentance, forgiveness says this.

[32 : 15] The problem is me. The ability to change has to come from the outside. I need grace. I need a God who will deliver me from my own sinful desires that I am incapable of escaping on my own.

And only God can be in charge of this. There's a movie that illustrates surrender and acceptance really well.

It's called Forrest Gump, if you haven't seen it. And there's this character named Lieutenant Dan. And Lieutenant Dan loses his legs in Vietnam. And then he goes on this journey of anger and trying to find himself.

And he meets this guy, Forrest Gump, who just loves him, just in a sweet, sweet way. And Lieutenant Dan eventually ends up, right after this huge storm, on this boat where he's sailing.

He's yelling at God. He's saying, bring it on. And something happens after that moment where he sees a peace. And I'm going to show you a clip of that rather than just talk about it. Forrest, I never thanked you for saving my life.

[33 : 25] I never thanked you for saving my life. He never actually said so.

But I think he made his peace with God. I love that clip. A life transformed from anger and questioning and pain to swimming in the sunset with no legs and a smile on his face.

Forgiveness changes us and the world around us. And ultimately, this parable is about us as we relate to God. God is that king. We are the servants.

He's our creator. We are his creatures. And what he's telling us is that he forgives us not because of what we're doing or because of what we've done, but because of his compassion. And he understands where you are.

He understands what you've been through. And you cannot make up the debt that you owe. Somebody said to me this past week, who's richer? Someone who has a million bucks in their pocket and has \$999,000 in debt or someone with \$5,000 to their name and no debt to speak of.

[34 : 55] My credit card says freedom right here on it. I'm paying for this freedom. Is that what forgiveness is like for you?

Is this your relationship with God? Paying that monthly fee to get something that says freedom on it, which is no freedom at all. Many times the problem for us is that we're comfortable in our own prisons.

Oftentimes our comforts blind us and we replace our contentment in Christ with our own self-made comforts. While in the process forgetting Jesus and salvation. Ignorance is bliss, some say, but this is something that God promises we cannot ignore.

Forgiveness is freedom forever. Accepting the debt that's been paid in your behalf but not being forgiven is prison forever in eternity. Christ refers to that as Gehenna, the second death in the lake of fire.

And we're very awake when we are there. But God is a God of compassion and does not wish for you to be there. 2 Peter 3.9 says, The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

[36 : 07] And God is the only one who can pay that debt. He is the only one who has the keys to unlock that prison cell. And that payment happened on the cross. That key is faith.

It's accepting His forgiveness as a free gift. A gift that you will give to others so that you can have all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you.

So that we can be free to be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven us. He is before all things. In Him, all things hold together.

In Him, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through Him to reconcile Himself. All things, whether on earth, in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.

And if Christ is in you, although your body is dead because of sin, your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the spirit of Him who raised Jesus Christ from the dead dwells in you, then He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

[37 : 13] Christ offers us a swim in the sunset of forgiveness and the opportunity to teach others to swim with us as we live authentically.

Has He set you free from that prison? If you have never asked God for forgiveness, hear Him today. He knows where you are.

He looks on you with compassion. And He has paid your debt completely. He offers you freedom and salvation from that prison.

And it's transformational. If you're here and you have, ask for forgiveness. Hear Him today. He knows how hard it is to forgive. Run to Him.

Cling to Him for that power first before you try to give it to that other person. True forgiveness is authentic. You can't give what you don't have. True forgiveness is never ending.

[38 : 12] It goes on and on and on. And true forgiveness is transformational. It changes us and the world around us. And as Kirk Franklin says in one of my favorite gospel songs, truth can hurt you or truth can change you.

What will truth do to you? Let's pray. Father, thank You for Your truth. And I pray that everyone in here would know that You are that truth and we would feel Your love and Your presence.

And may they know they have a place to struggle here, to ask questions. We don't have to have it all together. Lord, may we repent of our sins to You and say, Father God, I give my life to You and I accept Your forgiveness and that free payment of debt if they never have.

In the name of Jesus, I pray all of this. Amen. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.