
The Power of Forgiveness

By David Wilkerson

July 25, 2005 Dearly Beloved:

GREETINGS IN THE NAME OF CHRIST, OUR LORD!

I trust you will take time to prayerfully read the enclosed message. May you be edified and blessed by the truth from God's Word.

I want to share with you a word about the funds that have been sent to us over the past six months for victims of the tsunami. Our ministry received a sizeable amount designated to aid in the devastated areas. Here is an up-to-date report.

Our funds have built 28 schools so far. These are all steel buildings, which have never been built in those areas before. The people there are amazed that they will no longer have to fight termites. Building these schools for the traumatized children gives great credibility to the Gospel in the eyes of the government and local officials.

Many churches also have been built. In one country (which we cannot name), the missionaries we work with lost eleven churches and entire communities. Now we are building houses for \$1,000 each and churches for \$10,000. What a privilege it is to erect these buildings for believers in the hardest-hit areas.

Immediately after the tsunami, we told our readers that interest would soon wane, as massive food supplies sat rotting away in the hot sun and in warehouses. We wanted to wait until honest surveys of the damage could be made, so our funds could be used only through experienced Christian leaders and missionaries in those countries. It is very hard to get building materials into the needy areas, but the building is moving ahead.

Again, we want to thank all who sent funds for this purpose. And we are pleased also to hear from readers who tell us they appreciate our sharing about the many outreaches and ministries to orphans and hungry children around the world.

Our ministry is still working with addicts, alcoholics and the homeless, and helping the ministries of Teen Challenge overseas. You may recall that Teen Challenge is the ministry the Lord enabled me to establish over forty years ago in New York City. There are now over 250 Teen Challenge centers overseas, in addition to 175 centers in America.

Every missions gift sent to us helps fund these needy ministries, here in New York City and around the world.

We'd love to hear from you.

In Christ,
DAVID WILKERSON

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Newsletter: The Power of Forgiveness

July 25, 2005 Forgiveness is not just a one-time act, but a way of life, meant to bring us into every blessing in Christ. "I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:44–45).

According to Jesus, forgiveness isn't a matter of picking or choosing whom we would forgive. We can't say, "You've hurt me too much, so I'm not forgiving you." Christ tells us, "For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same?" (5:46).

It doesn't matter who our grudge might be against. If we hold onto it, it will lead to bitterness that poisons every aspect of our lives. Unforgiveness brings on spiritual famine, weakness and a loss of faith, afflicting not just us but everyone in our circle.

Over the past fifty years of ministry, I have seen terrible devastation in the lives of those who withheld forgiveness. I once saw a man who dropped dead in a fit of bitterness, caused by his refusal to forgive. Someone had reproached him, and he never let go of the hurt. One minute he was raging over it, his fists clenched, and, overwhelmed by it all, his lifeless body crumpled over his desk.

Yet, I also have seen the glorious power of a forgiving spirit. Forgiveness transforms lives, causing the windows of heaven to open. It fills our cup of spiritual blessing to the brim, with abundant peace, joy and rest in the Holy Ghost. Jesus' teaching on this subject is very specific, and if you want to move in this wonderful realm of blessing, then heed and embrace his words.

1. Forgiving others has no merit with God. Jesus tells us, "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 6:14–15). Make no mistake: God isn't making a bargain with us here. He isn't saying, "Because you've forgiven others, I will forgive you." We can never earn God's forgiveness. Only the shed blood of Christ merits forgiveness of sin.

Rather, Christ is saying, in essence, "Full confession of sin requires that you forgive others. If you hold onto any unforgiveness, then you haven't confessed all your sins. True repentance means confessing and forsaking every grudge, crucifying every trace of bitterness toward others. Anything less isn't repentance."

This goes hand in hand with his Beatitude from the same sermon: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7). His point: Forgive others, so you can move into the blessings and joy of sonship. God can then pour on you tokens of his love. Indeed, when Jesus says, "Love and bless those who curse you, that you may be the children of your heavenly Father" (see 5:44–45), he's telling us: "Forgiving reflects the true nature of God's children. When you forgive, you're revealing the Father's nature to the world."

“Love your enemies, and do good...hoping for nothing again [in return]; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.... Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: give, and it shall be given unto you...for with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again” (Luke 6:35–38).

2. We are commanded to forgive our enemies. According to Jesus, an enemy is someone who has cursed you, hated you, used you or persecuted you (see Matthew 5:44). By his definition, we have enemies not only in the world, but at times in the church, and perhaps even in the grave.

I spoke with a Christian woman who for years had carried unforgiveness toward her father. He has long been dead, but she was never able to forgive him for years of abuse. This caused roots of bitterness to spring up in her, and it affected her whole life. Her joy in Christ had diminished, and whenever she prayed the heavens seemed as brass. Lately she had grown troubled, sensing a deep turmoil mounting within her.

So she began to diligently read God’s Word, and Jesus’ words in these passages convicted her. Slowly, she began to lay down all her bitterness. Today, this woman walks in the realm of blessing, because she found strength in Christ to forgive her father. She told me, “I gave that unforgiving spirit to the Lord, and I can’t tell you the joy that has been released in my life. I thank God, I have seen the power of forgiveness.”

I think of the terrible hurt caused by divorce and the bitterness that follows. Many who have been through a divorce say it’s worse than death, because it often turns former lovers and friends into bitter enemies. Our ministry receives tragic letters from Christian men and women whose mate walked out of the marriage, turning hateful and attempting to destroy what’s left of the family.

These are awful, painful tragedies. But God makes no allowances for harboring unforgiveness. How often have you heard these chilling words from someone who has endured the tragedy of divorce? “I can’t forgive him.” “You just don’t know what she’s done.” “I have my reasons.” Yet none of these things will be accepted on Judgment Day. And such unforgiveness closes heaven to a person’s life today.

According to God’s Word, there are four requirements to complete forgiveness:

1. Paul first outlines two requirements for forgiveness. “*Forbearing* one another, and *forgiving* one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye” (Colossians 3:13, italics mine). Forbearing and forgiving are two different issues. Forbearing means ceasing from all acts and thoughts of revenge. It says, in other words, “Don’t take matters into your own hands. Instead, endure the hurt. Lay the matter down and leave it alone.”

Yet forbearing isn’t just a New Testament concept. Proverbs tells us, “Say not, I will do so to him as he

hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work" (Proverbs 24:29). We are given a powerful example of this admonition in David's life.

In 1 Samuel 25, we find David in a vengeful rage toward a wicked man named Nabal. David and his men had guarded Nabal's huge herds of sheep for several months, and in that time they never took a single sheep. Now David was on the run from Saul, with his men and their families huddled in a cave, hungry. So David sent some of his men to ask Nabal if he could spare some sheep for them.

But Nabal laughed, saying, "Who is David? He's nothing but a runaway servant." When David heard this, he flew into a rage, swearing, "So help me, I'll get even with him." Then he gathered up 200 men and marched toward Nabal's camp to kill him.

But Nabal's wife, Abigail, got wind of it, and she quickly intervened. She loaded down her donkey with food and rode out to intercept David, stopping the warrior with these words: "Do not avenge yourself by your own hand, David. Let the Lord fight your battle. He will deal with your enemies. Forbear now, and you'll continue to be wrapped in the bundle of life with your Lord. You're meant to be king of Israel. But if you try to get even over this, you will live to regret it."

David knew this counsel was from the Lord. So he thanked Abigail and turned back, telling her, "You've saved me from taking revenge by my own hand." When Nabal died shortly afterward, David praised God for his intervention: "Lord, you pleaded the cause of my reproach. You kept me from avenging myself."

David had yet another opportunity for easy revenge, when he found his pursuer Saul asleep in a cave, in which David himself was hiding. David's men urged him, "This is God's doing. He has delivered Saul into your hands. Kill him now, and avenge yourself." But David forbore, instead cutting off a piece of Saul's garment, so he could later prove he could have killed him. Such wise actions are God's way of putting our enemies to shame, and that was the case when David showed Saul the garment. Saul responded, "Thou art more righteous than I: for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil" (1 Samuel 24:17). Saul's bitter heart toward David was now melted.

That is the power of forgiveness: it puts hateful enemies to shame, because the human heart can't understand such a purely loving response.

2. In addition to forbearing, we must forgive from the heart. Now we come to forgiving, which encompasses two other commandments: 1. loving your enemies, and 2. praying for them. "I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).

One wise old preacher said, "If you can pray for your enemies, you can do all the rest." I have found this to be true in my own life. As I pray for those who've hurt me, Christ begins to remove my pain, my desire to defend myself, and my fleshly urge to get even. And as he does this, I am moved to ask,

“Lord, what would you have me do to repair this relationship?” Sometimes his direction is to make a phone call, write a letter, or meet the person face to face. When I do as he directs, my soul soaks in his peace.

Of course, Jesus never said the work of forgiving would be easy. When he commanded, “Love your enemies,” the Greek word for “love” doesn’t mean “affection” but “moral understanding.” Simply put, forgiving someone isn’t a matter of stirring up human affection, but making a moral decision to remove hatred from our hearts.

Imagine the deep, deep hurt of one young man who wrote an account of his life in applying to our Bible school. His parents divorced when he was very young, and his mother took custody of him and his brother. Then, when he was four, his mother packed two little suitcases, set them outside the door of their house, and told the boys, “Don’t ever come back.” The brothers were left sitting on the curb, confused and hurt. Eventually, the father came and picked them up, and for years this boy hated his mother for not wanting him. He endured years of bitterness, unable to forgive her.

Then, at age thirteen, he went to a church camp, where he came to Christ. God spoke to him then, saying, “If you will forgive your mother and start praying for her, I will change her.” He did begin praying, and the Lord slowly changed his heart toward his mother. He began to love her, and within six months’ time his mother came to Christ.

I am overjoyed that this young man is now enrolled in our school, wanting to become a youth evangelist. He knows firsthand the incredible power of forgiveness.

3. We must also learn to forgive ourselves. To me, this is the most difficult part of forgiveness. As Christians, we are quick to offer the grace of our Lord to the world, but we often parcel it out meagerly to ourselves.

Consider King David, who committed adultery and then murdered the husband to cover up his offense. When his sin was exposed, David repented, and the Lord sent the prophet Nathan to tell him, “Your sin has been pardoned.” Yet, even though David knew he was forgiven, he had lost his joy. He prayed, “Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.... Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit” (Psalm 51:8, 12).

Why was David still so disturbed? This man had been justified before the Lord, and he had peace through God’s promise of forgiveness. Yet, it’s possible to have your sins blotted out of God’s Book but not out of your conscience. David wrote this Psalm because he wanted his conscience to stop condemning him for his sins. And David simply couldn’t forgive himself. Now he was enduring the penalty for holding onto unforgiveness — an un-forgiveness directed toward himself — and that is a loss of joy. You see, the joy of the Lord comes to us only as the fruit of accepting his forgiveness.

Years ago, I was greatly impacted by the biography of Hudson Taylor, the founder of China Inland

Mission. Taylor was one of the most effective missionaries in history, a godly man of prayer who established churches throughout China's vast interior. Yet he ministered for years without joy. He was downcast over his struggles, agonizing over secret longings and thoughts of unbelief. In his correspondence with his sister in London, he confessed, "I am plagued with thoughts that are not pleasing to the Lord. I fight so many battles in my mind and spirit. I hate myself, my sin, my weakness."

Then, in 1869, Hudson Taylor experienced a revolutionary change. He saw that Christ had all he needed, yet none of his own tears or repenting could release those blessings in him. He told his sister, "I don't know how to get all that Christ promised into my vessel." Taylor recognized there was only one way to Christ's fullness: through faith. Every covenant God had made with man required faith. So Taylor determined to stir up his faith, yet even that effort proved vain. Finally, in his darkest hour, the Holy Spirit gave him a revelation: faith comes not by striving, but by resting on the promises of God. That is the secret to tapping into all of Christ's blessings.

Now Taylor began to recite Jesus' promises, over and over: "Abide in me, and you will bear fruit." "I will never leave you nor forsake you." "If you believe not, I remain faithful." Taylor stopped trying to imitate Christ and instead began to rest in Jesus' promise of continual union with him. He wrote to his sister, "God sees me as dead and buried at the Cross, where Christ died for me. And now he asks me to see myself as he sees me. So I rest in the victory that his blood won for me, and I reckon [count] it so. I am as capable of sinning as ever, but now I see Christ with me as never before. As I confess my sins quickly, I believe they are instantly pardoned."

Taylor forgave himself for the sins that Christ had said were already cast into the sea. And because he rested on God's promises, he was able to become a joyous servant, continually casting all his cares on the Lord. That is when all of us enter into covenant with God: as soon as we rest in his Word to us, relying on his promises.

I have a final question for you. You believe your sins of the past years and months have been forgiven. You've confessed them and accepted God's promise of forgiveness. But do you believe the same about yesterday's sins? Like Hudson Taylor, did you confess them quickly and believe they were immediately forgiven?

God never puts a time limit between the moment of our confession and his forgiveness. "In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, strengthenedst me with strength in my soul" (Psalm 138:3). "Remember not against us former iniquities: let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us" (Psalm 79:8). The Hebrew word for "speedily" here means, "Send your mercy to us quickly, even now."

Tell me, what are your mornings like? Do you wake up with a dark cloud overhead? Do you have feelings of guilt, and immediately begin replaying your failures? Are your first thoughts, "I'm so weak and sinful"? Here is what God's Word says about what your mornings should be like: "Sing unto the Lord, bless his name; shew forth his salvation from day to day" (96:2). God's mercies are new every

morning. So, no matter what you did yesterday, or even in this very hour, when truly confessed it's all under the cleansing blood of Christ.

If you believe in his moment-by-moment mercies — if you trust that he's more willing to forgive you than you are to confess — then rise up in the morning and say to the devil, "This is the first day of the rest of my life. I'm leaving behind those things in the past — all my past failures and sins — and I'm pressing on today, with a new beginning. Today is the day of the Lord's salvation!"

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