

BREAKING BARRIERS TO INTIMACY WITH GOD:
Overcoming Unforgiveness
A Study of Matthew 6:12, 14-15

Characteristic of Completeness: Prayer

Big Idea: Our fellowship with God requires our forgiveness of others.

Related Scriptures: Psalm 103:12; Jeremiah 31:34; Luke 5:21; 6:27-28; 17:3; John 2:24;

Romans 12:17-19; 2 Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 1:7; 4:31-32; 1 John 1:9

Introduction:

1. We've been studying through the Lord's ► Prayer in the Bible, and this morning we come to ► Matthew 6:12, where Jesus tells us to pray this way:

^{NJ} Matthew 6:12 "And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors."

Two verses later, Jesus explains why we should pray this way. In ► Verses 14 and 15, He says,

^{NJ} Matthew 6:14 "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

2. There is a grave tension built into these verses.
 - a. Certainly, tension arises from the notion that God won't forgive us if we don't forgive others. That raises all kinds of questions, doesn't it? For example, are we going to hell if we don't forgive?

Some people think so, including a very well-known evangelical preacher and author. In his sermon titled, "Battling the Unbelief of Bitterness," he said, based on his understanding of Matthew 6:15, ". . . no one who is unforgiving goes to heaven." Then he illustrated his point this way:

About 18 years ago, when I was still in seminary, I was in a group with some other couples with Noel. One night it became tense because one of the young wives said that she would not forgive her mother for what happened to her as a girl. We all just kind of gulped and we talked for about an hour about the commands to forgive, and we talked about the forgiveness of God towards us and our sin. She was adamant, "Never will I ever be able to forgive her." And so I said to her, "Don't you realize that if you're unwilling to

*forgive your mother, God will be unwilling to forgive your sin and you won't go to heaven?*¹

Yikes! Is he right?

b. Tension also stems from the reality that forgiveness can be very hard. Someone has said, "Forgiving is love's toughest work, and love's biggest risk."² I think it's true. Forgiveness can be terribly difficult.

- (1) How do you forgive the spouse who walked out on you for another person?
- (2) How do you forgive a parent who never gave you what you really needed growing up?
- (3) How do you forgive the friend who betrayed your trust?
- (4) How do you forgive the boy who impregnated your daughter?
- (5) How do you forgive the person who raped you?
- (6) How do you forgive the inlaws who don't think you're good enough to be their son's wife?
- (7) How do you forgive the colleague who stabbed you in the back?

c. Not only is forgiveness difficult, but it's also just plain confusing. There is widespread misunderstanding in the Christian community about forgiveness and its application to real life situations.

Consider this true story. An adolescent had been sexually molested by a church leader for much of her childhood. After years of abuse, she finally gathered the courage to disclose it. She explained the abuse in a letter that she gave to her pastor. After reading the letter, the pastor called the girl into his office. The pastor proceeded to rip up the letter in front of her and said that God commands her to forgive and forget. He then admonished her for her "sin" of unforgiveness. She left his office frightened and confused. The abuse continued for several more years.³

Is this the kind of forgiveness God has in mind?

¹ John Piper, "Batting the Unbelief of Bitterness," *Preaching Today*, Tape 249.

² Lewis B. Smedes, *Forgive & Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve* (New York: Harper Collins, 1984), xvi.

³ Steven R. Tracy, "Sexual Abuse and Forgiveness," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 27 (1999): 219.

3. This morning I want to address ► three big questions that serve as an outline for this message. Here are the questions.
- a. ► What does it mean to forgive?
 - b. ► When should you forgive?
 - c. And, ► why should you forgive? Which includes the question, are you going to hell if you don't?
- I. Let's deal with the ► first question which is really foundational to all the rest: What exactly does it mean to forgive? How can we define it so that we know whether or not it's happening? We're going to spend most of our time on this question.
- A. Let's consider the primary biblical terms for forgiveness.
1. In the Old Testament, a primary Hebrew term for forgiveness is *nasa*. It literally means to take away, to carry away, or to lift up.⁴ The picture is one of separating the sin from the person who wronged you.

Psalm ► 103:12 reflects the idea. It says,

^{NKJ} Psalm 103:12 As far as the east is from the west, *So far* has He removed our transgressions from us.
 2. In the ► New Testament, the main Greek term for forgiveness is *aphiemi*. That's the word used in our text. It also means to send away, release, or let go.⁵ Releasing a guilty prisoner by dropping the charges against him reflects the idea here.
 3. So, the root idea in both the Old and the New Testaments involves letting go.

This raises the question: What exactly are we to let go of? What is the object that must be let go?
- B. I think it is helpful and accurate to distinguish between ► three different types of forgiveness in the Bible. All the types of forgiveness involve a letting go, but they are distinguished by *who* lets go and by *what* is let go. Dr. Steve Tracy, a friend and

⁴ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, s.v., “נָסָה” (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), hereinafter referred to as BDB.

⁵ Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, s.v. “ἀφίημι,” (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000).

professor at Phoenix Seminary, has dubbed these ► three types of forgiveness “judicial,” “psychological,” and “relational” forgiveness.⁶

1. Let’s start with ► judicial forgiveness. This is where God as Judge removes or let’s go of something. God let’s go of the guilt of our sin and declares us righteous. Judicial forgiveness is synonymous with justification. Only God can extend judicial forgiveness; we can’t. I can’t wipe away your sin so that you can go to heaven. I can’t declare you righteous before God. Only God can do that.

a. When Jesus forgave sins in this way, some Pharisees questioned in ► Luke 5:21,

^{NKJ} Luke 5:21 . . . “Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

They knew that only God can extend judicial forgiveness.

b. Judicial forgiveness is also in view in verses like ► Ephesians 1:7. In speaking of Jesus, it says,

^{NKJ} Ephesians 1:7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins . . .

2. In addition to judicial forgiveness, there is ► also psychological forgiveness. This is a type of forgiveness extended by us, not God. And, it involves a letting go of revenge or retaliation. Dr. ► Tracy describes psychological forgiveness this way: “This is the inner, personal category of forgiveness, and it has two aspects: negatively it involves letting go of hatred and personal revenge; positively it involves an extension of grace to the offender.”⁷

a. We can illustrate the concept of psychological forgiveness using an analogy of baseball bats. When someone wrongs us, it’s as if they smack us with a baseball bat, and it hurts. The baseball bat represents what another person has done to hurt us. We can respond in a number of different ways.

(1) The first option is retaliation. It’s when we hit back. You hurt me; I’ll hurt you. You take a swing at me; I’ll take a swing at you. There is no pretense of forgiveness here. It’s just revenge. Get even.

⁶ Tracy, “Sexual Abuse and Forgiveness.” See also Steven R. Tracy, *Mending the Soul: Understanding and Healing Abuse*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 180-194.

⁷ Ibid.

Psychological forgiveness precludes this kind of revenge. Passages like ► Romans 12:17-19 make this very clear. It says,

^{NKJ} Romans 12:17 Repay no one evil for evil. . . . 18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. 19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves . . .

So, personal retaliation is not a legitimate option.

- (2) Option ► 2 is what I call imitation forgiveness. It's cheap. It's when outwardly we say, "I forgive you" but inwardly we don't. It's like taking the baseball bat that hurt us, and temporarily storing it in our homemade bat rack. We rationalize that, in the next argument or conflict we get into, we may need to use it.

This reminds me of a situation that happened some years ago. A husband was unfaithful to his wife. He was guilty. He admitted it. And, he begged his wife to forgive him. She said she forgave him. In fact, her forgiveness seemed to come so easily that many of us complimented her apparent God-given graciousness in the face of such a harmful betrayal.

But, as the weeks and months unfolded, it turned out to be imitation forgiveness. She simply stored the bat of unfaithfulness in her bat rack, and brought it out to beat her husband with it whenever they had a conflict. She seemed to use it as a means of controlling the relationship, keeping him in bondage to his own sin.

Imitation forgiveness is so common. It's when we dredge up stuff that we said we forgave, and we use it to hurt our debtor.

Imitation forgiveness doesn't send sin away; it puts it in storage now, so you can punish later, whenever you want.

Imitation forgiveness is not a legitimate option.

- (3) Option 3 is real psychological forgiveness. And, it's very costly. It's when we say "I forgive you" and mean it. It's like taking the baseball bats that hurt us, and throwing them

away, never to be used to hurt the debtor again. To truly forgive someone of something is to make a commitment not to vengefully harm them, even though they deserve it. To forgive is to make a vow to never use the bat to harm the person who harmed us. “I will not bring up this incident again to harm you.”

- b. In addition, psychological forgiveness includes more than a decision to forgo revenge. It also seems to involve a choice to be governed by grace. You see, grace gives people what they don't deserve.

In ► Luke 6:27-28, Jesus says,

^{NKJ} Luke 6:27 “. . . Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.”

We don't have to like those who have hurt us. We don't have to have warm fuzzies when we think about them. But, we are commanded to choose to be governed by grace, to choose love them and pray for them. You see, psychological forgiveness is not just something you say; it is something you decide to live out.

3. A third kind of forgiveness is ► relational forgiveness. Relational forgiveness involves a letting go of relational barriers that often go up after you have been harmed. The letting go allows the restoration of harmony in a relationship. Relational forgiveness is closely associated with reconciliation in which full fellowship is restored and there is peace.

Relational forgiveness can be extended by God and us.

- a. I think relational forgiveness extended by God is in view in ► 1 John 1:9. It says,

^{NKJ} 1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

This verse is addressed to believers who have already been forgiven by God in a judicial sense. Judicial forgiveness is not at issue here. Relational forgiveness is.

One Bible scholar explains the distinction between judicial and relational forgiveness as it relates to this verse. He ► says,

Justification by faith [that is, judicial forgiveness] imparts to the believing sinner a perfectly righteous standing before God at the moment he receives Christ, and nothing can be added or subtracted from it. ► But this legal and forensic issue is not the same as the question of fellowship with God within His family. ► Though the believer in Christ is promised that he “shall not come into judgment”, it should be obvious that the question of family discipline is something different. ► The . . . judge who paid a fine for his own son in court, but was perfectly free to discipline that same son once they got home, carries the point. ► Every sin of which the believer is guilty has been paid for by the cross of Christ and thus can never be summoned before the bar of eternal justice to answer for this, since the Savior has already atoned for it. ► But as a Father, God is free to set the terms on which His children shall commune with Him and His refusal to commune with the sinning child until confession has occurred is . . . a divine prerogative. ► Hence, [relational] forgiveness . . . relates to the restoration of broken fellowship within the household of God.⁸

- b. Not ► only does God extend relational forgiveness, we do too. An example is provided by a Christian man in the ancient church at Corinth. This man was involved in incest. And, apparently he was defiantly unrepentant about it. According to 1 Corinthians 5, the apostle Paul prescribed a process of church discipline whereby the unrepentant man was removed from the church.

Later, however, the man seems to have experienced brokenness and repentance. He turned from incest and sought forgiveness. Then, Paul prescribed relational forgiveness. He called for a letting go of the church discipline barrier that kept the man from being restored to a right relationship in the church family. He says in ► 2 Corinthians 2:7-8,

^{NLT} 2 Corinthians 2:7 Now it is time to forgive him and comfort him. Otherwise he may become so discouraged that he won't be able to recover. 8 Now show him that you still love him.

- c. Having ► identified what biblical forgiveness is in its various types—judicial, psychological, and relational—it is every bit as important to understand some things forgiveness is not.

⁸ Zane C. Hodges, “Fellowship and Confession in 1 John 1:5-10,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, January 1972, p. 57.

1. For example, forgiveness is ► not forgetting—not when we think of forgetting as erasing wrongs from our memory banks. For the most part, we don't have much control over what we remember. But, we can decide to forgive despite our remembrances.

I suspect that forgetting has become linked to forgiving because the Bible says that God doesn't remember our sins when He forgives. For example, God says in ► Jeremiah 31:34,

^{NKJ} Jeremiah 31:34 “. . . I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

Here, remembering sins no more is clearly equated with forgiveness. God is saying, “I will not punish, even though it is deserved.” Nevertheless, I don't think this means that God gets amnesia. After all, God knows everything, past, present, and future. “Remembering no more” is simply a figure of speech to reiterate the idea that God is letting go of the debt.

You may never be able to forget a wrong done to you. But, you can still forgive. Forgiveness is not forgetting.

2. Also, forgiveness is ► not a feeling. It is an act of the will. It is not a lack of resentment or hurt feelings. It is a decision made despite those feelings.

You may be wondering, “When you forgive, shouldn't hard feelings go away? When you forgive, shouldn't the pain subside? Shouldn't you feel good about the person who wronged you?”

The answer is, “No, not necessarily.”

- a. Let's look at a guy named Joseph in the Old Testament. Joseph had been sold as slave by his own brothers. Over 20 years passed since his brothers wronged him. And, it seems that Joseph had been able to forgive them, even though they had not yet asked to be forgiven. Joseph says in ► Genesis 41:51,

^{NKJ} Genesis 41:51 “. . . God has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house.”

Joseph is not forgetting in the sense that he had erased his brother's wrongdoing from his memory banks. He probably never forgot in that way. Once again, forgetting here is used as a figure of speech for forgiving. Joseph had been able to let go of his brothers' offense.

Nevertheless, despite Joseph's apparent forgiveness, and despite being separated from his family for many years, when Joseph sees his brothers again, some negative feelings come back on him. Genesis ► 42:24 says of Joseph,

^{NJ} Genesis 42:24 And he turned himself away from them and wept. . . .

The pain of his brothers' sin against him came back on him. The years of hardship. The loss of family relationships and what might have been. He wept. It had been over 20 years, and he wept.

- b. I am so glad Joseph wept. It means that you and I are normal when we struggle with the feelings surrounding forgiveness. I find that forgiveness of someone who has harmed us is not a tidy proposition. When we make the decision to forgive, wonderful feelings don't always follow right away, and sometimes not at all. And sometimes, just when we think we're completely over a harmful incident, something triggers a temporary recurrence of the pain.

Is this bad? Is it sinful to have hard feelings? I think it is simply reality. We have control over our will to forgive, and we should stand by our decision to forgive. But, we don't have much control over our feelings.

Negative feelings may disappear, but usually with time, and only as God supplies. Forgiveness is not a feeling.

- 3. Also, forgiveness is ► not tolerance. Seminary professor and author, Dr. Lewis Smedes explains this well. He says, "You do not have to tolerate what people do when you forgive them for doing it; you may forgive people, but still refuse to tolerate what they have done."

- a. Because forgiveness is not tolerance, forgiveness does not always remove consequences. Sometimes the consequences remain, not for the primary purpose of harming or punishing, but to teach the offender and others not to sin again, or to protect others, or to maintain integrity, or to preserve the honor of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

God Himself provides the model of the difference between forgiveness and tolerance. As Christians, we enjoy God's forgiveness, but He doesn't always tolerate what we do. In fact, like any good parent, God often allows us to suffer the consequences of our sin, not to hurt us, but to discipline us. And, in some rare cases, the Bible says that God takes some Christians home early because He can't tolerate what

they're doing. Person forgiven? Yes. Behavior tolerated? No. Forgiveness is not tolerance.

- b. Also, because forgiveness is not tolerance, forgiveness is not winking at injustice. The person who forgives can value and want justice every bit as badly as the person who won't forgive. It's just that the person who forgives entrusts justice to God. The person who forgives takes God at His word when He says in ► Romans 12:19

^{NKJ} Romans 12:19 . . . "Vengeance *is* Mine, I will repay," . . .

Forgiveness is not tolerance.

- 4. Also, forgiveness is ► not trusting. Do you have to make yourself immediately vulnerable to a person who has hurt you deeply? Do you have to pretend like nothing ever happened? Do you have to forgive *and* trust?"

I think the answer is, "no." Forgiveness is commanded. But, trusting is a very different thing. You can forgive the child molester. But, you don't have to trust him to babysit your kids. You can forgive the employee who embezzled money from your company. But, you don't have to continue to trust him as your Chief Financial Officer.

- a. I believe Joseph forgave the brothers who wronged him. But, he didn't trust them. In ► Genesis 42:16, Joseph says to his brothers,

^{NKJ} Genesis 42:16 "Send one of you, and let him bring your brother; and you shall be kept in prison, that your words may be tested to see whether *there is* any truth in you . . ."

Joseph didn't trust his brothers as far as he could throw them. He had forgiven them. But, he didn't trust them.

- b. Is it right not to trust someone? I am intrigued by the early ministry of Jesus in this regard. The Bible says that many people were believing in Jesus, yet ► John 2:24 says,

^{NLT} John 2:24 But Jesus didn't trust them, because he knew what people were really like.

These are believers here, but Jesus didn't trust them at that time. It's not sinful; it's prudent.

- c. I'm not saying that you shouldn't give debtors a chance to earn your trust. When people close to you have wronged you, when they've

violated your trust, I think it is good to give them a chance to earn back your trust. Help them to do that. Give them time and opportunities to do that. Not with the baseball bat in hand, ready to hurt them. But with the idea of graciously helping them.

God can change people. God can change the people who have hurt you. That's why we should give them a chance to earn our trust. Forgiveness isn't trusting, but it can lead to trusting again.

5. Finally, forgiveness is ► not words. You don't need to say something in order to forgive someone. It's an inner decision. You can forgive your debtor without ever vocalizing the words, "I forgive you" to them personally. It may be quite appropriate to say something, but it's not required, and sometimes it's not even possible.⁹

Remember, Joseph forgave his brothers without saying a word to them; they were long gone.

Conversely, just because the words, "I forgive you" come out of your mouth doesn't mean you have really forgiven someone. The words alone don't count. Again, it's an inner decision.

Well, that's my best shot at explaining what it means to forgive.

II. Let's move on to the ► next question: When should you forgive?

For example, should you forgive when your offender doesn't care? That is, should you forgive somebody who doesn't show any regret or remorse over how they wrongfully hurt you? Should you forgive the perpetrator who doesn't vow to change?

- A. Some contend that the person who harmed you should repent before you should forgive them. They appeal to ► Luke 17:3, which says,

^{NKJ} Luke 17:3 ". . . If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him."

The condition seems clear. Forgive him ► "if he repents."

- B. Nevertheless, in many cases, the Bible doesn't seem to put conditions on the forgiveness it commands and models.

For example, Jesus says in our text from Matthew 6:12,

⁹ Your debtor may be dead, for example.

^{NKJ} Matthew 6:12 “And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors.”

There are no conditions here. Just forgive. And, there are other Scriptures which seem to call for unconditional forgiveness, such as ► Ephesians 4:32 that says,

^{NKJ} Ephesians 4:32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

C. How are we to reconcile these verses? I believe we must go back to the biblical ways in which the term, “forgive” is used and then figure out when each type of forgiveness is to be extended.

1. For example, I believe psychological forgiveness is the type of forgiveness we are to ► extend unconditionally. We are to extend psychological forgiveness regardless of what an offender does. Our failure to forgive in this way can eat us up inside. It can make us bitter. Notice that this kind of forgiveness seems to be linked with a putting away or letting go of bitterness. Ephesians ► 4:31-32 says,

^{NKJ} Ephesians 4:31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 . . . forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

What kind of trouble can bitterness and unforgiveness cause? Relational trouble. Emotional trouble. And physical trouble.

One M.D. writes, “The side effects of holding unforgiving thoughts in our minds can have a very negative impact on our well-being.” He says, “Here are just a few of the physical problems that may be associated with an unforgiving mind: headaches, backaches, pains in the neck, stomachaches and ulcer-like symptoms, depression, lack of energy, anxiety, irritability, tenseness, insomnia or restlessness, free-floating fear, and unhappiness.”¹⁰

For your own sake as well as for God’s, psychological forgiveness should be granted unconditionally.

2. In contrast, I believe that relational forgiveness is ► conditional. The offender should confess and repent before relational forgiveness is granted. After all, God requires confession for relational forgiveness in 1 John 1:9. And, Paul required repentance for relational forgiveness of the incestuous man.

D. These distinctions are very helpful in sorting out difficult life situations.

¹⁰ Gerald Jampolsky, *Forgiveness: The Greatest Healer of All*, (Hillsboro, OR: Beyond Words Publishing, 1999), 30-31.

1. Consider the example with which I introduced this message—the girl sexually abused by the church leader. How would forgiveness relate there?

a. Because forgiveness is ► not tolerance, the abuser should be made to suffer the consequences of his own sin. He should be turned over to the authorities, and if that means they lock him up, so be it.

b. Should we forgive him? Yes, ► psychologically. We should extend psychological forgiveness by refusing to exact personal revenge and perhaps by graciously praying for the man. Often this is not a simple one-time decision; it can be more like a process through which we wrestle.

(1) And because forgiveness is ► not forgetting, and because forgiveness is ► not a feeling, we shouldn't expect the victimized girl to put the whole thing out of her mind and feel wonderful about the guy.

(2) And because forgiveness is ► not words, we should not demand that the victim say anything in particular to her abuser.

c. Should we forgive him ► relationally? Maybe someday. If he were to get out of prison, having confessed and demonstrated true repentance, we should extend relational forgiveness by restoring him to fellowship in the church family and loving him.

But, because forgiveness is ► not trusting, I wouldn't allow the guy to be alone with children in the church again.

2. Consider another difficult example. A man repeatedly abuses his wife and children physically. The beatings often come after he has been drinking and he tees off in a fit of rage at the most trivial things. He shows no signs of changing his ways. In fact, he tells his wife that if she were really a Christian she is obligated to forgive him. Their extended family and some church friends agree that she must forgive and forget his abusive behavior.

How does this square with what we have learned about forgiveness?

a. Because forgiveness is ► not tolerance, the wife should not put up with the abuse from her husband. I believe she has every right to take whatever measures are necessary to protect herself and her children, including physical separation and/or calling the police.

- b. Should she forgive him? Yes, ► psychologically. She should extend psychological forgiveness by choosing not to respond with her own form of abuse, trusting that God will deal with him.
- c. Should she forgive him ► relationally? If the man contritely confesses and demonstrates true repentance, I think so.
- d. But, even if she forgives him relationally, because forgiving is ► not the same as trusting, I believe it would be reasonable for her to establish certain boundaries in her relationship that might remain unless and until her husband has earned her trust. For example, the husband might be required to seek counseling and/or be in an accountability relationship with another man in the church who would make sure he does not return to his abusive ways. This is where the church has the unique and vital role of providing protection for the abused and vulnerable.

III. Let's move on to the ► final question: Why should you forgive?

- A. First of all, it's commanded in the Bible. That should be enough.
- B. But, there's another important reason to forgive. If you do not forgive others as the Bible prescribes, God will not forgive you. Our text is very clear on this. Matthew 6:12 says,

^{NKJ} Matthew 6:12 "And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors."

Two verses later, Jesus explains why we should pray this way. In ► Verses 14 and 15, He says,

^{NKJ} Matthew 6:14 "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

This doesn't mean that unless you forgive, you're going to go to hell. I think the preacher I quoted at the outset of this sermon is confused on this point. Judicial forgiveness is *not* in view here. God's relational forgiveness *is* in view. The ► Big Idea is this: Our fellowship with God requires our forgiveness of others. Our fellowship is at stake, not our eternal salvation. Jesus is saying that, unless we are forgiving toward others, God will not grant us relational forgiveness with Him; God will not commune with us; our fellowship with Him will be broken. And, our unforgiveness will bring a spiritual dryness, a joyless bitterness that God will not remove. He won't remove it until we are forgiving and confess our unforgiveness to Him. In order to take hold of God's hand, you must let go of your debtor's throat.

Do you find yourself feeling distant and disconnected from God?

1. Maybe it's because you are unforgiving. Maybe you've been confused about forgiveness, thinking that you cannot forgive because the person who harmed you is unrepentant. Now you know you must extend psychological forgiveness unconditionally. Maybe you need to do that right now, confessing your unforgiveness to God, so that you can reconnect with Him.
 2. Or, perhaps you have been confused about forgiveness in a different way. Perhaps you are in an abusive relationship and you thought forgiveness obligates you to put up with it. Maybe you need to decide not to tolerate the abuse any longer. Forgiveness is not tolerance. And relational forgiveness is not automatic.
 3. On the other hand, maybe the conditions for you to extend relational forgiveness to someone have been met, but you stubbornly refuse. Better forgive, so you can reconnect.
- C. There's a final reason you should forgive. You cannot fulfill God's purpose for your life unless you forgive as the Bible prescribes. Remember our text comes in the midst of the Lord's Prayer.

As we've been studying the Lord's Prayer, you may recall that, as Christians, our top priority in life is to honor God's name, to build His kingdom, and to do His will. This is our chief end. And we learned that asking for God to give us our daily bread is merely a means to that end.

And now I want you to see that asking God to forgive us and granting forgiveness to others is also a means to that end.

1. You see, if we are unforgiving, then our fellowship with God is broken. And, when our fellowship is broken, we have no power to honor His name, to build His kingdom, and to do His will.
2. And our stubborn refusal to forgive others robs the world. It robs the world of seeing God's grace through us. It robs the world of getting a glimpse, through us, of the wonderful judicial forgiveness that only God can give. How dare we refuse to forgive in light of how God has forgiven us?