

Forgive Us Our Trepasses/Debts

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Preacher: Anthony Parrott

[0 : 00] We contract an administrator. We contract somebody to do some of our sound and production. But it's a very small paid staff. The way that's possible is through volunteers.

And then who leads the volunteers? When Anthony's troubleshooting sound, and when Tanetta's speaking prophetic words over the city, who's leading the volunteers?

And that's our directors. By the way, Tanetta today is preaching at Peace Fellowship Church in D.C. So you can be thinking of her as she preaches there today. So the directors are the ones who lead the volunteers, who put on the ministries that happen through Sunday and throughout the week.

And we've had some transition with our directors, and so we want to recognize them today and sort of commission and pray over them. So I'd like to invite up front with me Caroline.

Caroline Norris. Jules. Jules Park. I'd like to welcome up Okechi.

[1 : 04] And Serena. And then I believe Lisa is not able to be here today. Okay. So Caroline is going to be one of our co-directors of prayer.

Jules is one of our co-directors of first impressions. And Okechi and Serena have just come on as co-directors of worship. Woo! Also not here today, but we want to recognize a few folks who transitioned off.

So Beck Engwong is one of our elders. And because she was an elder, we never called her a director because that got like organizationally messy. But Beck was essentially serving as like a co-director of worship, coordinating everything that was going on.

She's transitioning off of that. So we'd like to thank Beck. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Rogelio was overseeing our first impressions in our evening in our downtown service.

Rogelio moved away. So we want to thank Rogelio for his work. And then Adam Clark also moved away to California. Adam Clark was one of our co-directors of justice and compassion.

[2 : 14] And so we thank Adam for his work with the food pantry. Lisa, who's not able to be here today, she is coming on. Lisa Hicks is coming on as a co-director of justice and compassion as well.

So with that, I want you to take a posture. It might be comfortable for you in prayer. So if that's looking up, if that's closing your eyes. In some of the churches I've been a part of, sometimes we reach out a hand as if we were laying hands on our new leaders here.

And we just want to pray a prayer of commission for them as they lead and direct and offer vision and friendship to all of their volunteers in our ministry. So let's pray for them.

Triune God, you are God, who is inherently communal, inherently self-giving and others-oriented.

And God, you have made yourself known in the world through service, that when you, Jesus, came into the world, you came not to be served, but to serve.

You came with a towel wrapped around you like a servant. You came to wash feet. You came to give your life. And so God, as Jesus followers, we follow your example of service, of giving of ourselves, looking outside of ourselves, and asking the question, how can I help?

[3 : 32] So I thank you for these leaders here next to me. I thank you for the myriad of volunteers throughout this congregation, God, who give their talents and their skills and their time and their ability and just their willingness to give something to a little church like ours, raging our little revolution of peace.

God, I pray for Caroline, for Jules, for Serena, for Akechi, for Lisa. God, I pray that you would anoint them with Holy Spirit power. God, I pray that you would cause your face to shine upon them, that they would know your goodness and mercy and love, that they would gaze upon your holiness and beauty, and that they would be changed from glory into surpassing glory.

God, I pray that as they lead and serve their teams, God, that they would see your character and your goodness made known, made manifest, made physical in the work that they do, that every cup

of coffee, every note played on a piano, every food pantry that's open, and every gift that this church offers to our congregation and to our city, that those gifts would be a physical manifestation of your presence, God.

And God, as they show us the way, as they lead, may we look at them and behold the face of God, because it's in service that we see you clearly.

So God, bless them, anoint them, empower them. We pray these things in the unity of the Spirit, and in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Let's give them a round more time.

[5 : 12] All right. We are in a sermon series. I'm going to pop up onto the stage. I'm short enough as it is. We are in a sermon series on the Lord's Prayer, cleverly titled The Lord's Prayer, and we have been exploring the way that Jesus taught his disciples to pray.

In the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 6, Jesus says, don't pray like this, but rather when you go to your God, to your Father, your parent in heaven, pray like this.

And similarly, in the book of Luke, the disciples just go right up to Jesus and say, hey, John the Baptist taught his disciples to pray. Can you do the same for us? And so Jesus said, pray in this way.

And so we've explored some of these phrases already. So a bit of summary. We've talked about the three third-person imperatives that begin this prayer.

And third-person imperatives are the sort of unusual construction in English where we say something like, hallowed be your name, let your kingdom come, let your will be done.

[6 : 18] But basically, we're praying to God that God would cause God's will and reign to happen on earth. Somebody make your name holy. Like sort of that, like church, like somebody give me a hallelujah.

Somebody make God's name holy. And then each question sort of answers itself. Somebody make your name holy. How do we make God's name holy? By somebody making God's kingdom come.

How do we make God's kingdom come? By somebody making God's will be done. And what is God's will? Next slide. Are these next for demands or requests or imperatives to God?

God, give us bread. God, forgive our debts. God, don't lead us into a time of trial. God, deliver us from the evil one.

And so we see that God's name is made holy by God's kingdom coming. And God's kingdom comes by God's will being done. And God's will is people not being hungry, debts being forgiven.

[7 : 16] There's no more injustice and there's no more pursuit by those who create injustice. That is God's will. That is God's kingdom. And so what we're focusing on today is the phrase, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

And that little word as right there is doing a lot of work. Doing a lot of work. It can be translated in a variety of ways depending on how you might have been taught the Lord's Prayer.

Forgive our debts in the same way that we forgive our debtors. Forgive our debts in as much as we forgive our debtors.

Forgive our debts in as far as we forgive our debtors. So what is forgiveness? What are we asking God forgiveness for?

And what do we need to forgive? Forgive our debts for? So in order to sort of dive deep into this passage, I want to go to a Jesus parable in the book of Matthew chapter 18.

[8 : 20] So if you have a Bible on your phone, your iPad, a physical one, I invite you to go to the Gospel of Matthew chapter 18. We're going to hang out there for a while.

Matthew 18, verses 21 through 35. I'm going to go through this verse by verse. I'm going to interject and interrupt a bunch to give us some context.

So Peter goes to Jesus and he asks Jesus, Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times.

Now we'll pause there. Peter thinks he's being exceptionally generous with this question. There are other rabbis, other teachers in the time of Jesus and before Jesus.

And the common number for how often it was to forgive is around the three. And so the rabbis would sort of lay out, if somebody sins against you, if somebody makes a mistake, takes a trespass against you, forgive them.

[9 : 21] If they do it a second time, forgive them. If they do it a third time, forgive them. If they do it a fourth time, stop forgiving them. And it's time to seek out some retribution, some vengeance, some revenge.

So Peter is like, Jesus, you know, Jesus is nice, kind, friendly, seems to be the forgiving sort. If I'm going to be a disciple of Jesus, Peter thinks I'm going to be exceptionally generous. What about seven times?

So Jesus answered, I tell you not seven times, but 77 times. And your Bible may have a footnote that says 77 or 70 times seven.

And the fact of the matter is, if you're getting caught up on the number, you're sort of missing the points. If you're counting, you're not really forgiving, you're just postponing revenge. The point is not the number, but the attitude.

Essentially what Jesus is saying is, if the forgiveness was real in the first place, you probably wouldn't be keeping score. Okay? So then Jesus launches into a parable.

[10:22] Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like. Now, lots of things to talk about parables. Let me give you a thumbnail sketch. One, parables are notoriously difficult to interpret.

I was an undergrad. I was a New Testament professor. New Testament professor taught what she was taught in like the 40s or 50s, which was like, parables have one single point, that's it.

And the reason that sort of style of teaching about parables in like seminary or Bible school is because in the past, like in the 1800s and before, every single line and word of a parable was like dissected so that it was more like allegory than parable.

So there was this overcorrection in New Testament studies. No, they just have one single point.

And then I got to seminary a few years later and my seminary professor was like, no, your undergrad professor was wrong.

Parables can have multiple points. Maybe not full on allegories, but multiple points. All that to say, they're notoriously difficult to interpret. And that's sort of the point. They're rich with imagery and word pictures that they can be interpreted in a variety of ways.

[11:24] Sometimes they do read like allegories where more details have correlation to real life.

And sometimes it is just a major point. The thing is that Jesus doesn't tell us, okay? We're meant to wrestle with it and chew on it.

I've heard a parable called a fictitious garden with real toads in it. Okay? You got, you got the, it's either sinking in deeper over your head. I'm not sure. A fictitious garden with real toads in it.

Every metaphor or allegory by definition does not have a one-to-one correlation to real life. So we must be cautious when of how we interpret parables. Two, the kingdom of heaven, okay?

When Jesus launches into a parable, he often starts by saying that kingdom of heaven is like, and we must remember the kingdom of heaven is not about the afterlife, okay? The kingdom of heaven is about what Jesus is doing on earth right now.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth. So we're not talking about something that happens after you die. We're talking about something that's happening while you're alive. The kingdom of heaven is like, the way that God's will, reign, economy, system of governance happens today is like the following story.

[12:35] So, Jesus launches in. The kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him 10,000 talents was brought to him.

Okay, let's talk numbers. So a denarius is a day's wage. It's about 20 to 60 dollars. You're talking like farmers, subsistence living in first century Palestine, Galilee, Judea.

So that's a denarius. A talent is 6,000 days wages. Okay, so about 50 to 75 pounds of precious metal, light gold or silver, and depending on what precious metal, you're talking about anywhere from 120 to 360,000 dollars.

Okay? This servant has a debt of 10,000 talents. 1.2 to 3.6 billion dollars. Not 20 years worth of work, not 6,000 days worth of work, but 200,000 years worth of work of debt.

But even that doesn't really get us get at what Jesus is trying to say. Because the word 10,000, mirios, is the largest denomination of number in the ancient Greek language.

[13:56] So you've got the biggest word for a number, 10,000, mirios, and talent was the largest sort of denomination or measurement possible. So this is sort of the equivalent of a kajillion dollars.

Okay? Jesus is using the two biggest words that he has access to to make this point. This servant has 10,000 talents, a kajillion dollars of debt.

Okay. Continue. Since the servant was not able to pay, of course, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

Obviously, this guy cannot pay. There's no chance in 200,000 years that he could possibly pay. So what is the master doing and what does this mean? So we have to be careful to say the master is a perfect representation of what God is like.

Oftentimes, there are masters in parables that are sometimes meant to represent God and sometimes not. Oftentimes, parables serve more as a mirror of our own thoughts about God rather than a perfect window into what God is like.

[15:11] And we're not yet done with the story. The story's not done. We don't have a perfect representation. So the master orders that this person and their family is sold to repay the debt.

And we also want to be careful right here to not overly spiritualize because debt was a real issue for most people in the Roman Empire and in Galilee and Judea.

Later in the Lord's Prayer, we pray the line, deliver us from evil. And the phrase actually refers to not just evil as a concept, but the evil one.

And the evil one may conjure up imagery of the devil or Satan, deliver us from the evil one. But the evil one was actually a known character in the life of a peasant.

The evil one is basically the court-martial who goes to repossess your home. The evil one is the one who goes and takes all of your belongings to begin to pay off the debt that you owe to whoever owns your land.

[16:13] He's a known character in poverty life. He breaks your kneecaps, yells, where's my money, dude? And so, when we pray, deliver us from the evil one, it's not just, oh, deliver us from this like spiritual being somewhere out there, even though if you mean that, that's fine.

For those praying the prayer in first century Judea-Palestine, it is a real prayer. Deliver us from the guy who's going to break my kneecaps. So, this story, the master order that he and his wife and his children know that he had be sold to repay the debt, is a common story.

You would have had siblings or cousins or uncles or aunties who had been in this experience where they were farming the land and got so far into debt that they couldn't pay back the landowner and so they were sold or put into prison.

So, I think the prayers of the prayer, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, would have appreciated the fact that they were praying that actual debts were being forgiven.

And the master so far in this story is acting like typical masters or kings or landowners. Readers of the gospel of Matthew thus far, if you were just experiencing this for the first time as a listener or a reader, they know that God does not typically act like this.

[17:30] In Matthew 5, 13 chapters before this parable, Jesus is clear. Jesus sends rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous. God loves imperfection, in total.

There is no one that God does not love or treat with loving kindness. But the readers of Matthew's gospel or the listeners of Matthew's gospel are probably also familiar with images of God who is all about retribution and vengeance.

And this master so far in the story looks more like those classic images. There is also something important to note here about forgiveness. That forgiveness has to actually mean something.

Forgiveness is not the same as saying it is no big deal or it is okay. Forgiveness has to be willing to admit something is wrong.

The pain and hurt and debt has occurred. To appreciate God's forgiveness, we have to be willing to admit our own need for forgiveness.

[18:32] This is known as the discipline of confession to say there are things I have done that I should not have done and things that I should have done that I didn't. This is also a good place to note that we're preaching a sermon series on a prayer that Jesus himself prayed.

And what does Jesus pray? Forgive us our debts. Jesus says that. Now, despite protestations online that say otherwise, I'm actually a pretty classical theologian.

Like, my theology is pretty orthodox. And I believe that Jesus lived in sinless perfection. But often that focus on Jesus' sinless perfection can emphasize too much sort of individual action.

Jesus was human, tied up in human systems. Jesus walked on roads built by slaves and enjoyed the fruit of forced imperial labor.

Scripture says that Jesus learned obedience. There were things that Jesus did not know that then he learned and knew. That Jesus grew in wisdom. And even Jesus is willing to pray, forgive us our debts.

[19 : 43] There's this sort of collective, communal confession that Jesus is willing to engage in. He knew, Jesus knew, by the very act of being human, living in human systems, that he was in debt to the generations before him.

He was in debt to the very ways that his existence was tied to the suffering of others. So if Jesus can pray to God, forgive us our debts, maybe we can too.

On the flip side, in order to forgive, we must be willing to acknowledge that we have been hurt. In order to forgive, we have to be willing to acknowledge that we have been hurt.

Forgiveness is not the same as saying it's no big deal. It's not the same as saying that we should tolerate the wrong or the harm or the abuse. It's not the same as excusing bad actions.

Forgiveness acknowledges the truth that hurt has happened, that pain has occurred, and we don't pretend otherwise, which is what the Master is doing. You are 200,000 years with wages and debts.

[20 : 48] I am going to acknowledge that you must be sold to pay this off. At this, the servant fell on his knees before the king or the master.

Be patient with me, he begged, and I will pay back everything. Which, of course, the servant's being ridiculous, right? You can't pay back that amount. But the servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt.

Can I have a hallelujah? Cancel the debt and let him go. So we're now getting an image of God's mercy and forgiveness and compassion. God didn't make a payment plan.

He didn't lower the interest rate. He didn't consolidate. He didn't do a credit card transfer. The debt is forgiven. It's canceled. It's no more. It's what Paul is talking about in Colossians 2.

When you were dead in your sins, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins. He canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us. God has taken it all away and nailed it to the cross.

[21 : 51] Jesus became sin in the flesh on our behalf, was crucified, and thus any debt that could have possibly construed on us towards God was destroyed.

And that's not a new transaction. When you get saved, it's like not a new transaction. Any mistakes we've made towards God have already been atoned for and forgiven and canceled. Not canceled someday in the future.

We don't have to earn the cancellation now. It's done. But, when that servant, the forgiven servant, went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, a hundred days pay, two to six hundred bucks.

And the servant grabs him and chokes him and demands, pay back what you owe me. So the parable sort of takes this shocking turn.

One, the amount that this man is owed is so much smaller than the debt that's just been forgiven him. I have this written down. Point 0,000,000, 0,000, 1,7% of what he was just forgiven of.

[23 : 02] So you're probably surprised, as the listener of the story, that he's asking in the first place, and you're probably also surprised by the manner by which he asks. He grabs, he chokes, he yells.

This is a guy who's not looking for justice, he's looking for vengeance. He stops seeing his fellow servant as a human and instead has dehumanized this person into merely the money they owe, the pain they've caused, the hurt they've inflicted, and he wants a vengeance.

Vengeance wants to make others not only suffer, but to make sure they know they're suffering because of what they did to us. Vengeance sees people not as people, but only as the sum of their mistakes.

He didn't just lie to me, he's a liar. She didn't just steal from me, she's a thief. They didn't just fire me, they're self-righteous pricks, and so on. Forgiveness, on the other hand, frees us of vengeance. It's not pretending like nothing happened, but it is a surrendering of our right to get even, and it allows us to see people as people and human beings once again.

[24 : 20] So, his fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, be patient with me, and I will pay it back, but he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

Fell to his knees and begged, the exact same verbiage, phraseology of what he did to the master. And the point of contrast here, the king at least is selling the servant to pay off the debt, and this servant is too short-sighted to do that.

In what possible way is throwing someone into prison going to help them or allow them to pay off the debt? They're never going to make an income again, which there's things to say here about the ineffectiveness and failures of our own prison system.

When we refuse to forgive and we hold on to the pain and we hold grudges, we're doing nothing to actually bring healing to our pain. We're essentially throwing the person who hurt us into the prisons of our own hearts, demanding that they pay us back, demanding that they pay back the debt against us, and at the same time robbing them of the power and opportunity to do so.

When the other servants saw what happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. I think this verse is fascinating.

[25 : 43] I preached a version of this sermon like eight, nine years ago and I had this slide and no notes and when I was rewriting the sermon for today, this is the first time I really noticed that here you have a parable about forgiveness, about massive amounts of forgiveness.

But that is not the same as saying that no one should be held accountable for their wrong actions. So servant one is forgiven, 200,000 years worth of debt.

He goes to servant two, grabs, chokes, yells, throws into prison and there's another group of servants who are watching this happen and they say that's not right. We need to do something about that.

So even within a parable about forgiveness, we see people who take action to prevent injustice. Okay? So don't let a sermon on forgiveness be some sort of spiritual abuse that says let people hurt you.

A sermon on forgiveness should be a let's talk about freedom, let's talk about release, let's talk about letting go, not hold no one accountable. Do you understand the difference? All right. So the other servants see what happened, they're outraged, they tell the master what's happened.

[26 : 50] The master calls servant one in, you wicked servant, he said, I canceled all of that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had mercy on you?

Now note, the debt is still canceled. That fact has not changed, it happened, it's done. To me, the primary sin of the servant boils down to the fact that he failed to appreciate, to understand, to realize the depth and the power and the mercy and the hugeness of the forgiveness that he had just been given.

His biggest mistake was to continue to live as if he had never experienced forgiveness himself. If you're three billion dollars in debt and your fellow servant owes you six hundred dollars, I can imagine two scenarios.

One that's like, oh, whatever, it doesn't even matter. And another scenario that says, every dollar, every dime, I demand, I am owed because my debt is so huge.

And when you are forgiven three billion dollars in debt, the reaction should be, like, how much have I been forgiven?

[28 : 01] How much have I experienced? How much goodness have I experienced? Can I pass that along? Forgiveness is not something that we can brute force out of ourselves.

It's not something that we can just like grit our teeth and just sort of like start offering to people.

Forgiveness has to be a fruit of the forgiveness that we ourselves have already experienced.

It's a reflection on our own ability to receive forgiveness as well as to offer forgiveness to others.

Self-forgiveness, unshackling ourselves from shame and self-hatred and self-loathing is so hard because it means that we have to be willing to re-evaluate our own perception of ourselves.

I'm willing to bet that there's a direct correlation between our ability to receive a compliment and our ability to offer ourselves forgiveness. And I'm certain that there is a direct connection between our ability to receive forgiveness and our ability to offer it.

So to answer the king's question, shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servants? The answer, of course, is yes. Paul, again, puts it this way in 2 Corinthians 5.

[29 : 19] All of this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. But God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ. Listen, not counting people's sins against them.

And, he has committed to us this message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors as though God, God's self, were making their appeal through us.

As we grow in our understanding of God's mercy, of God's forgiveness, then we too will grow in our ability to offer forgiveness to those who hurt us. In anger, the servant's master handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back all he owed.

And this is how my heavenly father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart. Now, remember, remember, remember, is this parable about the afterlife? Try again.

Is this parable about the afterlife? No. This is not a passage about hell. Okay? The kingdom of heaven is like, is about here and now, currently.

[30 : 28] It's the reality that Jesus is bringing about. And from all of the other passages of scripture that we have, I can confidently say that God does not have Jack Bauer on retainer to torture people.

It's also worth noting that the word torturers here is completely unnecessary. So, again, sort of some seminary nerdery.

There are two lexicons, dictionaries, that you can buy of, like, ancient Greek. Okay? There's the one that gets put out by, like, Bible scholars, and there's the one that gets put out by, like, Greek classic scholars.

Okay? The one put out by Bible scholars, it's great, it's good, it's \$300, but I own it because you have to, you know, put that on my seminary debt. And it's great, it's good, but it's influenced by Christian theology over the centuries and the years.

And so there's this word here that gets translated as torturers because it assumes that hell is part of this grand scheme of God's plan. And if you know me at all, I'm going to talk about universalism, here we go. So, if that's not actually the case, is that a good translation of the word?

[31 : 36] Whereas the classical lexicon, the classical Greek lexicon, which is translating Greek from text outside of the Bible, just translates it as prison garden. Okay?

So there are these two competing images. Is it God the torturer or is it God who is, you know, there's still something to be talked about here, handing him over to the person in charge of the prison.

Now, since this parable is about life here and now, then what we can see is that the refusal to forgive, the refusal to take to heart what God has done, when we hold on to the pain, when we dehumanize, when we seek vengeance, when we grab and choke and yell, the one who ends up tortured is us.

The one who ends up imprisoned is us. But that cycle can be broken. And the road to our healing and pain can start when we forgive our siblings from our hearts.

Because that's what forgiveness ultimately is. It's something that happens within us. There are two sort of word pictures. In English, we use the word forgive, and it conjures up this image of forgiveness as something we have to give or offer to the ones who hurt us.

[33 : 00] In Greek and Hebrew, the word image that's used to create the word for forgiveness is to walk away or to cast aside. So I don't have to offer anything to the one who hurt me.

What I'm doing, rather, is taking that pain and that hurt, acknowledging that, casting it aside, and walking away. Here's a definition of forgiveness forgiveness from psychology today.

Forgiveness is a conscious and deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance towards a person or group who has harmed you, regardless of whether they actually deserve your forgiveness.

Or, in short, forgiveness is the release of resentment or anger. Forgiveness is a crucial and vital part of mental health, particularly anyone who has been victimized.

forgiveness propels people forward rather than keeping them constantly emotionally engaged in an injustice or a trauma. One psychologist offers four steps to forgiveness.

[34 : 10] Number one is to uncover your anger. Uncover your anger and explore how you've avoided or left unaddressed the emotion. Resentment and vengeance are valid and necessary coping mechanisms for experiencing harm, but left to themselves they can ultimately be self-destructive and have collateral damage.

A brief little personal story without going into too much detail. I have some folks in my life that I do have some anger towards because after I lived with them for three years they put me back in the foster system when I was ten.

And that'll mess you up. But it's only been within the past few years that I've been able to name and identify the anger that I feel. I made excuses for them.

I knew it was my fault because of what I had done what grown-ups did to a ten-year-old. And my therapist has been working with me constantly of like actually you need to name that anger. And I lived in an environment where anger was not okay. It was never okay. It was unchristian and unkind. No, naming, uncovering that anger is a necessary step towards healing and avoiding and spiritually bypassing that anger is a great way to build up toxicity inside.

[35 : 27] Forgiveness is not forgetting. It's not pretending that it's okay. It's not smoothing things over. It admits and it bears witness to the harm that has been done. So you uncover your anger.

Number two, you make the decision to forgive. Forgiveness is an act of agency and power. You get to reclaim your emotions and not grant somebody else the permission to define how you feel.

It is a both recognition that other people can affect and change you. You're not an island. You're not all on your own. People can hurt you. And it is also a refusal to hand over control of your emotional life to someone else.

Forgiveness is rarely just a feeling. It's a process, a choice, a conscious act that no one can do for you or make you do and it's rarely a one-time act.

And that's why forgiveness is an act of power and not weakness because it's willing to reclaim that you are a person. Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation.

[36 : 33] It's not the same as becoming buddy-buddy with a person who hurts you. It's not that you have to trust them again. Forgiveness can, as we said, look like walking away. And not just walking away from the person or group who hurts you, but also being willing to walk away from the feelings of resentment that feels so good, but ultimately will burn you up inside.

Third, I don't like this one, develop compassion to cultivate that forgiveness, not a one-time act, a cultivation, by developing compassion for the offender.

To reflect on whether the act was due to malicious intent or circumstances in their life and systems that they too are tied up in. It's the ability to re-humanize them in my imagination, to see them as a three-dimensional being and not just the one dimension of the harm they cause.

And finally, to release harmful emotions, to let them go, and to reflect on how you have grown from the experience and the act of forgiveness itself.

one piece of decent advice I think I have is forgive people and topple systems. The language of the New Testament is pretty absolute.

[37 : 52] God moves in utter and complete mercy towards people, and God also brings all powers and authorities and systems into complete subjection and obedience to the kingdom of God. So people are people.

They are human. They will always be human. And they deserve that compassion. But the systems that hurt, harm, oppress, they don't deserve compassion. They deserve to be toppled.

The final thing I'll say is our perception of God forgive us our debts as we forgive those who have deaths against us. Our perception of God is often a mirror of ourselves.

There's this fascinating verse in Psalm 18. It says, With the faithful you show yourself faithful. With the blameless you prove yourself blameless. With the pure you show yourself pure.

And with the crooked you show yourself twisted. Which is a fascinating Bible verse about God. And it seems to imply that we bring our own ideas and concepts about God into that relationship and that God is a sum of our projections.

[39 : 02] Yes, I believe that there is a real God with actual qualities that can be known. I believe that Jesus is the ultimate revelation of that God. And yet, Paul says, we see through a mirror dimly. Which means the character of God we're praying to when we pray forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

The character of that God is very much in our hands. How much are we willing to forgive our debtors? How much do we believe that God is willing to forgive? We get to make that choice.

And even though it can feel really good to hold tight to the anger and to the vengeance, in as much as we forgive our debtors, we can then know a God who forgives us.

Would you pray with me? God, I thank you that I praise you that you are a God who offers forgiveness and mercy.

That you are a God who doesn't give up. You are a God who pursues us. That you are a God who sends rain on both the just and the unjust.

[40 : 23] God, I pray that I would be the kind of person who can accept a compliment, who can accept forgiveness and mercy so that I can forgive those who have hurt me.

God, I pray for this congregation that we would be a people known for our mercy, known for our ability to call people to account, for the harm that they have caused, as well as a people known for our ability to release and walk away when necessary.

God, may we be transformed by mercy and believe that grace in itself is healing. We pray these things in Christ's name.

Amen.