

# Journey at the Cross

Three messages by Gregg Gibbons

## **The Flesh:**

*Works Apart from the Life of Christ*

## **Surrender:**

*Experiencing the Mind of Christ*

## **Forgiveness:**

*Experiencing the Heart of Christ*

# THE FLESH

## WORKS APART FROM THE LIFE OF CHRIST

*Gregg Gibbons (January 18, 2011)*

### **Introduction**

Two weeks ago, we reviewed the message entitled *Journey to the Cross*. We focused on Paul's use of the term *The Cross* as the whole encompassing work of Christ – His death on the cross, His burial in an unused tomb, His resurrection, and His ascension – AND God identifying us in this entire finished work of Christ by uniting us to Christ. This foundational truth can cause us to always live in awe of the presence of Christ in our lives because we are so intimately related to Him through His cross.

We reviewed how all of history is a journey to the cross and Jesus' life from eternity past was a perfectly ordained journey to His marvelous work for us and in us through the cross. Paul uses the term *the cross* to point not only to the instrument of death of our Lord, but to point us to Christ Himself as being the center of Scriptures, and the center of our lives and ministry.

So, we know Christ personally through His finished work of the cross. That work includes His resurrection and ascension AND seating at the right hand of God the Father. This seating reveals His finished work and His ongoing authority. It also reveals our rest in Christ's finished work and our authority in Him to proclaim the glorious gospel to others.

*Ephesians 2:6* says that God in His great mercy and love for us made us alive together in Christ through the cross and has raised us up to sit together in the heavenly places in Christ. But why? *Ephesians 2:6* goes on to say "so that God may manifest His grace through us!"

This evening we will begin a three-part series, about 20 to 30 minutes each, entitled *Journey at the Cross*, our personal appropriation of the cross – our personal appropriation of Christ and His finished work -- in our daily lives. Paul says in 1 *Corinthians 2:2*, "I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." This, too, is our deep desire.

### **The Meaning of the Flesh**

Let's look into what God says about the flesh and we will begin to see how to appropriate the cross in the midst of fleshly temptations. What is what the Bible refers *the flesh*? By God's grace, we can live boldly in His presence because He has made us completely acceptable in His Son Jesus Christ. And by God's perfect design, we carry over into our Christian lives old thought patterns that led to sinful habits as we learned as non-believers to control getting our God-given needs of love and acceptance met...and old habits we learned to cope when we didn't get these needs met. These ways are what the Bible refers to as *the flesh*.

The flesh can be described as trying to make life work for ourselves...apart from Christ. It is important to know that we are no longer identified with the flesh, that is to say, we are no longer *in* the flesh...we are *in* Christ. However, *Romans 8:12* reveals that we can still fall for the temptation to live *according to the flesh*, according to those old habits. We are no longer

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identified with these habits and are no longer bound to these habits, but we can fall for the subtle temptation to choose to live according to old sinful habits of the flesh. *James 1:13-14* reveals that each one of us is tempted in these ways.

### **The Blessing of the Flesh**

The flesh, however, is not a liability. God did not save us for us to be crippled with a liability. Christ came to set us free! Temptations of the flesh are opportunities for us to choose the truth of Christ as our functional source of life thereby manifesting His reality and His grace to the world around us. *Ephesians 2:6* is our call in the face of daily temptations, "so that God can manifest His grace through us."

*James 1:12* says, "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord promised to those who love Him." The Greek word for *blessed* means *indwelt by God and, because of that, fully satisfied*. The blessed person is one whose satisfaction comes from God alone and not from favorable circumstances.

James goes on to say that God allows temptation not to provide opportunity for His children to fail, but to show us approved in Christ, who is the promise of life. Again, *Ephesians 2:6* is our call, "so that God can manifest His grace through us."

What set Paul free from his struggle with the flesh in Romans 7? What caused Paul to jump through roof with a victory shout at the end of Romans 7? Was he finally able to get rid of the flesh? No! What is the only thing that can set us free? Truth!

Paul's experience of freedom began when God revealed to him the truth that his old flesh habits resided in the members of his body, not in his new spiritual heart in Christ. Paul said he rejoiced in his inner man, but he struggled with the flesh in the members of his body. Then God revealed to Paul that his inner man, the deepest core of who Paul is, is indwelt and united with the very life of Christ. This is the truth that brought forth his victory shout: "through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

God also revealed to Paul that flesh habits are still present in his body, but he now had to choice and empowerment of the Spirit to choose Christ as his life source to overcome the temptations of his flesh habits. Why? Again *Ephesians 2:6*, "so that God can manifest His grace through us."

So, we are free from the power of sin. We will not be free from the presence of sin in our bodies until we receive our new heavenly bodies. For now, we are free to manifest to the world God's grace in the Person of Jesus Christ in the midst of the same temptations that everyone in the world experiences. We witness Christ to the world when others see His hope in us during the same temptations the world experiences.

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### **The Lies of the Flesh**

We will spend the remaining time reviewing two tables by T.W. Hunt that have been so helpful to me for over 20 years. These two tables summarize the Christly Mind from James and the Fruit of the Spirit from Galatians, while at the same time help show how we can be subtly tempted to pervert and to imitate the character of Christ according to the flesh.

*James 3:17: The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.*

*Galatians 5:22-23: The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*

These manifestations of the character of Christ are listed in the center column of these tables. This is a description of your nature and my nature in Christ. The right column lists fleshly imitations of the life of Christ, ways we are tempted to get our needs for love and acceptance met based on our performance and not Christ. The left column lists fleshly perversions – opposite traits of the life of Christ – ways we are tempted to react to life's circumstances in order to cope when we don't get our needs for love and acceptance met.

Both the right and left columns are based on lies. The right column is based on the fundamental lie that I have something within me that can contribute to the life I have in Christ. This is self-righteousness. It is the lie that Adam fell for. For you see, Adam wasn't trying to do evil, he was trying to do good. As Jesus told the rich young ruler, no one is good but God.

The left column is based on the fundamental lie that Christ is not sufficient to meet my needs for love and acceptance and, therefore, I must react in these ways to cope.

There are 1000s of versions of these lies that Christians can be tempted to believe. For example, a Christian living out of the right column might believe, "I must read my Bible one hour every day and witness to at least one person every day to be a faithful Christian." A Christian living out of the left column might believe, "I am unlovable. I can be loved and accepted through sex." Or, "I am unlovable. I will cope by withdrawing from relationships."

Both the right and left columns are based on performance-based acceptance. If I perform a certain way, I will be accepted, or at least I will be able to cope and accept myself to some degree. Both of these columns are depend on the initiative of the Christian. The lie is "I am what I do."

The center column is based on our now and forever total acceptance through the cross of Christ. Instead of a performance-based acceptance, the center column is a testimony of acceptance-

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based performance. The truths are “I am who Christ made me through the cross” and “I do what I am.”

The right and left columns seek to do the most right thing to do. The center column seeks to do the most loving thing. There is a difference. *2 Corinthians 3:6* says it is the difference between life and death.

The right and left columns seek self-protection. Walls are built that hinder real relationships. The center column seeks truthful openness...an openness that fosters relationships.

*The Mind of Christ Conference Manual*  
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<b>FLESHLY PERVERSION</b>	<b>CHRISTLY MIND (James 3:17)</b>	<b>FLESHLY IMITATION</b>
Lust	Pure	Puritanical
Fussy	Peaceable	Compromising
Harsh	Gentle (in action)	Unkind restraint
Unapproachable	Entreatable	Yes-man
Merciless	Merciful	Indulgent
Fruitless	Fruitful	Fruit-obsessed
Wavering	Steadfast	Inflexible
Lying	Honest	Brutal

<b>FLESHLY PERVERSION</b>	<b>FRUIT OF SPIRIT (Gal 5:22-23)</b>	<b>FLESHLY IMITATION</b>
Hate	Love	Possessive
Hurt	Joy	Frenzy
War	Peace	Neutral
Impatience	Longsuffering	Lenience
Hard	Gentleness	Soft
Badness	Wholesome	Finicky nice
Unbelief	Faith	Presumption
Arrogance	Meekness	Weakness
Undiscipline	Self-control	Self-discipline

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### **Conclusion**

Our Christian life does not teeter on the narrow way depicted by the center column. We are not unstable and prone to slip off to the right or to the left at any moment. It is not an effort to balance our efforts. We are completely free to believe the truth and to live in the center column. We have to choose to live according to the right or left column.

We don't have to focus on the lies behind the right and left columns. It is not about performing better. It is all about believing God and His truths and experiencing Christ living through us. We are called to focus on the truth of the center column. God's light in each of us will expose the lies that we can subtly fall for.

We can be lured into believing that all is well in our Christian life when our life circumstances are positive – when our bills are paid, the family is healthy, the cars are operating, I am accomplishing a lot of good things at work, I'm reading my Bible every day, my emotions are positive, etc. This is when we are most vulnerable to be tempted to find life in our performance.

Freedom every day comes through being intentionally in seeking God and His truths. We are tempted every single day in subtle ways that only God through Christ Jesus in us can expose. May we grow in being more intentional every day beholding Christ, in relating and depending on Him in our lives, for one reason: "so that God can manifest His grace through us" to a watching world for God's glory!

Next week we will review the sweet surrender of the Christian life and the beauty of brokenness.

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Last week we reviewed that while we are new creations in Christ, complete and righteous in Him, we are still free to choose to fall for the temptation to live according to the flesh. The flesh is our old habitual ways of trying to make life work with our own resources apart from Christ. Remember that we are no longer identified by the flesh, *i.e.*, we are no longer *in* the flesh...we are *in* Christ Jesus. But we can choose to live according to the flesh.

I emphasize the word *choose* because it is a choice for us as Christians to sin according to the flesh, albeit incited by subtle temptations from the enemy. We don't fall into sin as if we are helpless. It is a subtle temptation to try to look spiritual while actually manifesting a lifeless imitation of Christ.

We choose to fall for temptations when we don't know the truth. Everyone chooses to live out of what they perceive is truth, whether or not it really is the truth. This is why the proclamation of the pure Word of God is so vital.

### **The Beauty of Brokenness**

God uses brokenness to free us from choosing to live according to the tyranny of the flesh. Brokenness is simply God stripping us of our pride and self-sufficiency -- the flesh -- so that the beauty of the life of Christ can shine through us.

To the world, the term *brokenness* is a negative term. However, it is God's beautiful plan for us who have been given a new spiritual heart and a profound desire to exalt Christ through our lives. I believe this was revealed to the psalmist in seed form in Psalms 51:10, 17, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart."

As Christians, brokenness is not something we go through alone. May we always remember that we are united with Christ through His cross and resurrection, and He promises to never leave us nor forsake us!

Listen to the psalmist again in Psalms 66:10-11, "For You, O God, have tested us. You have refined us as silver is refined. You laid affliction on our backs. We went through fire and through water. But You brought us out to rich fulfillment." Listen to that last verse closely. How can God "bring us out to rich fulfillment"? He has to be with us to bring us out! In this verse, God does not call us out nor lead us out to fulfillment, He brings us out! Brokenness is in the arms of God. And our fulfillment is in Christ!

Isn't it amazing to realize that the silversmith's removal of the dross from the surface of the silver is a picture of our Father stripping away our impure fleshly efforts?! The silversmith continues this relational process until He can see His face reflected on the surface of the silver!

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May we entrust our lives to God in all of His love through any form of brokenness He knows is best for us in order to reflect Christ in us!

And remember that there is nothing wrong with the silver itself and that the impurities are not an integral part of the silver. That's why the dross can be stripped away. So it is with us. We are the righteousness of Christ in our spiritual hearts. Romans 7:23 says that our fleshly impurities are not in our spiritual heart but in the members of our body.

I want to share one more picture of brokenness. A common analogy of brokenness is a horse being broken by going through a period of intense bucking...a picture of a Christian being brought to the end of his or her fleshly resources. There is truth in this analogy. And I realize that any earthly analogy of a heavenly truth ultimately breaks down. However, this particular analogy breaks down a little too early for me.

First, it seems to be a picture of a person going through brokenness apart from Christ. I know someone is riding this horse, but I just cannot picture this rider as Jesus. Second, it can imply that tragedies and extreme circumstances are needed for brokenness. This can be the case, but not necessarily so. Have you ever known anyone who has gone through a series of really tough situations, and then wondered, "Surely this time he or she will be changed"?

*Brokenness itself cannot set us free...only truth can set us free.*

Here is another horse analogy that I believe approaches a more accurate picture of truth. I heard a man from Kentucky explain that the reason a wild horse bucks is because the horse is distracted by the new experience of a saddle and a man placed on his back, and the horse cannot clearly what's going on behind him. The horse simply tries to rid himself of this new distraction.

In contrast, this man carefully puts the reins on a horse, and he extends the reins to 15 or so feet behind the horse. The man never lets go of the reins. This can be a picture of Christ being vitally connected to us all of time. The man periodically tenderly jostles the reins to tap the sides of the horse's legs...not enough to spook the horse, but enough to let the horse know he is there with the horse. The horse is still walking according to his own wild ways, but the man faithfully stays with the horse. The man patiently continues this process, slowly approaching the horse closer and closer.

Ultimately, the man reaches the horse. He tenderly touches the horse. We are truly touched by God, aren't we?! The man patiently continues this relational process as the horse comes to trust the man. And ultimately, the man looks the horse in the eyes to affirm the mutual trust relationship. The man carefully mounts the horse to ride with the horse in a beautiful rhythm

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and unity. Isn't this a beautiful picture of brokenness?! This horse was freed by truth through brokenness, by coming to see the truth of the man who had the horse's best interest in mind. After this brokenness, the horse must continue to surrender to the man as a lifestyle.

### **Sweet Surrender**

So it is with us, as we will see in Paul's letter to the Philippians. I personally began to experience and grow in a lifestyle of surrender after a season of brokenness as a Christian when God revealed to me the futility of my good efforts to make it through that particular season. So, brokenness, to me, is beautiful for two reasons: (1) Christ in all of His beauty is involved with me in brokenness, and (2) my personal initial understanding and experience of brokenness opened my eyes to my nature to remain surrendered to Christ who indwells me.

I am still growing in a lifestyle of surrender. Yes, there are other times God takes me through a season to break me from depending on my own good efforts; however, my nature is to continuously remain surrendered to Christ.

Listen to Philippians 1:29, "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." Paul saw suffering for and with Christ as a gift, not as a liability. We can be honored by God's grace to allow us to know Christ in the fellowship of His sufferings. Hebrews 5:8 says that "Jesus the Son of God learned obedience by the things He suffered." Am I greater than my Master?

Philippians 2:5-8 are our keynote verses for this evening and the basis for the *Fellowship of His Sufferings* insert describing our surrendered nature in, and of, Christ:

*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.*

The Greek word translated "let this mind be" means "to think of and to be mindful of." We are called by God to think as Christ did on His journey to the cross. We can do this because we have the mind of Christ.

Note Paul's use of the title "Christ Jesus." This is unique of Paul. W.E. Vine's book on New Testament words notes that "Christ Jesus" places the emphasis on the exalted One who humbled Himself. Christ the Messiah humbled Himself to also become Jesus the Savior. Paul first met Christ as the glorious One and then was discipled to see how Christ had humbled

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Himself for Paul. This seems to be why Paul frequently uses the title "Christ Jesus," particularly in the context of our message this evening.

All other writers of the New Testament epistles first met Jesus and then witnessed Christ the resurrected One. These writers primarily use the title "Jesus Christ."

So, the title "Christ Jesus" suggests His grace. The title "Jesus Christ" suggests His glory, which Paul does use a few verses later describing the exaltation of Jesus Christ.

Let's review the *Fellowship of His Sufferings* summary.

1. Jesus *emptied Himself*, not of His deity, but of His rights to live as God. He chose to live as a Man under control of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, our nature is to be willing to be *out of control* in sweet surrender to the Spirit of God in us.

After last Wednesday's evening service, I thought of ways I might have communicated certain things better. I had the thought, "Just do your best, and surrender the results to God, don't worry about it." However, there was a check in my spirit. I believe there is a subtle yet dangerous deception in this phrase that, at first glance, sounds true. In this phrase is a temptation to see myself as separate from Christ, *i.e.*, to deny His work through the cross, as I tried to do my best. The message of the cross is our enemy's primary target.

Sure, I want to do my best *as I am surrendered to God*, not to only surrender the results to God later. It's all about relationship. Colossians 1:29 says, "I labor and strive to preach Christ, according to His working which works in me mightily."

2. Jesus *humbled Himself*. Likewise, we desire to be humbled. This is not a door-mat humility nor a "woe is me" humility nor an I'm-sorry-I-got-caught humility, but a fruit-of-the-Spirit humility that is full of life. I am enjoying teaching 20 men at the Haven of Rest mission in Anderson every Monday evening. These men are sometimes pitied by those outside the mission, but their brokenness and humility have them in a most honored position in Christ, and a seek to tell them this. The men there who are truly humble are being set free before my eyes as they receive the good news of gospel, the message of the cross.
3. Jesus *did not defend Himself* and He was *rejected*. Likewise, because we are totally accepted by God in Christ, we can surrender the right to be right. This does not mean that it should not hurt when someone rejects us or what we say. It does hurt. And it doesn't necessarily mean that we simply say nothing in response. We are called to passionately testify of the truth. We are not called to prove we are right, but to testify that Christ is the Truth.

How do you defend a lion? You don't. You just let Him out!

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4. Jesus was *weakened* emotionally and physically. Likewise, our nature is willing to be weakened anytime if that is God's plan to manifest Christ in our lives. Hear the words of Jesus in 2 Corinthians 12:9 in a most personal way, "O Gregg, O Gregg, My grace is sufficient for you, for in your weakness, My strength is made perfect."

I am experiencing a greater weakness at night these days as a result of being so busy 7 days a week, week in and week out. How do I know if I am busy in the Spirit or according to the flesh? For years I had the sense that all busyness is fleshly. I think this comes from making Martha the "cover girl" for fleshly busyness.

Then, this past week I realized how busy Jesus was. He was "busy about His Father's business." He had to search for 12 elders, and then He had to train them. Crowds pressed for His time for healing and feeding. And just imagine how busy He was that last week. How could He be this busy and not sin? Was it because He took time off to pray to the Father and be rejuvenated? This is part of the answer. The underlying answer is that He remained surrendered to the Holy Spirit during His busyness! And that's our nature!

So, how do I know whether my busyness is in the Spirit or according to the flesh? That's the point. I surrender the need to analyze my life to figure it out and to live accordingly. I am simply growing to entrust, or surrender, each step of my journey to Christ who is my life. And when I need a rest, I am trusting Him to lead me. He may speak to me about this through one of you.

5. Jesus *lost all of His possessions*. Likewise, our nature is to not depend on material things to define us.
6. Jesus was *shamed* before and on the cross. This is a deep one for me. God doesn't call us to carry any shame. He does call us to believe Christ has bore all of our shame for us. And He does call us to be open in order to minister to others who are riddled with shame.  
  
We are not to be ashamed of our emotional and/or physical scars from past circumstances -- because they tell a resurrection story. This is the nature of Jesus in us, our Savior whose glorified body still bears the scars of the cross due to our sins. He is not ashamed, and neither should we. Our scars, in Christ, tell a resurrection story!
7. Jesus *rejected rescue*. Likewise, our nature is willing to experience brokenness. We, with the psalmist, yearn to experience God Himself "bringing us out of afflictions to rich fulfillment."
8. Jesus *gave us His rights*. Our nature is to be free from the bitterness of rights. We are bond-slaves to Christ only, not to any other person.

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9. Jesus was *unloved*. Our nature is to serve unconditionally, sometimes with tears in our eyes and confusion in our minds. "Always carrying about the dying of the Lord Jesus that His life may be manifested in our mortal bodies" (2 Corinthians 4:11).
10. And finally, Jesus *chose to forgive*. I believe the #1 stronghold that prevents a Christian from experiencing freedom in Christ is forgiveness -- holding on to a hurt. This is the ultimate surrender, and a supreme manifestation of our true nature. We will finish our series next week on this miracle in our lives -- forgiveness.

# FORGIVENESS

## EXPERIENCING THE HEART OF CHRIST

*Gregg Gibbons (February 2, 2011)*

Two weeks ago we reviewed how we can choose to live according to the flesh if we do not know the foundational truth of our life in Christ through His finished work of the cross. We saw how God's word exposes how subtle and deceptive temptations are to lure us into choosing good, but dead, works according to our old ways of thinking. We will always be tempted to imitate the fruit of the Spirit described in Galatians 5 and to imitate the Christly mind described in James 3.

We may not realize this subtle temptation if we are not intentional in surrendering each step of our day to Christ. When things seem to be going well, we are lured to presume we are doing well, while we might really be being lured away from faith in Christ.

So last week we reviewed how surrender is the lifestyle God has called us to...a sweet surrender to the Father through dependence on the Spirit of Christ who indwells us. This is the same surrender of which Christ testified in His earthly ministry as a Man. Last week we walked with Jesus through God's Word in Philippians to witness the characteristics of His surrender on His journey to the cross. Philippians 2:5 says to let the surrendered mind of Christ be in you and me. This surrendered mind of Jesus is our nature.

Therefore, the flesh – our old ways of thinking and reacting to circumstances of life – is not a liability, but is a divine opportunity to experience Christ living in and through us in *His* sweet surrender. The most supreme act of surrender is forgiving someone who has hurt you. Tonight, we will conclude our series with the message "Forgiveness – The Heart of Christ in You."

### **The Definition of Forgiveness**

Forgiveness for this message is the act of setting someone free from an obligation to you that is a result of a wrong done against you. It is forgiving, or cancelling, a debt that someone owes you by hurting you. I will refer to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane several times, because God nurtures me to relate to Jesus' heart of Christ depicted in great splendor in Gethsemane.

### **The Importance of Forgiveness**

Unforgiveness is the #1 thing that robs us of our freedom in Christ. Forgiveness has been an issue to various degrees in every person I have ever met with in a discipling relationship. Therefore, forgiveness is the most liberating thing we can do as a Christian, and forgiveness is the greatest spiritual warfare in which we can engage.

Forgiveness is the supreme expression of Christ on the cross. His love, His mercy, His justice, and His grace...all at the same time. And thus, forgiveness is a supreme expression of Christ in us.

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Key verses for tonight are Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13. Listen to God's heart for us in these verses. *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Bear with one another and forgive as the Lord forgives you.*

Do you hear that God calls us to forgive as He forgives?! Wow. That's an enormous calling. It is not a call to forgive as God, but to forgive as God's child. We can fulfill this calling in Christ.

### **Forgiveness is...**

Let's review what forgiveness is in the context of God's call on us to forgive.

1. **Forgiveness is a command of God**, as seen in our two verses. At first, this command goes against our sense of justice. However, as God renews our mind to how profoundly we have been forgiven, we grow to joyfully obey this command. We don't obey the old covenant command that says "forgive and you shall be forgiven." That's forgiving out of obligation. We obey the new covenant command that is greater and says, "forgive as you have been forgiven." That's forgiving out of the heart of Christ in us.
2. **Forgiveness is a miracle of Christ is us through the Holy Spirit.** Forgiveness is impossible apart from Christ. We are tempted to believe the lie that we really are not united with Christ when we think like, "I just can't do this. You can't expect me to do this. Just look what this person has done to my family." The truth is, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me with His very life" (Philippians 4:13).

We may grapple with God for another way in our personal Gethsemane, but ultimately we want to obey God and to fulfill His will, which is to manifest Christ in us.

3. **Forgiveness is a reflection of God's character is us.** Forgiveness was an on-going theme and emphasis during Jesus' earthly ministry. Jesus was using the Law to show the disciples how everyone falls short of God's character. After the cross, grace allows us to reflect God's character through forgiving others.
4. **Forgiveness is an intentional step of faith.** The experience of healing from forgiveness is a process, but like everything else in our life, forgiveness is a step of faith. Our feelings may not yet line up yet with the truth, but we are called to walk by faith in Christ, not by faith in feelings.

When asked if a Christian has forgiven someone, it is often said, "I'm still working on it." Oh we must drive that stake of faith in the ground to the glory of God, and then continue to trust God to heal our emotions. In Gethsemane, Jesus' emotions were wild, yet His faith in His Father was steadfast. He didn't wait until His feelings calmed down. He took a step of faith to surrender to the Father His very life even as sweat drops of blood streamed down

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His forehead. He trusted the love and integrity of His Father to work things out for the glory of God, and for the good of others.

We are not above our Master. So, we not only are called to entrust our hurts to God our Father, we entrust our hearts to Him! We cannot entrust our lives to God if we are still holding a grudge, holding on to a hurt.

5. **Forgiveness is a mighty weapon of God.** Forgiveness sets you and me, and our captives, free. At the beginning of His earthly ministry, Jesus related Isaiah 61:1, 2 to Himself, saying "The Spirit of the Lord is on me...to proclaim liberty to the captives." With the Spirit of the Lord on and in us, we are called to proclaim liberty to those we are tempted to hold captive for a hurt they did against us. They may not realize it at the time, but God's hand touches them in a mighty way as we choose to forgive.
6. **Forgiveness is an acknowledgement of God as sovereign Lord in our lives.** Unforgiveness, on the contrary, is seeking to maintain control of our lives.
7. **Forgiveness is unconditional and complete.** We don't have to wait until someone is repentant to forgive them. And we don't have to say, "Well, I'll forgive them this time." Some people will hurt us frequently. We must be equipped to forgive them every time. Because we are called to forgive as Christ forgave us, how does Colossians 2:13 say we have been forgiven? Completely.
8. **Forgiveness is trusting God to protect us.** We are not doormats. And we will not always be understood. Right after Jesus related Isaiah 61 to Himself regarding setting the captives free, the Pharisees rose up and led Jesus to the edge of a cliff to throw Him off. Jesus knew He was not a doormat, and He knew His Father was protecting Him. So, Jesus did not wrangle Himself loose and run away. The Bible says that He simply "walked through the midst of Him and went on His way" (Luke 4:30)! Jesus in His princely majesty just walked away and everyone just watched in awe! Do you believe you have Jesus in His princely majesty living in you?!
9. **Forgiveness is surrendering the right to hurt someone who has hurt you.** Unforgiveness is irrational. Unforgiveness is like taking a poison pill and wishing the other person will die! This is not our heart's desire. Forgiveness believes that vengeance is of the Lord, not us. Forgiveness is part of our lifestyle of sweet surrender. Forgiveness is the experience of the forgiving nature of Christ in us.
10. **Forgiveness is entrusting one who has hurt you to the Lord.** Entrusting is a good synonym for surrender. For we don't surrender to our enemy, we surrender, or entrust, everything in

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11. our lives to God. He is faithful to work all things out for His glory and our good. So, we not only have the power to set others free through forgiveness, we are actually setting them free with our prayers of blessing into the hands of God.

### **Forgiveness is not...**

Let's review briefly what forgiveness is not.

1. **Forgiveness is not a natural response.** I want to clarify this. Forgiveness may not seem to be natural to us because it goes against our sense of justice. However, forgiveness is indeed our very nature. So, the most real sense, forgiveness is our natural response. It is supernaturally natural and naturally supernatural.
2. **Forgiveness is not a process.** Forgiveness is a step of faith. The experience of healing from that step of faith is often a long process.
3. **Forgiveness is not waiting for time to heal a hurt.** Time doesn't heal. Only Christ heals. And He does heal in His perfect ways and time.
4. **Forgiveness is not unfair nor does it circumvent God's justice.** Forgiveness is no longer holding a person in my hands, but is entrusting a person into God's hands.
5. **Forgiveness is not denying feelings, particularly feelings of anger.** Forgiveness is being true to your feelings and walking by faith in the midst of those feelings.
6. **Forgiveness is not denying the hurt.** Forgiveness is not saying something like, "Oh I'm ok. It's no big deal." It is ok to hurt. Forgiveness does not mean the hurt goes away during that step of faith. Think upon our Lord Jesus in Gethsemane. Oh how He was hurting! All of his friends who He poured His life into abandoned Him. He did not deny the hurt. He shared His hurt with His Father in prayer.
7. **Forgiveness is not being a doormat.** As we have already reviewed.
8. **Forgiveness is not forgetting.** Forgiveness does not depend on mentally forgetting or denying a hurt. We can remember the hurt, but not in a way to ever bring it back up, but in a way to testify of freedom that is real in Christ, not in forgetfulness. Forgiveness is so much more. Forgiveness is actually remembering. Remembering God's forgiveness of us is the foundation for forgiveness.
9. **Forgiveness is not a feeling.** When we take that step of faith to forgive as God calls us to forgive, it often feels like we're being hypocritical. However, that's only a ploy by which the

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enemy seeks to deceive. A hypocrite is pretending to be something he is not. However, we are truly forgivers by nature, even when our feelings don't seem to validate that truth. We are not hypocrites when we choose to walk in the truth even when it feels like we are a hypocrite because we may have not walked that way much before.

10. **Forgiveness is not justifying one's behavior.** Forgiveness is our opportunity to justify our identity as forgivers. Forgiveness is not for us to justify someone else's behavior. We entrust that to God. God's justification is only by faith in Jesus Christ.
11. **Forgiveness does not necessarily include reconciliation.** Reconciliation requires both people. And some people who hurt you are not yet open to claiming their responsibility for the hurt, and most often deny they hurt you in the first place. So they don't even see the need for reconciliation. Forgiveness is first and foremost between you and God. You and I are not in bondage to those who hurt us.
12. **Forgiveness is not saying "Let's just forget about it."** The enemy will tempt us to believe forgiveness is not that big a deal. However, forgiveness is serious and awesome. Forgiveness requires the power of the cross. Forgiveness requires resurrection power! And the enemy's primary target is to make the cross look weak and foolish. In forgiveness, we are soldiers of the cross.

### **Closing Testimonies**

Testimony of my mother leading me to forgive myself for my father's suicide.

Testimony of my first experience of intentionally praying to God to free me from a hurt.