

# SERMON #1 FORGIVENESS

## Reflecting the Heart of Christ

BE TRANSFORMED

JOHN R. MURPHY

**Subject: Resembling Christ's Character Through Forgiveness**

**Scripture references:**

**Romans 12:2 AMP**

**Romans 8:29 AMP**

**Matthew 18:32-35 AMP**

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God has a plan for your life. How many times have you heard that? How many of you know what that plan is? Believers throughout history have been asking that question while living a life with uncertainty and suffering. We have all heard that God's plan is to prosper us not harm us. Then why are we believers struggling so much? How is it that we can declare that Christ is the Lord of our life but feel stuck in life patterns that seem meaningless or behaviors we regret but can't stop? Does it make sense that we can know His power and presence and yet be living a life that's not very powerful or peaceful and certainly not victorious?

Let me assure you that while God's love and perfect plan for our lives may seem foggy, uncertain or even unknowable at times, it is absolute and is intended to be a blessing as the perfect fulfillment of who you are. There is no better plan than God's plan because it stems from His perfection and includes His perfect love for you. So how can we be assured that there is one and how can we know what it is?

Paul gives us clear guidance about this in his letter to the Roman church. Let's look at Romans 12:2.

(Read the scripture)

### **Romans 12:2 AMP**

Do not be conformed to this world (this age), [fashioned after and adapted to its external, superficial customs], but be transformed (changed) by the [entire] renewal of your mind [by its new ideals and its new attitude], so that you may prove [for yourselves] what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, even the thing which is good and acceptable and perfect [in His sight for you].

So here is the message of that passage. As our minds are renewed by the influence of the new ideas and attitude we received with the new nature at our salvation, we are able to discern the will of God including His will for us. Simply put, as we submit to the new ideas and practices we will progressively know the will of God for our lives. So we need transformation through renewal of our minds to know the will of God. In the practical everyday Christian life of a believer, that presents the question of how that happens and where we look for examples or evidence that anyone is being renewed. Here an example of how our mind is renewed.

This is the true story of a young man named John who was 26 years old when he accepted Christ in 1982 as an unhappy atheist who had come to the end of himself and his false beliefs. He gave up on the world's answers to his emptiness. At that moment in his life he heard the gospel again, and for the first time it made sense. What he heard struck him as the truth he had been looking for in all the wrong places. He moved from hearing truth to bowing before the Lord, asking to be forgiven and led out of his pain. He will tell you that he knew his sins were forgiven

# SERMON #1 FORGIVENESS

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and that something, many things in him were healed at that moment - but there was much more work to be done.

The first couple of years went by with much enthusiasm for his new found faith. His excitement for the Truth and this new relationship with God crowded out much of the old pain and filled him with hope. But over time the hope began to fade as the promises of more peace, abundant life and spiritual richness were not forthcoming. About five years into the faith, disappointed and feeling much of his old pain, he concluded that he had given God a try but saw no hope for freedom from the tormented state of his soul. Christianity was just not working for him, as evidenced by the unabated sin behavior both imagined and realized. He also felt no sense of direction. None of his disciplines to pursue God yielded the result he had expected and hoped for. And he felt no assurance that just trying harder would make any difference.

One day everything changed because of the advice of a Christian counselor who explained that his anger and deepening depression was the result of his need to forgive. It was certainly true that anger had been one of John's greatest struggles. Thankfully it had not gotten him into any trouble yet, but his new faith had only put a dent in the problem. As you might expect from a person with pent-up anger, the idea of forgiving his past abusers just made him angrier and launched a recounting of offenses he had endured. His defiance rejected the idea of doing anything to release them of their debt to him. From his perspective, forgiveness was simply not going to happen.

As some months passed he was strengthened by God to finally forgive, not because he felt like it or they deserved it. But just because it would honor God. It was simply His will to forgive and that is all the justification needed. While he knew those people did not deserve to be forgiven, God helped him see that he had received forgiveness he did not in any way deserve and could not have earned. John was convicted that God desired him to pass on that forgiveness with no condition - no exceptions.

The following months after being obedient to pray the necessary words of forgiveness brought relief from his depression. As the cloud lifted, he wondered how he could have missed the need to forgive while pursuing a faith so foundationally based on forgiveness. The torment of his heart began to lift and old sin behaviors became less of a struggle. He experienced his relationship with God strengthening, and his hunger to advance his faith began to grow.

Something big had just happened in John's life and he wanted more of it for himself and for others. The pursuit of more and how to help others over time directed him into a life purpose that continues to be his passion today.

Let's now take a look at two more passages of scripture to better understand the biblical principles operating in this situation.

The first is to clarify and apply what happened in this story and the second reveals how God's bigger purpose is being advanced in this situation.

Let's look at the parable of the unmerciful servant as told by Jesus in Matthew 18:32-35.

"Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a human king who wished to settle accounts with his attendants. When he began the accounting, one was brought to him who owed him 10,000 talents [probably about \$10,000,000], and because he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and his children and everything that he

# SERMON #1 FORGIVENESS

Reflecting the Heart of Christ

BE TRANSFORMED

JOHN R. MURPHY

possessed, and payment to be made. So the attendant fell on his knees, begging him, Have patience with me and I will pay you everything. And his master's heart was moved with compassion, and he released him and forgave him [cancelling] the debt. But that same attendant, as he went out, found one of his fellow attendants who owed him a hundred denarii [about twenty dollars]; and he caught him by the throat and said, Pay what you owe! So his fellow attendant fell down and begged him earnestly, give me time, and I will pay you all! But he was unwilling, and he went out and had him put in prison till he should pay the debt. When his fellow attendants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and told everything that had taken place to their master. Then his master called him and said to him, you contemptible and wicked attendant! I forgave and cancelled all that [great] debt of yours because you begged me to. And should you not have had pity and mercy on your fellow attendant, as I had pity and mercy on you? And in wrath his master turned him over to the torturers (the jailers), till he should pay all that he owed."

In the next verse listen to what Jesus Himself proclaims about the message of this parable and the practical application in our lives as Christians. Matthew 18 23:34 AMP

He said in the last verse of chapter 18, and I quote, "So also my heavenly father will deal with every one of you if you do not freely forgive your brother from your heart his offenses." Matthew 18:35 AMP

So what is he saying? If you do not forgive you will be tormented. The unforgiveness will rob you of your peace. What we know is that torment can drive you to seek relief from all the lies of the world which cause you to suffer consequences. Not the least of which is shame that produces even more torment.

You can see now how this spiritual principle was operating in the story about John's unforgiveness experience. He was living the torment promised all believers who harbor unforgiveness. This could not be overcome by how deeply he pursued the faith and all the ways he tried to be a good Christian. None of that matters. Christians will not be free of torment without forgiveness. We cannot claim scriptural promises of peace and joy while we resist God's will. It is clearly His will for us to pass on what we received freely to others without condition. No exceptions.

Ok we have that settled. Now while it is obvious that God has a requirement of forgiveness, how does this fit into His bigger plan for all of His children?

Let's take a look at Romans 8:29 AMP.

"For those whom He foreknew [of whom He was aware and loved beforehand], He also destined from the beginning [foreordaining them] to be molded into the image of His Son [and share inwardly His likeness],..."

God has a vision and a mission to mold you inwardly to reflect who Christ is inwardly. So if you have ever wondered what God's plan is for your life – know that the answer is to be more and more like Him. Of all the things He could do for us, His perfect love for you is expressed in His desire to mold you to be like Him!

Can He mold us if we resist Him? Ask yourself if a believer has taken offense and is unwilling to forgive whether that inwardly reflects the heart of Christ. Based on the parable of the unmerciful servant, do you think that we

# SERMON #1 FORGIVENESS

## Reflecting the Heart of Christ

BE TRANSFORMED

JOHN R. MURPHY

can escape torment when we do not forgive? You have to ask, if we are members of the Kingdom are we subject to the principles of the Kingdom? Yes we are. The King of our Kingdom wants us to be blessed. He wants us to fully experience the spiritual richness available to those who He draws into the Kingdom. He intends the blessings of the Kingdom to be for those who comply with His wishes, and He is gratified like a father when we do the things He knows will bless us.

When we operate in of the character of forgiveness, we are relieved of the associated torment. The more we forgive people of offenses we have harbored over our lives, the more we will be freed of torment. As we adopt and value the character of forgiveness in our hearts, we inwardly reflect the character of Christ. And as we inwardly reflect Christ, God is glorified and His will is being accomplished. So how many of you would like to have more of the heart Christ? Can you agree with me that it would be a blessing for you? Can you see that it is a divine intent and purpose for you to be free of emotional suffering and the consequences it brings? I know that people in this place today are suffering from emotional pain without knowing any specifics. And I know that at least some of this stems from the torment of unforgiveness.

Are you tired of struggling against an unwanted behavior that your flesh is clinging to in an effort to escape the way your heart feels? We don't like to be in pain. I know that when pain comes, it is sometimes just too easy to choose the solutions of the world to crowd out the pain. Do you experience growing shame about sin in your life that you rely on to escape from how it feels to be you inside?

If you are tired of the "sin-repent cycle" that does not address the urge to sin, that comes from your desire to be free of some torment within you. Or perhaps you just want more of God's will in your life to realize more of His promises and fulfill a desire to honor Him in your life. Now is the opportunity to do all these things. Only Christ has the heart of Christ, but all of His people have the opportunity to have a heart that more resembles His by addressing any type of offense lodged in our heart toward someone else. It could be a parent, a child, a sibling, a spouse, a boss. It could even be toward the leadership of this church. Maybe it is me.

The idea of forgiving may bring up feelings of resistance. That's pretty normal. The sin nature will always resist the will of God. Some may say that they have dealt with a past offense and "put it on the shelf". That's not forgiveness. Others of you may be thinking that the offending person will have to say they are sorry before you forgive or that you need to go tell the person of the offense or even reconcile first. But there are no conditions of man that overrule a command of God. Some will say "no" to forgiveness, thinking it means they have to trust someone who has not been trustworthy. Forgiveness does not call us to be unwise. There are even those who hang on to their anger to drive them to accomplish a goal. That is using the urgings of Hell instead the power of God to be successful.

Let's be honest. All of those things are justifications, excuses to defy God's will. Those feelings are driven not by the Spirit of God that lives inside of us but by our sin nature, the pride that fully rebels against the will of God. Again, God's command to forgive is not contingent upon the requirements of man.

We all have somebody we can forgive right now. And this is your opportunity to break the bondage of anger, rage, depression, spiritual dryness and torment in your soul. Who is that person for you today? Don't wait six months

# SERMON #1 FORGIVENESS

Reflecting the Heart of Christ

BE TRANSFORMED

JOHN R. MURPHY

like John did, which just delayed his freedom and extended his suffering. Let's all have a breakthrough today. Let's all honor God today. Let's accept the truly awesome invitation to have our character be more like the heart of the Creator. Remember there is no situation in life that is not improved by having more of the heart of Christ!

Let's all forgive somebody right now.

Let me pray for us and we will get started:

Heavenly Father, we need to hear Your urging. We need to feel conviction for what is your will in our life today. Father, we ask for your strength and grace to help us fulfill the calling you have for each of us today. Lord bring us all conviction for who we need to forgive today. Please bring the name of the person we need to forgive to our mind along with the comfort we need to handle the memories of the offense. Lord, we desire to do your will and we are thankful that following your will even if it is a challenge at times will bring us blessings - and bring you glory.

In Christ's name we pray.

(Distinct pause to give people a chance to be convicted (not condemned) 10-15 seconds)

Ok do you have the name? If you have more than one, take the first one that came to mind. Now I will lead us in a prayer of forgiveness. But before I do, take a minute to be aware of three things you will need to know in order to do this prayer.

They are:

- What was the offense?
- What suffering did it cause you?
- What were the consequences in your life because of it?

(Distinct pause to give them time to think through the question)

I am going to lead you in a prayer to release this person. You can say it out loud; you can say it in your thoughts, and if you are just not ready to forgive, then listen to the prayer and ask God to give you the strength to forgive later.

Repeat after me.

## Forgiveness Prayer

Heavenly Father, I forgive [Name]. I forgive [him or her] for: [list everything you can think of that caused the offense and how you suffered as a result of the behavior]. I ask that You forgive [Name] as well. Father, I ask that I would lose sight of the offense, and if I am ever reminded of it, that I will dismiss that memory as an old, resolved conflict. Father I ask for the strength to simply forget the incident and move on with rebuilding that relationship if you lead me to do so. Father, please show me how to love [Name] the way you do. Father, show me how to turn my offense into concern for [Name's] well-being. Father, I am moved to forgive [him or her] because I desire to be obedient to You and desire for You to be glorified. Father, I ask that You would forgive me for not forgiving



# SERMON #1 FORGIVENESS

## Reflecting the Heart of Christ

BE TRANSFORMED

JOHN R. MURPHY

[Name] before now and remove from my heart any consequence or torment from not forgiving them in the past. Father, I confess that I will need Your help to live out this forgiveness and I ask You to give me the strength to have the character of forgiveness. Father, please bless [Name]'s life in every way and heal [Name] of any emotional or physical wounds that cause [Name] suffering. (If you are not sure of person's salvation in Christ: Lord, I also pray for [Name]'s salvation and ask that You would write [Name]'s name in the Book of Life and compel [Name] to seek Your salvation. I pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen

For all of you who have prayed this prayer you have changed. You have a heart that more resembles the heart of Christ. You have honored God and you will be free of the torment that has been resident in you from the moment you took offense. You have exercised a principle of the Kingdom and you will receive a greater portion of the blessing of the King.

(Now pray for them)

Let me now pray for you.

Heavenly Father, as a minister of forgiveness and reconciliation, I extend forgiveness to each person who prayed and ask that You will forgive them for withholding their forgiveness until now. I ask that You honor and reward them for their obedience to You and remove from them any negative spiritual consequence that they may have suffered until now. Lord, I ask that their heart would be more attuned to Your leadership in their daily life. Lord may you be glorified by their act of obedient forgiveness and by my extending your forgiveness to them. I ask these things in the name of Jesus. Amen.