

Joy of Forgiveness

#0118

Study Given by W. D. Frazee—March 7, 1975

Tonight we're going to study a happy subject: The Joy of Forgiveness. First of all, forgiving makes God happy. He just loves to forgive. Jesus told three experiences related to three parables to give us glimpses of this joy. They're recorded in Luke 15. The first had to do with a sheep that was lost. The second had to do with a piece of silver that was lost. The third had to do with a son that was lost—Sheep, Silver, Son. In each case, the story opens with sorrow and ends with joy.

In each case, the sorrow is over the lost, the joy is over the recovery. How happy the shepherd is when he finds that one lost sheep on the mountainside. How happy the woman is when she finds that lost piece of silver which is a part of her cherished marriage portion. And how happy the father is when he sees that son coming, for whose return he has watched that road, oh so long. My point is: every one of these stories is given by Jesus to tell us what it is that makes God happy. So in Luke 15:7 after telling the story of the lost sheep and its return, He says:

"I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repents, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance" Luke 15:7.

This doesn't mean that God isn't happy with good people. It doesn't mean that God doesn't love the righteous. Certainly He does. But the return of the prodigal thrills God's heart with a joy that He longs for us to get a glimpse of, to understand.

In Psalm 86:5, the psalmist says:

"...Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Thee" Psalm 86:5.

God doesn't have to *get* ready to forgive when somebody approaches the mercy seat. He's ready already all the time. I'm glad to think of my heavenly Father as like this, what do you say?

I want you to notice what God's forgiveness includes; let's turn to Jeremiah. Here's the wonderful, new covenant promise:

"...this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother,

saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” Jeremiah 31:33–34.

In the beautiful parallelism of Hebrew poetic writings, we have in these last two lines a repetition of the thought in different words. You notice the two things He equates. I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. When God forgives, He includes the precious thought that He wants to not only forgive our guilt and take away our suffering of the penalty, but He wants to forget all about what we did that broke His law and broke His heart.

That’s real forgiveness, isn’t it? Do you know what it takes? It takes love, that’s all. God has so much of it that it’s no problem for Him to forgive at all. The more He loves, the more anxious He is to forgive, and the greater joy He gets in forgiving.

When that prodigal son came home, he *hoped* his father would forgive him enough that he would give him a job as a servant. He knew he’d greatly wronged his father, and he had his speech all ready; he made it up down there in the hog pen. You remember the Bible said he came to himself and he said:

“I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him,
Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,
And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me
as one of thy hired servants” Luke 15:18–19.

He got three fourths through that speech—if you read the story. But when he admitted his sin, confessed his guilt, and asked for pardon, the father never gave him even the opportunity to ask for a job. He was welcomed once more into the bosom of the home. His father threw those arms of love about him, put his own rich robe over his rags, and called for a feast. When the son went to bed that night, he knew that he’d been welcomed royally.

Oh, my dear friend, just to give God an opportunity to welcome us when we’ve gone astray from Him; just to give God a chance to forgive us when we’ve wounded Him makes Him so happy. Let’s rejoice in His rejoicing. What do you say?

Now that leads me to the next point in the joy of forgiveness. It is not only God that is made happy by forgiveness. You and I, as forgiven sinners, enter into the joy of the reunion.

Psalms 32:1–2, while you’re turning, let me remind you that this first word in each of these verses, the first word in Psalm 32:1, and the second verse is from the Hebrew word “Asher.” One of Jacob’s sons was called Asher. It means happy. Some of the translations put the word happy in here. Our King James puts it “Blessed.” It means both. If you’re blessed, you’re happy, and if you’re happy, you’re blessed.

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile”
Psalm 32:1–2.

Oh yes, the happy man is the forgiven man. Don't you know that prodigal was happy as he saw all the festivities that night, and recognized that his father was so happy to have him home? The father was happy, so was the boy. So, my dear friend, as you think of the forgiving love of God, He wants *you* to be happy. He wants you to know the joy that your sins are forgiven.

Let's repeat together 1 John 1:9.

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”
1 John 1:9.

I want you to notice in Psalm 32, the experience that David had before he wrote this Psalm. David had sinned grievously. He had broken the Seventh Commandment, broken the Sixth Commandment, broken the Eighth Commandment, broken the Ninth Commandment, and broken the 10th commandment. He had broken just about all the commandments in the Decalogue in that awful experience with Bathsheba and Uriah. And he went through an experience. He tells us about it here in the third verse:

“When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and Thou forgave the iniquity of my sin” Psalm 32:3–5.

Thank the Lord, not that men sin, but that they can confess and find forgiveness; not that they fall, but through the grace of Christ, they can be lifted up. God is in the forgiving business, and He wants the forgiven sinner to share the joy of the reconciliation, to know the happiness of the reunion.

We're all sinners here tonight. I pray that every one of us may be a pardoned sinner, a forgiven sinner. Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Someone says, “I'd like to, but I don't feel worthy.”

Bless your heart, friends. How in the world are you ever going to get worthy continuing unforgiven? There's no way to. Our only worthiness is in Jesus; that's what's brought to us in that beautiful message in Psalm. He took our place so that we could take His place. He suffered the death that was ours so that we might have the life that was His. He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. With His stripes we are healed. We will never find forgiveness by waiting

long enough for the remembrance of sin to pass away, either in God's mind or our own. Our only hope is in coming to the mercy seat, presenting the merits of Jesus. He died for me. That's why I know that He forgives sin.

"...the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" 1 John 1:7.

Someone has put some of these thoughts in beautiful verse. May I share them with you?

"Not worthy, Oh Lord, of Thy pardon, not fit to partake of Thy grace;
Not worthy, my Savior, but longing to live in the light of Thy face.
Not worthy to cling to the promise of cleansing and healing divine;
But eager to come at Thy bidding, and claim all Thou givest as mine.
It is not because I have asked Thee, though Thou hast encouraged my prayer
But Thou who doest love me has offered my sins and my sorrows to bear.
God offered, and I have accepted the cleansing, the joy and the light;
And into my life, there is flowing a wonderful beauty and might.
Still higher as onward I journey, my will rises up to Thine own;
For God has accepted a sinner, and I have accepted a throne.
There never was souls so unworthy to meet with compassion like Thine;
That I should be heir to a kingdom, and God, the eternal, be mine.
Not worthy, but willing to praise Thee with jubilant spirit and breath;
Then crown me, Oh Christ with Thy merit o'er sin and temptation and death."

Ah, dear ones, we need not wait, we *cannot* wait, we must not wait till we are worthy to come to Jesus. It is because we are utterly *unworthy* that we come.

"In my hand no price I bring,
Simply to His cross I cling."

[The hymn "Rock of Ages" is sung.]

Forgiveness makes God happy. It makes the forgiven sinner happy. But let's go a little farther, let's go to Matthew 6. Jesus had just given what we repeat as the Lord's Prayer. In that prayer, you remember that we are taught to pray. In the 12th verse: "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." As it's put in another place: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Now we're ready to read, will you read these verses with me?

"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses"
Matthew 6:14–15.

Is that really so? If I want to be forgiven, I must be what? I must be forgiving. Now on first thought, we might wonder what connection there is, but Jesus has tried to make this plain.

Go over to the 18th chapter of this same book. We'll notice another one of Jesus' parables. The occasion of the giving of this parable was Peter's question in the 21st verse:

"...Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" Matthew 18:21.

Jesus said:

"...I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" Matthew 18:22.

Just keep on forgiving. As Luke tells it, Jesus even said:

"...if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shall forgive him" Luke 17:4.

Seven times in one day; think of it. And in Matthew 6, where we were reading, He links my forgiveness with my attitude toward my brother. Now He's going to tell a story:

"Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents" Matthew 18:23–24.

By any reckoning, that's a lot of money. Some of the translations to make it more real to us say millions of dollars, that's what's involved, graft in the government, an unfaithful steward.

"But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all" Matthew 18:25–27.

Do you suppose he ever could have paid all? But he begged for what? For mercy.

"Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt" Matthew 18:27.

The man had asked for time. The king knew it was impossible, so he just wiped the whole thing out. It's too bad that the story doesn't stop there. It goes on in reality.

"...the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him an hundred pence..."

It was one-millionth part the size of the debt that he owed to the king.

“...and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owe. And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all” Matthew 18:28–29.

It’s about the same words he used with the king, some hours before. But he didn’t do to his fellow servant what the king had done to him. He would not, he wouldn’t listen, and wouldn’t give him time, wouldn’t have mercy on him.

“He would not. But went and cast him into prison And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Should not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses” Matthew 18:30–35.

We can’t earn God’s forgiveness. It’s made clear that forgiveness this man got from the king was free grace. He didn’t deserve it. He couldn’t earn it. But notice, he lost that when he turned around and refused to be forgiving and kind and merciful and patient to his brother. God is telling us here in plain language, that we lose the blessing of God’s forgiveness when we are unforgiving to others.

This is no arbitrary act of God. It’s so in the very nature of things. It is impossible for a loveless heart to appreciate the love of God. It is impossible for an unforgiving spirit to bask in the sunshine of God’s forgiveness. Oh, how many a heart is worried, fearful, anxious concerning the personal experience because of an unforgiving attitude toward others.

Let’s go over to Ephesians 4:32:

“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted,”
Ephesians 4:32.

What’s the next word?

“forgiving one another,” Ephesians 4:32.

What are the next two words?

“even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you”
Ephesians 4:32.

We are not forgiven *because* we forgive others, but *as* we forgive others. We do not earn forgiveness of God when we forgive our brother. But we close the door to God's forgiveness of our faults and mistakes and sins when we refuse to forgive our neighbor.

This verse points us to a positive way to love and forgive. My dear friends, we will never be able to forgive others as God forgives us if we keep uppermost in our minds their faults, their mistakes, their slights, and their wrongs. No. The thing that will enable us to forgive others is to look at how wonderfully God has forgiven us. When we look at Jesus and His great sacrifice for us, when we think of Him standing there at the mercy seat holding up His wounded hands as He prays for us, and when we remember that our sins against God are a million times greater than anybody has ever done to us, and how mercifully God has forgiven us, then we will rejoice that we have the opportunity to reveal God's forgiving grace toward others.

Somebody says, "If I do that, people will take advantage of me." Probably they would, undoubtedly they would. But my dear friends, whether you know it or not, you are doing yourself a far greater injury by cherishing that unforgiving spirit that anybody could ever do to you by any other means.

More than one man has gotten ulcers of the stomach or suffered a heart attack just because of malice, anger, selfishness, a cruel, unforgiving spirit. Oh friends, for your *own* sake, ask God to take every bit of unforgiving spirit out of your heart. But also, for the sake of the one who has fallen, for the sake of the one who has wronged you. If *you* (don't miss it) will take an attitude toward the one who has wronged you as Jesus has taken toward you, you may win that one as Jesus has won your heart. Has it not been the revelation of God's forgiving love of God that has melted your heart? Oh, then reveal that love to others.

As I share these thoughts with you, there comes back to my mind over the years, an experience that made a deep impression on my mind. This happened over 40 years ago. I was holding evangelistic meetings in a certain city, and among others who came to my meeting was a middle-aged man and his wife. They accepted the message and along with others were getting ready for baptism. We had a baptismal class and they attended; they were having studies in their homes. As my custom is, I sat down with them personally before they were baptized to go over things with them and make sure everything was clear. I was sitting in their home one afternoon. We were going over the different points of truth, and everything was clear to them; they were accepting it, walking in the light. Then I asked them a question. It's a question I had asked hundreds of people before, and little did I dream of what was going to be unearthed.

I said to them, "Have you confessed all your sins to the Lord, and as far as you know, is everything all right between you and every other person?" You see, I didn't want them to go down into the waters of baptism with any shadow over their heart. And when I asked them that question, they looked at each other and then they told me. They said, "Brother Frazee, everything is all right except one thing. There's one man in this world that we can't forgive. Several years ago, he lured our

little 12-year-old girl out into the woods and attacked her and murdered her. And because he had an influence, instead of being electrocuted, he was sent to the penitentiary. He's up there now in jail, and we can't forgive him because he murdered our little girl."

I sat there and I thought in my soul, "Lord, what do I say? What do I say?" Then, in His mercy, the Lord brought to me something from Luke 23. You might like to turn to it:

"And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" Luke 23:33–34.

In our imagination, we gathered there at Calvary, and we looked at Jesus suffering on the cross. We thought of the abuse and the cruelty that was heaped upon Him, and we listened together to that prayer for his murderers, "Father, forgive them."

Then I said, "Dear people, I do not blame you for your feelings or your attitude. It would be strange if you did not feel as you feel." But I said, "Would you be willing to pray that God will give you *His* divine love for the one who has committed so grievous a sin, and who has wronged you so deeply?"

They looked at each other again, and they said, "Brother Frazee, frankly, I don't think we're ready to pray for that. I don't think we're ready."

Well, again, I couldn't blame them. But as we continued to look to Calvary, they came to the point where they were willing for God to work a miracle in their hearts and lives that would lift them above the level of hate and revenge and an unforgiving spirit. And my dear friends, when they opened the door, God came in. When they asked God to work the miracle in their lives, He did.

Some of you have heard the story of Harry Orchard, that anarchist that years ago up in Boise, Idaho, set off the bomb that killed the governor of Idaho. Some of you know that his widow was a Seventh-day Adventist. After her husband's murderer had been put into the penitentiary for life, God, in His infinite wisdom and love, impressed the widow to go to the penitentiary and arrange with the warden to see that man who had murdered her husband—a very unusual thing. She kept going, giving him literature, revealing the love of Jesus to him. Harry Orchard was eventually converted and became in the providence of God, an agent to win dozens and scores of others. He became a most trusted man there in the penitentiary, and lived out his life witnessing to the redeeming power of God's grace.

Oh, my friends, that God may help us to open our hearts to forgiving love. And when I think what tiny little things sometimes become the basis for malice, for barriers, for an unforgiving spirit—what tiny little things they are. Anything is small compared with that great murder of Christ on Calvary, isn't it? But from His loving heart came that prayer, "Father, forgive them."

And so, my dear friend, if there's a soul here tonight who has found it difficult to forgive others, let us face reality tonight: First, it's simply a law of the universe that there's no way that you can experience the forgiving love of God as long as you are unforgiving toward others. No matter what they've done. No matter how they've wronged you. God says, "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Don't wait for them to make all the advances; don't wait for them to make everything right. Oh, reveal to them the loving, forgiving mercy of God. What do you say, friend?

And this completes the circle of rejoicing. In fact, without this, the circle is broken. Remember, exercising forgiveness makes God glad; receiving forgiveness makes the repentant sinner happy, and exercising forgiveness toward others will bring joy to your heart. And as they receive that forgiveness, they in turn, will share the joy and complete the circle of love. Thank God.

Remember, you and I can't originate this love ourselves. Is there a wife here that's been wronged by her husband? Is there a husband here that's been wronged by his wife? Are there children that have been wronged by their parents? Are there parents that have been wronged by their children? Are there brothers and sisters that have had scraps, quarrels, perhaps deep wounds?

Oh, I think of how people sometimes get into trouble over legacies. What a foolish thing to break the *harmony* of a family over money. Isn't it a terrible thing, friends? Well, the list is a lengthy one, endless of the things that people get disturbed about, get mad about, get angry about, or just a deep, hidden, malice, hatred, selfishness, or perhaps just a don't care attitude. Sometimes it finds its manifestation in this: "Well, they don't want to see me, and I don't want to see them; the bigger the distance between them and me, the better. The world is large, and they can go their way, and I'll go mine."

I'm so glad that Jesus didn't treat me that way, aren't you, friend? He could have stayed in Heaven and left me to my fate. I was not looking for Him. He came looking for me.

Ah, dear ones; if you want to be happy, it takes love, and love is forgiving. Whittier puts it this way:

"For still in mutual sufferance lies
The secret of true living;
Love, scarce is love, that never knew
The sweetness of forgiving."

You remember that text we read from Psalms:

Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive..." Psalm 86:5.

Let's just, as it were, be on the lookout for chances to reveal the forgiving love of God for those about us. Instead of carrying a chip on our shoulder instead of being sore at this point or that point so we're liable to say, "Be careful, you're

stepping on my corn.” Oh, no. We’re just looking for chances to reveal the forgiving love of God.

Is this a higher standard than we know how to reach? Indeed it is, my friend. But bless the Lord; He’s in the business of *giving* this kind of experience more and more to those who seek it. And it is as we behold the love of Jesus revealed on Calvary that we hunger and thirst for an experience of forgiving love like that, and we seek it with all our hearts. It is written:

“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” Matthew 5:6.

[An appeal is given.]

Ah, dear ones. As you go to your homes, thank God for His forgiving love, what do you say? Thank God for His forgiving love and share it with others. Tell them the good news: Jesus came to save sinners. He’s on the forgiving end. All right, will the audience please kneel as we pray?

Our kind, merciful heavenly Father, we gather here at the foot of the cross, seeing what they did to our best Friend. We see them drive those cruel nails in His hands; His heart is breaking in love for them. He doesn’t murmur or complain. He only cries out, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” It is our sins that have done this, dear Father. We ask that Thou would forgive us, for we know not what we have done. Truly, we know not. And Father, tonight, we have seen that a condition for us receiving this forgiveness is that we are willing to forgive our fellow man. And as we do this, God opens the door of mercy for us. Give us the joy of forgiveness. Give us the joy of knowing that others are receiving forgiveness.

Oh, Jesus, we thank Thee for the victories that have been gained tonight. Some have caught a glimpse of the forgiving, relenting love of a Father. And oh, we want this in our own souls as we go home. If there is yet one who is holding back, who can’t believe such love, come closely. If there is one who is still waiting until he does something before he comes to Thee, bring that one, right now, to Thy heart, Father. May he hold back no longer. Time is short. So soon, the door of mercy will be forever shut. We cannot delay on this point. Teach us to number our days carefully. And now dismiss us with Thy blessing, Father, that we may be happy indeed. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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