

If you weren't here last week, we started to go through the letter of Philemon. We got through about sixteen verses last week, and we learned that this is a letter that the apostle Paul is writing to his brother and friend Philemon who is in the church back at a place where Paul had visited and shared the gospel. And what happened is Philemon's slave stole from him and ran away. And as the slave ran away, he got caught and put in jail where he met Paul. Paul shared the gospel with this slave, he became a believer in Jesus Christ. And now Paul is writing back to Philemon and appealing to him to receive back this slave that had run away and stolen from him and wronged him. That's what we unearthed a bit last week, and so we're going to finish this week. And as I said last week, there's lots of things we can draw out of it. There's lots of applications that we can make from this personal letter. In particular, there were three things that I had hoped that we would see as we read this together.

The first thing is how the apostle Paul lovingly handled such a delicate situation. And I hope as we read this letter that we can really hear Paul's heart. Because this letter, unlike any other of his letters, is an intensely personal. He wrote some personal letters to Timothy and Titus, but many commentators have said that this letter in particular is the most personal that Paul wrote. And I think that, as you read this letter, you can really see Paul's heart and his love for the church of Jesus Christ working itself out in a way that you don't really get to see in some of his other letters. Paul is sometimes characterized as this hard or stern man who just goes around, preaches the truth but he doesn't do it in love very often. And I think that this letter just blows that characterization out of the water. Because you can't read this little personal letter without going, "The apostle Paul was gentle and loving and wise." And he was at times in other letters very stern and sharp and very much into correcting the churches that he had planted, but he always did it with love. And I think in this letter that that's so clear. You can't read it without seeing that this is the man who not just wrote, "Love is patient, love is kind, love is all these things," but the man who worked out that kind of love in his life and in relationships with people around him. So that was the first thing I wanted us to see.

In fact, I found a quote this week regarding that. It said, "This little epistle provides insight into Paul that no other does. Elsewhere, he wrote about Jesus' willingness to act on behalf of sinners. Paul pondered the meaning of grace, the cross and the nature of salvation. In other epistles, he wrote about the meaning of the cross for Christian living. In this epistle, he demonstrated that he understood the implications of the gospel. And in this magnificent section of Scripture, one truth emerges: Paul served as the agent of reconciliation, and there is no better picture of what Jesus did for humanity than what Paul did and offered to do for Onesimus, this runaway slave." And Martin Luther, the great reformer and theologian, would say about the apostle Paul as he read through this letter that in this letter, Paul emerges as Christ figure. Just as Jesus Christ stands before the Father and reconciles us to the Father in His death and resurrection, in this letter, in a similar way, Paul images and tries to act like Jesus Christ by standing between Philemon and Onesimus and being an agent of reconciliation.

The second thing I wanted us to see is how the apostle Paul views his circumstances and the circumstances of others, particularly those in the family of faith, as being governed by the sovereignty and wisdom of God Almighty. This song that we just sang, "You hold the whole world in Your hands...You hold my every moment," Paul actually believed that. And he believed it in such a way that it worked itself out in his daily life. So when unfortunate circumstances came his way, the apostle Paul was able to step back from those circumstances and understand that God has it under control and that he can trust Him. He's actually able to step in and counsel Philemon in the same way and say, "Brother, I know that

this slave has wronged you. He has sinned against you and ran away from you, but perhaps the whole reason that this happened was so that the slave would find me in jail, become a believer and come back to you, no longer as a slave but as a brother." Paul saw life like this, and it changed the way that he lived. And we ended last week by saying that we need to trust the Lord more than we do in our circumstances. We need to begin to see our circumstances as being governed by God. And unless we do that, we're just going to be caught in this perpetual cycle of disappointment because we see the world horizontally and as being all about us. And as we continue to do that and never see the bigger picture that God's got things under control and He's working things together for His glory, our good and the good of every one else around us, then we'll just be perpetually frustrated. And Paul knew that. So I just wanted us to see that he not only knew it, but it affected his life in such a practical way and he was actually able to shepherd others into seeing life that way as well.

The third thing I wanted us to see as we read this letter is how the way believing the gospel that Jesus Christ has paid for our sins causes us to act in relationships in our lives, especially those relationships where you and I have been wronged and sinned against. When we believe the gospel, it changes the way we respond and treat those who have wronged us and sinned against us. I really believe, as we read these Scriptures and think through some application together, that the Lord wants to heal many of our hearts. Because what we're going to be talking about tonight is forgiveness, and what Paul is going to be asking from Philemon is forgiveness. And if you and I could just be honest for a few minutes this evening, maybe we could ponder the amount of hurting and bitterness that is in this room collectively because people have wronged us, people have sinned against us and we've never forgiven them. Some of us have been carrying around I for years. I really believe, as we see the gospel rightly, that the Holy Spirit would begin a work of healing in our hearts. And that was the last thing that I wanted us to see.

So let's read this letter and see what the Holy Spirit would do as we read it together.

Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

*To Philemon our beloved fellow worker and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you — I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus — I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother — especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it — to say nothing of your owing me even your own self. Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ.

Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.

Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

This letter is an amazing letter, not simply because Paul is asking Philemon to forgive Onesimus and receive him exactly as he would receive Paul himself. That's amazing. But it's also amazing if you think about the context in which he's asking him to do this. Do you know who delivered the letter to Philemon? Onesimus did. So Paul writes this letter to Philemon saying, "Hey, I want you to forgive this person," and the person who is delivering the letter is actually the person he's asking him to forgive. So you can imagine Onesimus coming into this room and giving Philemon the letter. Now just think about being in Philemon's shoes. In walks this man who has sinned against you and has run away from you, and he's got this letter from the apostle Paul. So he opens up this letter and begins to read it. He reads the greeting, he reads through Paul's prayers and encouragement and then he gets into Paul saying, "I'm going to ask you to do something. I want you to receive him like you would receive me." And the "him" that Paul is talking about is standing right there. It's not as if the apostle Paul e-mailed him and said, "By the way, in a few days, this guy that wronged you is going to be coming your way. So you may want to pray up about this. You may want to think about this. Maybe read these Scriptures and then think about what the Lord Jesus would have you do." No, he's reading this letter and, on the spot, has a decision to make. And Paul is saying, "Receive him like you would receive me."

What would you do? Or better yet, what do you do? Doesn't this play itself out a thousand different ways every single day? Whether it's something where someone has wronged you from a long time ago or maybe it's just sitting in traffic and someone wrongs you, what do you do? How do you react in those moments? And where in the world would you even get the resources to respond in the way that the apostle Paul is asking Philemon to respond? Does that not seem impossible? He hadn't even seen the man. So he sees the man and starts reading the letter, and the apostle Paul just goes, "Forgive him. Receive him like you would receive me." That seems to me like an unbelievably difficult thing to do. So how in the world do we do that?

I'm going to go out on a limb here, but I really think that, unless you're a believer in Jesus Christ whose heart has been transformed by the gospel, you can't really do this, at least not from the heart. Any of us can do the action of it. When someone's here, you can say the right thing and act like you forgive them, but I'm talking about from the heart, really receiving them like you would receive someone you have the utmost respect for. So think about this person that you're holding a grudge against or who has sinned against you. And then think about another person for whom you have the utmost respect. When they show up, from the heart, you're supposed to receive the person who has wronged you like you would that other person. Now it's going to be tough to white-knuckle the action, but to do that from the heart I think is impossible unless your heart has been changed by the gospel. Unless we understand how the Father, through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, has received us I don't know where else you get the resources to live this way. But Paul is saying, "This is how Christians live. Because we do understand how the Father receives us."

In Luke 15, you'll find a parable about how the Father receives those who repent and come to Him humbly. I think it has an amazing parallel to Philemon. And really I think this is the only place we get the resources to do what He's asking us to do. Starting in verse 1, "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them.'" To receive and eat with someone

in the ancient Near East is to basically say, "I accept these people." So these religious people are grumbling, and Jesus responds by telling them three parables, but I just want to talk about one of them. Skip down to verse 11. "And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'" And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate."

So I want to allow my friend, Rick Adams, to be a commentary on this verse and then we can talk about how this applies to us to respond to those who have wronged us:

Hi, my name is Rick Adams. I go to the Denton Village campus. I live in Denton, Texas. Around the time that I was sixteen, my life changed drastically after my parents got divorced. I started to feel like something twisted in me. I started drinking, smoking pot and doing stuff like that, and I just kind of went south. I kind of went my own way. I didn't have a lot of male influence. Because of that, I ended up getting in trouble here and there. I ended up in jail several times and was always bailed out by my folks. It was never talked about much; it was always kind of swept under the rug. So I kind of got the impression that that's how things worked, that I could always be bailed out. Things rocked on for a few more years, and I ended up going to several drug rehabs. The old 30 day rehab with a 30 day follow up never took. Thinking things couldn't get any worse? Well guess what. They did. I ended up going to prison for seven years. When they told me that I was going to do seven years, I couldn't get my brain wrapped around it. My brain was pulling a muscle trying to understand how I was going to do this. I wish I could tell everything that happened in there, because it was such a blessing, especially after it was over. That was the longest time that I ever went without doing drugs or drinking alcohol, and I learned how selfish I was. I had a lot of time to think about a lot of things. During that time, I sought the Lord pretty heavily. I've learned more about what Scripture means now, not just the words on the page but I'm seeing things like the heart of the Father.

The Prodigal Son is one of my favorite stories. I see myself in that light sometimes as the one who ran off and was eating pig food, because that's what I was doing for so many years. The part that I really like about that story is when he's coming back home and it said when the son was still a long way from home, the father ran out to meet him. I always thought to myself, 'How in the world did the father know when the son was coming?' It was because the father was always looking. He was always on that front porch, always looking for the son to come home. He's always looking for a son, always looking for a daughter to come home, to come back.

Understanding how the Father has received you is the only place you'll ever get the resources to receive others when they've sinned against you. The only way that you'll be able to forgive others when they wrong you is understanding that when you wrong the Father, when you were still His enemy, when you ran as far away from Him as you could, when you robbed glory from Him every chance you got, because of the death of Jesus Christ, when you returned in repentance, He received you. When you get that, when that drops from your head to your heart and you understand that, you can't

do anything but forgive people when they wrong you. I'm not saying it becomes easy or a walk in the park to do that, but I'm saying when you understand how you have wronged the Father and that you have been a wretch that has only sinned against Him your entire life and yet He's received you through the death of His Son, you are compelled to forgive other people. You have to forgive other people because you understand how you've been forgiven.

And when you don't forgive other people, you're saying that you don't understand how you've been forgiven and you don't believe and receive the gospel, at least not in the way the Holy Spirit wants you to. And if you don't forgive, you become the other brother in the story. Listen to how the other brother responds. How easy it is to go from feeling like the younger brother to becoming the older brother. It's unbelievably subtle. Here is how his older brother responded. "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in." He sacrificed joy and celebration for anger and bitterness. And I think this is where so many of us are. We're just enslaved to those who have wronged us, and we're so angry with them that we allow what they've done to us to just control our lives. And very subtly we become the older brother in the story. Let me give you an example that's just prevalent amongst the Village Church, specifically amongst our demographic. We grew up in a church that was full of older brothers, men and women who grumbled, who told us that we just need to do this, try harder, be better and if we didn't do this, we'd go to hell. And somehow by God's grace and providence, we made our way into a church preaches grace. And the Holy Spirit has used the message of grace to transform our hearts and cause us to explode in worship to him. And after a couple of years of hearing grace over and over again, we realize that we never heard that in our other church. And instead of being gracious in the same way that the Father has been gracious to us, we begin to grow angry at the church from which we came. Somehow we allow an understanding of grace to fuel our bitterness toward our religious parents in these churches. Do you see what's happened? We've come in here and have been transformed by grace, but somehow we've wound right back up here, becoming the very people that we don't like, pointing at these people saying, "You don't get it. You're not as smart as us. Your church is not as good as ours. You need to do things better." It's to the point where I have numerous people come up to me and go, "I'm going home for the summer, Beau. Will you pray for me? Because there's just no good churches where I come from. None of them get it." We've just become this bitter, proud, angry older brother. We started off having an experience like Rick Adams, but it just lead to this really weird place. And so, we're just embittered, frustrated, prideful and self-righteous. It's just a really, really weird thing.

But I've got good news if that's where you're at tonight. Look how the father responds to the older brother, as gracious as he does to the younger brother. "But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

Tim Keller, in his book *Prodigal God*, says this about how the father receives the older brother, "How will the father respond to his older son's rebellion? What will he do? A man in his time and place might have disowned his son on the spot. Instead he responds again with amazing tenderness. 'My son,' he begins, 'despite how you've insulted me publicly, I still want you in the feast. I'm not going to disown your brother, but I don't want to disown you either. I challenge you to swallow your pride and come in to the feast. The choice is yours. Will you or will you not?' It is an unexpectedly gracious, dramatic appeal."

And the apostle Paul says, "You receive Onesimus like you would receive me. And you get the strength to do that by remembering how the Father has received you. You receive him back." He doesn't just stop there. He continues, "If he has wronged you at all,..." And he has wronged him. He stole from him and ran away. He wronged Philemon. Some of us spend so much time and energy trying to justify that we've been wronged. We spend so much of our energy trying to convince ourselves and others that we've been wronged, that somebody has wronged us. Let me just help you. You have been wronged. Some of you have been wronged in such a heinous way that I don't even have the integrity to get up and speak into your life. Because I can't understand, but Jesus Christ. But the point I want to make is that some of us are so busy trying to prove that we've been wronged and thus make an excuse for the way we act that you never stop to ask the question, "How am I going to respond to those who have wronged me?" We never even get there because we're so busy playing the victim. Paul says, "If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account." Does that sound familiar? Does it sound anything like what the Lord Jesus has done? We sing the song, "Praise the One who paid my debt and raised this life up from the dead." "If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand:" Paul here is saying, "This is so crucial, this is so serious that I'm not going to dictate this to anybody who is going to write it for me. I'm going to write it myself." "I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it"

Turn to Luke 10 with me. Because again, I think we have to ask the question: Where in the world is Paul getting this? Where in the world is the power to act like this coming from? Paul is simply doing what Jesus told His followers to do in Luke 10. Starting in verse 25 it says, "And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion." I can't explain with enough shock value the tension of how much the Jews and Samaritans hated each other. So this man comes by and sees his enemy on the side of the road. "He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." So in Philemon here, we simply have Paul going and doing likewise.

But again, it's crucial that you understand from where the power and resources come to be the good Samaritan. When you read the story, I think that you recognize that you and I are not first and foremost the good Samaritan. You and I are first and foremost the Jewish man dead on the side of the road. Jesus Christ is the good Samaritan. Jesus Christ came walking on by while His enemies were dead in our trespasses and sins. And He picked us up and raised us to life. And before the Father, He has said, "Whatever he or she owes, I've paid it." And when you get this like Paul got it, of course you can say, "Whatever this man owes you, charge that to my account. Because the Lord Jesus Christ has done the same thing for me.

Paul continues to write to Philemon, "I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self." This is Paul saying, "And by the way, Philemon, if anybody owes anybody anything here, it's probably you. Because weren't you saved through my ministry?" And then he says, "Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say." And that is a

huge confidence in the Holy Spirit's work in Philemon's life. "I'm so confident in the good work that the Holy Spirit has begun in you that I know you're not only going to receive him back, but you're going to do more than I say." What a huge statement in Paul's faith about how the Holy Spirit is transforming Philemon. He continues in verse 22, "At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you." So he's made this appeal, and then he's like, "And by the way, I'm going to stay with you, so go ahead and get the room ready. Whenever I'm going to get out, I'm coming to your house."

"Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." And so we don't have any historical documentation of what happened after this. There's no letter of Philemon writing back to Paul saying, "I did exactly what you told me to, brother. Here's what I did, here's how I received him, your room is ready." But I think I can say with some degree of confidence that Philemon did exactly what Paul asked him to do. The reason I think I can say that is because I don't know that we would have the letter if he didn't. If Philemon had no plan of being obedient to what the apostle Paul asked of him, I don't know that we would still have that letter. If I were Philemon and just completely disregarded everything the apostle Paul wrote, I'd probably go burn it up in a fire. I wouldn't say, "Hey, go put this with the rest of Paul's letters." So I think with a good degree of confidence we can say that Philemon and his runaway slave who has sinned against him and returned are walking home from the market some weeks later after this letter delivered and they're laughing, they're joking and Philemon is helping Onesimus carry the groceries. And you can imagine the church and everyone in the city who knew about what happened looking at these two and saying to themselves, "What in the world has Jesus Christ done with these two men that they would be reconciled in such a way?"

And this is Christianity. This is how you and I are supposed to live our lives, that we forgive others in such a way that they would have these kind of conversations around town. We are to live so people would look at our lives and go, "How in the world has this person who has been so wronged by this person found the grace and the resources to forgive them? That makes no sense outside of the gospel of Jesus Christ." That's Christianity. That's what happens when the gospel is believed by a heart and transformed by it. That's how it works itself out in our lives day after day after day, at least how it should be.

So as we come to the Lord's Supper tonight, obviously I want us to meditate on what Jesus Christ has done for us. And we say all the time that the gospel has to drop at some point. The example I've given before is a Coke machine. You have this Coke machine and you put the coins in and sometimes the coins get stuck. So what do you do when the coins get stuck? You kick it or shake it, depending on your temperament. And what happens hopefully when you kick it or shake it? The coin drops. And at some point in our lives, as we follow Jesus Christ and believe His gospel, the coin has got to drop and fruit has got to come out. And so I want us to meditate on the gospel in the hopes that it would, even tonight, drop a little bit further in us. Maybe you've known this for years, you can recite it, you've learned it, you've heard the parable of the Good Samaritan a thousand times, you've heard the parable of the Prodigal Son a thousand times, but for some reason it just doesn't affect you at all. Hopefully tonight, as we meditate on it, as we come to the Lord's Supper, it would begin to change you more and more. So I want us to meditate on the fact that Jesus Christ has paid for our sins and absorbed the wrath of the Father despite us. While we were still His enemies, He did that.

And then I also want us to think about this. Who in your life do you need to forgive? Some of you have been owned by your bitterness for years. You don't have to play the victim. Jesus Christ died. Do you get that? He was sinned against so that you could forgive others. He was murdered so no matter what anybody does to you, you can look at His example and say, "It's okay, I can still forgive you." So who in your life, what people, what institution, who do you need to forgive? And what's that going to look like? Maybe for some of you, it's not this big event that happened back when you were five years old or whatever. Maybe it's just ongoing. Who do you need to learn to forgive. Maybe it's in your relationship with

your spouse. You didn't know that the letter of Philemon was ultimately applicable to marriage, did you? Maybe it's in your relationship with your roommates. Maybe it's in your relationship with your parents. Maybe it's in the relationship with those religious people you're really angry at. But you need to forgive them. And if you need help with that, we'd be honored to help you.

You need to forgive them because the Lord Jesus did say this. After He taught His disciples to say the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Do you know why He won't forgive you? Because your lack of forgiveness towards other people proves what you really believe about the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. You holding on to your bitterness is a statement about the cross. So I want you to think about that as well.

I had a beautiful moment last week after the service. A person here at our campus came and found Kimberly and me and basically said, "I need to ask for your forgiveness. Because my father was a pastor, and he really wounded me and our church. I've carried that around for so long, and since I've been here, I've transferred that onto you. I've just put that onto you, and I've seen you like that." She just came weeping and said, "I need to ask for your forgiveness." I'm sitting here going, "Absolutely. Let's pray." I didn't know about all that, but for her, do you know how significant and freeing that was?

Let's pray, "Father, I have to believe that even tonight many in this room are angry at You and embittered towards You because You have not managed their life as they would like You to. They are embittered because You have not given them what they have wanted, You have not succumbed to their happiness and desires. But in love, You've given them what they have needed. And so, I just trust Your Spirit to do what He does. Help us to come and tangibly remember the Good Samaritan Jesus Christ, to come and tangibly remember the One who has caused us to be received by You as sons and daughters. As Rick said, You ran to meet us because You weren't just coming to meet us, You were meeting Your Son, because His righteousness has been transferred to us through His death. So help us as a family to believe the gospel more than we do. Help us to believe it in such a way that it works itself out in our lives like it did in Paul's and Philemon's. Jesus Christ, we love You. We remember You tonight. We remember that for the joy set before You, You endured the cross and You took on our shame, our fear and our depravity. You wore it all the way to the cross, You absorbed the wrath of the Father for us in our place and You paid our debt. We remember You for that and we worship You and agree with the Scriptures when they say that Your name is above every name. It absolutely is. So Father, fill us with joy and empower us with grace to go and act as Christ has on our behalf. It's in His name we pray. Amen."