

How Do I Forgive?

A broken-hearted wife had recently learned that her husband had been unfaithful. She looked deeply into my eyes and through her tears, she asked, "Brother Binney, I know I am supposed to forgive, but HOW do I forgive?" Like a flaming arrow, this question pierced my heart. I had never been asked this before. I had counseled many on the need of forgiveness but never on the actual method involved. This hurting wife wanted to know how to translate her obligation into action.

Probably no other relationship is as rife with potential for anger as is marriage. It is the only human relationship where a man and woman are thrown together for a lifetime in the closest possible proximity. This disallows hiding any weaknesses or impressing one another like we can a stranger. There are no secrets. It exposes both partners to the pressure of stressful moments. It is fertile soil for emotional differences and a culture dish to breed the germs of anger and unforgiveness.

You may not have experienced the sting of adultery in your marriage, but there are many other things which can plant the seeds of bitterness. Over the years, they can fester and burst into full view with poisonous effect. This girl had shown great maturity and wisdom in seeking help early on when the discovery was fresh.

As I reflected on this question I was smitten with conviction. If it is true that *"... to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin"* (James 4:17), then to tell a person to do good without showing him how may, in fact, contribute to his guilt. Had I inadvertently added to this dear wife's burden? The thought of it drove me to my knees.

God directed my attention immediately to a powerful passage of Scripture. *"Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."* (Colossians 3:13). I was immediately struck with the phrase *"even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."* "This is it!" I thought to myself. "This is the key of forgiveness!" I'm not really sure why that should have surprised me; after all, the essence of the Christian life is to be like Christ. The Scriptures clearly declare that. *"... because as he is, so are we in this world."* (1 John 4:17).

Christ is the supreme example of life and living. He is our example of humility and service to others, *"If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet: ye also ought to wash one another's feet."* (John 13:14). He is our model for loving; *"... walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us. ..."* (Ephesians 5:2). And He is our pattern of personal holiness; *"As he . . . is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation."* (1 Peter 1:15). How normal and right then that He should be the model of our forgiveness.

The key to forgiveness is to understand how Christ forgave and to emulate these things in our own heart and marriages. How did He forgive? There is no greater picture of our Lord's forgiveness than the Cross of Calvary. Let's go there to see how He forgave.

By Suffering For the Sins of Others

It is generally understood that we must suffer as a consequence of our own sins. However, the thought of suffering for the sins of others is abhorrent and contrary to every fiber of our being. But it was this very thing which was at the heart of Christ's willingness to forgive us.

The record of Scripture is clear; the reason that Jesus Christ went to the Cross is because He intended to suffer vicariously in our place, to take the punishment of our sins upon Himself. *"And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us . . . and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross."* (Colossians 2:13-14).

In the days in which this was written, it was the custom that if a man committed crimes, these offenses were to be written on a document. That document would then be nailed to the door of his prison cell until he had served his time and paid the penalty for all his offenses. The laws or "ordinances" he had violated were there in plain sight for all to see. Since the document was in handwritten form (having no typewriters or computers) it was called the "handwriting of ordinances" against the prisoner.

When the prisoner had completed his sentence, the document was taken off his prison door. The magistrate would write across it "It is finished" and return it to the prisoner as proof that he had, in fact, paid his debt to society. If he were challenged on the street, he merely produced the document as evidence that he was clear and had a right to his freedom.

The picture here of our Lord is beautiful indeed! He is seen traversing the long prison hallway which stretches from history past to eternity future. It houses every prisoner of sin who ever lived, representing every sin ever imagined or practiced by wicked flesh. He begins His journey, pausing outside every cell door, even your cell door, and rips the document off your door. He continues His journey, pausing at door after door until He has collected every single paper. He then takes it out of the prison, carries it to the Cross and nails it there. He then sheds His precious blood to pay for all that sin, crying out "It is finished!"

So you see, Christ forgave by suffering for the sins of others. But more to the point, dear friend, He suffered for your sin. *"Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows . . . he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed . . . the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."* (Isaiah 53:4-6).

I fear we sometimes lose the significance of this in looking at the bigger picture of Christ dying for the sins of all mankind. Yes, He did die for all the sins of all the world for all time. But to lose sight of the fact that it was your sins that put Him there is to lose something very precious indeed. Tozer comments on this passage in Isaiah with these piercing words:

"A great shadow lies upon every man and every woman – the fact that our Lord was bruised and wounded and crucified for the entire human race. This is the basic human responsibility that men are trying to push off and evade. Let us not eloquently blame Judas nor Pilate. Let us not curl our lips at Judas and accuse, 'He sold Him for money!' Let us pity Pilate, the weak-willed, because he did not

have courage enough to stand for the innocency of the man whom he declared had done no wrong. Let us not curse the Jews for delivering Jesus to be crucified. Let us not single out the Romans in blaming them for putting Jesus on the cross.

“Oh, they were guilty, certainly! But they were our accomplices in crime. They and we put Him on the cross, not they alone. That rising malice and anger that burns so hotly in your breast today put Him there. That basic dishonesty that comes to light in your being when you knowingly cheat and chisel on your income tax return – that put Him on the cross. The evil, the hatred, the suspicion, the jealousy, the lying tongue, the carnality, the fleshly love of pleasure – all of these in natural man joined in putting Him on the cross.

“We may as well admit it. Every one of us in Adam’s race had a share in putting Him on the cross!”¹

Now it gets personal; just as Jesus suffered for the sinfulness of other men, He calls upon us to do the same. *“Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you . . .” (John 15:20).* Clearly, then, it is part and parcel of the Christian life to suffer persecution. *“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” (2 Timothy 3:12).*

Furthermore, Jesus makes it clear that this suffering is something which begins with Him. His willingness to suffer for the sins of mankind is not limited to Him but is to be emulated by His followers. *“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who . . . humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” (Philippians 2:5-8).*

To fail in this reveals a gross misunderstanding of the Master-servant relationship we share with Christ. What He endured, we must endure. To refuse to do so or to think it unfair is the height of arrogance and bespeaks the corruption of pride. This is clearly revealed in the words of Christ; *“The servant is not greater than his lord.”*

What causes a person whose sins nailed Christ to the cross and who rejoices in His merciful forgiveness to turn from the cross and find a fellow sinner who has offended him in a far lesser way than his sins against Christ and refuse to forgive him? What causes a husband to accept God’s forgiveness of his sins and to reject God’s demand to forgive his wife? What causes a wife to rejoice that her hunger for forgiveness has been met, but relish the starvation of a husband whose affront she will not let go? Could it be pride? Could it be the unspoken manifestation of thinking somehow that he is greater than His lord?

We are saying, “Thank you sinless Lamb of God for suffering for my sins, for the sinfulness of others . . . BUT DON’T ASK ME TO DO THAT!”

The opinion of God about such posturing is clear from even a casual reading of Matthew 18:21-35. The story is told of a servant who was forgiven for an enormous debt owed to his master. Estimates range as high as a million dollars. He turned around and found a fellow servant who owed him a measly \$15. Because the fellow servant could not pay, he threw him into debtor’s prison until he made the debt good. When the master heard of this, he called the insensitive servant before him. *“. . . O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt . . . Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy*

fellobservant, 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.” (Matthew 18:32-34). Then follows a solemn warning from the Lord Jesus Himself, *“So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.” (vs. 35).*

Could it be that the greater sin is that of refusing to forgive after being forgiven? Is that why the wrath of the master was directed toward the servant?

Perhaps you, like the girl who asked how to forgive, have been the victim of the sinfulness of your mate. If you could get on one of the T.V. talk shows and tell them your story, you would get a lot of sympathy. In fact, you would probably find the crowd would urge you on in your unswerving devotion to bitterness and your determination to get revenge. But that doesn't make it right. You could go out to a mall parking lot, line up one thousand people, tell them your story and probably get them all to agree that you have every right to be angry. But don't put Jesus in the line!

Suffering because of the sinfulness of others is a staple part of Christianity. In fact, one is hard pressed to identify any human suffering that is not traceable, directly or indirectly, to the wickedness of another human being, even if you have to go all the way back to the Garden of Eden.

It is not enough, however, merely to acknowledge that you will be mistreated. Such passive or even reluctant admissions don't demand a willingness to suffer for another. It is this willingness of Christ which John addresses in I John 3:16: *“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”* In this statement, John extends the theme of persecution to that of a willingness to suffer for another's transgressions.

The beginning place of Christ-like forgiveness is to emulate His willingness to forgive from His heart the suffering imposed upon Him by the acts of sinful men. Yes, you may have suffered in your marriage, you may even have suffered because of your marriage partner, but no one was ever more of a victim than our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and His willingness to be a victim is ours to copy and the key to our own forgiveness.

By Praying For His Enemies

Christ met with His disciples and uttered these penetrating words: *“... I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you...” (Matthew 5:43).* These were not hollow platitudes uttered by our Lord. They were not the pontifications of some armchair theologian whose hands had never been dirtied by contact with the real world. This was His practice, vividly illustrated on the cross when He prayed: *“...Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34).* Within this poignant prayer there are key ingredients, transforming principles which made His prayer such a powerful model for you!

He Appealed To God On Their Behalf

When the Lord Jesus prayed that prayer, He, more than anyone else, knew the depth of the need of His malefactors. He had experienced firsthand the sting of their venom. It was their wrath which drove them and their hatred which condemned Him. It was their hands which bound Him and bruised Him. It was their demon-crazed eyes into which He was gazing when He prayed. It was their sin that nailed Him to the cross. And it was over the crescendo of a cacophony of mocking voices amidst raised fists and of a cacophony of mocking voices amidst raised fists and shrieks for His blood that His prayer was lifted to Heaven.

It is precisely because Christ had experienced these things that He was best qualified to pray for His enemies. Think about it. In that crowd were the Pharisees and Sadducees, the highly respected and honored spiritual leaders of the nation. Their hearts were full of envy and hatred, and yet to all outward appearances, they epitomized holiness and reverence. Why would their followers be motivated to pray for them? Jesus knew better. He had felt the lash of their blood lust and He knew what was in man. So He prayed.

Who better to pray for your enemy, even if you consider your mate to be your enemy, than you, the eye witness of his failure? You, who have tasted first-hand the dregs of his depravity? Who could possibly be motivated more to pray for his needs than you, the person who God has allowed to see the aching greatness of those needs? Not the person at church who tells you how impressed they are with your mate's spirituality. Not the people who see your husband in a key role of spiritual leadership. Not the congregation who watches your pious wife sing in the choir. Why not? Because God has sovereignly positioned you to experience the fallout of their failure, to witness the true depth of their depravity, to experience the stinging lash of their sinfulness.

This is a high and holy calling, a sacred trust from God. To pray under the sovereign placement of this person into your life, to pray from a knowledge of need, to pray out of a burden of pain, is the ultimate opportunity to intercede for another with unction and angst. This is not merely a Divine Commission, it is also the outworking of a Divine plan.

It is more than an opportunity, it is a holy responsibility that many have shirked. They have justified this neglect on the basis of their pain, the unfairness of it all, the evil of their enemy, or their need of revenge. But they have shirked it nonetheless. Someone whom God designated for special prayers is not getting them. Someone whose hope lies in his specially assigned intercessor has no hope because that intercessor rejected his commission. I wonder, if the truth were known, how many souls are limping through life in the bondage of sin simply because some person failed to pray for them. I wonder even how many people are in Hell because their assigned intercessors chose to minister the disgrace of anger instead of the grace of their prayers?

Thank God that the ministry which Christ began on Calvary is still being carried on today. He ever liveth to make intercession for us. And He calls on you to do the same for your mate.

He Focused On Their Weakness Instead of Their Wickedness

Jesus prayed, *"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."* He could have seethed in anger toward these people, but He chose to look at the degree of their ignorance instead of the degree of their guilt. And their innocence was in their ignorance.

Their ignorance may have been related to the enormity of their crime. This was not a mere man they were crucifying but the Messiah, the Christ, God of very gods. If the emphasis of Christ's prayer is, *"they know not what they do,"* it would support this interpretation. The record certainly bears out the fact that there was little awareness that this was truly the Son of God until after His death.

On the other hand, it is probably that Christ's prayer indicated a total lack of understanding as to why they were compelled to act this way; *"they know not what they do."* After all, how many criminals really understand why they do what they do. If you could freeze-frame the typical hurtful action and then ask the perpetrator "Why are you doing this? Why are you acting so cruelly?" they would not have an answer. Sin has never been about logic but about emotion. The source of those emotions, the heart, *"... is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"* (*Jeremiah 17:9*). Who among us has not been guilty at some time of doing something and then asking ourselves, "Why did I do that?"

Their ignorance could have been based on the fact that they were under a control of which they were totally ignorant. During the Gulf War, I found myself getting angry at Saddam Hussein every time I saw his face in the media. But then I came under conviction that he was the wrong target for my anger. In fact, he was just a pawn in the hands of the real Enemy; *"... the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience."* (*Ephesians 2:2*). My enemy was not some tin-horn dictator of a fourth rate world power, just as Christ's real enemy was not the mob of people gathered around the cross, nor is your real enemy comprised of "flesh and blood." The real enemy is the one who *"...hath blinded the minds of them which believe not..."* (*2 Corinthians 4:4*) and who has taken them *"captive at his will."* (*2 Timothy 2:26*). He is masterfully deceitful and as an "angel of light" can even convince mankind that the mayhem they're producing is actually "doing God service." Paul believed it during his killing spree of Christians, and it is likely that the crowd around Jesus believed it too. No wonder that Jesus said they didn't know what they were doing. We can certainly be thankful that we have been rescued from our former living death of Satan's control. *"And you hath he quickened [made alive], who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air..."* (*Ephesians 1:1-2*).

Though ignorance is not always innocence, it is a reason for showing mercy. Shortly after the horrific murder of this innocent man, Peter accosted the very people responsible. He pulls no punches when he declares, *"...ye delivered [Him] up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go."* (*verse 13*). He gets even more pointed in his accusation: *"...ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you."* (*verse 14*). He presses home his advantage, *"[You] killed the Prince of life."* (*verse 15*). Then strangely, Peter's mood changes. He softens the edge of his voice and lowers his volume and almost gently, consolingly says, *"And now, brethren, I*

wot [perceive] that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." (Acts 3:13-17). The Apostle Paul agrees with Peter. He refers to the "hidden wisdom" of God, "Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." (1 Corinthians 2:8).

In reflecting back on his past transgressions, the Apostle Paul candidly admits that he "...was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious," but then he praises God for His mercy and goodness, "...but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." (1 Timothy 1:13).

To the degree that ignorance is involved in an offense, some mercy is needed. This mercy becomes a motivation to pray for them as Christ did, that God will forgive them. Such a prayer is an expression of forgiveness, but it all begins with a sensitivity and awareness of the scope of your offender's ignorance. F.B. Meyer suggests some ways to increase this awareness of ignorance. Seeing the offender's weakness is aided by some basic questions: 1) How hard did he try not to sin? 2) What was the power of the forces that assailed him? I have added: 3) To what degree did he suffer as a result of his sin? 4) What particular weakness made him vulnerable to sin? and 5) What would we have done under the same circumstances?

Jesus chose to look at the weakness of His offender, to focus on his ignorance. When you think of your offender, what is your focus?

He Desired Restoration, Not Retaliation

As a little boy, when bullied by bigger boys, I fantasized about being a Superman with limitless powers and superhuman strength. Then I would show those bullies! Fortunately, my wish was never granted. Fortunately for the bullies, and for me; God could never trust me with such potential for destruction. On the other hand, He could trust Christ with it. And Christ had it! When He hung on the cross, His was the ultimate power! All the power of heaven and earth was at His disposal. The songwriter tried to capture this thought when he wrote, "He could have called ten thousand angels to destroy the world, and set Him free. He could have called ten thousand angels, but He died alone for you and me." But the songwriter was wrong; according to the Bible, Jesus could have called twelve legions of angels (Matthew 26:53) and that equals 72,000 angels! And the destructive power of these angels is unbelievable! In 2 Kings chapter nineteen, one angel destroyed 185,000 Assyrians in one night! Imagine what havoc 72,000 angels could have wrought at Mt. Calvary!

If anyone ever had the power to exact revenge, Christ had it. If anyone ever possessed the resources to retaliate against an enemy, Christ had them. If anyone ever had the ability to exact a pound of flesh for the evil done against them, Christ did. But He wanted none of these things. What did He want? He wanted restoration, not retaliation. He prayed for their forgiveness, their cleansing, their spiritual healing.

What do you want for your enemy? If you had the power, to do anything you desired with impunity, knowing that nobody would ever know or care, what would you do to that person who hurt you so deeply? To desire anything less than Christ, to seek any good less than Christ did, to fail to forgive as He did is to mock His example and disregard His teachings.

He Envisioned God's Higher Purpose In Allowing His Pain

A young boy entered a pet shop to buy a long-planned-for dog. He walked up to a cardboard box sitting on the floor which was full of squirming, yapping puppies. The store owner approached him and said, "Son, do you want to buy a dog?" "Yes Sir," was his reply. "You got one picked out?" The boy pointed into the corner of the box and said, "Yes Sir, I want that one!" The one he pointed to was whimpering and trembling in the bottom of the box, while the other stepped on him to reach the boy's hand. The owner reached into the box, and took the puppy out. "Son," he said, "you don't want this puppy." He laid its soft furry belly in one palm, and with the other hand took its hind leg. He pulled the leg out full length to reveal a deformity. "This dog is a cripple," he said. "He will never be able to run and frisk with you like other dogs. Why don't you pick another one?" At that the boy reached down and grabbed his pant leg and pulled it up, revealing a brace from his ankle to his thigh. "That's okay sir. I'm a cripple too, and that puppy needs a cripple to understand him."

If there is an answer to suffering and pain, to unfairness in life, it is to possess a clear vision of a higher purpose for that pain. I know. I had to learn that lesson for myself. As a child, I was sensitive of nature, too sensitive at times, which, I'm sure, led me to interpret life's events in a less than objective way. This caused my relationship with my father to suffer, whom I perceived to be as insensitive as I was sensitive. Whatever the reality of the situation, my perceptions caused me untold grief which I endured for as long as I could, always wondering why I seemed to be destined for such unhappiness. At age sixteen, I ran away from home and made a life of my own. Fortunately, in God's sovereign grace, He directed my steps to Bob Jones Academy in South Carolina, a boarding school where I soon came to know Christ. I continued carrying a burden from the past, however, not knowing how to deal with my relationship with my father. Eight long years passed after my decision to trust Christ, and all the while God was nudging me, coaxing me to make things right with my Dad. Finally, I went to see him and we talked. We talked of forgiveness, of understanding, or reconciliation. I saw a side of him I had never seen in my younger days, and I left that day at peace with God, with Dad, and with myself.

I continued to reflect on my life, still finding no answer to "Why?" Why did God allow a little boy to endure such things unnecessarily? As an eight year old child, I recall, after a difficult hour in my life, standing alone in a field behind our house. "God," I began, "if you're such a God of love, why do you let this happen to a little boy?" God had heard my questions and led me to an understanding through Scriptures. *"Blessed be God . . . the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation . . ."* (2 Corinthians 1:3-6). God revealed to me that He, who "doeth all things well," had been quietly at work in my life to accomplish His eternal good. As a parade of hurting souls came into my life for comfort and consolation, I identified with their sufferings. I had shared in those sufferings, but now I could shave the comfort which had been afforded me. Had I never experienced the pain, I could never have enjoyed God's tender comfort. Had I not experienced that, my ministry would have been radically different. Now I often thank my God for the privilege of bearing a little childhood pain, born out of

sensitive feelings, because they were used of Him to prepare me to help others as well. What a blessing?

I had to go through the experience and see the results before I could thank Him for it. I wish I could say otherwise; that I had thanked God by faith before having my present understanding. I wish I had not wasted so much time harboring feelings of anger, that I had forgiven and sought forgiveness sooner.

Thankfully the Lord Jesus Christ faced His suffering and embraced the pain before He experienced it. He was prepared for Calvary, but His final hours in the Garden of Gethsemane were the hardest. What agony He must have endured; the isolation, the sense of abandonment by His followers, the spiritual struggle. Such was His suffering that He confessed to His disciples, *"My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death."* (Matthew 26:38). Our precious Lord suffered in His spirit like no man ever could. He had never sinned, never violated His conscience, and was so pure of heart and tender of spirit, that the thought of the slightest indiscretion was soul-wrenching. He now faced the prospect of *"becoming sin for us."* It was almost too much for Him. *"And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground."* (Luke 22:44). How can a sinful human mind conceive of this? Who has ever entered into such spiritual travail that we saw blood oozing from our pores under the strain? It pushed Him to the very precipice of death. *"Then said he . . . My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death . . ."* (Matthew 26:38). So depleted and weakened was He that an angel was sent from heaven to strengthen Him.

He prayed on three different occasions that God would remove the "cup" from Him, but in each case He tempered His prayer with a humbled submission to God's will. *". . . O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."* (Matthew 26:39).

Much debate has raged over the centuries as to what the "cup" was. What was in that cup which caused Christ to tremble so? I do not believe it was the physical pain He was to face. He faced it calmly, quietly; *"he was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth."* (Isaiah 53:7). Through all His physical suffering, He never uttered a word of protest or pain. He was prepared to face the pain, *"even the death of the cross."*

Whatever else the "cup" may have represented, it included the dread of losing the one thing most precious to Christ. Just prior to entering the Garden, in the presence of His disciples, Jesus prayed in their presence, and, oh, what a prayer! If you ever really want to know someone, pray with them. If you really want to know the heart of Christ, listen to His prayer. Most importantly, notice His expressions of love for His Father, hear His rejoicing in their Father-Son unity, their intimate closeness. *"That they all may be one; as thou Father, art in me, and I in thee . . . that they may be one, even as we are one . . ."* (John 17:21-22). If there was one thing which Christ treasured above all else, it was this oneness with the Father. Their union had never been broken since the beginning of time. But now Jesus realized that in order to pay the full penalty of man's sin, He had to become sin. That meant that all the sin of all mankind from the first days in the Garden of Eden to the last days of this earth would be scooped up and compressed into one moment of time and into one site in space, into one representative body. *"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made*

the righteousness of God in him . . .” (2 Corinthians 5:21). He also knew that His Father is *“ . . . of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity” (Habakkuk 1:13),* which meant just one thing; when that moment came that Jesus became sin, the bond between Him and His Father would be broken. The Father’s face would be turned away from Him. All that He treasured and valued would be taken from Him. And it was at that moment on the cross that the most heart-wrenching, agonizing cry ever to escape from a man’s lips burst onto the pages of history and has echoed ever since down the corridors of time: *“ . . . My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46).*

So what was it that took Jesus to the Cross? What could possibly cause Him to go through with what He so dreaded so deeply? Through the eyes of His faith, He knew that God had a high and holy purpose for this hour. The very destiny of the whole of mankind rested on this one moment in history. *“Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin”* and He knew this was the reason for His existence. On the other side of the cross awaited the certain knowledge that humanity would have redemption in His death. It was this laser beam focus, this concentration on the higher good, which took Christ through the Garden and through the wall of painful separation from His Father. *“ . . . who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:2).*

There were many people in the life of Christ who needed His forgiveness. From His birth to His hour of suffering, He was followed by evil men, mocked by wicked mouths, and slain by murderous hands, and yet He was able to forgive. How? He never lost sight of the higher call of God on His life. He refused to relinquish His vision of a holy purpose in His death. And He knew that after all was said and done, He would once again be united with His Father at the *“right hand of the throne of God.”* It was the *“joy that was set before him.”*

There was a brief moment of time that He was forsaken by His Father, but our faithful God had a purpose in doing so. You may have felt forsaken by Him at some point as well, but He was working out His purpose for you. When our son Jonathan was a five year old boy, we took him to a major mall for Christmas shopping. In the neighborhood of the mall there had been a string of child snatching incidents, and we were cautious, to say the least. We told Jonathan to stay close; but the sights, the sounds, and the smell from the mall were a constant distraction to him. Realizing that a “Stay close, son” simply was not enough, I took Sandra and we hid behind one of the pillars which supported the atrium of the mall. Jonathan was blissfully ignorant of our absence. He was all agog at what was going on around him. Then it hit him, “I’m all alone in this big place! Mom and Dad are gone!” He began to look around. I told Sandra, “Not yet.” He began walking in confused circles. “Not yet.” His lower lip began to tremble. “Not yet.” Finally, he stood stock still and the tears just welled up and overflowed his eyes. “NOW,” I said. “We stepped out from behind the pillar and when Jonathan saw us, he had more power in those legs than any professional running back. He plowed into me, wrapped his arms around my neck and wouldn’t let go. For the rest of our time, the problem was no longer getting him to stay close but to keep him from walking on the back of my shoes. He even wanted to keep his hand in my pocket for fear of losing me. Now does any rational person think for a moment that I did not love my son when I hid my face from his for a few milliseconds of eternity? Absolutely not! I had a bigger plan for him which required a bit of suffering to accomplish the desired end. Do you think that

your heavenly Father does not love you when He seems to hide His face from you? Absolutely not! He has a higher purpose for you which He can see clearly. May God help you to accept it by faith. For then you will have found the key of forgiving as Christ forgave.

Conclusion

A little boy accompanied his mother into an exclusive furniture store. Shortly, she noticed that he had his arm inserted into an expensive \$15,000 vase. She panicked at the sight and demanded to know from her son why he was walking about with this thing attached to his arm. "It won't come off, Momma! Honest, I tried and it won't come off!" She tugged and pried and to her chagrin realized that he was right. When the manager was called over, she did all she could. She applied water . . . no success. Soap, even oil, still no progress. Finally, the decision was made to break the vase. After doing so, the mother noticed her son's hand was balled up in a tightly clenched fist. "Son," she asked, "have you always had your hand in a fist?" "Yea, Momma," he replied innocently. "Why!?" she demanded. He then opened his hand to reveal a shiny copper penny. "I didn't wanna lose my penny," he explained.

Like this little boy, many people, even Christians, even Christian marriage partners, have wrapped their hand around some cheap tawdry memory of their past. They care little for the damage this is causing all around them in the lives of others. They demand their right to hang on to that penny.

If your life is to prosper, if your marriage is to enjoy the blessings of God, the beginning place is to forgive as Christ forgave you. You must open your hand and let God remove your penny of bitterness. *"Le all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice."* (Ephesians 4:31).

What became of the wife who asked me "How do I forgive?" She struggled through the week of counseling; but before she left, she gained the victory. She forgave her husband and their marriage is blossoming today. So can yours.

Footnote:

¹ *The Tozer Pulpit*, Vol. 6, Christian Publications, Inc., 1975, p. 34-35.