

# Forgiveness: A Grace-Filled Obligation of Spiritual Transformation Pt. 2

## Michael J. Wilkins

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These were uh just some final thoughts that I put up in case some of you ran out of things to say to your friends. An unhealthy person and community is one that does not live in relationship to the reality of the cross and resurrection of Jesus. And that's just- that's, that's a day to day thing. A very very real thing. You know, theologically, various traditions kind of swing between those, the cross and resurrection, which is central to theology, and I just- simple enough that I don't have to make a decision. You live in the reality of both those. Death to self and alive to God. I mean that's what Romans 6, 7, and 8 are all about. So an unhealthy person and community is one that does not live in relationship to the reality of the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Rather, it lives according to the prevailing cultural paradigm of values. We might try to gather round like interests or geographical location or even ideologies, as what we tend to do in our churches, in our academic institutions. Your church is- it's- it's good but if you just change this and this and this and this and this, you'd be a whole lot better off. And that church is good but if they change that and that and that and that, it'd be a whole-. And who ends up being the final determination. We ought to-, everybody ought to just be like me. But the kind of community that Jesus advances is based on having received mercy and forgiveness, which in turn will impel us to demonstrate mercy and forgive-, forgiveness. So those are just a few thoughts that hope to somewhat wrap things up.

My friend Dr. Coe rebuked me for going too quickly with one slide so I need to back up to one. See, he thinks I'm the dean but um you know it's like when I was in the army, officers thought that they ran the army but it's the enlisted people that run the army and that's the way it is with faculty. This is the one that I put up, is that the one John? To forgive is to release a person from the wrong that they have done to us for the purpose of establishing our relationship in a healthy way. And we'll try to maybe deal with some of that. And I-, you know, let me tell you, I'm not here to in any way say I'm an expert on forgiveness. I'm a professional nerd, that's what I am. I'm a New Testament theologian so I know a little bit about an awful lot but forgiveness is just a very important issue in my life. So I want to-, I just want to share it with you. And I've probably come to the extent of all that I know on it and there may be other definitions to be a whole lot more. I look at my dear friend Dr. Pollster in the back and you know, he's- he was-, he was teaching here when I was a student. So he knows a whole lot more than I do. So he's the kind of person you know, there's a amount- amazing amount of collective wisdom in here. But these are just a few thoughts for us.

What-, what we dealt with this first hour as I said we are going to focus on some of the personal and focus on some of the biblical and then we will try to see how it enters into the issues of that which are relational and transformational. What I would like to do now is to kind of set this in the context of spiritual formation, in a more formal sense, and the way that I would like to do this is set it in the context of the very first speaker that you had here the- this uh- this this series, uh Dr. Dallas Willard. Again he knows more about a lot of this than I'll ever know and he uses philosophical terminology so I don't know what he's saying. You know so. (laughing) Only John knows. But I spoke at a- I was- he and I were at a conference some years ago, it's been more than

10 years ago in Colorado, and he was giving the evening a message. And it was a group of spiritual formation practitioners and authors and we were working on a spiritual formation line and we had gathered together just to see if we could grow together. And he was working on-, he had just finished a manuscript for the book um- what's one of the Sermon on the mount? The Divine Conspiracy, had just finished the manuscript for that one, and was just putting thoughts together on his next book, which was Renovation of the Heart, renovation the heart yep.

And he had these- these drawings and he was making overheads as he went, and it had to do with a schematic that he ended up putting into the renovation book. And as he went through that evening I was supposed to speak the next morning, and as he went through all this he said, now I'm giving this from the standpoint of a philosopher who is in process of transformation. He says Mike's going to be speaking in the morning and what I'd like for him to do is to comment on this and to take this schematic and see whether it works with Biblical Discipleship. No pressure. (laughter from audience) I mean. I didn't sleep that night.

I really was literally up all night long trying to think through what he has done. And I think he's onto something there, I'm not-, my- my field is not anthropology but I think he has something by way of anthropology. Personally I think that his best book which is most important for us in terms of spiritual formation is spirit of the disciplines, where he sets out a biblical anthropology that is the basis of the disciplines. And unless you understand biblical anthropology and the doctrine of sanctification you really can't understand what the disciplines are all about and that's where a lot of people get mixed up. So I would encourage you to read that, it's really an excellent book.

But what I'd like to do now is to do a brief run through of inside out transformation and see how forgiveness can be a test case for that. When we speak of inside out, we're speaking of the transformation of kingdom people from the inside to the outside. And it is rooted really, in my opinion, the key interpretive verse for the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says "for I tell you unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven." And the Scribes and the Pharisees were the epitome of righteousness in the first century. But as Jesus will do later on as He concludes His earthly ministry in Matthew Chapter 23, He gives a series of woes upon the Scribes and the Pharisees. And the woe is had to do with the fact that there was an external righteousness. And so what Jesus is doing even in the Sermon on the Mount as he is preparing the way for what Paul will later articulate theologically, the doctrine of justification that righteousness is something that occurs, it starts from the inside and works to the outside. The year of the Scribes and the Pharisees were- They were attempting to work from the outside to the inside.

So from the very beginning and this is why I say Dallas's book is so very important is that we have to understand how God has made us and what He has done in salvation and sanctification. And unless we are careful, the- that- one of the great dangers for all of us is to work from the outside to the inside, is to simply put on disciplines, we become like the Scribes and the Pharisees and they were they had sincere motives of wanting to attain to righteousness but the easiest way of religion throughout the years has been to work from the outside to the inside.

So Jesus starts this at the very beginning by suggesting that inside out transformation is Kingdom life. And the inside out nature of Jesus teaching a kingdom life can be illustrated by thinking of His disciple as concentric layers to penetrate to the core of the person. We are soulish persons and what it means that we are soulish persons is that we are a complex of immaterial and material realities. You look at this young couple here and what is most real to them; the fact that they're eating or the fact that they have a relationship? And what is the core of that relationship? Is it material or is it immaterial? This young couple, for me, I'd just- I like to look at them. They're just happy. You know? They're just happy and they're just having a great time. And they are as soulish persons a complex of immaterial and material realities. Our outermost layer consists of social relationships or social relations. And I'll try to-, you can see these, you'll be with a different colors but I'll try to focus these. This is the outer layer. The outer layer is the first thing that we know about persons.

Social relations are what I know first about a person. The relationships that we share or see a person engaged in, whether in a class, in a family or on the street. That's the first thing that we can know about a person. It's the first thing that you and I enter into. We are social creatures, and we enter into that for better or for worse. We are social creatures: sustaining social relationships from the very beginning.

The next inward layer is the body. The social relations as we look around us we are all gathered, a person walks into this room and they can tell that there is a social relation that you and I sustain. The first thing that they'll note is that it's probably something like a class. There is a teacher or a leader, so there is a social relation. But then as they look around, they'll say "Aha!

Let me see if I can find out something about this person." And so they just take a look at you and they'll be able to see something in you and they'll be able to tell a little bit about each one of us. You know just-, you can tell who we are, a little bit about each one of us. The body includes what the person wears, how she carries herself, the way he walks, what she looks like, the way you dress, the way that you don't dress, the way that you primp, the way that you don't primp. Everything on our body says something about us to the world. It is our statement to the world with what we do or don't do. It is our statement to the world of who we are.

The next inward layer is the mind of the person. So we have social relations. We have the body. And then we have the mind of the individual. The mind is where the person reasons, considers emotions, and evaluates spiritual realities. Where we interact with the external world is next in our mind. The innermost core is the heart, the heart of the person. The spiritual heart includes the person's will and identity. It's the core of the person. So that- that- that slate, that- that- that slate is what your life will be written upon. From your entrance into this world, your heart is where your person is being written upon. That's who you are. That's the- that's- that's your identity to the world of all that you have accumulated, all that you are. All that I am is expressed through the heart, of what Scripture speaks of is the heart.

Now inside out transformation of kingdom disciples is when the Gospel that is empowered by the Spirit, the Gospel empowered by the Spirit, which are in the first century context, Jesus' words of the Gospel energized by the Spirit, move through social relations. You are here. You're seated. You have heard the word of God. You heard that- that- that powerful parable. You have had to come here in order to place yourself in the hearing of the Word. And as the Word was

read to you, as you read the Word, as you heard the Word, it was energized by the Spirit of God. And it is- it is come through social relations through your body. You had to physically hear. You interacted with that. There was reason that was going on. There was a motion that was going on. What I shared with you this- that last hour, I've never shared that whole collection ever in my life before. It was- I was worn out after that last hour. It was very very personal; it was very emotional. And I like the way that Dallas has suggested that our- our mind and emotions work together. It's our interaction with the world. We are reasoning and we are interacting emotionally. It penetrates to the mind.

Now what's very interesting is that the battle rages in the mind of the would be disciple. That's where the battle goes on. The battle is going on last hour as you reasoned with Scripture. Spirit of God is speaking to you. You are reasoning with Scripture. And you are interacting emotionally with it, as well through your own experiences. Some of you might have been shaken. Some of you might have been offended. But the battle is raging in your mind. The spirit empowered Word of God battles with the temptations from the world, the flesh, and the devil. Because at the same time that the word of God energized by the Spirit is penetrating through the social relationship that we sustain; going through into your body literally through your ears, and you are wrestling with it logically and emotionally. The devil's at work. The devil's at work. And you are being presented with temptations from the world, the flesh, and the devil. And that battle is going on in your mind. You haven't- you've heard forgiveness over and over and over. Some of you have been Christians longer than I've been alive perhaps. No, that's not getting possible any longer. Well it is. For some of you.

My father in law lives with us and he's 89 years old. He's been a Christian since he was 20 years old and he still loves Jesus in a wonderful way. Now the lights are on. He's not always there but he loves Jesus so he's- he's been a Christian longer I've been alive. Case of the battle rage is there but as I say here, although the battle rages in the mind the would be disciple, the war is for his or her heart.

See Jesus wants your heart. The devil wants your heart. The battle is for your heart. The heart that is hardened against God must be broken. And there are two ways in which we harden our heart. What were they? When we sin, we hardened heart against God. And what's the other way? When we've been hurt, we harden our heart against other people. Either way, the word of God empowered by the Spirit can't get through. And what God's gonna have to do in either way is He's going to have to break our heart. And the word of God empowered by the Spirit attacks a hardened heart to break it so the healing can occur.

The heart will make a decision for or against Jesus' Spirit empowered Word. And any of you who have wrestled with the unpardonable sin in Scripture, where a person commits a sin that cannot be forgiven either in this life or in the life to come, what is that? It's a non-believer who continually hardens their heart against God. And so the Spirit of God cannot break their heart to bring healing. That's all that the unpardonable sin is. That's what occurs and only occurs in non-Christians. It cannot occur in Christians. Each of you, somewhere along the line, has had a broken heart. God has broken your heart to get through so that you would no longer have a hardened heart. What I think is wonderful is Jesus says in harking back to the new covenant in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, speaks of the fact that when the Spirit of God comes He will remove from



you a heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. The moment that God breaks our heart, we become humans in the way that we originally intended to be. The beginning restoration of the image of God in which we are created occurs at the moment of salvation. And that's why Christians will be better husbands than I would be as a non-Christian. I will be a better father. I will be a better teacher because He started with my heart. It isn't for me- it's where God wants to do through my life.

So the heart will make a decision for or against Jesus' Spirit empowered Word. Now this is going to get a little complicated. As the heart says yes to Jesus, the truth of the word of God energized by the Holy Spirit penetrates to the heart. See that line th- the way in which it goes? penetrates through these to the heart. As the Spirit empowered Word penetrates to the heart it brings regeneration and sets the person free to become Jesus' disciple. So this is where-, these are the bridges now between what Dallas does philosophically and what I do biblically in terms of Biblical Discipleship, and both of them combined are what spiritual formation is all about. Spiritual formation is simply what I call the flip side (someone sneezes) of the same. Bless you! Spiritual formation is the flip side of the coin of sanctification. And what's on the opposite side? Discipleship. So discipleship and spiritual formation are flip sides of the same coin and the coin is sanctification. They're just different perspectives. One is from the Gospels, usually through Paul, I mean the epistles through Paul, discipleship is through the Gospels, look in the way Jesus approached it. So, anyway that's a whole different thing. I love it. OK.

So, the regenerated- where am I now. So the regenerated heart is the beginning of the transformation of a disciple into the image of Christ, particularly to love like Jesus loves. So as

you receive now this heart of flesh, it is creating the image of God that is now being restored. Your heart will now be like God's heart. And God is love and God has an endless supply of love. Therefore, we will have God's heart and we will now begin to love like God loves. The Spirit indwelt heart directs the inside out transformation process to bear the fruit of the Spirit (John 13:34, 35). And again, I'm translating philosophy into New Testament theology.

So you get the gist. Now, and we're gonna make-, now- now this- this all of this that we've gotten up to this point is the moment of salvation. This is the point of salvation. Now where does transformation occur? Transformation begins to occur as we now move from the inside out. What has happened? God, through the Spirit empowered Word of God, has penetrated to the core of our being has changed us; we are new creatures; we are born a grant-, again at the moment of salvation.

Now begun-, begins the work from the inside to the out. The Spirit indwelt heart directs the inside out transformation process and it begins in the mind. So that the heart will direct the transformation of the mind and we'll give some verses that will bring this into play a little bit later on as we go along.

It directs the mind transformation, the mind so th-, your heart, your will is directing the transformation of your mind so that you will now have the mind of Christ. You have the heart of Christ. Now there will be the transfor- the continual transformation of the mind to have the mind of Christ. The transformation of the body so that you will function like Jesus in this world. And the transformation of social relations. Continuing to say yes to the Spirit of power the Word of

God, the disciple is transformed and enabled to say yes to God with his or her entire person throughout life. That's the goal. So that everything that you are now is directed from the inside out. It's not outside in as in what the Pharisees were doing. It's inside out. So that the core of your being is saying yes to God and is directing all that you are.

Now, some of you have suffered with me on this. I have a little exercise that I want to do. We're gonna take two minutes to pray. OK. Can you pray for two minutes? OK OK. What I'd like you to do is sit up tall, sit up straight, feet on the floor. If you're here with the boyfriend or girlfriend or husband or wife, you can't hold hands.

OK. So what I want you to do is I'd like you to look around the room and I'd like you to pray for somebody. The only person you can't pray for is me. Okay. I'd like you to look around. I'd like you to pray for somebody. Just take a look at them. You may not know them but you know they- they probably need some things; you can pray for em. Okay you ready? Ok now, what you're going to do is you're gonna put your arms straight out. Put your arms straight out; put your palms up. You're going to lock your elbows. You're going to keep your elbows locked and you are not going to put your hands on the pew in front of you. OK? So you have to be straight out there and locked. So put em out there please, close your eyes, begin praying.

The Pharisees among you had ineffective prayer because you prayed externally. You prayed because you didn't want me to look at you and see you put your arms down and you prayed but it was not effective. You got your reward and your reward was that you received my praise because I didn't- because I saw that you didn't put your arms down. That's Matthew chapter 6,

the Sermon on the Mount. Some of you were very effective and that's because you worked from the inside out. And what you had to do is that you really had to want to pray. Now, you had to want to, this is where your will is, in your core of your being you had to want to pray but what were the other things that were going on? The other things that were going on was your mind and emotions. And your mind and emotions-, your mind was saying this is- this is unreasonable. And then emotionally you're saying what kind of a jerk is this. That's why he says he's a jerk, to have me doing this. So you're wrestling with that and immediately you are- you're- you are allowing your mind to trap your heart.

Or maybe the social relationship. You were here and you continue to pray only because of that person who is next to you. You don't want them to think you are a failure. Or might have been your body that put- did you in. Because it- it- just- it gets painful. Now, the Pharisees continue to pray just because of the acclaim of persons. James, the brother of Jesus, was said to be camels knees. Why was that? That's oftentimes why people throughout history have prayed on their knees. Not a form of masochism but a form of disciplining our body to recognize that every discipline has to do with something of our body. We don't do it to make ourselves hurt but it's to discipline ourselves so that our body does not control who we are. Instead, you had to want in your heart to pray. And as your will determined that you would pray, you began to discipline your mind and your emotions to say he's not as much of a jerk as he looks like. Let me just forget him and let me pray for that person. What you're going to do then is you discipline your body and in turn you discipline the social relations so that you enter into the life of that other person, who you may have never even met, but you care enough to pray for that person. That works then from the inside to the out.

How do we do this then with inside out forgiveness? A heart that is received God's forgiveness is impelled to forgive like God forgives. How do we do that? Let me just-, we-, I've given you some principles earlier theologically, maybe let's see if we can just see how this works maybe on a practical level as well. I think the theological is very practical but let's see if we can flesh this out a little bit. In the first place, the disciple is set free from the power of the sin of retribution to give God's mercy and grace. The disciple is set free from the power of the sin of retribution. That's what we really want to do is get back when we've been hurt. And so when the Spirit energized Word of God enters into our heart, we are now set free. That's what Jesus is saying, "you will know the truth and the truth will set you free."

And so what we are to do is in every situation when we look at relations with people, whether we have hurt others or they have hurt us, we are to compare the words of the world to Jesus' words about reality and then choose Jesus' way. To enter into what-, the world says get back. The world says don't allow yourself to get hurt. And there- there is some wisdom in that. But Jesus, as He hangs upon the cross, says, Father forgive them for they know not what they do. That's Jesus' way. He is the embodiment of forgiveness and what we are to do is to look at God's higher purposes in our lives and to enter into Jesus' way.

Secondly, the heart wills to love instead of take, to give to the person what is needed and that is forgiveness. And I define love in this way. Love is an unconditional commitment to an imperfect person in which I give myself to bring the relationship to God's intended purpose. That's what forgiveness does. Forgiveness enters into that person's life and if you really say that you love

them, you will enter into their life and recognize that they are imperfect and they have hurt you because they are imperfect. You are you- you sustain an imperfect relationship. But what we're doing is that we are entering into their life and I am giving myself to bring the relationship to God's intended purpose and we CANNOT have God's purpose in our lives unless we forgive each other. It's impossible. We cannot have the kind of relationship God desires for us to have unless we forgive each other. So that's what it means to love a person.

Thirdly, the heart directs the transformation in the mind to think like Jesus. To think like Jesus does in each of these situations and the one- the ones that I would encourage you to do, write these passages down. They have to do with the mind and what is going on in the mind of the individual disciple. In our transformational process. And so the way that I describe it is this. Discipline your mind/emotions logically and empathe- empathetically to enter into the other's world to be God's gift of forgiveness to them. Think and feel toward the other person what Jesus has been to you. Jesus is the gift to the world, and you are God's gift to the relationships that you sustain with people. So discipline your mind/emotions logically and empathetically.

Two of the most important words that I ever learned in my relationship, I learned in um-, it was the- our fifth year of marriage. I am known for 10 easy steps to success in anything. I mean I can give you ten steps and you can be successful in anything. I've just got ten steps. And that's what would happen, we get into- , you know my wife and I would be in these-. I remember we were- we're- at summer camp together the first summer we're married and my wife was having a hard time with another co-worker and she was the hostess at Ponderosa and I was the kitchen boy. And I was a brand new Christian a year and a half old, and she'd been a Christian since she was

three and-, four and a half. And our first summer we're married and we're living in this little tiny cabin and I noticed that she wasn't having regular devotions. And as she was having difficulties with this one coworker, I took her aside one day and said Lynn "I'm not sure that you're a Christian."

Now what's my middle name? Yes ladies, you may say it, you may say it. I just have a way with my wife. It was just all external. I've- I-, you know, I was a brand new Christian, just zealous about everything and I just- you know what you need to do? You just- you need to have a regular devotional time. Get up- Let's- let's get up at 6:00 in the morning, we'll- we'll read the Bible together, we'll study. I'll bring out my concordance and I've got a brand new commentary uh you know, and let's study together. And what did she do? She just burst into tears, just burst into tears. And- and I've been making that up for 35 years. (laughter from audience)

But I remember one time we're- we're-, this is-, we've been married five years, I was first year student at Talbot; I was working full time, going to school full time, our first daughter was born the week before classes started. It was just a hard hard time. And I came back from work one day and I was gonna have to study that night. I'd regularly just get home, I would take an hour with our family and then I would study from usually about 7:00 until midnight or 2:00 in the morning, get up at 6:00 do the whole thing. And she jus-, I walked in the door and she looked at me and she said "I'm going home. I'm going home. I'm going back to my mother." I said "What's wrong?" And she says "What's wrong?! Look at our life!" And she just-, you know, then proceeded logically to tell me what was wrong. And I listened to her, I listened to her. And- and finally I said "you know Lynn, I understand." And she just stopped, her mouth got this big and

she said "what?" Cause she was expecting the 10 steps to spiritual formation. And- and I- I said I understand. And we sat down and we talked. At the end of our talk together I said "Okay, let me help you get packed and I'll get you and Michelle home." She says "what do you mean?" "Well, you said you wanted to go home." She says "well that that was just venting." Those are the two most important words I ever learned, "I understand."

Discipline your mind/emotions logically and empathetically to enter into the other's world to be God's gift of forgiveness to them. Think and feel toward the other person what Jesus has been to you. And you know what she said? "I forgive you." She is a love machine.

Fourthly, the heart and mind direct the body to place oneself in the position of physically offering forgiveness or receiving forgiveness. Whether we are offering our gift at the altar and we recognize that somebody has something against us. What do we do? We leave. We leave and we go to be reconciled with that person. It's a physical act of going to the person. Or we recognize the first verse our daughters learned "be kind to one another." Our daughters said "be kind to nother oner." They still say it. "Be kind to one another, gentle hearted forgiving each other as God in Christ Jesus has forgiven you." So the heart and mind direct the body to place oneself in the position of physically offering forgiveness or receiving forgiveness. Direct the mouth, feet, and body for you to become an instrument of righteousness in this world as you forgive and as you are forgiven.

And then lastly, fifthly, the heart mind and body direct social relations so that forgiveness is extended within the community. Healing is realized and reconciliation is accomplished in



personal and corporate relationships when the whole person offers forgiveness. See, it isn't just our mind. It isn't just our emotions. It isn't evenly-, it isn't even just the words but it's the relationship that we sustain. That for 35 years now, as I have continued to be a jerk, my wife has stayed with me, and there is no greater demonstration of love than her staying with me. And no greater demonstration of the fact that I mean what I say that I've stayed with her. So it's an ongoing reality of the forgiveness of God in our relationship.

So those would be just a few little things that I've tried to work out, you know, it could be much more practical than that but you know I'm a nerd you know, that's- that's what I am. So we have 15 minutes and I guess we take questions. Any questions that you might have. And John, I'll expect you to answer any I can't. Okay.

Audience #1:

I just want to thank you Dr. Wilkins for especially this story from your life that you shared before the break. That was very meaningful, at least for-, I think for all of us. But I want to say just for me it's very meaningful to hear that. And as I was- I was thinking about it during the break. And I'm really-, I didn't know where you're going to go after the break and I was really happy to see how you brought in Dr. Willard's model and of the person. It was-, because I was thinking about the- the physical component of forgiveness and I was thinking about apology too because it seems like apology and forgiveness often kind of go hand-in-hand. So I was wondering if you could say more about what are the physical components of forgiveness? What does forgiveness look like in our bodies? Is it, you know, gestures or postures that we can take in

asking for forgiveness or extending forgiveness? Just wondering if you can say more about what the physical components might look like.

Dr. Mike Wilkins:

Very good. I don't know, let me just take a stab at it. The first thing that came to my mind was humility to- to truly forgive another person or to truly ask for forgiveness from another person. Humility is- is a core element. Because what we're- what we're not doing any longer is kind of exalting ourselves over the other person. And- and what we do in that humility, I think, is we take a posture where we become vulnerable. And- and the vulnerability means that we- we can be rejected. And when we put ourselves in a physical position of humility and vulnerability, uh- you really are setting yourself up for being hurt again.

And I think that then any of those heart attitudes, the heart attitude of humility, we have to disciplined our mind and know really what we're getting into, this-, we're not foolish in going about this, to position ourselves in such a way that the cockiness is taken away, that the- that the who-, exalting ourselves over another person is taken away and we become vulnerable. That to me really becomes key. The position that then takes-, I- I- I-. My wife has really taught me a lot about this, is that uh-, she said what I used to like to do and we get into arguments is- is I would stand. And you know, everybody else could be sitting and I'd be standing and I'm kind of going at everybody. And- and she said "you know what I like to do when I'm with little children is I like to get down on the floor and look 'em eye to eye. And I've had to do that-, I've learned to do that with my daughters when they were little, -is when I blew it with my little girls. One of the

things-, those of you that are parents, the thing that I learned the most is that day to day I never knew what I was doing. You know I knew what-, they hit 13 and I've got this nailed.

Now they're 14. And I have no clue what to do with a 14 year old. And I would get down on their level and I would look them right in the eye and I remember saying this to Michelle, "Michelle, I've never been at this place before. And I was wrong with the way that I treated you last week. I apologize." I'm down on her level now and I apologized. And I was saying "now the thing you got to realize is you've never been 14 before either. So let's- let's just say that let's go through this together." For me that would be the- a critical element of humility, in putting ourself even physically in a place where we're demonstrating our humility which means that we're vulnerable.

Audience #2:

Dr. Wilkins, I was wondering from a spiritual warfare standpoint, I've heard some speakers and books say that- that passage when it says being handed over to the torturers, in the parable. Um- that when we give in to bitterness and anger, that's leaving a stronghold for the enemy to work in our lives. And when we let go of our bitterness and anger, it produces spiritual emotional and maybe physical healing. Would you agree with that?

Dr. Mike Wilkins:

Well, let me say- wa- I want to look for the primary point of the parable. I think the primary point of the parable has to do with eternal punishment. So I think that's- that's the real issue. At the same time, there would probably be a related principle that could be developed within that,

that we serve one of two masters. There are only one of two masters in this life and whether a person knows it or not, in their consciousness, when any time that we-, when this battle is going on in our mind that is for our heart, we're going to yield to one or the other. And so anytime that we reject the Spirit empowered Word, we are going to be listening to- to the lies of the world the flesh and the devil. And it can be manifested, I would say, in a variety of different ways. I don't know if it would be-, you know, I I know what- I know what demonic stuff is like. Any of you before you were saved, did you um-, were any of you under control of Satan? You all were. You all were.

Look at Ephesians Chapter 2. You know, Paul, a good guy, even when he was a Pharisee, recognized that he was under the control of the Prince of the powers of the air. How is that- was that manifested for him in some kind of conscious spiritual oppression? I don't think so. But you are going to be under the control of the evil one in however that best tricks you into being deceived that's the way in which you would be.

Audience #3:

Yeah. I also want to thank you for- for being honest and sharing your life experience. That was- that means a lot to me and it really kind of puts it in a real context. I just wanted to talk to you or ask for your comment on this idea of the sin of retribution. I think on an individual level we can understand that. But my experience as a Christian has been that as a community of believers we have a much more difficult time with that. And I would use as an example perhaps you know the of- some of the the the political things that we're involved with now and some of the issues that have come out of 9/11 and everything where um we under maybe a mask of patriotism and

standing for God and country, we have had a very difficult time looking at the possibility or the option of forgiving those who have, you know, committed some pretty heinous things toward us. And so, you know, I've raised that issue on occasion, you know, in different groups and I always- or I usually get the same kind of response and it's usually kind of a gritting of our teeth and how can we be expected to, you know, forgive people who would- who would take the lives of innocent- innocent others that they don't even know. And I just wonder if you could kind of comment on that whole idea.

Michael J. Wilkins:

Well that's an easy one umm. (laughter from audience) And I'm not- I'm probably not going to give you the answer you want. You know, I've wrestled with this a lot. When I came back from Vietnam, I was- I was a devout pacifist. And then I had to wrestle with the Bible a little bit more. I do think that the Bible speaks of just war theory. I think that we have to be pretty serious about trying to work through those issues. Most of us don't do that. Um as- as I try to say every believer on the face of this earth has two masters and our primary allegiance is to the kingdom of God. Every person on the face of this earth also is to be submissive to governing authorities. So that if we have young people that are in Afghanistan right now that are Christians, that they believe that they are serving the kingdom of God but they believe that they are rightly carrying out Romans 12 and 13, Romans 13 in particular. But I think 12 has to be connected with that. But in terms of serving- governing authorities, governing authorities are God's sword on this earth, and it is a sword that is being used by God, whether they recognize it or not, to bring justice on the earth. The complex issue is that the soldiers in Afghanistan, who are Christians, who are serving the kingdom of God and submitting to their government, may be fighting against

the Christians on the other side, who are serving the Kingdom of God, submitting to their governing authorities, and they're fighting against each other.

I think that that- when you wrestle with those issues, none of us are going to be quite as, I'll be careful here, we're- we're probably not going to be quite the flag way- wavers that we might have been once- once at a particular time in our lives. I'm- I'm a very supportive per- person of our governing authorities but I serve the Kingdom of God first. And it creates dilemmas, ethical dilemmas, for every single one of us. We as Christians need to be hardcore about facing those and recognizing that none of us really are gonna do it right. I was just in Arkadelphia Arkansas. Anybody ever been to Arkadelphia Arkansas? or even know where it is? It's in the United States. It's in. Uh- I would speak on issues like this and I was dealing with some of the chaplain candidates and they have- they have not wrestled with these issues and I said you better before you go any further in your training to be a chaplain in the military, you better go read your Bible pretty seriously and recognize that there are some ethical dilemmas here that all of us face when we serve the Kingdom of God in a fallen world. So that's just my brief little comment.

Audience #4:

Your definition of forgiveness that you gave us at the beginning "to release a person from the wrong that they have done to us" at least as I have it written "for the purpose of re-establishing a health-, the relationship in a healthy way." Later on, near the end there you were talking as though forgiveness encompassed the re-establishment of that relationship and that it really wasn't forgiveness until the relationship was reestablished almost, at least so it seemed. And so um-, you want-, is there a border or a boundary where we can say we've forgiven even if the

relationship really isn't established, and if so, where is that in us? And how does that, even though that we may not have done all the things that we need to establish the relationship but we've still forgiven? Or is that more of that the other person that they are putting up barriers to prevent or is that some of both in this dynamic?

Michael J. Wilkins:

Yeah. If I- if I meant that it's not done well until the relationship is uh- is a healthy functioning relationship for us. I-, my relationship with my second stepfather, no first stepfather, was not a functioning relationship but it was healthy on my part. And so I have established in the way that God wanted me to, and what I- what I say is that then when I dovetail with the definition of love, I said "to bring the relationship to God's intended purpose." I don't believe it was God's purpose for me to have this warm huggy relationship with my stepfather. That's not what I'm called to do. I opened the door for him to have one with me if he wanted to but he didn't desire to do that so I'm fine. Now it's his- his reality. He's got to deal with this, and it's not my responsibility then to determine what he does with it.

What I have to do is I have to seek most importantly what does God want for my relationship? And that's what we have to- really-, in essence we have to do that with every relationship. What does God desire for my relationship with this person or this person or this person and it is different for these three because I've had this person as a student. I have more of a commitment to her than I do to either one of you. I'm sorry. So it's God's- God's design for that and what I can't do is I can't put my understanding of it upon her. It's my realat- my relationship.

Audience #4:

So um, just to clarify here, that um there is- the- forgiveness is the side of setting aside the hurt, in order to enable that relationship that we're trying to achieve in all cases with all people whether there was hurt interfering with it or not and so-

Michael J. Wilkins:

yeah that's- that's one part of it yeah

Audience #4:

that seems to be what-

Michael J. Wilkins:

I- I- I mean I don't think it's just the hurt. I think sin enters into it and that's retribution. Retribution is a big issue. We have to all be very careful of that. So I hope that helped a little.

Audience #5:

My question is how can we help nonbelievers or perhaps Christians that are weak in their faith deal with issues of forgiveness?

Michael J. Wilkins:

That's an excellent point. Maybe I'd say it this way, when you look at those passages from Talmud and Mishna earlier, that's- and I want to say this as appropriately as I can. That's- that's a religious person who is unregenerate. They can't understand what we're talking about here. You



can't understand forgiveness in the way we're talking about it as it comes out of that parable until you know the reality of a- of a spiritually changed heart, a regenerated heart. So in many ways you-, what you can't do is force this kind of thing on non-Christians because you're going to force them into doing it externally, and you're going to force them into legalism then, be very careful that. You can teach non-Christian children the manner of this so that they understand when they come to a point where they recognize their own accountability in their heart, they're ready to now say "OK I now understand this comes from the heart," but you can't do it for- for non-Christians on this- on the service otherwise you force them into legalism.

I- I guess I would just say two things when when it comes to new Christians. Point them to the cross and point them to your own life. That's- that's pretty risky. But when you point them to the cross they get- they get the real picture. When you point them to your own life they're going to see the cross in action, and they're going to see the way in which even as you deal with them as a non-Christian who's made-, I mean a new Christian who's blowing it or even a non-Christian, they're going to say "you know, maybe there is something to this." So that just be a feeble attempt at answering that.

Would I- would you mind if I close us in prayer? Thank you for letting me be with you tonight. Let's pray if we could.

Father, there are- there is many stories here as there are people. And Father I pray that even as You gave me- You kind of impelled me to- to tell some of my story. I've been real hard on my mom in many ways over the years. And You gave me an insight to her heart, when I've seen the

journey that she's been on. Father as um- as we have shared experiences this evening, I pray that looking into the heart of other people will allow us to look back into our own heart and- and we would look very deeply there and- and see whether there are issues that we haven't received Your healing. Haven't perhaps consciously received Your forgiveness. And Father perhaps where we have hardened our hearts against others. Father, where there is need of further issues to be addressed, I pray that each individual here would follow the leading of Your Spirit and would either be with a friend or a pastor or- or just simply in Your presence to experience the touch of the Savior, the Savior who died for our sins. Thank you for my privilege of being with this group and I pray that You would continue to lead us into this thing of forgiveness. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. In Jesus' name, Amen.