

Philemon:
“From Trash To Treasure”
Part 3 of 3

Intro:

The past couple weeks, we have been looking at an oft-neglected book in the New Testament, the book of Philemon. And so we come now to the conclusion of our study of the book or in fact, the **letter** that Paul had written to Philemon.

And so let's turn there together. If you are just now joining us and don't remember where Philemon is, turn to the book of Hebrews and just thumb left. If you can't find Hebrews, then go all the way to Revelation and thumb left until you find Hebrews, and then go further left until you come to Philemon.

We had seen over the past couple weeks in our study together, that this was a very *tender*, very *personal* letter from Paul. In fact, we might even be able to say that it was THE most personal of all the letters that he had written. And because there is such a richness and a depth here, despite this book only having 25 verses, we've had to break up our study into a few pieces. I was talking to Dave earlier and I told him that there's so much here that to do this study in only 3 pieces, I feel like I'm robbing you guys. So tonight, as I say, will be the final part of our look at this very loving, very important letter.

Just to recap and to get us all back up to speed on the past couple weeks, before we dive in:

Paul had written several letters while he was imprisoned in Rome prior to his execution, and one of the letters he wrote during his imprisonment was to a man named Philemon, who was a Pastor. Likely in fact to be the Pastor of the church in Colossae where the church all met in his home. Paul was writing to Philemon and appealing to him to forgive someone named Onesimus, who happened to be his slave and who had stolen something and then run away. And last week, we left off with how God had sovereignly brought Paul and Onesimus together in Rome, and that Onesimus has been brought to Christ and was, as Paul said, now more useful than ever. And then we saw that in order for a greater reconciliation to take place, even in his chains Paul would have no doubt benefited greatly by having him stay with him in Rome, Paul sends Onesimus BACK to Philemon.

And we quickly arrived, from the start of our study a couple weeks back, at the fact that this letter Paul wrote to Philemon is one that concerns itself with forgiveness. And we begin to see how important this is in our own lives as Christians. Early on in our study, we saw how we were to be known for our love for one another. And along those lines, we also saw that through forgiveness, there existed the possibility of great healing, of great reconciliation. And then further along, we noted that not only was forgiveness a Christian virtue but far more than that, that we are actually commanded to forgive just as God through Christ forgave us. But even beyond that, we noted that God goes further by promising us that if we don't forgive others, He won't forgive us.

We also took careful note of how Paul was making his appeal to Philemon to forgive Onesimus, NOT based upon his apostolic authority (as he could have done) but rather from his HEART. Paul wanted Philemon's cooperation in forgiving Onesimus voluntarily, and NOT based upon compulsion. And we underscored the desire of Paul in that he wanted Philemon to do the right thing for the right reason.

So now that we **know**, LIKE PHILEMON, that **we** are being exhorted **TO** forgive, and we are now seeing why we **MUST** forgive, I think we will find occasion in our study tonight to discuss perhaps some ways **HOW** to forgive. I've mentioned this before but I think that forgiveness has to be one of the MOST difficult aspects of our walk with the Lord. I know we **all** probably have some hardness, some bitterness, some unforgiveness within us that we would like to let go of and be free of. But it's hard. And so at the conclusion of our look into the book of Philemon tonight, we're going to pray together this evening that if you are still harboring some bitterness, some pain, some unforgiveness, we're going to pray together that God would guide us into a meaningful, lasting, and authentic forgiveness. And I assure you, that He is faithful to do just that if you'll only trust in His goodness to lead you.

And so let's read the rest of the letter to Philemon together beginning at Verse 15 and reading through the end, through Verse 25:

(Read Philemon 15-25).

Verse 15:

Paul perceived, as we see in Verse 15, that there was a much **greater** purpose in this whole affair. We read the words from Verse 15, "*For **this** perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever,*". For "this" perhaps is why. Or we might read it as "For this *reason* perhaps is why". Make sure that we see that: again, Paul is suggesting that although Onesimus had run away, (he uses the phrase "parted from you for a while") that there was something much greater at work here: what's that? That Onesimus would be ultimately saved, (brought to a saving knowledge of Christ) and disciplined, only to return to Philemon where he would remain *forever* **in** Christ.

And look at the latter part of that verse, where Paul goes on to say, “*that you might have him back forever*,”. Onesimus had undergone SUCH a radical transformation that Paul was certain, he was sure, that this was an issue that he would not have to intercede in again.

I think we can see **3 greater works** taking shape here:

1. **Salvation**: In short, what greater work can there possibly be? What greater, more important work of reconciliation can there be in all the universe than unregenerate mankind being brought into right relationship with God? That’s paramount. Through God’s Sovereign work, through His Providence, He brought Onesimus to Paul where Paul would then lead him to repentance and trust in Christ. Onesimus, by way of the Holy Spirit, was raised as it were from death, to LIFE. Now he could do things that “dead” people can’t do. Which brings us to number 2...
2. **Transformation**: It is precisely BECAUSE of our *salvation*, that **Transformation** through the Word of God, by the Spirit of God, is then possible. Transformation takes place in our walk with Christ through that process we all love, called “sanctification”; a process that we are called to participate in whereby through the often very painful, life-shattering, soul-crushing shaping and moulding at the direction of our Lord, that we are made to become more and more like Him. Being transformed more and more into the image of Christ, degree by degree. More of Him...less of US. MORE OF HIM. LESS OF US. This transformational work then brings us to the possibility of number 3...
3. **Reconciliation**: The Bible clearly says that prior to the moment of our salvation, our conversion, that we are “dead in our sins” [Eph. 2:2]. Dead! In fact, we are so dead that it literally requires the work of the Holy Spirit to act upon us, to raise us from spiritual death to spiritual life in Christ. And such is the depravity of our own sin, so thoroughly and

infinitely insulting is our sin against a Holy, Perfect, and Just God, that all other reconciliation PALES in comparison to THAT great work of reconciliation.

That level of CRIME against a Holy and Just God DEMANDS eternal punishment as the Just recompense for our own sin. I've heard people say "The Cross is a measure of our worth". No! The Cross is a measure of our utter DEPRAVITY. It took Jesus Christ Himself to bear the full, unfiltered Wrath of Almighty God to satisfy His Justice against sin. It took a sacrifice of INFINITE WORTH to satisfy the Righteous Wrath of the Most High God. Do you really think that Jesus wiped beads of blood from His brow in Gethsemane because He feared what the Romans were going to do to Him? Do you think He agonized in the garden of Gethsemane because the Romans were going to beat Him, place a crown of thorns upon His head, and nail Him to that tree? We have a rich tradition of martyrs in Christendom that actually sang hymns and songs to God as they were going to be executed. You think they were somehow stronger in character than our own Savior? No, Jesus asked that if it were possible, that this cup pass because He knew that He was about to bear the full weight of the Wrath of God.

Why do I belabor this? Because we need to see that our human perspective of the wrongs committed against us, PALE in comparison to that wrong that WE committed against HIM. And if HE extended Grace to US, then let US extend Grace to those who have hurt us.

Let's go back to Paul's position here for a second. Remember, in addition to everything Paul was saying, he was sort of *modeling* for Philemon, arguing from the big point to the small point: he was saying, "I'm here in this stinking dungeon, in chains for the sake of Christ, and I'm being as faithful as I can be; I'm asking you to do the same." Remember what we read last week from Luke 12:48, "if you have been given much, much is

required". If you have been forgiven of much, then much forgiveness FROM you is required.

So again, our SALVATION leads to TRANSFORMATION and our transformation through the Word of God, by the Spirit of God can then lead us to a place of RECONCILIATION. In the context of this letter to Philemon, this speaks to our reconciliation THROUGH FORGIVENESS with those who have hurt US.

I think oftentimes we see what's in front of our nose without a thought, necessarily, to what's beyond it or rather, behind it all – to the glory of God and His purposes. I think we would do very well to simply give ourselves over to the understanding that His ways are above ours and just settle this fact in our minds: that He has a purpose and in His sovereignty, He will fulfill it. This is liberating! If He has allowed this pain in your life, it **could** be to give you an opportunity to be more like Christ. And which in the end will glorify God. We talked a lot last week about how much of an impact forgiveness can have on even the most hardened souls.

Verse 16:

Now here in Verse 16 we read where Paul continues on with the words, *"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."* I've looked and looked and the overwhelming consensus is that Paul isn't calling for Onesimus's freedom per se, but rather that he is saying "Onesimus is not "merely" a slave" and that additionally, Paul is saying that Onesimus is now ABOVE a slave, in a spiritual aspect. And that he wasn't simply to be just another piece of Philemon's property, but that he was to be received in a way much MORE than that. Indeed, to be received as a brother in Christ, a fellow servant in the faith, a reception that Onesimus's radical transformation in

Christ should accord. We read in Ephesians 6:9, Paul is reminding those who are slave owners that Christ shows no partiality and to therefore, show none between brethren. These words from Eph. 6:9, "*Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that He Who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with Him.*". We're seeing the fact that there should be a mutual honor of one another, a mutual respect for one another as believers because of our shared salvation in Christ. After all, for one who has undergone such a miraculous transformation in Christ, and received so large an amount of Grace and Forgiveness by God through Christ, that there exists now a spiritual brotherhood & sisterhood between believers as indeed we have been adopted into the family of the King. We must *act* accordingly. We must *love* accordingly.

Paul emphasizes that not only to Paul is he now a beloved brother but by using the phraseology "*...how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord*", he is emphasizing that Onesimus's value to Philemon is even greater than he is to Paul because with Philemon, Onesimus was once considered "USELESS" (remember that from Verse 11?) and is now considered to be USEFUL. Now considered ***precious***.

I think also, that Paul was careful to mention how indeed Onesimus had become so much more USEFUL because of what had happened to him but **more** than that, BECAUSE of what happened, he would be even more USEFUL in other ways, such as in his service under Philemon because he would have served Philemon NOW AS UNTO THE LORD. Paul notes that the entire value of Onesimus is not just spiritual but also in the flesh. This may mean that once Onesimus returns to Philemon, he will continue his work in the employ of Philemon as before, but it could also mean that perhaps he continues instead in the work of ministry under Philemon's leadership. We'll never know. But at least the possibility would have existed.

We often think of ourselves so important. That the reason we matter is because of our character and virtue. That somehow we have accomplished much by the effort of our own hands and will. The reality is that without the work of Christ in us, we are utterly useless. In fact, it can be said that anything done for the Kingdom that relies on our own sufficiency **will not last**. The work of **Christ** IN US absolutely MUST be exalted for us to have any “worth” at all! We must exalt Him in all we do!

Verse 17 & 18:

Let's take a look at the next 2 verses. Verses 17 & 18 read, “[17] *So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would me.* [18] *If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account.*” So I want to look at both Verse 17 and 18 as one complete thought. And I think you'll see why in a moment because there's a couple of really amazing things to look at here:

First: (Our Equal Value in Christ) Paul is essentially affirming that Onesimus's worth was at least as equal as Paul's. You can see it in Verse 17 by the way Paul says “*So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would me*”. Paul could very well have just said “please receive him”. Right? But if he HAD done that, we wouldn't notice the level of esteem that Paul had in the work of Christ in Onesimus. Because we would just read it like this: “So if you consider me your partner, receive him”. But no - Paul says, “...receive him AS YOU WOULD ME”. You see that? That's heavy. I mean, it's beautiful. It's tender. But it's heavy. It's powerful.

The question then becomes, “How often do **we** discard or dismiss people based on their perceived “value””. I think it's fascinating here that Paul isn't valuing Onesimus on any worldly scale of importance. No, he is literally valuing him solely on CHRIST'S WORK IN HIM. He already knows that his own worth is eternally and inextricably tied to the Lord's working in him.

So I suppose it's no wonder that Paul reflects that to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus in his letter to him. And knowing Paul's "worth" in Christ, he makes certain to place him in equal esteem when he tells Philemon to receive him *as you would me*. He's saying "Don't treat this newfound treasure like the trash you thought he was. He is our brother now; our joint heir in the inheritance of Christ. Take him in and treat him the same you would me".

Then in Verse 18, Paul acknowledges the sin of Onesimus with the words, "If he has wronged you at all or if he owes you anything". This isn't the "if" of uncertainty. This is the sort of "if" you might use in a matter of "peace making". You might say it's an "if" of a conciliatory nature. Think of a time you may have had a disagreement with someone and you may say, "Look. **If** I've something wrong, let's talk about it and clear the air". You know something has happened. You know for a fact something is wrong. But this is the peace-making "if".

Well what does that say to us? It says that Onesimus confessed what he had done to Paul. Confession is often the mark of a repentant heart. Not always. Sometimes confession is an admission of how proud someone is of causing another some form of injury. But here we see a confession of repentance.

And then, amazingly, Paul actually takes responsibility for the debt of Onesimus. "*Charge it to my account*", Paul says. He is taking full fiscal responsibility for the debts of Onesimus so that in his reconciliation, Philemon has nothing left to consider of restoring Onesimus to himself except Paul's exhortation. He just took all of Philemon's bullets away. If Paul didn't do this, Onesimus might return to a man that continued to treat him badly solely on account of making sure that he settled that debt. Paul is washing all that away by putting Onesimus on "his tab". But he's saying something else. Something MUCH greater: In a sense, Paul is saying "Your problem with

Onesimus? That's been nailed to the Cross, brother. He's one of *us* now. Receive him as you would me. And forgive your brother”.

Now... here's the 2nd amazing thing we see from Verses 17 & 18 and let's read it slowly this time: “[17] *So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would me.* [18] *If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account.*” Sound familiar? Let me read it a different way and see if you spot something incredible. “Father, if you consider me your Son, receive them as you would Me. They have sinned against You and they owe you a great debt - a debt that they are unable to pay, Put their debt of sin upon MY shoulders on that Cross...”.

I cannot help but see the Gospel of Jesus Christ here. Paul is truly walking out his testimony of what Jesus has done for HIM by taking unto himself the debts that he himself did not incur. I believe he does this because this is exactly what the Lord has done not only for him but for us who are God's adopted children. Our debts to the Father have been paid by Someone that should never have had to pay them. Those were OUR debts, not His. The point in this passage *! believe* is to show the importance of walking out our testimony to the point of personal peril. We don't know what the dollar amount of Onesimus's debts were and we can only imagine that Paul's financial position was pretty much zero considering he was in prison. It's not hard to imagine that if Philemon intended to collect Onesimus's debts from Paul that Paul would likely have to find employment in order to do so. I don't think Paul's sacrifice in this matter should be taken casually. And I certainly don't think Christ's sacrifice in the matter of our forgiveness should be taken casually either. We would be well to consider the same type of sacrificial FORGIVENESS, which serves and EXALTS Christ and makes His testimony in us **REAL**.

Verse 19:

Moving further into this powerful letter, we come to Verse 19 where Paul writes, “*I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it--to say nothing of your owing me even your own self.*” Paul seems to be in “mentor mode” with Philemon here by reminding him that he owes Paul something more than what Onesimus owes Philemon – he owes Paul his salvation. Not in terms of substitutionary atonement of course. That belongs to Christ alone. But rather that he is now saved because of Paul’s missionary work. It almost seems plausible that Philemon was personally disciplined by Paul by the sound of it. He is reminding Philemon to maintain a greater perspective and of the overall purpose to this whole thing instead of it just being about money. Or getting his justice. Or his pound of flesh, as it were.

It’s my own personal belief by the sound of it that Paul would have honored his word to repay Onesimus’s debts but that he would have been gravely disappointed in Philemon if he couldn’t get Philemon to discover a greater responsibility. In effect he is actually modeling for Philemon what he ought to do. He’s saying “Onesimus owes you monetarily. I’ll pay the debt monetarily. But remember that you owe me spiritually. Repay me spiritually.” He’s trying to get Philemon’s mind away from the physical, monetary transaction and onto what Christ has done FOR ALL THREE OF THEM. I think that’s the application point here. To model our sacrifices based on THE INFINITELY MORE VALUABLE WORK OF CHRIST in us. We should seek to serve the Lord sacrificially based on what HE HAS DONE FOR US which could NEVER be repaid by ANY amount of money or time here on this earth.

Verse 20:

Now onto Verse 20 where we read, “*Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ.*” Paul cleverly uses his initial praise of Philemon to hammer home his request: he uses the words “I want some benefit from you in the Lord” and “refresh my heart” which is sort of a mirror of the words from back in Verse 7 where he praises Philemon for the

“joy” and “refreshment” that he provides the other saints. Ouch. He’s essentially saying, “If you value me, do this for me just as you have done for the others”.

I think there’s a lesson here for us in terms of Paul’s consistency. He’s been very clear up to this point about his heart and his request. And he ties it back together with the original work that Philemon has been doing in the hearts of other saints. Not only would it be very convicting to be told those things in the way Paul says them here, but how very clear is his heart. I think it’s obvious: Consistency in our words to others shows the clarity of our heart. Being consistent shows not only the clarity of our heart but the spirit of it as well. We don’t want a confused testimony, nor confused communication with others, with our brothers and sisters in Christ, or especially our spouses. We must make certain that our heart and our spirit is clear.

Verse 21:

Watch how Paul continues here in Verse 21 where he says this: *“Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.”* Man...he’s laying it on pretty thick. Paul is making the assumption that a fellow laborer in Christ can be counted on to honor his request. He is making the assumption that a fellow laborer in Christ can be counted on to honor his request. If you’ve ever been involved in sales, you’ll recognize this perhaps as a sort of “close”. This “close” is what is called a “presumptive close”. It’s where you go ahead and make the assumption that the buyer has made his or her decision by “assuming” it. Paul assumes Philemon’s compliance here. He knows what’s best and assumes that he can rest in a full resolution to this issue.

And I think when we apply this to ourselves, at the very least, we should be expected to do what we say we’ll do and honor those who make godly requests of us. It’s an issue of integrity. If for some reason we can’t fulfill a request or a demand, then we need to be able to say so or at least

be clear as to why. It's the very least that one would expect from a person of integrity and it's DEFINITELY something one should be able to expect from a Christian.

Verse 22:

And now we begin to come to the close of Paul's letter to Philemon. Here in Verse 22, Paul writes, "*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.*" Going back to that presumptive "close", Paul, in the first part of that sentence, sort of seems like he's saying "I know you're going to do the right thing in forgiving Onesimus. Go ahead and get the guest room ready - because I'm gonna come and make sure that you did".

Looking at the back half of that sentence in Verse 22, we see clearly that Paul also understands the power of prayer and he's placing his hope of returning to Philemon based on it. The fact that he even goes so far as to tell him to prepare a room. He's asking Philemon to **marry his faith to action**. He's saying "Get ready for me, and pray that I'll arrive". Naturally I can't speak for you but I've found that oftentimes *in my own life* it's difficult to marry faith to action. This is hard for me to say, but I think oftentimes, prayer is used as a **SUBSTITUTION for action**. There are things we need to do "in the natural" that must be based on faith and prayer. But all the prayer and faith in the world won't make that phone call for you, won't have that conversation with your spouse you need to have, won't address harassment at work, won't change the flat tire on your car, and WON'T FORGIVE HIM OR HER FOR WHAT THEY DID TO YOU, etc. Faith and action must cooperate.

Verse 23:

Paul begins to close his letter here in Verse 23 with this, saying "*Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you,*". Paul is locked up with other brothers in Christ, Epaphras

being one of them. It seems clear that Paul must have shared this letter with him, that this was at least discussed with him and the other brothers since Epaphras had an opportunity to interject a greeting.

There seems to be a sharing with other “prisoners in Christ Jesus” of all the consequences of living for Christ under intense persecution that seems normal and necessary: suffering, misery, incarceration. Not for the sake of commiserating but for the sake of encouraging one another, bearing each other's burdens, lifting one another up, strengthening one another for the sake of the great work, refreshing each other in joy. These guys were locked up together in a first century prison, as we saw - likely the infamous Mamertine Prison where the sewers of Rome connected to and where the prisoners were lowered down into the prison through a hole in the ceiling. I can't even imagine what they endured. Yet, they all sent their greetings as though they were sending a postcard from a beach somewhere in the Caribbean. How is it we can be so miserable therefore, living in relative comfort and security, and not have enough energy left to encourage one another, lifting each other up in encouragement and life, speaking God's truth to one another? We should seek to do all these things not only during persecution or trial but so much more when we have the freedom and ability to do so in our “charmed lives”.

Verse 24:

Paul continues the close of his letter to Philemon in Verse 24 here saying, “*and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.*” I think it's safe to say that Philemon knew the stakes and what was possible in serving Christ in the early Church. He must have known that imprisonment and death were a near certainty. I think Paul seems to be reminding Philemon unconsciously of this fact here as well as letting Philemon know that he ought to remain humble. After all, here we have Mark and Luke, among others, in chains, while Philemon, likely a man of means, is probably hunkered down with some measure of relative

freedom, perhaps ministering to a group of believers in his home; a home spacious enough to host a group of believers anyway. It also seems Paul is laying some measure of peer pressure on Philemon to do the right thing by letting him know the names of the other brothers that are “watching” him. It sort of elevated the level of accountability I think. We already have Timothy looking on, as mentioned in the beginning of Paul’s letter. Now we have these brothers.

We know that the student isn’t above his master. We are not only susceptible to persecution, we can fully expect it. And continuing to serve God in the midst of it all, we must learn to keep our eyes heavenward to our ultimate destiny and purpose in the finished work of Christ. **That is where our treasure lies and that is where we are headed.** Now, Keeping **that** perspective should bolster our souls because we have been set apart by God and for God for a greater purpose. And even in the middle of all that, keeping in mind that we should seek the strength necessary to not only build up our own faith, but the faith and spirits of our brothers and sisters in Christ while being shackled to a cold, concrete floor in a rat and insect-infested cell, with little to no food – and when available, was likely worm-ridden and unfit even for animal consumption. Treasure the days you have in seasons of bounty!

And of course, I think the other takeaway here is that we should **live in the sight of God**. Even harder, we need to consider living *in the sight of others*. That is to say, do what is right for the right reasons and be open to investigation. Be open to investigation by others BECAUSE you walk in the sight of God. The Lord has forgiven us. Others may not. But let us not harm our own testimony by having such little esteem of our OWN forgiveness so as to harden our hearts against others who have harmed us.

Verse 25:

And finally, we arrive now at the conclusion of this most tender, most heartfelt letter from Paul to Philemon. In Verse 25, we read, “*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.*” Paul hearkens back to his greeting in verse 3 (his wish for grace) and he blesses Philemon with the grace of the Lord because he knows precisely that it is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself that will lead Philemon to accept this letter and do the right thing. But... maybe Philemon knows that already – **so Paul wishes it for him as a reminder to bestow grace on others HIMSELF. He models what he wishes Philemon to live and walk out.**

Grace. Changes. Everything. Particularly the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Grace changed you and I from utterly depraved sinners, dead in our sins, to LIFE in Christ. How much more surmountable a task or an effort or a problem is when we realize the grace that Jesus has provided to US. What sin, what mistake, what error, or what wrong can **outweigh the grace of our Lord?**

How liberating is it to know that His grace is sufficient? **Therefore**, if **He** extends such a level of grace to **us**, then why aren't **we** willing to do the same thing, in the **same measure** to others **KNOWING the power of it?** We have to-model-the-things-we-speak. Otherwise our words and our testimony is void and is made up of nothing more than the flesh...

Now, it might be that Philemon had already forgiven Onesimus by the time he showed back up with this letter. We don't know. But guess what? It doesn't matter WHEN Philemon forgave Onesimus, what matters is that he DID forgive him. How do we know that he forgave him? Because we are reading the letter.

This letter that Paul wrote ended up on Philemon's doorstep by way of Divine Providence. And a great reconciliation took place. Don't miss this. This letter showed up on Philemon's doorstep. And by Divine Providence, it has now showed up on YOUR doorstep TONIGHT. We know that Philemon forgave Onesimus and a great healing took place because Philemon kept this letter and it's now part of biblical history. The only question for us this: What will YOU do with this letter? Will it get filed away into the "someday" part of your heart? Or will this letter be part of YOUR story?

Now as I said at the top of our study this evening, if you are here tonight and you still have some built-up bitterness in your heart, maybe some unresolved pain that someone has caused you, maybe some hardness, and you know that you should do the right thing. Perhaps you might even feel the tug of the Holy Spirit on your heart tonight to begin this process of healing in your spirit, to forgive. I mean **really** forgive some wrongs that were caused you.

We're going to pray together right now that our Heavenly Father, Almighty God, will cause us to embrace forgiveness **this night**. It may be a pain that the Lord allows you an instant deliverance from as you begin to process forgiveness. It might take a lot longer. But I count it no coincidence that if you are hearing this message now, that the Lord has ordained you to receive His mighty right hand as you begin the journey to a real forgiveness in your heart. I said, in an earlier study, that real, true forgiveness was impossible without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. And so let us pray together now, that our Heavenly Father, who desires to shoulder this pain FOR US, would grant us the gift of forgiveness.