

## Christian Friendship - Part 3

### Patience & Forgiveness

Colossians 3:12-14

Well I suppose it would come as no surprise to you to hear that I am not a good cook. Doesn't shock you does it? I'm not a good cook. I better have something that comes out of a can, and can be slid into the microwave if I'm in charge of cooking. But thankfully Carlynn is a good cook and perhaps inspired in part lately by the fact that I catch her often cooking dinner with the cooking shows on the TV within eye shot of the kitchen. Strange it always seems she turns those on she's going to cook something. I'll often come home from work and there it is, the kitchen is all lit up and stuff all around and the cooking show is on. Well, recently I came home and I walked through the door, familiar sight I saw the cooking show on the TV and it was facing the kitchen and she's in the kitchen, I'm thinking at least because all the lights are on, stuff is strewn about the island of our kitchen and I walk in looking for her and she's not there, I couldn't find her anywhere. So, I called about the house, I couldn't find anyone, no one was there. And yet everything looked like she was supposed to be there cooking dinner. Well as I'm contemplating my eschatology, considering the possibility of a partial rapture, at least I don't know I was relieved when she walked through the door just at that moment. Whew. I said, "Where'd you go? Where have you been?" She said, well I had to run to the store real quick I'd forgotten a key ingredient here to what we're making. I said, well couldn't you have just done without it. She said, "Well, no of course not." Well I said, "That's what I would have done." She said, "Well that's why you're a lousy cook. Wouldn't trust you with cooking dinner." (02:19)

See because you see if you want it to turn out right, I mean, you certainly need all the ingredients and you better put them all in and not leave any out if you want, you know, the thing to turn out the way it's supposed to. A lot of people want the finished product to be good, they just want to leave out the key ingredients. And you find that in a lot of areas of life. I mean a lot of people like to have a college education, they just don't want to read all the books and write all the papers, they would like to have a house that they own and not be a renter they just don't want to sacrifice and scrape together a down payment every month. They'd like to have a nice clean organized garage they just don't want to spend hours working on getting it that way. We find that often in life, that we'd like it to turn out just the way we want, we just don't want to stop and work hard to catch some of the more difficult and you know painful key ingredients. (03:07)

But you better do that especially when it comes to the topic we've been studying last few weeks and that is our friendships. If you want good friendships, Christian friendships, the kind of friendships we started a few weeks back to describe from the Bible as the kind that we were made for. Not just the fickle relationships of this world but the kind of relationships where you have really have something happening there that reflects even that inner Trinitarian commitment and loyalty that is really the pattern that's laid out for us there in John 15. Well, then we're going to need all the ingredients even those that may be more difficult to acquire and employ in our relationships. So, that's how I want to wrap this short series up with. And that is a study of that key ingredient and it's found in Colossians chapter 3 verses 12 through 14. And if we don't make it a point to focus on this and put this in place well then, we may understand what Christian friendships are, we even may be motivated to try and cultivate them but you'll never be able to maintain them. I mean, they'll only last for a while, I mean you may get them going, you may even begin to experience the benefits of real rich fellowship and Christian friendship the way it's designed to be but it'll only be there as long as you don't have a conflict. Because as soon as there's a conflict, soon as your feelings are hurt, as soon as someone says something insensitive, as soon as someone posts something on Facebook that is taken the wrong way, as soon as there's friction there, well then you're going to find there's distance and there's barriers and you're going to back out and it's going to be like I said the older you get them more you're just going to lop off these friendships until you get to the end of your life and have very few at all because you didn't employ what's written about here. (04:47)

Even before I read it, I want you to get the context, look up at verse number 9. It says here in Colossians chapter 3 verse 9 that this is a set of instructions that's coming that's given to new people in Christ. I mean they don't do a lot of things in their lives because they're not the old person they use to be. They put off the old self with all of its practices, verse 10, and they put on the new self. Now that's who we are if you're a Christian you've been



regenerate, that's the word you've been made new. It starts with the inside and God changes who you are and it something that has to be constantly maintained it says. Renewed in the knowledge after the image of its creator. So, these are instructions for those who are Christians and then he speaks of the community because he's going to get to this very important thing that we're about to talk about, but he says here in verse 11, you know there's a lot of diversity in the church, you've got Greeks and Jews, completely different backgrounds, lots of things that can cause friction between those people. Circumcised and uncircumcised and if you take that back to the Old Testament, that distinction is critical in terms of people getting along. Barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, can you see them all there worshiping together and trying to celebrate as they did with the potlucks that they had there in the early church, the love feasts they were called. And have all these different kinds of people that were supposed to be all connected in Christ and building networks of real, tight, loving Christian friendships and relationships. All of that is the ideal, Christ is all and he's in all and so we understand that should be the reality, but it's going to be hard. You need these next three verses to make that thing last. (06:28)

Put on then, if that's the case, going to be some challenges in your relationships as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, you better put these five things in place. Compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Now it's going to ramp up to the core instruction, here it comes, bearing with one another and if one has a complaint against another, and you will, forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you so you also must forgive and above all put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony. Not just everything but everyone. Catch the image here you've got to go back to verse 9 to get the image, verse 9 and 10, you're a new person. Now look at the verb in verse 12, you're supposed to put on these five virtues like layers of clothing and then you've got verse 14, something like a sash or a belt if you picture the old Sunday School flannel graph the outfits of the first century people, you've got this big belt, this big sash that goes around the middle and that's this thing called agape love, and it binds all these virtues together in perfect harmony which is a bit of a play on words because in verse 11 we saw there's a lot of diversity within the body of Christ. You've got a lot of relationships with a lot of potential friction in those relationships but love is going to bind all these people together. And while we cannot be friends with everyone as we said the first week, we can certainly be friendly, certainly have a level of fellowship, we're talking about those close relationships like Jesus had with the twelve apostles and we've got that circle and network and that is the thing that's going to keep this all together even when there's conflicts between Philip, Nathaniel, Thomas, Peter, this is going to keep these guys together. And so, it is for us that we look at a passage like this, not forgetting the context knowing that the apex of the passage is really found there in verse 13 when it comes to instruction. We've got to be forgiving people. (08:19)

But there's something that leads into that in verse number 12 and I want to start there. If you've pulled out your worksheet you see we're just going to follow verse 12, 13, verse 14. Three simple observations and resolves based on these three verses. But before we can make sense of verse 12, a lot of times I'll give you the point and then we'll talk about it and unravel it but here I want to make sense of this first and then we can write that first point down. (08:41)

When you look at these five things that are like layers of clothing, let's just go to the bottom of verse 12. You've got compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. These five things are not to be taken out of context and just put on the front of a DaySpring Card or some kind of you know wall art and say these are great things and my mind can go anywhere I want when I think about compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. No, this is stuck right between the context of look at all the people that are all in Christ. They could have potential conflicts with each other, they better learn to bear with each other and forgive each other. So, every one of these virtues that you're supposed to put on in a metaphorical sense and make sure that I have in place in these relationship, these are all to be understood within the context of a kind of grievance or as it's put in verse 13 a complaint that you might have against a brother or in our case let's put it in terms of a friend of yours. (09:33)

So, these are things that really, we need to think of in terms of a response that is necessary when there's some kind of provocation, there's some kind of irritant, there's some kind of annoyance. And see because we're imperfect people, living in an imperfect world with an imperfect yet to be glorified body we've certainly are going to have conflicts. You're not going to need this sermon in the New Jerusalem. You won't need this when we get to the place of perfection but right now we're going to need these things because we are going to disappoint, frustrate and let our friends down and they're going to let us down and that's what I want to focus on this morning. What do we need to have in place? (10:10)

Well let me define these for you in light of the context. Let me just add to each one, I want you to look down the list. Compassionate hearts, compassion you understand that word, heart which you may have to have pointed out here. Is that often times when you read the word heart in our English New Testament if you've been around you know it often translates the Greek word, kardia, from which we get English words like the Cardiologist. What kind of doctor is he? Heart doctor. And you're going to go to the gym and do some cardio workout. What are you working out? The big muscle in your, you know, rib cage there, the fist sized muscle, your heart. When you speak of heart I know on Valentine's Day we put those on the cards because we think that's the seat of emotions in our Western thinking but in their Eastern thinking it wasn't the seat of your emotions it was the seat of your thinking. And so often in scripture when you see the word heart if it's translating the word kardia you know it's how we think. And you could look at a passage like this if you thought it was the word kardia and you could say well you should have a compassionate heart. You ought to think in a sympathetic way toward what they're going through and what they're having. But this is not the word kardia, it's the word splanchnon and the word splanchnon as you saw me visually move my hand from here to here, it's the word that is translated, intestines if you were to put it in a lexicon I suppose. Or bowels, you can see why that's not, we don't translate it that way. Compassionate intestines, that would be hard for us to process. But the idea is where I feel things in my gut we like to say. So, you should have, here it goes now, put it this way. You ought to feel for your friends, now remember the context, when they bother you. This is odd. (11:43)

Look at the next one, kindness. Kindness it's really based on the word need, it's the sense that I should be mindful of their needs, ready to meet their needs. Now again context when they disappoint you. Humility, you know what that word means, it's really of a graphical word in the original language it has that sense of being lowly and thinking less of myself than that person, or to put it inversely like it is in Philippians 2 to think more of them than myself. So, I have this sense of prioritizing them when they fail you. Meekness which is the sense of gentleness and being very careful and thoughtful toward them. It's the opposite of the bull in the china shop. It's being really careful. Okay, I don't want to tip things over here. It's being very sensitive and gentle toward them when they hurt you. Patience, a very visual word, makrothumia, means long, a lot, big, thumia, thumas like thermos it means hot and so it's the idea you're not getting hot right away. You have a long fuse, you're not quickly angered when they sin against you. (12:46)

Run through that again, compassionate hearts, I feel for them when they bother me. Kindness, I'm mindful of their needs when they disappoint you. Humility, I prioritize them when they fail me. Meekness, I'm very gentle, thoughtful and sensitive toward them when they hurt me. Patience, I'm slow to get mad when they sin against me. This is a weird set of things to say when the whole point is you're going to have some irritants in your relationships now you better learn to bear with each other and forgive each other, stuck right between that is five virtues like layers of clothing that you're supposed to put on your life so that you can if you put all those words together kind of puts yourself in their shoes from the gut. I need to think about what you're going through. (13:28)

Now let me put that under this one word heading, sympathy. Now it's time to fill in our first point. If you're going to take some notes this morning, jot this one down on your worksheet or type it in, or whatever you doing to take some notes here to remember this sermon, but write this down if you would. Number one, adopt an exceptional standard of sympathy. (13:45)

#### 1. Adopt an exceptional standard of sympathy

That's the way I want to put it. Now let's think that through. All of these words are words that are given for us in response to provocation, irritation to being annoyed, having something some kind of complaint against my brother. All of them get me to think about your needs first, your feelings first. It's a sympathy that I've called exceptional and here's why. Because if you are thinking like the world, you will be sympathetic toward your friends as we will naturally be, we at least live up to that standard, when they tell you that something in their life that they've done is wrong or bad, we'll wince with them, we'll go "Oh" and "I'm sorry to hear that", like if you had someone this afternoon text you after church, that you were at church with, and they're your friends, one of your close friends. And they said, "Oh man you know what happened when I was leaving church? I backed into a really expensive car in the parking lot." Now if you're really good friends with that person, you'll go, "Oh, I'm so sorry." And what do you say? You're sorry for your friend, that's your natural reaction, that's your good friend and you think how bad, I wonder how much it's going to cost you, were they mad at you? All this concern for them. That is natural sympathy for someone when they do something wrong. You will feel for them, you'll wince with them, you'll get in their

heart, you'll be sympathetic toward them. All of that is natural. (15:03)

Here's the exceptional kind of sympathy, when it was your car they backed into. Right? Now that's a little different. My friend says I just want to tell you I'm so sorry that brand new car you got I just crunched the entire back fender. Oh, I feel so bad for you. I wonder how much it's going to cost you. Oh, am I mad? I mean this is a weird thing to think about. But that's exactly what's being described to us in all these virtues. Put yourself in their shoes, concern yourself with them when they annoy you, when they bother you, when they disappoint you, when they let you down, when they sin against you. Yeah, that's exceptional, that's exceptional because it's not like the world, it's something the world will not do. The world immediately when they're hurt they think of themselves. Look through that list, they feel for themselves, their mindful of their needs, they prioritize themselves first, they're very sensitive to their own hurts, and they're pretty quick to get mad. All of that happens when they're hurt. And the Bible is now saying you need all of these words to apply to them when they hurt you. That's a tough tough thing to do. It's a hard thing to do but it's not done in a vacuum if you look back up to where we've been in terms of context. You are supposed to be a brand-new person, you're not putting on virtues that are counter to who you are. You have been made in God, this new person, verse 10, you're a new self, a new person, and it's being renewed in the knowledge of its creator. God is giving you a new capacity and I'm only talking to the Christians in the room. If you have a testimony you know God has invaded your life you're a new person in Christ, you're not who you use to be from the inside out. You have a capacity to do something that is not like the world is going to do and that's why your relationships are going to be qualitatively different than the rest of the non-Christian world. Who frankly are pretty fickle when it comes to relationships and when they're hurt and when they're frustrated they may forgive a few times but you know what eventually they're going to check-out if this person is not as sensitive, as nice or as caring, they don't meet the expectations of the other person. So, we need that exceptional care. (17:13)

One good example of that is the commentator you may have been familiar with Matthew Henry's Commentary, 17<sup>th</sup> century pastor. If you know church history, he's a nonconformist so he went through a lot of persecution to stand up for what's right. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century he wrote this exposition of the scriptures which has come down to us, he didn't quite finish it but other guys finished up the New Testament parts of it for us that he didn't get to, but it's a great commentary and it shows kind of the godliness of this man. Well, in his diary, not his commentary, but in his personal diary he wrote about a day when he got his stuff stolen out of his house. Now someone has now sinned against him, it's not his friend, but here's an enemy that comes and steals his things. Here was his journal entry that he wrote, okay, are you ready? Here's what he says, he says, first he says, "Let me be thankful" Why? Because I was never robbed before, this is a first time. Pretty godly. This is not a pattern in my life, at least to this point. (18:07)

Secondly, I'm thankful because although they took my wallet they did not take my life. That's putting things in, okay that's pretty godly, right? It could have been worse, could have killed me, not a murderer, a thief. Thirdly, because though they took all I had it really wasn't very much. Now so far, all that is like exceptionally godly now here's godly sympathy. And fourthly because it was I who was robbed and not I who did the robbing. Whoo, you follow that? That is sympathetic even toward the robber that he's just piled on another crime, he's got a pity, right? Which is the ancient English word the old English word for what we call compassion or sympathy. He's got a pity for the fact, look at this guy he's sinning. I'm glad I wasn't that sinner. Man, I feel bad that he's a crook. Now that's amazing, now that's varsity Christianity, right there is it not? It is and us it's the JV team here, I'm not asking you to do that to the guy who rips off your house, it would be a good lesson but, let's just deal with this. Can we start thinking about that way about our friend? When our friend shows us the foibles and the weakness and posting things without thinking clearly or not really considering your feelings and they do something just not what a good friend ought to do. To try and put your sympathy out there because you have the capacity to do it, you have God wanting you to do that and reflect that he's made a heart where you have the capacity to do that, but you've got to work at it, and you've got to say I'm resolving ahead of time to show that kind of exceptional sympathy for the frailties of that person. (19:51)

Now that shouldn't be such a novel idea when you think about something so often repeated in the New Testament. It's a phrase that we find seven times in the New Testament that comes from the original reference in Leviticus 19, we won't take time to turn there, but you know the passage already. And it simply says this, love your neighbor as yourself. You know that passage? Seven times it's repeated in the New Testament. Love your neighbor as yourself. Why is it repeated? Because it's a great one word way, or one phrase way, or one word love, to say now think about, if you could just love other people the way you love yourself. And what's interesting if you read the original context

of Leviticus 19 where you find this reference, you find that it's in the context of someone doing wrong against you. It's exactly what we're dealing with here. And it says you've got some options, you can get angry, you can harbor anger or hatred in your heart, you can slander them, or you can love them as you love yourself. (20:50)

Now think about that. When my friend does wrong against me he disappoints me, he offends me, hurts my feelings, does something that he shouldn't do or fails to do something I expect a good friend to do. And I'm sitting there frustrated and hurt over that. The Bible then employs the first reference to that phrase. Love him like you love yourself. Now there's a lot of things that eventually get pointed out to me, sometimes by my own conscience, sometimes by the Holy Spirit that I don't do that I should have done or that I did that I should not have done. And I look in the mirror I get frustrated and I think man I should not have done that. That was dumb, Mike. You have those conversations, hopefully you're not using my name when you do that. But you say – you do probably say that too, that was dumb Mike – but insert your own name, right. You say aww that was a dumb thing to do. Then I just wonder how long you bear a grudge against yourself? Do you as the text says go there and take vengeance on yourself? Do you hate yourself in your heart? And if so, for how long? See I mean in the context of the original reference to loving your neighbor as yourself, the original context is when someone does something wrong against you and you're tempted to hate them, take vengeance, slander them, harbor bitterness in your heart, no, no, can you just get over it? Because you come to learn this about yourself. You're not perfect. I know we like to present ourselves as perfect to other people as much as we possibly can, but you know in the silence of your own heart as you stare at the ceiling as you lay in bed at night don't you realize you're not perfect. You're a sinner, you realize that. And when you realize that, when you sin this afternoon and you have to deal with that in your own heart and hopefully as a Christian you go to God and you confess that, I mean I assume that you put that pretty quickly behind you. You claim the grace of God, you're thankful for the grace of God and you say, another reminder, you know I'm a sinner. I'd like to do better but I'm going to move on with it. You don't skip dinner tonight to punish yourself for what you did in the afternoon, right? You don't sit in the corner and slap yourself on the back like some picture of some medieval monk slashing himself for being a sinner, you don't do that. That's not a very popular Christian discipline anymore. Why? Because we learn to love, and what does that mean? I learn to be very sympathetic to the foibles of my own weakness. (23:08)

The Bible says, can you start thinking that way about your friends? Can you even pity them, not in a condescending way, but have a compassion for them that you know what? There they are again just like me doing another insensitive thing. I love them, I understand the weakness, I see as it says in Psalm 103 like a father has compassion on a child. I see their weakness their frailty. And here's a line that's not very good for your self-esteem but very helpful to put everything in perspective as God says, I see they're just made of dirt. Right? I'm mindful that they're just dust. That would be a great way for us to remember with a real big hearted, magnanimous, generous spirit that when my friend fails me, when he hurts my feelings, when he disappoints me, I recognize with sympathy that that just part of the reality of a fallen world of fallen people. (23:58)

It's exceptional which is by the way one of the reasons I think this passage uses this in verse number 12 if you're looking at it, God's chosen ones and holy. Let's just take those two phrases for a second. Chosen one, it comes from the Greek word that is transliterated election. We get the word election from this word, you're elected, you're picked, you're chosen out of the rest and you are holy. Holy means, now hagios, means to be set apart to be different than the rest. Then we're in a church which by the way we get the word church from the word elect too, ecclesia comes from the Greek word the transliterated election. We are called out in different than the rest. So as a group we're supposed to be different, individually we're called out to be different. And then we're to live in this holy set of standards and community because we're not like the others. It's an exceptional standard and in that exceptional standard of our Christianity we ought to realize this isn't going to be something that is like everyone else. It is a God-thing and we need to get used to a much higher standard than the world has. (25:01)

Let me add that third one there, are you still looking at verse 12? Chosen, holy and beloved. That might be a good one for us to remember. If you want to be a real good friend as you ought to be. That's very compassionate, kind, humble, meek, patient that sympathetic kind of patience, well then the thing that's going to give you the ability to do that is to really understand how much you are loved, not by your perfect friends, but by a perfect God. I mean really the best friends are those that have a sense of security in their love from God. Which by the way mirrors a little bit of what we see demographically and sociologically in our world when you hear the stats that those who come from divorced homes are 50% more likely to be divorced themselves. You've heard that stat, that very sad stat? And you understand if you study that and you think that through that you've got kids here that just aren't buying the line



when Dad gets down on one knee and says, “You know what? I’m divorcing your Mom but I’ll always love you.” Actions speak louder than words when they pack up their stuff and leave out the door there is that sense of insecurity that every kid is left with when their parent leaves in the middle of their childhood. And that has a residual effect in how they deal with their relationships. It moves from 50% more likely to 90% more likely if that parent remarries while the child is in the home, now think that through. If the relationship is seen as disposable and replaceable when they end up getting married they’re relationships often follow that same pattern. (26:29)

Now as our morning scripture reading said, I’m not saying there’s any kind of fatalism here of you being doomed to that when we’re speaking of your earthly parents because as David said in the Psalm this morning, Psalm 27, though our mother and father forsake us even in the worst situation the Lord takes us up as God’s people and when it comes to the Lord, guess what he doesn’t do? He doesn’t withdraw his love, he doesn’t pack his suitcase and walk out the door and leave us in the middle of our spiritual childhood. That doesn’t happen. So, you need to be confident in the fact that his secure love for you and when you have that, guess what you can do? You can be exceptionally sympathetic and gracious to your friends if you are confident in the exceptional love of God toward your life. You’ve got to get that settled and some of you coming from broken homes that’s a harder lesson for you to learn because you keep trying to look at the heavenly Father through the rubric or the lens rather of your earthly father and you’ve got to change that perspective. And I don’t mean to just throw fathers under the bus, a lot of moms do the same thing these days. (27:29)

But the point is we need to be confident in the love of God and though that’s not the elaboration of any of the doctrine in this passage it’s certainly mentioned for a reason we are different chosen, holy, set apart and loved. Deeply loved and that’s why we can start showing some exceptional responses because we are exceptionally loved by a God who cares for us. And working our way backward through verse 12 I guess I should end this point with the beginning of the verse. Here’s an interesting verb and as I said it’s all an analogy about putting on layers of clothing but put on that’s a very decisive verb that is a kind of decision you resolve it, you do it, and you go into the closet and you pull those out and you put them on. You make a decision to get dressed and so it is with this. You better be ready to make a firm decision in your mind. This will be my response to my fallen and imperfect friends. I am going to choose to be exceptionally sympathetic when they hurt my feelings, when they fail me, when they don’t meet my expectations. I’m going to go into this with a real sense that I look down the corridor of time and say I know you’re not perfect and when we have these problems I’m going to be sympathetic. Which is another way, a vibrant way, a deep way, a rich way to say we’re going to be extraordinarily patient with them. (28:45)

Now understand that friendship is not marriage, you know that. But there are some great things to learn about that, great things to learn about friendship from our marriages. When there’s a marriage you’ve got the guy in the tux, the gal in the dress, they’re in the front of the church there and they’re making commitments all about the future are they not? And they start looking into the future and they start looking at well it could go good for us in some sense and then it can go bad for us in another sense but no matter what it goes good or bad, sickness, health, richer, poorer, for better or for worse, we’re in this we’re committed. Matter of fact we’ll go the distance till death do us part. Now that’s what they’re saying at the altar and that’s the commitment because they’re looking down the corridor of time, making resolve ahead of time this is the way it’s going to be. (29:28)

Now I’m not saying friendship is marriage but there is something to be said that there’s a pattern there in you dealing with future problems in your relationships with your friends with a preexisting commitment to have this kind of compassion and so it is in verse 13 as we move into the second point, bearing with one another. And if one has a complaint against the other now – and here’s the real apex of the passage – forgiving each other for as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Now we need to forgive, and that little word “as” there in verse 13. Forgiving each other, circle that, as, highlight it, as the Lord has forgiven you. Just two little letters in our English text but it’s a big powerful, deep Greek word that it translates, *kathos*. *Kathos* is the word that gives us the sense of the breath and the depth and the height of it, the measure of God’s forgiveness towards you, that should be the measure that you use to forgive your friends. Let’s put it this way, number 2 on our outlines we need to deploy a divine measure of forgiveness. (30:28)

## 2. Deploy a divine measure of forgiveness

You’re going to be wrong, you’re going to decide ahead of time and when it happens just you need to have a kind of huge forgiveness toward your friends that’s in proportion with the huge forgiveness God has given you. And here’s



the thing, there's really no comparison. I mean ultimately you will be sinned against, I realize that but you could never be sinned against as much as you have sinned against God. And you can never forgive a friend as much as God has forgiven you because not only is the amount different but even the effect is different. Sinning against another fallen human being is a lot different than sinning against a holy and perfect God and so we must realize there's no comparison when it comes to what I've experienced to what God is expecting me to grant to my friends, forgiveness. C.S. Lewis was right, everyone thinks forgiveness is a lovely idea until they have something to forgive. And I know you can sit here if you're in a relatively tranquil period in your relationships, you haven't had any big blow outs recently, no big offense lately and you can say, "You know that is good, I want to be a forgiving person and I am forgiving toward my friends." Well, all that goes out the window on Thursday when there's a real stinging thing that happens and you're all of a sudden now going I'm not sure I feel quite so lovely about forgiveness anymore. (31:43)

So, I warn you if you're not in the throes of it all of this can seem purely academic but you need to put it in perspective and that's why Jesus puts it the way he does in his teaching in Matthew chapter 18 when he gives us that parable of the unforgiving servant. You remember that story? Let me retell it for you real quickly. You need to have the measure of forgiveness in our relationships with one another that's in proportion to, at least in our minds, which will never come close but I'm going to try to get that kind of thinking in my mind and situated before I'm ever sinned against by my friend but I want to make sure I dish out the same kind of forgiveness that's being given to me. And he says it's kind of like a king who has a servant who racks up an incredible bill. Actually, it's a ridiculous bill, 10 thousand talents it says. Now a talent is not you know tap dancing and singing. A talent in the Bible is a measure of money. It's a unit, a monetary unit, which is 70 pounds of a precious metal, and a precious metal standard in the New Testament times was silver. So, we've got 70 pounds of silver. Now think this through, 70 pounds of silver. If someone says I've got 70 pounds of silver in my trunk, do you want it? Say yes, and go get it. Because at 18 bucks an ounce right now which is about the going rate, you can look it up, we've got free Wi-Fi I don't know what it is right now but you look at it and do the math. 18 bucks an ounce, one talent, right think about how much one talent would be. That's 20 thousand dollars. Now that's a lot. Now this servant, think this through now, owed his master 10 thousand, 20 thousand dollars full of silver. How much is that? Well my calculator, I had to do this long hand, that's 2 billion dollars. Now if there's an open tab at the market in the master's house and he's getting Fritos and Diet Cokes or something, takes a long time to rack up a bill of 2 billion dollars. That's why this is a comical statement about how indebted of course the parallel is we are to a holy God when we've sinned against him what kind of debt did you rack up against God? (33:48)

It's amazing if you really were to contemplate what it is to sin against a perfect and holy God. And God has been so offended that that debt is astronomical and just like they giggled when he originally told this story. You mean a servant that's working an hourly rate here if you will to modernize this parable has racked up a 2 billion dollar debt? That's craziness. Well, it was time for the master to settle accounts. Let's call it the Day of Judgment by the way. And he brings the servant before him and he says, "You need to pay me back." And he says, "I can't pay you back." Then he says "Great, I'm going to take all that you have, I'm going to sell it. I'm going to cut my losses. You're going to be sold, your wife is going to be sold, your kids are going to be sold. You can take all your stuff back. I'm going to cut my losses and let you go." The servant fell on his knees, verse 26 of Matthew 18 says, and he implored the master. Have patience with me, have patience, I will repay you. Which is a joke. And then here's our other word, out of splanchnon, out of pity, out of compassion in his heart. Out of a visceral gut reaction, a feeling of, "Oh I feel bad", what must that be like for you to be so indebted to me and have no hope of paying me back, that's horrible, I feel terrible for you. The master it says forgave him the debt. Out of pity the master after having him incarcerated, here's a play on words in Greek, released him and forgave him the debt. I say that because the word, *aphiemi*, forgiveness is to release. He released him and then he released him of the debt. That's the giving away of this wrong and then the giving away of any kind of need to pay me back. That's the forgiving and forgetting. I'm going to let this go, I'm going to completely let this go. And I love this hand motion because that's the idea of dropping it. We like to say around our house, we're going to drop that palms down. It's one thing to do like this to God or even our debts to one another, it kind of stays there in the palm of my hands and my little fingers can wrinkle around it again. Or to drop it on the ground, palms down. Say I'm giving it up. He released him and he released his debt. (35:53)

Well that would be a great story about the cross and what great thing it is to have the payment that cannot be paid back, be paid back by someone else. And the master himself take on the penalty which is exactly what happens in that sense. The master has to absorb the hurt and so the cross absorbs our sin but that's not what the story is about. Actually, the story was predicated on a question that Peter asks Jesus when he said, "How often should I forgive my

brother when he sins against me?" My friend is going to wrong me, irritate me, annoy me, do something that's wrong, how often should I be magnanimous and forgiving and big spirited and forgive him. And he said, "Ahh seven?" And that was a big statement because the rabbis in the first century said three times would be enough. And Jesus, you know the answer to this Sunday School Grads. What does he say? He says six, right? No, seventy times seven, seventy-seven times, seventy times seven, two different ways you can translate that. Either way the point is made. What is that? Stop counting, stop counting. If someone comes wants forgiveness, you give it. You let it go, you release him and you forgive him the debt. (37:06)

Well that was what this story was about, so here comes the real inequity of the story when it says, and then his servant went out from that incarceration, found one of his fellow servants that owed him 100 denarii, you kind of need your Bible dictionary for this whole parable. Denarii, what's that? That's one full day's wage for a day laborer. If you put that into modernized terms that about 8000 dollars if you owed him 100 days' wage for a low paying employee. There you go, 8000 bucks, so at 8000 dollars he was owed. Now if you're an hourly wage worker, you're working at some fast food place and some fellow fast food guy owes you 8000 dollars and I know what kind of income strata you're in, working at you know a fast food place, do you think that's a small amount or a lot? That's a lot man, you owe me 8 grand, I need that back. Now again the whole turn of events that makes this ironic is the guy who needs that 8000 dollars back had just been forgiven how much money? Two billion dollars. (38:06)

He seized his fellow servant and began to choke him and said, "Pay me what you owe me." So, his fellow servant now fell down before him and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, I will replay you." Is that a de ja vu moment there? Oh, I remember those words. But he didn't remember those words apparently. Verse 30 says he refused and sent him to prison until he could pay the debt. Now the egregious inequity of this was what the onlookers highlight. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place they were greatly distressed and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place and then his master then summoned that one unforgiving servant in. He said, "You wicked slave, I forgave all the debt because you pleaded with me, you were penitent. Should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant the way I had mercy, pity, compassion on you?" And so, in his anger the master delivered him over to the jailers until he should pay all of his debt so also my heavenly father will do to each one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart. (39:16)

Wow, would have been convicting enough without that last commentary Jesus, I mean that's rough. So, this whole parable about the Father being mad at the servant because he wasn't willing to relieve a debt, which was a really big debt, is how God is going to feel toward us and act toward us if we will not release the debt of those who sin against us. That by the way is why it's put in our passage, look at the worksheet bottom of verse 13, so you also should forgive. Underline the word should, is that there? Correct me if I'm wrong. Must forgive, you have to. See this is a sign of your forgiveness. I mean you cannot claim that you are someone who understands what it is to sing a worship song with us about the redemption of Christ on a cross, about your sin putting him there and about that cross taking that away from you as far as the east is from the west. You cannot say you understand that if when someone comes to you with a 100 denarii debt of wrong and offense and hurt feelings and you can't let that go. Then you don't understand the cross. (40:23)

And to mitigate that with some kind of crazy statement that all forgiven but I won't forget I mean is ridiculous, you understand. It is and I hate to incessantly use this simple story but it's like the kid in class who's was told to sit down repeatedly and refused and refused and refused and when finally, the teacher got tough and went over and said, "Sit down." He sits down and looks her in the face, grits his teeth and says, "I may be sitting on the outside but I'm standing on the inside." And a lot of you may say, "Well, I'll forgive, I mean if God is going to be mad at me if I don't, I'll forgive, but I won't forget." If that's your middle ground for this teaching, then you missed the last words of that passage, verse 35. If you don't forgive your brother from your heart. That's why all that heart work was done in verse 12 for us. Compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, you can't forgive the way God wants you to without that sympathetic heart toward your friends. (41:24)

Amy Carmichael said it right, if I say yes, I can forgive, I cannot forget. As though the God who twice a day washes all the sands on all the shores of all the world could not wash away such memories from my mind well then, I know nothing of Christ's love. Now that's a good point. I know it seems impossible to let some of these things go, that's why some of you don't continue to expand and maintain these relationships because every time you get hurt you just lop them off and you move on with less friends than you had last year. You got to learn to forgive and forget, drop it, palms down, give it up. Why? Well according to our passage because you've got to forgive just as the Lord





forgave you. Deploy a divine measure of forgiveness, I know that's hard, but we live in an imperfect world, you won't need to do that, 100 years from now you won't need to do this, but you and I need to do it right now. (42:22)

Lastly verse 14, and above all these things, here's a picture of a new man, new person putting on new clothes, new virtues now. We're going to tie it together with this belt. Above all these, put on love which binds everything, and I would say based on verse 11, and everyone together in perfect harmony. You can read a verse like that and some people feel like they're coming back into very familiar territory because you've got the word love there and that is on all the DaySpring Cards and so there you go. I know what that is. No, you've got to be careful and I know we've tried to define this and kind of tool this and calibrate this throughout the series but don't rush to the worldly definition of love. It's not a how you feel, not the green fuzzys, it not just this feeling of "Oh I feel good about this person." Love in the Bible is defined this way. We went over this verse at our summer camp if your student went to Revival, I was teaching on this verse for part of the week. 1 John chapter 3 verse 16 which says, this is how we know what love is. Now I'm ready, here it comes, what the Bible says, that Christ would lay down his life for us. Now there's no feel good in that. The crucifixion didn't feel good in any way. There wasn't warm fuzzy feelings in Christ's heart and it wasn't because we deserved it, because as Romans chapter 5 verse 8 says he demonstrates his love toward us in this that while we were yet lovable, attractive, no, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. So, I understand it's not about because the object is worthy of it, its not because it's going to feel good, it's not because I'm motivated by green fuzzys in my heart but this is love that I'd be willing to meet your need by sacrificing my comfort. That's love. (44:02)

Then the middle of verse 16, 1 John 3:16 it turns and says this, so this we too ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. What's our word? Our friends. So, my command in the scripture is to love. It's the ultimate short hand for everything we've been talking about in this series. I want to love my friends. And that means I'm going to look to them and I'm going to love them. And I love how it's put here, I'm putting it on. It's the thing you remember the old flannel graph of the old ancient near eastern outfits? The sash or the belt around, that's the thing you see, it's one of the most prominent pieces of clothing. It's the thing my friends ought to see. It's this commitment to their good and their well-being that ought to be evident and obvious to them. I put it this way, number 3 we need to regularly reaffirm our love for our friends. (44:55)

### 3. Regularly reaffirm your love for your friends

Regularly reaffirm your love for your friends. This needs to be a regular commitment and before you take the verb there to affirm and think that means I'll text them this afternoon. It's more than that. Two verses later in 1 John chapter 3 verse 18 the Apostle John wrote this under the direction of the Spirit, let us not love in word or tongue only, just by speaking, but let us love in deed, in our actions and in truth. So, I know I can say it, it's not that I can't say it, not that I shouldn't say it, you should say it, you should reaffirm your love for your friends and if you're consistently doing that guess what you're insuring? That sympathetic patience and that commitment to forgive. When I say that, that's true, but it's more than saying it, it needs to be some kind of expression of that according to our passage in 1 John chapter 3 verse 18 it's making sure in some tangible way I'm expressing that. Now this one is hard and it's going to take some contemplation on your part maybe a little discussion in a small group if you're still meeting with your home fellowship group this week. But think this one through, how can I in some way, do something that is going to demonstrate my commitment to their well-being through thick and thin. Now again, friendship is not a marriage but there is something about that marriage ceremony that reminds us of how my friendships work and that is I'm looking to the future, with some kind of sense of security in this relationship that I'm going to be there, that I'm going to be forgiving, I'm going to be sympathetic and I'm there for your good. (46:28)

Now while it's an ancient, ancient situation, there's three thousand years old now so you can't just directly move this example across to the modern day. But the principles are somewhere hidden in that great friendship between Johnathan and David when they first have that encounter after the killing of Goliath. Remember Johnathan is Saul's son, Saul is the enemy of David. And there is that commitment to their friendship there and I say that because there is a statement that is made. Let me give you two things, the first three verses of 1 Samuel 18 that take place, two things. You have Johnathan, here he says, making a covenant with David because he loved him. Now I know people like to pervert this passage reading in their perversion into this text, it has nothing to do with that. And again, friendship isn't a marriage but there's something to learn in that they were coveting, they were committing. There was sense of some kind of expression that I am friend and then there's a gift, verse 3, he gives him his sword and he



gives him his bow. Now think that through. Again, you can't just modernize this because you don't have a sword and a bow to give away. But what's that, here's Johnathan saying I'm giving you the tools of my warfare in this gift to you as a sign and it's kind of this in that household, a monarchical household at least, it's a sign of subservience to them. You want to talk about compassion, kindness, meekness and humility and patience. Here's the sense of I'm committed to you and here are the signs of kind of my desire and my commitment and resolve to serve you. And then he gets up from that situation and we see in the ensuing chapter that's all that he does. I mean Johnathan goes out there and is willing to serve David and to risk his life for David and clearly David knew if he didn't have any other friend out there in the wilderness as he was running from Saul, he knew he had Johnathan. (48:19)

Regularly reaffirm your love for your friends. How you commit and covenant that and how you express that through some tangible means or some kind action I don't know. Be creative with that. But recognize that's what we need, certainly in a day of such fickle, non-Christian relationships to have some Christian friendships that are going to go the distance and again remember Christ had twelve but he wasn't batting a thousand either. And I think for the sake of what we're dealing with I mean Judas was a part of that band to know that sometimes there's going to be disappointment here and I understand that. You will have commitments to be friends with some people and some will go catastrophically wrong, that's going to happen. Hopefully we can get over that relatively quickly and continue to pursue the relationships we should with this kind of reaffirmation and regular reaffirmation of our love for our friends. (49:08)

Speaking of Christ and the twelve I was going to challenge you out the outset of this series to work on cultivating and developing friendships. That was our pastoral concern that our church have more networks of more friends within the people of our church that every person at church can step forward and say I have a network of real friends, not just acquaintances but real friends. And I said well look at Christ at least if we look at numbers, now I'm not going to throw out a number because I can't do it. There's no directive in scripture about how many friends you have, but Christ at least by example had a circle of twelve. And I don't know where you're at but I do know our tendency when it comes to being hurt or sinned against we start losing them and not even replacing them. I'm saying we need to maintain whenever possible and probably expand them a little more but I was challenged by a simple title of a chapter in a book about friendship that I read. Just a creative enough title to make me pause and read that chapter twice. It was entitled, "Grooming your pall bearers". If you know anything about the traditional funeral service you've got six people that are supposed to carry your box down the aisle. Take it out of the hearse, bring it into the auditorium, bring it back to the hearse, take it to the cemetery, take it out of the hearse, put it in the ground. I mean that's what the pall bearers do. Six, so that's just half. But it was a good challenge in that chapter to say, "You know I'll think about that." My cases I'm reading it thinking if I die today, this week, and we do a traditional funeral service which I recommend if anyone is taking notes. You need six guys to carry my box down the aisle back to the hearse to the cemetery. Who would my wife pick for those six people? First of all, I'd need to think of that, would that even be hard for her? I hope it would be hard because there would be twelve and not because there would be three. And then I wonder once they got my box to the front of the auditorium and came up on stage and gave the eulogies I just wonder what they would say. Not about the professional Mike or the preacher Mike but about the friend Mike. Would they speak of words like compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience? And would they as imperfect people dealing with imperfect friend be able to say and there was a lot of bearing with one another and forgiving each other because if they don't have that testimony then they're short term friends, not long term friends. (51:42)

Now, I hope that we can think not for the sake of making sure we've got six friends for our funeral but can we at least say, hey, we probably need to work a little harder in making sure we've got a core of solid friends. Friends that we're going to keep and you're only going to keep them if you're good at practicing patience and forgiveness. In a perfected state, we won't need that but right now we're going to. Imperfect friendships in an imperfect world, you're an imperfect person but we can have great fulfilling, enriching friendships if we can learn to forgive as Christ forgave us. Let me leave you with that thought as I hope this sermon lingers not just for a couple of weeks becomes a real part of the fabric of our church. Because we can do a lot of things right but if we don't have this right then there's something really missing, gaping hole in our church, so I release you to that application. Let's pray (52:39)

God, thank you so much for your word that continually challenges us. The Bible says it's like a mirror that shows me my deficiencies and I would be stupid if I saw them like someone looking in the mirror walking away seeing their hair all messed up but never fixing it. And God we thank you for this passage that reminds us that anything we need to fix in our lives it's just cosmetic if we're not saved, if our heart is not new, if we're not a new person in



Christ we can try to throw on the cloaks and the clothing of Christianity but those virtues are not going to stick because our heart is not in sync with those things and yet as Christians if it's the fact that I'm a new man in Christ and that my heart has been remade, I know it's going to be a maintenance program everyday I'm trying to renew in the knowledge of God that follows the pattern of the Creator of that new life, there's going to have to be a lot of that but then I can start layering on these virtues that will have such a positive effect on my relationships that my friendships would be enriched and maintained because of these kinds of sympathetic loving really exceptional qualities of patience and sympathy. And then God when there's problems and there always will be we need to learn to forgive each other. God if we could just somehow just see real Christians forgiving from the heart as you told us to. Putting our mistakes and our transgressions and our insensitive words behind us just like we do with ourselves. God what a chance then we would have to see our friendships last. God we know this is something we need, you've made us for friendship but it's more than that, this is an aspect of life that honors you and I pray we would honor you in a way that is so clear that if someone were educated and informed enough about what Christ said and taught they could look at us and say I know those people are His disciples because they have love for one another. We may have many friends in the room, we can't be friends with everyone but God we certainly can have a network of friends within our church that create that kind of richness among this fellowship that changes everything regarding our experience here, worshiping together, learning together, studying together and doing mission work together here in this place and around the world. God that's huge so get us there, help us please to buck the trends of our culture of being isolated and removed and get these lives intertwined, it was so good a couple weeks ago, God for you to move among us to see people lingering around this church and people introducing themselves to each other and giving opportunity for new relationships. I pray that would last not for this series but for years to come in our church. Let it begin even now as we dismiss to the patio with our food trucks out there and lunch, I just pray we have a great time for our church to have that kind of reaffirmation of love for another. Start that now among us I pray in Jesus Name. Amen. (55:36)