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August 20, 2017

Practical Ways to Love Deeply from the Heart

1 Peter 1:22

Prayer: *Father, we do thank you for your grace, for your goodness, for your mercy. We just thank you for your word. And Lord, we're just at that part of the ceremony where we open up your book, where we look into your book and we again ask for the presence of your Holy Spirit, because without your Holy Spirit these words don't make any sense, they don't have lasting value and so we pray by the power of your Holy Spirit your word would become a permanent part of our lives, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we are in 1 Peter in the first chapter and we are looking into God's challenge to love deeply from the heart. God says in 1 Peter 1:22: *Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.* We saw three things last time. We saw first that the "who" of loving deeply are those who can't, who don't or who won't love us back. We saw that the "why" of loving deeply goes back to this war in heaven which Satan lost, causing him to be cast down to earth that resulted in two very distinct

kingdoms that are now in place on the earth. There's the kingdom of darkness whose head is Satan who Jesus referred to as "the prince of this world" whose kingdom is marked according to Jesus himself by lies and murder, and then there's the kingdom of light, God's kingdom, marked by grace and truth and love. And we pointed out that both kingdoms are at war and the war itself comes down to the power of power itself versus the power of love. And it is God's determination to make love and not power the most excellent way. Jesus lays out for us in very practical terms just what it means to flesh out the idea of the love that Jesus is talking about. And we see that and we quickly realize that it has nothing to do with loving those who are loveable. This is what Jesus says in *Luke 6:27*. He says: *"But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them."*

Well, I pointed out that many people look at that passage and they just assume that God is speaking hyperbole. They say he can't

possibly be serious. Because what Jesus is saying here is so counterintuitive, it is so jarring to our way of understanding how we interact with our fellow man that we have a hard time taking God seriously. The point is Jesus is absolutely serious. And the only way that we can understand how we are to follow his commands is to understand that the love that God expects us to exercise is not natural. In fact it is supernatural. I mean God is not asking for the difficult here; he is asking for the impossible. But God isn't asking us to provide this love, instead he is asking us to be conduits of the love of Christ that he wants to love through us. And it's not human love that God is expecting us to express but it's rather a supernatural love that comes directly from God that is passed through us. As I said, it's not the hose that provides water to my dying plants, it's the well. You know the hose just conveys the water from the well to the plant, and so it is with the love of God. It is poured into our hearts with the understanding that we are the means that God uses to convey it. I mean I can't manufacture love for my enemies just as a hose can't manufacture water for the plants. I mean, it can't manufacture it but it can convey it. And God tells us in *Romans 5:5*: *God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.* So God's love has been poured into us to make it our weapon of choice. And as I said the last time, our task is to grow that love within the church, within the family, and that's the place

that God chooses to grow it. And finally I said that the "how" of loving deeply is an unfolding process. God gives us this love in its incipient form, it's just a seed, it's the acorn, and he gives it to us in that form expecting us to grow it into an oak. And I said you can't do that without God's word and without God's church and that the next time we'd be looking into some practical ways to grow acorns into oaks because God has high expectations of us and he tells us: *Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.*

And so we ask: How do we love one another deeply from the heart? And so we go to the source that Peter speaks of immediately after writing it. I mean listen to what the very next verses of 1 Peter is. This is 1 Peter 1:23. He says: *For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, "All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever." And this is the word that was preached to you.* So Peter says how do we go about loving deeply from the heart? He says we go to the living and enduring word of God. This is where we learn how to grow acorns into oaks. It's the place where we learn not just an alternative way of viewing life but a completely counterintuitive

way, a way that needs to be studied, understood and implemented.

And so this morning I want to look at three different pathways, three different approaches that the word of God gives to work out the love that God has worked into us when we became believers in Jesus Christ, and they involve a new perspective, a deeper patience and a commitment to prayer. We have perspective, we have patience and we have prayer.

The first thing that the scripture gives us in terms of kingdom living is a brand new perspective. Every one of us knows all too well how to function in the kingdom of this world. I mean from childhood we've all heard about the golden rule, we've learned what it is and to paraphrase *Matthew 7:12*, it's to treat others as you yourself wish to be treated. We know if everybody followed that rule we would have no need for all the other commands that Jesus gives us which have to do with how we respond to those who don't treat us as we'd wish to be treated. And here's where we see two very different perspectives. There's the kingdom of the world and the way it treats it, and there's the kingdom of God and the way it treats it. I mean the kingdom of the world says hate your enemies, destroy those who attempt to destroy you, curse those who curse you. I mean they may not use those exact words but you and I know that this is the way our world functions. And we know this is the

way it functions because we hear Jesus's words about the very same thing and they appear to us strange, they appear to us kind of abnormal. Listen to what Jesus is saying: *"But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."* This is the perspective of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of the world says if somebody strikes you on the cheek, try judo, try kung fu, try karate, try mixed martial arts and if nothing else works, try a gun. Kingdom of God says: *"To the one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from the one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either."* You know, the world says if somebody steals your cloak, the very last thing you're going to do is offer him your tunic as well. And Jesus goes on to say: *"Give to everyone who begs from you, and from the one who takes away your goods do not demand them back."* And again, this makes no sense to our way of thinking. If somebody steals something from me, am I supposed to say, "Hey, enjoy"? I mean Jesus follows up by restating once again the golden rule and then restating the obvious point of all of this. He says: *"And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them."* And so I ask the question again, is Jesus speaking hyperbole here or is he absolutely serious? And as I said before, he is completely and totally serious. And what he is doing here is

creating an alternative paradigm, an entirely new and different way of viewing every aspect of what it's like when someone violates the golden rule against me, when someone treats me not the way I would treat them. You know, every single person in this room knows what it feels like to be mistreated by someone. And all of us don't need any training whatsoever to respond in the way that the world tells us to respond. Some of us have more ability to use subtle innuendo and deception to fight fire with fire. But suffice it to say, we all know what our default position is when somebody treats us unfairly.

So I'd like to do an experiment this morning and I would like us to make this as practical as I can. I would like you all to take a moment and just envision somebody who has mistreated you, somebody who has hurt you. And you know, I've spoken to adults who can easily remember somebody in third grade or fourth grade. You all know what it's like when you have been mistreated. And I want you to keep this person in mind as we talk about God's alternative way of growing this acorn of love that is placed within you at salvation into this oak tree that God wants us to express.

And so the first part of this new paradigm involves perspective. You know, there's a reason why Peter after telling us to love deeply from the heart goes immediately to the one place where a

brand new perspective on responding to mistreatment is laid out, and it's the word of God. And the word of God speaks clearly and powerfully about our first order of business when we are hurt by someone. This is *Romans 12:17*. It says: *Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord.* If someone hurts me, my first response, my first reaction is always going to be to hurt them back. I learned that during the countless brawls that I had with my older and younger brothers growing up. "He hit me first!" I mean isn't that our first, best and only defense growing up? I mean how many times have you heard that? And as we grow older we learn to be far more subtle about hitting back when somebody hits us first. And usually instead of confronting the person directly, we talk to others about how hurt we are, we enlist allies in our counterattack and we usually try to fight fire with fire. Well, God's way is absolutely counterintuitive and he basically tells us that no one, no one does vengeance better than he does. God says he does it best because we do it to hit back and to hurt, and he does it for his glory and our good and oftentimes for the good of the person we're seeking vengeance from in the first place.

You know, I was watching a video from Nabeel Qureshi. And if you don't know, Nabeel Qureshi is a marvelous soldier for Christ who is a converted Muslim who has a powerful ministry to the Muslim world and just preaching about. He wrote the book *From Allah to Jesus* I think was the title of it, but he's in the advanced stages of stomach cancer. And I was looking at a video just describing how he's doing and I was just struck by his t-shirt. If you look at that t-shirt, it says in very bold letters, "I got this. God." And I was thinking that's exactly what you need to have as a perspective. You see, being attacked by someone and then being able to trust that God actually has got this requires that we grow in one critical area. If we are going to love as Jesus wants us to love, the area we need to grow in is the sovereignty of God, the idea that God is sovereignly in charge of every single aspect of our lives. And Jesus made that quite clear when he said in *Matthew 10*: *"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered."*

And so do you actually believe that God cares? Do you actually believe that God really cares when you have been deeply hurt by someone, that he not only cares but that he wants to use this situation for our good and his glory? And that he knows that we stink at vengeance. You know what the ultimate vengeance you could

ever ask for is? I mean when you think of someone who has hurt you deeply, when you're really hoping and wishing for that someone to understand the pain that he or she has caused you, that he or she would feel that pain and genuinely seek to make amends for it, you know when that happens best? It's when that person comes to faith in Christ. Or if he's a Christian, it's when he fully repents of his sin. But that's usually not what we're looking for when we're looking to avenge ourselves. See, God's kind of vengeance is glory-centered, whether it's to bring justice or repentance. And it's God's Spirit alone who can enter into sinners, convict them of sin, and open up a heart previously closed to the pain that they've caused us.

Let me give you an extreme example from the book *The Insanity of God* by Nik Ripken. In his book Ripken describes interviewing "the toughest man I have ever met." This is a guy who was as close to an ISIS soldier as you could possibly imagine, he was a militant Islamist, testified to murdering over a hundred people himself, and this is what he said:

"I took great joy in the name of Allah when I could sneak up behind an enemy soldier at night, silently cut his throat, and allow his blood to wash over my hands as an offering to almighty God." Well, God reeked vengeance on this man. This is the way he did it. It

led to an encounter in him with the living God. It happened with a series of recurring dreams that he began to have. Again to quote Ripken's book, he says:

"He dreamed of spots of blood on his hands. Night after night, he would have the same dream. Over time, the spots of blood grew larger. Eventually, he was dreaming that the blood was running down and dripping off his arms. He realized, early on, that in his dreams he was imagining the blood of all those people he had killed. The dreams were so vivid and so disturbing that he dreaded falling asleep at night. "I really thought I was going insane," he told me. "When I began to see the blood during my waking hours, I was even more upset. And no amount of washing or scrubbing with sand or pumice could get the blood off. I soon became convinced that I was going absolutely insane," he went on. "Then one night the dream changed. As I stood there helplessly watching the blood run down my arms, I also saw in my dream a man standing before me. He was a man clothed in white with a scarred head. He also had scarred hands, a scarred side, and scarred feet. The scarred man said, 'I am Jesus the Messiah and I can get the blood off -- if you will just find me and believe in me.'" The dream told him to find Jesus. He had no idea how to do that. Still, he began his search. It took him over a year to locate a copy of the Scripture. It took even longer for him to understand what he was reading. From time

to time, he would find people who could answer some of his questions. And, finally, this man said that he had found Jesus. When he had invited Jesus into his heart, the man said, 'I got the blood off. Jesus took that blood onto himself.' Immediately, his dreams ended."

God's "vengeance" takes a murderer who delights in shedding the blood of his enemies and he turns him into a person who is at first terrified of the evil that he has committed and then overwhelmed at the grace of God, so much so that he becomes now a soldier of Christ. Let me continue. He says: "At that point, he didn't have anybody to disciple him. In his country, there was no church that he could attend, no Bible study that he might join. On his own, he kept reading and studying the Bible. And he did everything that the Holy Spirit told him to do. Eventually he began to smuggle Bibles, Bible portions, other Christian materials and even the Jesus film over the mountains from another country into his own."

Well, eventually the man got captured by his own platoon, the very group of people that he used to lead and he was severely beaten by them and he would have been executed as a traitor to Islam if not for the fact that there was one person in his group who was also a secret Christian. And he talked the leaders into letting him take this guy away to patch him up and then interrogate him and maybe

torture him and get a lot more information out of him. And they agreed and so he took the man away and then freed him. So as Ripken was interviewing this man, he asked him about his wife and children and he realized that he had just touched a nerve. The man grew highly agitated, he set his hands on Ripken's shoulders and he looked him right in the face and this is what he said. He said: "I have given him everything! My body has been broken. I have been jailed. I have been starved. I have been beaten. I have been left for dead!" His words sounded a lot like the apostle Paul's recitation of all that he had suffered in the service of Christ. 'I have even been willing to die for Jesus,' he pleaded. 'But do you know what I fear? When I go to bed at night, what keeps me awake, and what actually terrifies me, is the thought that God might ask of my wife and my children what I have already willingly given him. How can He ask it? Tell me! How could God ask that of my wife and children?' Finally" -- this was Ripken -- "Finally I told him, 'I personally cannot answer your question. But I would ask you another question that I have had to ask myself: Is Jesus worth it? Is He worth your life? Is He worth the lives of your wife and your children?'" He was undoubtedly the toughest man I ever met. He began to sob. He wrapped his arms around me, buried his face in my shoulder and wept. When he finally stopped, he stepped back and wiped away his tears. He seemed angry at himself for this display of emotion. Then he looked me in the eyes

again, nodded, and declared, 'Jesus is worth it. He is worth my life, my wife's life, and he is worth the lives of my children! I have got to get them involved in what God is doing with me!' With that, the toughest man I have ever met said good-bye. He turned and walked out of the room. My encounter with this man was more than a dozen years ago now. The last I heard, he and his family were still doing for the Kingdom of God the work that he described to me. And he is still the toughest man I have ever met!"

That's the kind of vengeance that God is capable of. Now you might say, "Well, that's an extreme case" and it certainly is. But here's something that I've said over and over again to people who are desperate to try to get someone who's hurt them to at least admit it and maybe change. I tell them there are only two people who have access to the inside of a person's head. One of them is that person and the other one is God. You have to believe that God is sovereign and that what he asks of you when someone has hurt you deeply is to trust him, to just trust that he knows what he's doing and turn over your plans for vengeance to the only one who knows how to do vengeance right, and that is God. God says vengeance is his alone to exact and that he will repay, and whether that repayment comes on judgment day or whether it's something that's already been exacted and paid for by Christ on the cross is one thing we know, one thing we can be assured of, and that is as

surely as a sparrow cannot move from one branch to another without God knowing it, so also is the least thing done by anyone, anyone to one of God's own. Is it going to be avenged perfectly by God? Now if that person is outside the kingdom of God, understand where he stands. God says in *Romans 2:5*, it says: *Because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works.* Now you may feel that somebody's gotten away with murder when they hurt you deeply and they may seem oblivious to the consequences, but no one escapes God's ultimate judgment.

Now our perspective as believers in Christ will always go back to the sovereign control that God exercises over everything. I mean, consider Joseph. Joseph's wicked brothers, they throw him into a cistern because they are so intensely jealous. God uses that circumstance to send Joseph on a trajectory that eventually places him in the position of vice regent of Egypt. This is the country that winds up actually saving his brothers' lives. And in the end we see Joseph meeting up with his terrified brothers and forgiving them and he tells them, he says: *As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.* And what Joseph is saying is that people can intend evil in your life; God can superintend that evil for good. And that truth doesn't just apply to Joseph's

life, it applies to our life as well. There is not a thing anyone can do to us as Christians that God can't use in some way for good. Our task is merely to trust him. You know, God expects us to act in a way that is so counterintuitive that oftentimes people become completely flummoxed. You know, "turning the other cheek" is something that most people seldom encounter. The world around us has trained us that when somebody hurts us, we put up our dukes, every one of us, we put up our dukes, we get in the ring, we try to hurt them back. That's our default position. When you enter the ring as Christ would have you enter that ring, with your hands figuratively and literally behind you, that is when you respond to someone who hurt you without trying to hurt them back, you may find them lashing out at you even more. It's 'cause folks don't know what to do when someone approaches them with a truly Christ-like response. The world is immensely comfortable duking it out. It is absolutely mystified encountering someone who refuses to.

And the second part is patience. Now I've said this often but the vast majority of the struggles that people have with God have far more to do with a lack of patience than with the notion that God has actually abandoned them. You see when you are hurt, when somebody hurts you, patience becomes an incredibly important virtue or a fruit of the Spirit. And the first practical exercise of patience is exercised in the 24-hour rule particularly if you are

communicating via email or social media. Never, never respond in the heat of the moment. *James 1:19* says: *Know this, my beloved brothers: Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.* Now those are very wise words. Always allow some time to cool down to allow God's Holy Spirit to work his way into your response. I say 24 hours at least. And I know many times I have shuddered to think when I've been angry what would have happened if I just fired off the very first thing that came into my mind instead of allowing God to cool me down. But patience works in the long term as well. You see, God did a magnificent thing in Joseph's life. He turned a wicked jealousy-fueled act by his brothers into a God-glorifying affirmation of his love and his care for Joseph. Amazing thing to see. But understand, it took literally years for that to unfold. Somebody hurts me, I want relief immediately. I want out from under this. You know, we all need to go out and buy that t-shirt that Nabeel had. "I've got this. God." Because he really does have it. And whether it's in the long term or the short term, if we're going to love others deeply from the heart, we have to be prepared to trust God for the outcome. And understand, this is one of the primary ways that God grows faith in us as well as love. He puts him in circumstances that seem beyond our control, where we feel the pain and the hurt of the conflict and then he asks us to be willing to trust him to work it out. Our perspective comes from a place that the world

knows nothing about. It's Christ and him crucified and it's his understanding of how we address conflict. And his understanding is extraordinarily patient. *2 Peter 3:9* says: *The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.* Think of Christ's patience, it's lasted over 2,000 years so far. Our patience needs to be rooted in the same trust that God works all things together for good short term, long term or eternally.

And finally, I want to give you the most practical way that we can love deeply from the heart when someone has hurt us deeply and that third part involves prayer. Part of being a believer in Jesus Christ is that we are constantly altering our perspective, and the reason we do that and the way that we do that is we soak it in scripture. And there we learn that God's response to conflict is not at all the same as the world's but there we also learn something about how the prince of this world uses conflict to cripple us.

Let me give you an example that I've given many, many times before about how prayer has worked in my life. Many, many years ago -- excuse me. Many, many years ago I had a dear friend, a mentor, a father figure to me, who was a very Godly man, who absolutely

betrayed me in one of the most back stabbing ways that you could possibly be betrayed. Now the details are immaterial but suffice it to say I was at first stunned by this betrayal and then I was deeply embittered by it. And so I confronted the man in the biblical way and he was absolutely unmoved. He was unmoved because he said my theological position, my Reformed theology was so dangerous that he needed to take action and I was merely collateral damage. Okay. Furthermore he seemed to get away with it. He seemed to walk away with nary a scratch, no real concern whatsoever for the hurt and the pain that he had caused me. But God in his mercy showed me just how crippling my response to this person was. See, I realized that I was spending enormous amounts of time just ruminating on this person. Up to a dozen times a day I would find myself with a knot in my stomach just thinking about what he did. Any of you ever had that? I see a lot of nodding heads. I'd be rolling the tapes out, I'd be playing them over and over again with no resolution whatsoever. And then I realized one thing. I realized I was the one being crippled and not my friend. He wasn't walking down the street ten times a day saying, "Oh, my, my, must have really hurt that fellow." It was only me who was being crippled. And then I realized who really, really benefited from all of this and it was obviously the enemy. I mean, he was using my bitterness as a club to continually beat me with. And so I resolved, not for my friend's sake but for my own sanity, that

every time this fellow's name came into my mind, I would stop right then and there and start praying for him. I mean I had recently read *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis, most of you know what that is, it's a fictional tale about a junior devil assigned to make the character in the story, to make sure that he doesn't become a Christian. And this devil has to answer to his Uncle Screwtape and the senior devils about his performance in keeping this person locked into his sinful behaviors. I read that and I decided that whatever junior devil was assigned to me was having a field day and it was my job to make his day miserable. So I decided the best way to do that was that every time the devil tempted me to bitterness, I would use that opportunity for praying for my enemy. I've shared this before and I'm not very proud of it I but remember being very honest with God, saying, "Okay, God, here's my first prayer for him: May a brick fall on his head." And I remember saying right after, I said, "Lord, I know that's a terrible prayer but that's the best I can muster right now." And then I asked God to help me get out from under this bitterness. And then I began to pray in earnest for this man and I found myself praying for him sometimes, like I said, dozens of times a day. And over the course of the next few months, I noticed that my prayers at first very subtly started to change. I mean I was praying right from the start that God would open his eyes and make him see how deeply and profoundly he had betrayed and hurt me, and after a few

months I realized that my prayers had begun to change. Suddenly I had begun to see little bits of my role creep into my prayers, places where I could have behaved better. I began to see that I wasn't completely faultless in this and that I had a good degree of arrogance and attitude as well. And I began to see a bigger picture about my enemy, who he was, what his motivation might have been. And long story short, I remember the day vividly when someone in a conversation mentioned his name and nothing happened. Didn't bother me at all. Now for months the mere mention of his name caused a burst of adrenaline in me that got me instantly on this treadmill of rehashing what had taken place. Now suddenly I hear his name and I realize the adrenaline is gone. Then I realized along with it the bitterness was gone as well. I mean I was actually stunned with the realization that all of the power that that name used to have over me was gone. I realized that over the course of about six months God had been slowly answering my prayers. I mean I started out praying that God would make my enemy see how wicked he was and turn and seek redress from me. And guess what? That never happened. Instead God began changing my attitude toward my enemy and toward myself and my role in all of this. I have to tell you it was absolutely supernatural. But I can tell you it was as if a 500-pound weight had been lifted from my shoulders. And it required the very three things that we're talking about this morning. First it required perspective. If I

hadn't gone back and soaked this situation in the scripture, I would have never have known that there was a way to relieve myself of this bitterness. I would have not known Christ's way of loving deeply from the heart because it's so counterintuitive, it so goes the way -- so goes against the way the world tells us we are supposed to respond.

Secondly, I would have loved this thing to have been over in a day or two but it took six months. It required patience. Now it might have taken six years or sixty years, or it might not have ever have been resolved in my lifetime, but I realized in all of this God still has got this. My task is to simply be patient and let God work it out.

And finally, the third part was prayer. And my prayer did two things. First of all, it absolutely frustrated the temptations of the devil. I mean just imagine, every single time he sends a fiery dart of this guy's name at me, I'm taking it and throwing it back by using that as an opportunity to pray for my enemy. It was my hope that this junior devil got into an enormous amount of struggle and difficulty over this. But the bottom line is God answered my prayers. And he answered it not by changing my enemy's attitudes or my circumstance but by changing me and my attitude. I realized that if I was going to love deeply from the heart, I would have to

be working on growing that acorn that God placed in me at my salvation into an oak. God's love had been poured into my heart by the Holy Spirit who had been given to me and he wasn't asking me to manufacture a love I couldn't manufacture but to supply the love that he had given me and would be willing to flow through me if I would simply ask. God was now encouraging me to grow that acorn in me into an oak, to learn to love deeply from the heart.

So allow me to end this message on a practical note. I want you to re-remember that person you thought about at the very beginning of this message, you know, the one who hurt you, the one who accused you or abused you, and ask you right now, are you willing to pray specifically for that person? Are you willing to pray for him or her, knowing that the primary beneficiary of that prayer is you? Jesus said it best. This is what he said, here's how we love deeply from the heart. He said: *"But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."* Let's pray.

Father, no one was more hated or cursed or abused than you, Lord. You left heaven itself, you came to earth, you lived the perfect life among us and then you offered up that life as a sacrifice on the cross. Father, you exchanged your righteousness for our sin, and I praise you and thank you for that. And you have told us over

and over again that we have been -- we have had our debt paid for us and it's a debt that is immeasurable. And you've challenged us in your parables, Lord, to say how can we who have been forgiven this immeasurable debt still be exacting the minor debts of those who have hurt us? How can we still be demanding redress when you have given us absolute and complete forgiveness? And so Father, this morning I pray for each individual person as they're sitting here thinking perhaps about someone who is very painful to recall. I pray that you would give them the ability to commit to praying for that person every time the enemy brings them to mind, every time the enemy brings her to mind, give us the ability, Lord, to turn around what the enemy's trying to do, to make it of a sincere struggle for them to try to do anything in our lives to get us into that treadmill of bitterness, make it so that they deeply regret sending us this temptation. Give us the ability, I pray, Lord, to turn that temptation into a blessing. Give us the ability to love deeply from the heart, I pray in your name. Amen.