

# GROW IN GRACE

## NEWSLETTER

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Box 1594 / 1028 South Water Avenue, Gallatin, TN 37066 (615) 452-5951 / **The Grow in Grace Newsletter**— a weekly Bible Study, plus news notes— designed first and foremost for members and those attending services at Southside Church... sent forth to aid one and all, (including friends far and wide who receive the Newsletter), in the experience of 2 Peter 3:18. *"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our LORD and Saviour JESUS CHRIST. To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen."*

## FORGIVENESS and Healing the Hurt!

**\*\*\* Forgiveness is a core essential Christian virtue.** Jesus: *"... Forgive, and you will be forgiven"* (Luke 6:37). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus proclaims: *"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins"* (Matthew 6:14-15).

**The Holy Spirit moved the Apostle Paul to write in Colossians 3:13:** *"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."* As stated in Ephesians 4:32, Christians are to be those who are, "... forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you." In 1 Corinthians 13:5 we are informed that, *"love... keeps no record of wrongs."* *"Love ... doesn't keep score of the sins of others."* This is NOT because love has a bad memory. Rather, love finds a way to forgive the sins of others because those whose hearts have been FLOODED with the love of God (Romans 5:5) have themselves been forgiven!

**\*\*\* Jesus, of course, provides the supreme model of forgiveness!** When JESUS hung on the cross, (condemned to death by evil men who plotted to murder him, who produced lying witnesses to convict him), as he surveyed the howling mob assembled to cheer his suffering, Jesus the Son of God, the One who knew no sin, in his dying moments uttered words that still ring across the centuries: *"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing"* (Luke 23:34). **Those 11 words sweep away all our shabby excuses!** They reveal the barrenness of our heart. Many of us say, "If only the people who hurt me would show some remorse, some sorrow, then maybe I would forgive them." But since that rarely happens, we use that as an excuse to continue in our bitterness, our anger, and/or our desire to get even.

**\*\*\* Behold Jesus on the cross.** The crowd was not sorry. The crowd mocked and jeered; and those who passed by hurled insults at him. They taunted him, "If you are the King of Israel, come down from the cross and save yourself." Frankly, it is fair to say that when JESUS died, the people who put him to death were quite pleased with themselves. **No one said, "I was wrong. This is a mistake. We were such fools." And yet he prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."**

**\*\*\* As we follow Jesus, the Holy Spirit will lead and empower us to pray [TO FORGIVE!] like Jesus!** We must pray like Jesus in relation to people who hurt us deliberately and repeatedly, to those who intentionally attack us, and/or to those who casually and thoughtlessly wound us. **We must pray forgiveness** on behalf of those closest to us, and on behalf of our husband or wife, our children, parents, friends, neighbors, our brothers and sisters, and our fellow Christians. **CHRISTIANS: HAVING BEEN LOVED— we love! CHRISTIANS: HAVING BEEN FORGIVEN— we forgive, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven us!** [Christians experience the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit to thusly forgive!]

**\*\*\* HOWEVER, BEWARE** of misconceptions about forgiveness. **Here are a few things forgiveness does NOT mean:**

**\*\* It does not mean** approving of the evil someone else did. **\*\* It does not mean** pretending that evil never took place. **\*\* It does not mean** making excuses for other people's bad behavior. **\*\* It does not mean** justifying evil so that sin somehow becomes less sinful. **\*\* It does not mean** overlooking abuse. **\*\* It does not mean** denying that others tried to hurt you repeatedly. **\*\* It does not mean** refusing to press charges when a crime has been committed. **\*\* It does not mean** forgetting the wrong that was done. **\*\* It does not mean** pretending that you were never hurt. **\*\* It does not mean** that all negative consequences of sin are canceled.

**ALSO, PLEASE UNDESTAND:** It is quite possible to mouth kind words of forgiveness while continuing to inwardly harbor anger and bitterness. So, know this reality: Forgiveness begins in the heart and then eventually works its way outward. **Forgiveness in its essence is a decision made on the inside to refuse to live in the past.** It's a conscious choice to release others from their sins against you so that you can be set free— even if they never repent and are never set free in their own hearts. **Forgiveness does not deny the pain or change the past, but it does break the cycle of bitterness that binds you to the wounds of yesterday.**

Forgiveness allows you to let go and move on and to even REDEMPTIVELY INVEST in the life of the one who offended you. ABOVE ALL ELSE, Christian forgiveness is rooted in and empowered by, 'forgiving EVEN AS God for CHRIST'S SAKE has forgiven me!' (Ephesians 4:32) **AS INDICATED, you can forgive** even when other people make no confession of their wrong. **You can forgive** when the other person has done nothing to earn forgiveness because

forgiveness is like salvation— it is a gift that is freely given, it cannot be earned. **You can forgive** without saying, "I forgive you" because 'VERTICAL' forgiveness is a matter of the heart. Vertical forgiveness is between you and God, where you **IN YOUR HEART** forgive the offender **EVEN AS GOD** has forgiven you; and where **IN YOUR LIFESTYLE** you go forward, (as there is opportunity), not only forgiving but, blessing, doing good, loving, and praying for even your worst enemies! (READ: Matthew 5:44-48; Romans 12:14-21)

**HORIZONTAL FORGIVENESS**, (where you actually say the words "I do forgive you!" to one who has offended you), **is spoken on those occasions when** the person actually comes and asks for forgiveness. This is based on the clear teaching of Jesus in Luke 17:1-5.

**\*\*\* THERE ARE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES for refusing to forgive! In Matthew 18:21-35, Jesus tells a story, which, (to modernize it!), is about a man who owed his boss a vast debt that in today's terms would be something like \$1 million. When the boss demanded his money, the man unashamedly begged to be forgiven. He even promised to pay the money back. HOWEVER, the boss forgave him the whole debt— just wiped the slate clean. Soon after that, the man who had been forgiven such an enormous sum saw a fellow who owed him a tiny debt— something like \$100. When the fellow couldn't pay, he had him thrown into jail. But people heard about it and told the boss who got angry and had the first man thrown into jail to be tortured until he paid back the amount that previously had been forgiven. The King James Version says that he was turned over to the "tormentors."**

The moral of the story is very clear: *"This is how my Heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart,"* (Matthew 18:35).

#### **APPLICATIONS:**

1. In real life there are multitudes who hear the **GRACIOUS, FORGIVING WORDS** of the gospel and for a time rejoice. **HOWEVER**, they have no inward transformation. In contrast, saving encounters with Jesus leave us empowered to walk in His steps.
2. Applying this story of Jesus, we should hear: **"What happened to that man will IN SIMILAR FASHION happen to those who do not CHOOSE to forgive."**

What tormentors? The hidden tormentors of anger and bitterness that eat your insides out; the tormentors of frustration and malice that give you ulcers and high blood pressure and migraine headaches and lower back pain, the tormentors that make you lie awake at night on your bed stewing over every rotten thing that happens to you; the tormentors of an unforgiving heart that stalk your footsteps day and night, that never leave your side, that suck every bit of joy from your life. **Why? Because you/we will not forgive from the heart — it happens today just as Jesus said, because of refusing to forgive.**

**IN OUR NATURAL STATE, we are like the unforgiving servant. We stand before Almighty God with our sins piled up like a mountain. We come as debtors to God, with empty hands, and we say, "I cannot pay." The GOSPEL of God's rich mercy, love and grace is preached, "My Son has paid the debt. You owe me nothing."**

**Then we rise from the pew and walk outside the church building professing to have received God's mercy, love, grace, and forgiveness. HOWEVER, before we get to our car we see a man who has done us wrong and we want to grasp him by the throat and say, "Pay me right now!" No wonder we are so tormented. No wonder we are so angry and bitter. No wonder we have problems. No wonder our friendships don't last. No wonder we can't get along. No wonder the marriage is destroyed. No wonder churches are filled with angry and unloving people. We have EITHER never experienced the forgiveness of God; OR, having experienced God's forgiveness, we presently grieve and quench the Holy Spirit.**

**\*\*\* Forgiveness is not an optional part of the Christian life. It is a necessary part of what it means to be a Christian.**

**Here is deep, serious reality, a real test as to whether we are merely religious or are we born again: When the Holy Spirit has flooded our hearts with the love of God, (Romans 5:5), we have a willingness and an ability to forgive. We are called to forgive even as we have been forgiven! (Ephesians 4:32) Kindness, forgiveness, and a concern for lost souls is a true gauge of where we are in Christ.**

**We can't judge the spirituality of a Christian on the basis of his/her prayers, since praying is often done for its effect on the listeners. Nor can we measure a person's spiritual status by the loudness of his "amens" and "hallelujahs." The generosity of one's giving is not an infallible test for it may be done for personal recognition or to ease one's conscience. Faithful attendance at worship or participation in church programs is not reliable either for they may all be done because of family, community, or peer pressures.**

**A sure test of the depth of, (and even the genuineness of!), our relationship with God is found in our willingness to show compassion and to forgive those who hurt us. If we are going to follow Jesus, we must forgive. We have no other choice!**

**"Forgiveness is the fragrance the violet gives to the heel that has crushed it." You are never more like Jesus than when you forgive. We demonstrate powerful evidence that we are, indeed, the TEMPLE of the Holy Spirit, when we forgive.**

**AND, YES, A GENUINE CHRISTIAN can have battles with the call to forgive. Yes, we can grieve and quench the Holy Spirit! Let us remember this: "I will never be free until I forgive!"**

**\*\*\* We need to CULTIVATE two things: Soft hearts and Humility.**

**MAYBE** some who are reading this have been deeply hurt by things others have done. Maybe you have been attacked, maligned, mistreated, abused, sexually assaulted, ridiculed, belittled, publicly humiliated, physically beaten; and maybe these things have been done deliberately, repeatedly, viciously.

In response **IT IS EASY** to choose to become hard on the inside to protect ourselves from any further pain. But that hardness makes it difficult for us to hear the gentle call of the Holy Spirit.

**\*\*\* We need Soft Hearts to hear his voice. WHAT CAN SOFTEN OUR HEARTS? Behold Jesus, the Lamb of God, suffering for our own sin, making propitiation for our sin!** Spend much time in the latter chapters of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John which deal with the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And... **COME TO THE LORD'S TABLE!**

**\*\*\* We also need HUMILITY! Let us simply bow in submission to Jesus who calls us to walk in His steps. We live by FAITH, acting upon the Word of God... and not by our FEELINGS!** [The above article is significantly edited from Ray Pritchard]

## **FORGIVENESS IN ACTION!**

Twenty third January 1999 is a black day in Indian history. The Australian medical missionary Mr. Graham Staines (1941-1999) and his two sons were burnt alive in the tribal State of Orissa, on this day in 1999. Though the killing of the Staines has a left stain on Indian soil, they are grains of wheat which are fallen on the ground to give plentiful harvest. **Thomas Brooks (1608-1680): "Divine presence made the martyrs as willing to die as to dine!"**

**What our prayers can do for the persecuted at critical hours and perilous situations cannot be underestimated.** When challenged before martyrdom, Bishop Polycarp (70-160) replied, "Eighty six years I've served Christ and He never did me any injury. How then can I blaspheme my King and Saviour?" Tahir Iqbal, a muslim convert, before he died in a Pakistani prison in 1993, declared, "I'll kiss the rope, but I'll never deny my faith!" Every Christian must read Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*. The martyrs shook the powers of darkness with the irresistible power of weakness. **How much the persecuted need our prayers!** It's repeatedly observed in mission fields that the malignant opponents get powerfully converted and become mighty exponents of the Bible. This is what our prayers for the persecutors do. **Stephen's prayer deeply impacted the young man Saul.** When this persecutor of Christians became a preacher of the gospel, people said in amazement, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this Name in Jerusalem?" (Acts 9:21; 22:19, 20). (R. Stanley)

## Forgiveness and Healing: Gladys Staines

Deeply ingrained in *Gladys Staines* are the teachings of the Bible. Even after the brutal murder of her missionary husband, Graham Staines and their two sons, in Orissa, India, she forgives all to start life afresh. She testifies: It wasn't something I had thought about. But when I heard that the family was dead, I told Esther, my daughter: "We'll forgive those who killed them, won't we?" And she said: "Yes, Mummy, we will." Two weeks later someone approached me at her school and said: "I can't understand how you can forgive." My daughter later told me: "Mummy, I can't understand how they can't understand why we have forgiven." That was when I understood how deeply the teachings of Christ had penetrated within my daughter.

**Forgiveness brings healing.** If I have something against you and I forgive you, the bitterness leaves me. As I continue to walk by faith and not by feelings, I am now ready to report for the additional duty and privilege of loving, blessing, doing good, and praying for the one I forgave. **Forgiveness liberates the forgiver.** IF OR WHEN the offender repents, then, he/she will also be liberated!

**How was I able to forgive?** The truth is that I myself am a sinner. I needed Jesus Christ to forgive me. Because I have forgiveness in my own life, it is possible for me to forgive others. I had also read much about the power of forgiveness. For instance, the Church in China had been much persecuted during the earlier regimes and many had suffered terribly. Even so, many had publicly proclaimed their forgiveness of their tormentors, and this fact had inspired many more to become Christians. **The Bible teaches you to forgive.** Jesus Christ set the example. When crucified and suffering, he asked God to forgive those who had killed him for, "they know not what they do". **I have forgiven those who killed my family, but I still have to heal fully.** I still have to go through the grieving process for the people whom I loved who are not here. I feel their absence deeply.

**At the funeral:** Thousands were waiting to pay their respects to the Staines. It seemed as if all of Baripada had come to a halt. Shops were shut and many officials joined in the funeral procession. **At the service, the inmates of the Leprosy Mission were besides themselves with grief.** Only Gladys was able to console them. Both Esther and she sat with them on the ground right by the three coffins. **Whilst condolences were expressed and others shared comforting verses from the Bible, many then joined in with Gladys and Esther singing in Santhali, the local language, the following hymn:** *There is not a friend like the lowly Jesus, No, not one! No, not one! None else could heal all our soul's diseases, No, not one! No, not one! Jesus knows all about our struggles, He will guide till the day is done, There is not a friend like the lowly Jesus; No, not one! No, not one! There is not an hour that He is not near us, No, not one! No, not one! No, night so dark, But his love can cheer us, No, not one! No, not one!*

**God had revealed His plan:** God had prepared Gladys for bearing this greatest grief. She recalls: "I believe God very specially spoke to me on January 14, [9 days PRIOR to the murder of her husband and sons!] during my morning quiet time. I use a particular daily Bible reading book as help. The story for that day's reading ran like this: There was a young 12-year-old girl in a hospital that was losing her sight. Her pastor came to visit her and she told him, "**Pastor, God is taking away my sight.**" For a long time, the pastor kept silent and then said, "**Jessie, don't let Him.**" The girl was puzzled, and then the wise pastor said, "**Give it to Him**".

As I meditated upon this story, [it seemed that God] asked me whether I was also willing to give all that I love - my husband, children, and possessions for Him. I spent much time on this. Tears began to roll down my cheeks. **Then I told Him, "Lord Jesus, yes, I am willing. Take all that have, for your use - my husband, children and everything that I have. I surrender them all to You...The Lord comforted me by saying, "don't you know that Abraham pleased me by sacrificing his only son, Isaac...."** These days, our blessed Lord has been strengthening me in very unusual ways."

**Testimony of Gladys:** Asked whether she now planned to leave India for good, she said: "Never. My husband and our children have sacrificed their lives for this nation. India is my home. I am happy to be here" She further said, "The Lord has called each one of His workers to serve Him wholly and live a life that would be a 'sweet-smelling sacrifice unto God'. Be faithful to whatever you are called to do. **Never yield to the temptation to "go back"; never say "quit", even if there is persecution or threat.... keep 'looking unto Jesus who has gone before...'** I have only one message for the people of India. *I am not bitter. Neither am I angry. I can forgive their (killers') deeds.*

*Only Jesus can forgive their sins.* But they will have to ask. I have one great desire: that each citizen of this country should establish a personal relationship with Jesus Christ who gave His life for his or her sins. Every Indian should know that Jesus loves him or her, and in turn they should trust Him and endeavor to love one another. Let us burn hatred...and spread the flame of Christ's love".

**Esther Staines stated,** "I praise God that He found my father worthy to die for Christ". [Until 2004, Gladys continued to serve Christ in the Leprosy Home by washing the wounds of the lepers.] (Drawn from several sources)

**SAINTS: LET US GO FORTH forgiving, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven us!**

**Grace to one and all!**

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