

Pastor Spencer Martin
First in Our Relationships

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Series: First
Colossians 3:12-17

BIG IDEA – IF JESUS IS FIRST IN YOUR LIFE, IT WILL CHANGE THE WAY YOU LIVE

Whether you are here or down in Lexington, I want you to know that here at Two Cities Church, we have a huge heart for the next generation. When it comes to our middle schoolers, our high schoolers, and our college students, we do not want anything *from* them, but we want a lot of things *for* them.

We are completely not okay with our students having a completely boring and comfortable life. What we want to do is to create, as a church, environments where these students can find fun and friends. We want to give them repeated opportunities to hear the gospel and respond and be disciplined. We want to create attractive alternatives. We want to give our students a chance to take steps of faith and to get a taste for mission at a young age.

I want you to know this. Right now, in the life of our church, the Lord is doing something special in our student ministry and college ministry. If you are a student or a college student, I want to invite you to be a part of it. In two weeks, our high schoolers have their fall retreat. Our college students have Black Mountain Weekend.

For the church, I want to invite you to be in prayer for these events, because we are expecting that the Lord is going to do something special in the lives of our students at these events. I told our college student leaders last week, "Guys, if you expect this to be just another normal semester on the college campus, it will be." But we are just not about it. We are expecting the Lord for great things this semester. We are asking him for life change, and we are trusting that that is what we are going to see happen.

We trust that right now in our student ministry and college ministry we have future pastors, future missionaries, and incredible church staff. I know that I, personally, grew so much spiritually when I was in college. Our heart as a church is that many of our students and college students would have the same experience. So, let's start today by praying for these upcoming events, and then we'll jump into Colossians. Let's pray.

Father, I pray that in the coming weeks we would see more and more life change. I pray that we would see students, just like we saw in that video, go from lost to laborer. Lord, I want to pray specifically for the fall retreat, for Black Mountain Weekend, that you would draw many students to yourself, that students would be saved, that students would be called to ministry. I pray that the trajectory of lives will be changed this semester. Lord, we ask you to do it. In Jesus' name, amen.

I think all of us should be able to agree that the clothes you wear are a big deal. Studies have shown that those who dress more professionally are more likely to get hired. They're more likely to get a raise. They're more likely to make more money and get promoted. Pretty much once per week at my house, I will be about to walk out the door, and Olivia will stop. She'll look at what I'm wearing, turn her head to the side, and say, "I don't think that works." I'm like, "Really?"

The clothes you wear are a big deal. Clothing has been a big deal all the way back to Genesis, chapter 3, with Adam and Eve in the garden. They were covering themselves with leaves. What Paul is going to do in Colossians, chapter 3, is he's going to use clothing to illustrate how we should live as Christians.

If you are new, we are in the middle of a series called *First*. It's in the book of Colossians. What we saw last week was Paul said if Jesus is first in your life, then you need to put some things to death. You need to take off dirty clothes that you're wearing. What we're going to see today is Paul is going to say if Jesus is first, you're going to have some clothes you need to put on.

Here's the big idea of this entire message: *if Jesus is first in your life, it is going to change the way you live*. We're going to see that if Jesus is first in your life, it's going to change these four areas: your attitude, how you bear with one another or how you put up with people who annoy you (which is going to be fun to talk about), how you forgive, and how you worship.

So, that's where we're headed. We're going to pick up in Colossians 3:12. ***"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience..."*** Paul says if Christians want to be different and distinct from

the world, they need to put on these five things, and all five of these things are related to your attitude. So, we'll walk through these.

First, he says, "Put on compassionate hearts." The compassionate heart... What this person is doing is seeing the brokenness around them, and they want to help. This person is not apathetic or angry but compassionate. The next two things he says to put on are *kindness* and *humility*. *Kindness* is an attitude you have toward others. It is literally the consideration of others. *Humility* is the attitude you have toward yourself.

So, kindness is toward others; humility is the attitude you have toward yourself. C.S. Lewis is the one who famously said that humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less. The person who is humble is not, on one hand, humiliated for the bad things they've done, but they're also not overly honored for the good things they've done. They are viewing themselves rightly.

Now, how do you know if you're a humble person? I think this is so interesting. There are a lot of different ways you could identify this. A mark of someone who is not humble is that they are often escalating problems. You'll notice with these people that what should have been a small problem ends up becoming a big problem.

The person who's not humble doesn't do well with authority. They don't view themselves rightly. Those small problems usually become big problems because they're not able to take ownership of the mistakes they made that might have contributed to the problem.

The fourth thing Paul says is "Put on meekness." Now, *meekness* is a really interesting and often misunderstood word. Meekness is not the same as weakness. Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, "***Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.***" Meekness is strength under control.

I think about some of our college students. These guys are very fit. They do things like do pull-ups on door frames, and they climb trees. They're strong. Okay? At the same time, I also see these guys in our kids' ministry, and they're super soft and gentle, and I think to myself, "This is what it looks like to be meek."

It has been said before that what a meek man ought to be is both tough and tender. They are tough *for* people, and they are tender *with* people. What happens is if you find a man who is actually meek, who has strength under control, those who are around him are not scared; they feel safe. They feel protected instead of feeling vulnerable. So, Paul says, "Put on meekness."

Then, he's going to say to put on patience. Let's see what he has to say about this. We're going to reread verse 12. He says, "***Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved,***

compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience... Now look at this. What does it look like to have patience? Verse 13: ***"...bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."***

We need to talk about the importance of bearing with one another. Here's why this is so important. If you do life closely with people, the people you love are going to annoy you. It's just going to happen. We have to figure out how to deal with people who annoy us. How do we deal with friction? Some of you in this room right now are annoyed with those you are here with. Right? We have to figure out how to bear with one another. So, I want to give you three practical ways to bear with one another.

First, *we have to learn how to deal with strangeness*. Can we just acknowledge that all of us, to some extent, do some things that are strange? Do any of you think your spouse or your roommate does something strange with the dishes or the laundry? You normally figure out that strangeness is a thing when you move into your dorm with your college roommate or when you get married.

When I got married to Olivia, I owned one bowl. It was a plastic green bowl, and I used that bowl for everything...oatmeal, cereal, soup, spaghetti...you name it. It was doing a great job. I thought, "This bowl is meeting all of my needs. Why would I need another bowl?" Well, when I got married, Olivia was like, "You have one bowl? This is strange. We're throwing this thing away." I'm like, "What?!"

We have to figure out what to do with strangeness, and we have to have categories for things in our lives that are sinful versus things that are just strange. If something you are doing is sinful, of course, you need to repent of it. You need to stop doing it. You need to put it to death. But on the other side of things, there are going to be things in your life that are strange.

I would encourage you with this. We tell couples this in premarital counseling. If you are doing something on a consistent basis that your spouse finds strange, and it is actually bothering them, then out of love for your spouse, would you please just try to stop doing it? If you are doing something your roommate thinks is strange, maybe you could try to stop doing it.

On the other side of things, the Bible also talks in the book of Proverbs about how it is a very valuable thing to try to overlook things. So, if you're doing a strange thing, maybe try to stop it, but if you are trying to deal with strangeness, as much as you can, you need to try to overlook it. This is why it's so helpful to be in Christian community, because we often need help figuring out whether things we're doing are sinful or just strange.

So, some of you might need to invite some people who know you and love you to speak into your life in this area. I would encourage you to ask this question. It's a scary question to ask, but you should ask it. "Do I do anything on a fairly consistent basis that is strange?" You might just need to hear it. You might need to have someone tell you, "Hey, when you sneeze, you basically scream."

It's like, "Hey, when you shake hands, it is an extremely firm handshake. What are you trying to prove? Don't do that." Some of you may need to hear that you have a little bit of a close talking tendency. Do you know what this means? Like, you're standing, you're talking, and you're a little bit too close. Just back up a little bit. The point is that if you are strange, you might need to change. So, we need to bear with one another. We have to figure out how to deal with strangeness.

The second way we bear with one another is *we have to give others the benefit of the doubt*. How many of the problems you deal with would be solved or wouldn't even be problems at all if you were quick to give others the benefit of the doubt? We hope our church is and will continue to be full of people who are giving each other the benefit of the doubt constantly, because one of the most exhausting things possible is to be in close relationship with someone who is extremely easily offended.

Are you someone who's extremely easily offended? It is extremely exhausting. Here's why this is so important. It's because when you work closely with someone or when you live in the same house or when you work for someone or if you're in the same family as someone, you are going to have a ton of opportunities to not give that person the benefit of the doubt.

The Christian natural response ought to be to respond with assuming the best in others. We are giving each other the benefit of the doubt. We are being charitable. This is what Paul is talking about in 1 Corinthians 13 where he says that love believes all things. We need to be quick to give others the benefit of the doubt.

That leads me to the third way we bear with one another: *kind and clear communication*. Now, whenever we have friction with the people we spend a lot of time with, we have to be able to talk about things. We just need to be able to talk about it.

Something I've learned in pastoral ministry (I did not know this until I stepped into pastoral ministry) is that so many families, probably more than half of families, have certain dynamics where you are not allowed to talk about certain things. Certain things are just off limits. The norm in this family is "We are just going to pretend certain things are not issues, even if they are issues. We just have to pretend these things aren't problems."

What you end up having is a lot of passive-aggressive behavior. You have manipulation. You have maneuvering. Things get swept under the rug until what often happens is there's a big blowup. You're on vacation, and things have been swept under the rug for months, and then *Boom!*

So, we have to bear with one another, give each other the benefit of the doubt. What would happen if our families were the kinds of families where it was normal to practice kind and clear communication? We just normalize it. Something we say here is that clarity is kindness. If we want to bear with one another, our friendships and families have to normalize kind and clear communication.

All right. Let's keep going. I want to go back again to verse 13. It says, "***...bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.***" What Paul says here is if Jesus is first in your life, it is going to change how you forgive. So, we need to talk about forgiveness.

There's a lot to be said about this. C.S. Lewis said that everyone thinks forgiveness is a lovely idea until they have something to forgive. Our natural desire is we want forgiveness for ourselves, but when it comes to everybody else, we want them to have justice. So, we need to talk about what forgiveness is, but I first want to talk about what forgiveness is *not*. Three things.

Forgiveness is not forgetting. Something we should stop saying to one another is "You should just forgive and forget." Do you want to know what you forget? You forget where your toddler's water bottle is. You forget your username and password. That's what you forget. You don't forget it when you are sinned against. It's just not a thing.

You might say, "Well, doesn't God say in Jeremiah that he remembers our sins no more?" Yes, he says that, but what that means is that God is choosing voluntarily to not hold your sin against his relationship with you. God has not actually forgotten your sin. He doesn't have amnesia. So, you don't forgive and forget; you forgive and you remember.

Secondly, *forgiveness is not trusting the other person again.* A couple of weeks ago, we found that our 4-year-old Emma had spread Aquaphor on the walls of her room. If you don't know this, Aquaphor is a skin protectant ointment that's extremely difficult to get off.

Well, after we found out about this, of course, we talked with her. She apologized, and we forgave her. Now, does that mean we are going to trust her with Aquaphor in her room tonight? No. Think about this, though. What about when she's 5? Maybe we will. So, on one side of things, just because you forgive someone doesn't mean you need to automatically trust them again.

But I think a word for some of you is this: once you have extended forgiveness, even though trust was broken, you ought to at least hope that, over time, that trust can be rebuilt. Yes, trust can be shattered quickly, but you should at least hope it's going to be built over time. We have to believe in the grace of God.

Thirdly, *forgiveness is not reconciliation*. You've heard this talked about numerous times, I'm sure. Forgiveness takes one person; reconciliation takes two. If you look at the New Testament, *forgiveness* seems to be defined as canceling a debt someone owes you. It's canceling a debt.

A very helpful principle for forgiveness is that forgiveness is not a feeling; it is a decision. The bottom line is if you wait until you feel like extending forgiveness to someone, then you might never offer forgiveness. It has to be a decision. So, I would encourage you to extend these three promises of forgiveness to someone. Here they are.

First, if you forgive someone, you need to promise them, "I will not dwell on this incident." This is not very easy, because whenever you are sinned against, the temptation is for you to dwell on it constantly, think about it constantly, ruminate on what was done to you. But when you forgive someone, you need to commit, as much as you're able to, to not dwelling on the incident.

The second promise you might need to make is "I will not bring this incident up in the future and use it against you." The problem is that, so often, whenever you are in a conflict or an argument, some of you will get historical or hysterical. The person who gets historical... What they are doing is bringing up things they said they forgave the other person for years ago. They're bringing it up in the moment. They're getting historical. This is not helpful.

Then, the person who's getting hysterical... What they're doing is they're just so overwhelmed and so emotional they're not able to think clearly. They're not able to speak clearly. To forgive is to commit to not bringing that incident up in the future and using it against the other person.

The third promise is "I will not talk to others about this incident." Now, we are not saying that you are not able to talk about challenging things with a few close friends, your DNA Group. We say we believe in privacy here, not secrecy. But once you have forgiven someone, you need to commit, as much as you're able to, to not talk about it unnecessarily to other people.

I want to talk for a second about what happens if you do not forgive. What's going to happen in your life if your life is marked by a lack of forgiveness of other people? Well,

it's usually going to lead to one of two categories. It's either going to lead to *denial* or *bitterness*.

The person who is in denial... What they are doing is refusing to look at their past. They won't look at it. The reason this is such a problem is because part of the healing process is that you have to appropriately view your past, have some conversations about it, and offer forgiveness as necessary so you can move forward.

So, *denial* is when you refuse to look at your past. *Bitterness* is when the only thing you will look at is your past. Bitterness is when all you can see is the brokenness. You are meditating on the past. Here's the problem with bitterness: bitterness causes you to suffer in a lot of different ways.

Bitterness causes you to suffer *physically*. I don't even have time to get into it, but it puts you at a higher risk of cardiovascular problems, of blood pressure problems. Bitterness causes you to suffer *mentally*. There are studies that show that those who have resentment, those who are filled with bitterness, are at a higher risk of anxiety, depression, and chronic stress.

What I think is the most interesting that people don't really think about is that bitterness will affect you *socially*. Why is that? Well, it's because friendships and relationships are almost always built on positive emotion. When you are bitter, what ends up happening is you have a hard time cultivating relationships and building friendships.

Some of you are suffering. You are suffering because, unfortunately, you are taking your bitterness with you everywhere you go. It is affecting all of your relationships, and you are suffering for it. You don't have to live in that.

When Olivia and I got married, on our wedding day, we were sitting at our reception eating our dinner. By the way...rule of thumb...when the just-married couple is eating their dinner, leave them alone. Don't go talk to them unless you're, like, the maid of honor.

We were sitting there eating our dinner, and a woman in her 70s walked up to us. I'm not making this up. Her words were these. She said, "I loved your vows. They were so beautiful. My husband broke the vows." Olivia and I just looked at each other, completely shocked. We didn't know what to do. We had just gotten married one hour earlier, and this lady is talking to us about how her husband broke the vows.

I can remember in that moment I had this thought. I thought, first, "Okay. This, of course, is very sad. There's deep hurt here." The second thought I had was, "How bitter do you have to be to say that to a newly married couple at their wedding reception?" Bitterness

causes you to suffer socially. No one wants to hang out with a person who's always bitter. Guess who's not getting invited to play cards? *That* lady. Right? Bitterness causes you to suffer socially.

Now, here's the thing. That's a little bit of a dramatic example, I know. I don't think most of you suffer with that high of a level of bitterness, but I wonder how many of you suffer with some degree of low-level bitterness toward somebody. You have it right now. You think about your mom or your dad or your in-laws or your siblings or your former boss, and even right now as I say this, you can feel the low-level bitterness building up.

You don't have to live in this bitterness. The gospel is the solution of this bitterness. We're going to get there in just a second. Instead of being in denial or being bitter, we need to appropriately deal with our past, extend forgiveness as necessary, and then move forward. It has been said before that to forgive is to set the prisoner free and to realize that prisoner was you.

Now, I want to go back to verse 13 for the third time, because we're going to see why we forgive. Look at this. ***"...bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."*** Paul says the reason you need to forgive is because you have been forgiven.

I can't talk about forgiveness without asking this question: Have you received God's forgiveness? We are all in need of horizontal forgiveness from each other. We need to give it. We need to receive it. But much more important than receiving *horizontal* forgiveness from each other is we need to receive *vertical* forgiveness from God.

The center of Christianity is forgiveness. The good news of the gospel is that your sins can be forgiven because of Jesus, that because Jesus paid the debt you owed on the cross in your place, you can receive that forgiveness freely by faith. God gives forgiveness *to* us, but he also gives it *through* us. He says forgiven people forgive people.

Let's keep going to verse 14. ***"And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful."***

Paul says, "Put on love." What he's saying here is that what is ultimately going to bind all of these things together is love. He says love is going to allow you to bear with one another, to forgive, and to have unity. So, he says, "Put on love," and then he says at the end of that sentence, "And be thankful."

What Paul is going to do in the upcoming verses is tell us three different times that we need to be thankful. He's encouraging us to have a thankful attitude, to have an attitude

of gratitude. The way you cultivate thankfulness is you become an expert in the areas that God has already been good to you.

For some of you, you might need to start a gratitude journal. I've heard of people doing this. Every night before bed, they write down one sentence of something they're grateful for. Maybe you need to go around the kitchen table at night and have every person in your family share one thing they're grateful for.

Another way to cultivate thankfulness is you have to figure out how to get the right perspective. It's all about perspective. Last year, I went to Brazil on one of our mission trips, and I can remember walking around the city and looking at the living conditions the entire city was living in, and I just felt overwhelmed. It was very difficult, not clean, no air conditioning, 95 degrees...very difficult.

I can remember coming back from that trip, and I had a renewed sense of thankfulness for my house. I was like, "This house is the most amazing thing in the world." Well, on the other side of things, a couple of years ago, my brother and sister-in-law, who are both veterinarians, built a new house on my parents' farm.

If you're wondering what it looks like, just imagine in your head the perfect house. That's their house. It's five bedrooms. It has a porch that wraps around. It has 20-foot ceilings in the living room. Every time I'm in that house, I'm just walking around, like, "Do not covet this house. Do not covet this house."

I always leave, and I come back to my house, and I'm like, "How in the world do we live in this little house with our six kids?" Do you know what people say when they come and visit my house? They call my house *cute*. Do you know what that means? That means you have a small house.

You see, we have to figure out how to have the right perspective, because perspective is what will allow us to be thankful. Part of growing spiritually is developing an attitude where you are more and more thankful. Thankfulness is a positive attitude that is rooted in what God has already done for you with the understanding that God didn't owe you anything.

Okay, let's keep going. Thankfulness is what's going to lead to worship. We're going to see this in verse 16. It says, "***Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.***"

Paul says if Jesus is first, it is going to change the way you worship. What I want to do is give us a theology of singing. Now, worship is more than just singing, but it certainly is

not less than singing. You've heard us say before that there are four different ways we respond to God in worship. We *obey*, we *pray*, we *sing*, and we *bring*.

So, why do we sing? Well, Paul tells us in this verse. He gives us two reasons. He says you sing to teach one another. Here's what's true: what the church sings, the church believes. There's something about singing that takes the truths of Scripture from your head down to your heart. It has been said before that songs are sermons you remember.

One of my grandmothers passed away just over 10 years ago, and she had Alzheimer's. Toward the end of her life, she got to the point where she couldn't really speak clearly and she had trouble recognizing names, but if you played the song "Amazing Grace," she could sing every word extremely clearly. Why is that? Well, I looked it up. Basically... This is a little bit of an oversimplification, but your brain stores language in one spot, but your brain stores songs and music throughout different parts of the brain.

So, this is why songs are sermons you remember. This is why this week, when you're at work or at home with the kids, you're going to be singing to yourself some of the songs we are singing today. Do you know what you're *not* going to be singing? This sermon. You're not going to be singing the points of this sermon when you're at home, because songs are what we will ultimately remember.

Paul says we sing to teach one another, and then he says we sing to admonish one another. The word *admonish* means to lovingly warn and encourage someone. When you sing, you have the opportunity to do two things. You have the opportunity to repent and remember.

So, as you are singing these songs, as you sing about the grace of God, as you sing about God's forgiveness, you have the opportunity in that moment to repent and say, "Lord, I wish I did not deserve your grace as much as I do. I'm going to repent." King David in the Psalms... In most of his songs, he is repenting all the time.

So, we have the opportunity to repent. We also have the opportunity to remember. You remember the goodness of God that you have received. When you sing, you are recalling the faithfulness of God, and those around you who are wayward or weak are encouraged. This is one of the reasons it's very important to get here on time, if at all possible, because you need to sing the first worship song. You need to sing the second worship song.

This is also why it's important to do your best to not leave right when the sermon ends, because you need the song. You need to repent and remember. Something that I'm intrigued by is why some genuine Christians do not sing. I've thought about this a lot over

the last week or two, and I'm going to give you three reasons why I think some Christians don't sing.

The first is they don't think it's a big deal. To which I would say, God is serious about singing. Here's something that's really interesting. Did you know that almost no other world religion is a singing religion? Think about it. In Islam, they are not singing. They will recite the Qur'an some, but they are not a singing religion. Hinduism, Buddhism... They will sometimes do some chants. They might recite some things, but they are not singing.

Christianity is a singing religion. One-third of the book of Psalms are songs. We're told over 400 times in the Bible about singing. We are commanded 50 different times in Scripture to sing. We're told in the Old Testament that God sings. We're told in the New Testament, in the Gospels, that the night Jesus was betrayed, he and his disciples sang a hymn. God is serious about singing.

Secondly, sometimes people do not sing because they don't feel like they are a very good singer. Just because you are going to make a joyful noise doesn't mean it has to sound like the best thing ever. If you were going to come up on this stage and have to sing in a microphone, I could understand you not wanting to sing because you don't have a good voice.

Listen. Have you ever heard me sing? It's not great, I can tell you. Come stand beside me sometime, and you will be encouraged. Here's what's worse. Not only do I not have a good singing voice; I don't even have a good talking voice. It's weak, and it breaks, and whatever. The bottom line is if God calls you to do something, you do it. You submit to what God has called you to do regardless of whether or not you are a good singer.

The third reason some people will not sing (I'm actually more concerned about this one than the others) is they feel no to little emotion about the truths they are singing. Great truth deserves great emotion. I'm just telling you that if you can come into this room or down in Lexington, and you can sing these songs and see these lyrics on the screen and feel nothing, something is wrong.

This is not a matter of worship preferences and whether or not you like a guitar and drums. That's not it. This is a matter of whether or not these great truths are leading to you having great emotion. If you can drive in the car, and you are thrilled to sing a Luke Combs song or some Alan Jackson, but you don't feel anything in *here*, or you love to sing your alma mater when your football team wins, but you don't want to sing in *here*, then I'm just telling you, that is a "check engine" light that should let you know something is wrong.

Let's finish with the last verse, verse 17. Paul is going to tie everything together. He says, **"And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."** What Paul does here at the end is he ties everything back to Jesus. Paul says, "Whatever you do, whether you are bearing with one another, whether you are forgiving one another, whether you are singing, you need to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus."

Here's the thing. If Jesus is Lord, that means he gets to decide what you are called to do. Did you notice what Paul said in verse 13? He said, "As God has forgiven you, so you also must forgive." Paul didn't say, "Hey, if you feel like it, if you feel like you're in the right mood, then maybe you should forgive." No, no. He says, "You *must* forgive."

So, the word for some of you today is you need to figure out how to joyfully submit to what God has clearly called you to do. God has called you to obey, to be generous with your finances, and the right response is to submit to that. God has called you to love your neighbor. He has called you to serve others, and the right response is to submit to that.

God has called you to worship and to forgive and to bear with one another, and the right response is to submit to that. Why? Because when you joyfully submit to what God has called you to do, it will lead to your good and flourishing, and it is going to lead to the flourishing of other people.

Here's the thing about forgiveness: God doesn't need your forgiveness; other people need your forgiveness. Your heart needs to extend forgiveness to other people. Who do you need to forgive? What debt do you need to cancel? God doesn't need to hear you sing; other people need to hear you sing. Your heart needs to hear yourself sing. Your kids and your family need to hear you sing, because when you sing, what happens is that the wayward and the weak are encouraged.

About a year ago, Olivia and I were pregnant with twins. Everything was going very well up until about 20 weeks when she had her ultrasound. At the ultrasound, Olivia was told she had a very serious complication that was going to require urgent intervention. We were told there was a 30 percent chance that we were going to lose both twins if something didn't happen.

So, we got in the car the next day. We drove to Johns Hopkins in Baltimore and had a procedure, and the procedure went well. Praise the Lord. The girls were born two months premature, and they're doing well. Five months ago, I found out that a friend in our church and his wife were pregnant with twins. So, I saw him here, and we were joking about twins and talking about how hard it is and things like that.

Two months ago, I found out they also had a similar serious complication. Unfortunately, they lost one of the two twins. It was very difficult. Well, a couple of weeks ago, Olivia and I walked in here, and we happened to stand right beside my friend and his wife who had just experienced loss.

As soon as I stood there, I started to think about how we both had walked through very similar difficult situations within the last year but had had some different outcomes. As we were standing there, we started to sing the song, "Good Plans." I heard my friend sing that he will take heart in deserts and gardens. I heard him singing that surely goodness and mercy will follow him.

I just thought to myself in that moment, "I need to hear him singing, because I need to be encouraged by this faithful brother who is walking through both life and loss at the same time, by someone who is walking through both deserts and gardens." I thought to myself, "He probably needs to hear me sing as well. He needs to hear me sing about the goodness of God so that he is reminded that the Lord is working all things together for his ultimate good."

You see, God does not need to hear you sing, but other people do. So, how we're going to close is I'm going to invite you all to respond to God in singing. I want to read these words to you. This is the Word of God. First Chronicles 16:9: **"Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works!"** Psalm 13:6: **"I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me."**

Psalm 63:7: **"...for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy."** Colossians 3:16: **"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God."** Let's pray.

Lord, I pray that you would give us thankful hearts. I pray that you would help us to forgive one another. I pray that you would help us to respond to you rightly in worship. I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.