

Fil-Am Community Church
Barry Black
9 August 2015
Connecting with God Series

“The Prayer of Cleansing”

Welcome FIL-AM, and blessings to each of you. God has prepared a magnificent sermon for you today that we can feast on. It is a sermon of Hope, Comfort, and Freedom. And, if you take to heart the message and follow-thru with the instruction it will free you from your hurts, hindrances, and hang-ups. So.... Let's Eat!

Today we are going to continue with our series; Connecting with God: The Prayer of Cleansing. And we will talk about it as it specifically relates to The Lord's Prayer - And this PART - Which we will cover - is specifically the part where we get into “Forgive Us Our Debts- As we forgive Our Debtors” is mentioned.

What? The Prayer of Cleansing? Is this going to be a foot washing ceremony? Maybe we are going to clean our golf clubs - Get all the dirt out of the grooves and get more backspin. Not quite; What we are talking about is a subject you have all heard about before: Getting right with God and getting right with yourselves and your fellow man/or woman as the case may be.

Think back to a time not too far off ago in a distant galaxy - A time (oh, maybe 10 months ago) when Pastor Rolly introduced the church to a Series that we preached on and then introduced it to each of the Cell groups called “Life's Healing Choices.”

“My, my, my; Now that is interesting” as Joe Kenda would say; How things come around? It is almost like DeJaVu; What was that time about with Life's Healing Choices? I believe it was related to and paralleled The Beatitudes of Jesus when Jesus gave what was probably the most down to earth and revealing SERMON EVER.... Remember from Matthew 5:3, the first Beatitude says “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for **theirs** is the kingdom of heaven.” Now who are the Poor In Spirit? It is those who realize that nothing they can do can please God; That they need His Grace to do anything for Him. And, if you will remember, we also mentioned “Blessed are those who mourn.” Those who mourn are those who are grieved because of their sin; they recognize their needs and present them to God. We also mentioned and called out the words of Jesus when He mentioned; “Blessed are the Meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” Who are the Meek? They are those who humble themselves. They realize they need God's Grace, His Love, and humbly understand their position to Him.

The solution was this: Taking the necessary steps to realize that you were not God - You needed someone to take away your pain and hurts, habits, and hindrances;

AND here is the big one - I had to HUMBLE MYSELF - Point to your neighbor on your left; Humble yourself. Now - Point to YOURSELF with that BIG FINGER you have and say “I Must Humble Myself!”

How did we humble ourselves? We admitted our faults to God [He already knows them by the way.]

We admitted them to ourselves by – Watch This Now - Writing them down; Almost like when we write down our Goals in Life Coaching. Again, as Joe Kenda would say; “My, My, My - Now isn’t that Interesting.”

And then - most importantly – Get ready for this - We admitted them to a close friend and were transparent. Now, I am certain you all did this during the teaching on Life Healing Choices within your cell groups? Right?

Wrong! Most of you did not..... How do I know that? Because I watched with great anticipation....

I questioned each of your Cell Group Leaders..... And I questioned a lot of you as to how you were doing in the Life’s Healing Choices Training. Sadly to say No Cell Group completed this exercise. Why? Because we do not like to get out of our own way AND WE DO NOT LIKE TO HUMBLE OURSELVES!

We do not like to be transparent and open with others. But God is a stickler – He gets down and in your Face – And He keeps coming at you with all this stuff – And it feels like He is making a Point about how you are not Breaking Free – And it all feels all sooooooooooooo Self Exposing – And I just want to go jump in a pile of Leaves and wait for the Trash Man to come - And I Want to CRY OUT – GOD! Why do I need to do this? And He smiles and says – “I made you this way, and you do not even know why?”

Don’t you hate it when God answers a question with a question?

But first, before we go down that road - let’s cover some Spiritual Ground from the Lord’s Prayer:

Slide Two: We MUST Forgive IF (there’s that word again) We Want To Be Forgiven.

Let me tell you a story of the parable where Jesus explained to His disciples ABOUT WHAT Heaven was really like. This comes from Matthew 14:23-35. Jesus is explaining what the Kingdom of Heaven is like;

And He states, “It is like a King who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And - As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him.” Now, before we go on, I want you to understand the relationship of items in this story – because it makes a huge difference.

A Denarius and a Talent were units of currency in New Testament times. A Denarius was a Roman silver coin of about 4 Grams; It was a day’s wages for a common laborer or soldier. A Talent was a Unit of weight for gold or silver, weighing about 33 grams. A Talent equals about 6,000 Denarii; So, 10,000 Talents equaled approximately 160,000 years of earnings.

Now, continuing on with the story; The man was not able to pay the debt – so the master ordered that the man, his wife, his children, and all that he had (Servants, Slaves, and Home, Furnishings) be sold

to repay the debt. The servant fell on his knees before him and stated: 'Be patient with me, and I will pay back everything.'

The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

Now on to Act 2: It is the servants turn to show mercy; So he goes out, and finds one of his fellow servants, who owed him a hundred denarii (100 days wages). He grabs the servant and begins to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demands. The fellow servant falls to his knees and begs him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'

But the man, who was forgiven by the King, refuses. Instead, he goes off and has the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened (and just remember who is always watching your actions - other servants and God), they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

Then the master [the King] calls the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?'

In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

Next Slide 3:

This Jesus states: In verse 35 "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." [What is Jesus saying? He is saying this: If I forgive you for a price that you can NEVER REPAY - 160,000 Years of Wages - Then you can certainly forgive your brother or sister for their infractions of a minor amount - 100 days wages; IF YOU CANNOT DO THIS - Then you have lost Communion with the Father and me and you really need to check your spirit:] In fact; A persons unforgiving spirit bears strong witness to the fact that He has never repented.

Now - Does this mean that if you do not forgive your fellow man- your brother - you will not be forgiven by God? Because, if God does not forgive you of your debts/sins, you cannot go to heaven;

In fact, only thru the Blood of Christ can we even be forgiven of our sins!

Here is the key: There is no forgiveness for the one who does not forgive. How could it ever be otherwise? A person's unforgiving spirit bears strong witness to the fact that He has never repented. And; God, not forgiving an unforgiving person is akin to Him withholding blessings from him/her in the context of fellowship with them; What are the consequences? God simply refuses to listen to the prayers of another who stubbornly refuses to forgive his brother; God's unforgiving spirit relates to

Jesus' ethic of love and Jesus is saying His Father - God will condemn the unforgiving person (i.e. to hell) as long as the unforgiving person is in this state. Why? Because it demonstrates fully that they have never repented in the first place.

Why is this important? Because when we come to Christ, we trust in Him and His forgiveness for our sins; And, as such, we agree to allow him to live inside of our hearts and follow after him - Living a life of repentance, forgiveness, and love – Just as Jesus did here on earth.

FORGIVENESS IS THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE FOR US TO HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST!

Notice these verses:

Next Slide 4;

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Mark 11:25 And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Matthew 6:15 But, if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Then, as to qualify if the forgiveness is limited to a “I will do this, this time, but no more.” We get:

Matthew 18:21-22 Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.

Now, all you Math experts out there who go “I know what that means, that is, we must forgive our brothers 490 times.” That is not what that means; It means “Unlimited.” God multiplies his pardons, and so should we; It means that we should make it our constant practice to forgive injuries, and should accustom ourselves to it until forgiveness becomes habitual.

Next Slide 5:

Furthermore, in Psalms 78: 35-39 we read; “They (Israel) remembered that God was their Rock, that God Most High was their Redeemer. But then they would flatter him with their mouths, lying to him

with their tongues; their hearts were not loyal to him, they were not faithful to his covenant. Yet he was merciful; he forgave their iniquities and did not destroy them. Time after time he restrained his anger and did not stir up his full wrath. He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return.”

Next Slide 6:

So the first part of this is to recognize that we were made to be forgiving creatures as WE HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN (Modeling the love of Christ that He showed us.) But there is more.....

God's *modus operandi* is love. GOD IS LOVE! Everything He does, He does for Love. And Yes, He corrects us because HE LOVES US. And His goal, since we fell away in the Garden, is to mend the hurt, pain, and anguish that we caused by our sin and broken relationship with God. Therefore, when Jesus says that the Father will not forgive, what He means is that God will allow the person to walk in their sin (that is, He will not overlook it and embrace the person), to the necessary extent; until they come face to face with it and see it for what it is. In other words, if the person is unwilling to forgive, he/she will deal with a God twice as stubborn when it comes to forgiving. God will not give in and the sinning brother will have to deal with an unforgiving Father, on whom he depends for the basic necessities of life (Matthew 6:25-32).

Note the slide; God's intention, as the unforgiving brother goes his way in unforgiveness, is to expose him, to bring about legitimate shame and repulsiveness toward the sin, AND to get the child to come face to face with His sin. A rare blend of justice and mercy.

The Goal is this: To re-establish the broken relationships between God and the people involved.

Now: Having made that point - and it is a major point; God will not continue in a relationship where you can rely on the sustainment of your basic needs; your prayers being answered; and your abiding in Him; If you do not forgive as He has forgiven you.

Let's go to Slide 7: So; we need to do as it states in (Hebrews 12:1-2). “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.”

Because we are faulty, we make mistakes, we have regrets. We have remorse; We have guilt. And sometimes we have shame. That guilt keeps us stuck. It keeps us stuck in our past – we can't get on with it because we keep thinking about what we did. We get stuck in our pain. We get stuck in our problems. In fact, the Enemy – SATAN – uses this guilt and shame to keep us stuck!

So, in order to get unstuck – we turn to a variety of behaviors - Depression; Being Judgmental; Gossiping of others (a form of judgmentalism); and Guilt – And then we tend to rationalize things saying “That isn't so bad what I did.....” In other words..... We tell Rational ----- Lies.

So what is going on with why we always feel either judged or judging of someone else; Yes, we are Guilt ridden; Judgmental people feel judged themselves. They don't feel forgiven so they don't

want anybody else to feel forgiven. The more guilty you feel the more judgmental you're going to be.

So you are asking yourself - Why Brother Barry do I have to ADMIT MY FAULTS TO A God who knows what I have done already? Why then do I need to Admit to Myself (by writing everything down)? Why can't I just say it? And please- please tell me why I need to confess to another human being my faults, pretenses, and lies – Why bring him/her into this at all?

Because God says to - I didn't come up with this; Pastor Rolly didn't come up with this; and Pastor David didn't come up with this. Jesus did; Look at James again; James is addressing a truth about God: When we confess our sins to one another, which requires us to be absolutely transparent, God is able to heal and cleanse us. We experience a spiritual, physical, and emotional restoration.

But, if you want the real answer it is this: When God made you in the Garden He breathed Life into you; And He wired you a very special way; Take a look at this verse so often overlooked in scripture.

Next Slide 8;

I want you to see something very special and we are going to go back to the beginning, the Garden of Eden to see this. In Genesis 1:27, it states; "So God created man in His own image; He created him in the image of God; He created them male and female." The image of God was burned into the being of man and it makes all of the difference for us.

Note something here: God's image is not placed in anything else. The universe is made but not granted God's image. The Earth with all of its grandeur, is spoken into existence but does not have God's image ingrained upon it. Animal and plant life came into being, but without God's image upon it. Only when God creates people does He grace us with His image on the sixth day.

God has revealed Himself to us in personal terms. In the Bible, God tells us that He is Father, High Priest, Comforter, Shepherd, and many other personal terms. He speaks to us, reveals to us His will, and acts as a friend to us.

God desires to know us and has therefore placed His image within us. We bear a resemblance to Him in that we are designed for relationships. Why did God create you in the first place - For Relationship!! The relationships that we enjoy with other human beings are part of the general blessing of being alive. We love and care for those in our circles of influence. In bearing God's image, it is obvious then that God also wants us to relate to Him.

BUT, in Eden, the image of God in man was marred. Sin stands in opposition to people mirroring the character and nature of God. While God wants the crown jewel of creation – humanity – to be a showpiece of His handiwork, sin obstructs that purpose. It keeps us from knowing the very One who has placed a reflection of Himself in us.

This is a reminder for us that sin is not just a glitch in our moral character but an affront to the very nature of our creation. It is an affront to our Creator - God. As the Lord seeks to draw us close, He then does all the work necessary to reestablish His image within us through the redemptive work of Christ.

Why is GOD'S image within us? So we might desire Him. The Bible states that He has placed eternity in the heart of man (Ecclesiastes 3:11). We clearly see from the whole of redemptive history that God is seeking those who do not seek Him. God has a great desire to restore the marred image of Himself in us through a saving relationship with the Messiah - Jesus, whom He has sent for us.

In a sense, Is God Living His own life thru you and me - His children? Yes! He desires you so much that He has given up everything for you to desire Him!

So this is the Key Point from all this: You will never grow a close relationship with God by just attending church once a week or even having a daily quiet time. Friendship with God is built by sharing ALL your life experiences with him.

It is important to establish the habit of a daily devotional time with God, but God wants more than an appointment in your schedule. He wants to be included in every activity, every conversation, every problem, and even every thought. You can carry on a continuous conversation with Him by including Him in everything you do – Note the next slide; This speaks to “Praying without ceasing”, which means, conversing with God while shopping, driving, working, or performing any other everyday tasks (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Many times Monks, when they enter the Monastery, take vows where they do not speak for a year. This allows them to focus on what they are doing, seeking God, and being about their humble nature in serving Christ. And they go about doing their tasks habitually praying – and doing unto God everything that they do; Sweeping the floors, cleaning the monastery, and performing humble tasks. It puts praying without ceasing in a new context.

Church, the key to friendship with God, is not changing what you do, but changing *your attitude* toward what you do.

What you normally do for yourself, you begin doing for God, whether it is eating, bathing, working, relaxing, or taking out the trash. We do not need to get away from our daily routine in order to worship God; We can worship Him in everything we do by doing it for Him.

This is God's ideal. In Eden, worship was not an event to attend, but a perpetual attitude; Adam and Eve were in constant communion with God. Since God is with you all the time, there is no place is any closer to God than the place where you are right now. The Bible says, “He rules everything and is everywhere and is in everything” (Ephesians 4:6b).

How do we get rid of all the baggage we tend to carry around with us? The hurts, the pain, the grief, the guilt? Well here is the solution - Again.

Slide 9

I am going to lay out for you what it is you need to do to connect; To get it right with God and others and in turn, FREE yourself from all Hurts, hangups, pain - guilt – and shame.

Point 1; Review every area of your life.

That's the first step. We call this making a personal moral inventory. Or a personal spiritual assessment. What you do is you sit down with God in a quiet space by yourself all alone, when you're unhurried and you do what I just told you, "God, I'm going to do business with you. I'm going to make a list of anything that's between me and you that's wrong in my life that I feel guilty about – consciously or unconsciously – help me to see the things that I know are wrong and the things that I don't know that are wrong." The Bible says in Lamentations 3 "Let us test and examine our ways." Or as Psalm 139:23-24 states "Search me, O God, and know my heart. Test me and know my thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you. [Anything!] And lead me along the path of everlasting life."

Take your time. Write it all down. You are asking, "Couldn't I just think it? Why do I have to write it down?" You have to write it down. Writing makes it specific. Thoughts tend to disentangle themselves through the lips and the fingertips. You talk it and you write it. If you haven't written it down, you haven't really thought about it. It makes it specific.

Point 2;

2. I repent of every sin.

First, I review every area, then I repent of every sin. What does it mean to repent? It means three things. It means first, I take responsibility for my sin. I'm not blaming anybody else for this. Second, it means I turn away from those things. And third, it means I turn toward God and his grace. I say, God I don't want to do that anymore. I take responsibility. I turn away. And I turn to. That's what it means to repent.

Why do you do that? The Bible says this "Let us turn again in repentance to the Lord. Let us lift our hearts and hands to God in heaven and say, 'We have sinned and rebelled.'" You write it down. You accept responsibility. The Bible says this "If we claim to be without sin we're just deceiving ourselves. [We're living in a world of illusion, We're acting in a fantasy world. We're pretending. We're faking it.] If we claim to be without sin, we're just deceiving ourselves but we are certainly not deceiving God. And we're not even deceiving anybody else 'cause everybody else knows you've blown it. We just deceive ourselves. It's self deception. And the truth is not in us."

Listen closely to this: the things that defeat you in your life, the self-defeating habits in your life that you don't like about you, would you like to get rid of them? You will stop defeating yourself when you stop deceiving yourself. I will stop defeating myself when I stop deceiving myself. It all starts with gut level honesty. No matter how much you rationalize it and excuse it, it's wrong. And I need to admit it, confess it, and get it out of my life.

Pt 3;

I resolve to make restitution.

As you go through that list you find somebody that you have hurt and then you go and make restitution. If you've hated them, if you've hurt them, mistreated them or you've cheated them, if possible you make restitution. Sometimes it's not possible. They may have died. They may have moved away and you can't find them. They may have remarried and it would be not a good thing

for you to open an old wound. So, in some situations you can't make restitution. But anything you can do to make it right, you do so.

There's a story in the Bible of a guy named Zacchaeus. He was a tax collector. He was a tax cheat. One day Jesus came to his house and Zacchaeus was so touched by Jesus, here's what he said "If I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to your house."

Pt 4; I receive God's forgiveness.

Mercy is forgiveness for all the things you've done in the past. Grace is the power to change in the future. You need both. You need mercy for all the things you've done wrong in the past (forgiveness). And you need grace, the power to change in the future.

You believe God's promise "If we freely admit that we have sinned [that is if we confess our sins] we find God utterly reliable. He forgives our sins. [God forgives us. Your forgiveness is not based on who you are or your deserving it. It's based on God's character. He's utterly reliable. Our forgiveness is based on who God is, not on who we are. If we freely admit that we have sinned we find God utterly reliable. He's not going to backtrack on this.] He forgives our sins and makes us thoroughly clean [Wouldn't you like to be totally clean on the inside? Have all that shame wiped out?]

God could never forgive me." You're wrong. I don't know what you've done but it doesn't matter. "I've had an affair." Yeah, so what? You don't think God could forgive that? "I've had an abortion." So what? You don't think God can forgive that? "I've stolen from my company." You don't think God can forgive that? God can forgive anything.

Pt 5; 5. I reveal my faults to a friend.

You need one person that you come clean with.

You say, "Come on Barry! Can't I just be forgiven by confessing to God?" Of course you can. But here's the question. You need to ask yourself, "Do I want to be emotionally healed or just forgiven? Do I want to be emotionally healed from all that shame and hurt or do I just want to be forgiven?" If all you want to do is be forgiven, and you want to carry the weight and the pain and the resentment and pressure all the rest of your life and have it come back and keep messing with your mind, all you need to do is just confess it to God. God will forgive you. You don't have to tell anybody else. Just tell God and he'll forgive you. But you'll keep on carrying it.

The way God wired us is that we need other people in our lives for healing. God wired us that we only get well in community. You say, "It's humbling!" That's why you need to do it. When you tell one other person, you don't just tell God, but you tell somebody with skin on what you've done. Something happens in your life that sets you free in ways you can't imagine.

The Bible says "Confess your sins to each other [Emphasis is on "each other"] and pray for each other [we're to confess and we're to pray for each other.] so that you may be... [What?] healed."

Revealing your feeling is the beginning of healing. So let me ask you again: Do you want to be forgiven or do you want to be emotionally healed?

Why does God want me to drag somebody else into this?" I'll tell you why. Because God knows that the root of your problem is relational. You don't even realize that. But the root of all your problems are relational. Your relationship to God and your messed up relationship to other people are the root of all your problems.

When we don't have one person in our lives that we're completely honest with, we wear masks. And we pretend and fake it and we're dishonest with each other and we play games and we're hypocrites. We pretend that we have it all together when everybody knows we don't. We act like it's all right when it's not. And we deny our true feelings. What does that do? It isolates you from other people when you're not authentic. When you fake it, it prevents intimacy. And it keeps you from the deepest level of love. You cannot love fully with guilt in your heart. You just can't.

You say, what do I say to this person? You say, "I need somebody to come clean with. I don't need you to fix me. I don't need you to give me any advice. I just need you to listen to me while I do a little spring-cleaning. I've already confessed this stuff to God. I just need to confess it to one other person." What you do is share, here's what I've done. Here's how I feel about it. Here's where I want to change. And that's it.

If you actually shared this with a mature Christian, they would be honored to hear your confession. A truly mature believer is not going to be blown away by that. They're going to understand the importance of it. They've done it themselves likely. They're not going to be blown away. They're going to be honored by it.

If you want healing there's got to be some revealing, and you have to stop concealing. The very thing that you don't want anybody to know about, that's the very area God wants to give you the most grace, the most mercy, and the most healing. And you will receive the most joy when you're forgiven.

6. Repeat these steps regularly.

That's step number 6. Repeat the other five regularly. You guys, I'm a grandfather, so let me give you some advice. Never procrastinate changing a diaper. The longer you procrastinate, the messier it's going to get. Never put off cleaning up a mess.

Another piece of advice. Take the garbage out of your kitchen every day. What if you only took the garbage out of your kitchen once a year, a month, a week? Your house would stink. Because you haven't taken the garbage out maybe ever.

These six steps- we are to take them together. You're not on your own. You're not a lone ranger. You're not out there by yourself. We're all in the same boat. We've all blown it. We all need forgiveness. We all need cleansing. And God wants to bless us all. We are a church family. We are better together. You need a church home. You need to be connected.

We are going to pray in a moment and it is going to be a very special prayer;

I want to pray for you right now that God releases a special dispensation to confess your faults- THAT He releases you to go boldly into the Throne room of Grace; and to Take Back your Joy; Your Heart; Your Peace; and Your Love for others.

If you will do that - God will bless you for it; You will know Him like you never have by being REAL - By allowing God to take your pain, your shame, your cares, and your guilt.

Let Us Pray.