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**Series: Useless to Useful**  
**Message: Philemon - The Gospel in Action**

**Transcribed Message**  
**March 12, 2017**  
**Philemon 8-16**

I am very confident that everybody in this room has faced a choice on many occasions, sometimes daily, to either go to somebody and ask them for forgiveness, or to have somebody come to us and ask us if we would forgive them. That's just part and parcel of life. It's sometimes, as I said, a daily encounter and a daily need. As we face that choice, I think one of the first things we would do well to remember is what we looked at two weeks ago when we said forgiven people forgive. That probably should be the first thought that comes to our mind when we need to ask somebody for forgiveness and when somebody comes to us in asking us for forgiveness. Probably the first thing that we should think of is this is the right thing to do because forgiven people forgive. Forgiven people reach out and ask for forgiveness. But you know, as we face that choice and that decision, and sometimes it's easier than others, isn't it?

But as we face that decision and that choice, another thing that we should consider is the fact that the Bible tells us that there are a number of things that happen in our life spiritually when we don't seek that forgiveness and when we don't extend that forgiveness to other people when they come to us. Things like bitterness and resentment, anger, a hardening of the spiritual arteries, a hardened heart, that sense of grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit, the short circuiting of our prayer life. The list is pretty lengthy and is not a very pretty list when you consider the fact that God wants forgiven people to be forgiving each other. In fact, Neil Anderson says in his counseling he sees unforgiveness as one of the leading causes of defeat in the Christians that he's trying to help work through any number of things, saying that very often it comes back. They think they're dealing with this problem here, but in his experience it can be something else and sometimes very often it's coming back to another problem over here in which forgiveness was never extended or received. One of the things that we can be certain is God does not want us there. He does not want us in a place where either we

are not seeking forgiveness or we are not willing to extend that forgiveness and we know that in part because He's given us a whole book in the Bible just dealing with this matter of forgiveness. That's where we are. That's where we've been for a few weeks.

We're in the little book of Philemon. It's in between Titus and the book of Hebrews. It is on page 1000 if you grab one of those pew Bibles. In this little short letter, we really have this theme and the importance of forgiveness brought to us front and center. This morning we want to see that both the forgiver and the forgiven have the opportunity to display a trust in a good and sovereign God, and it is for both a step of faith. For both it is a step of faith.

Let's do a quick review. We haven't been able to have back-to-back weeks of this little book of Philemon. It's only 25 verses, so we're taking a little longer because we've had some good reasons to interrupt it. Lord willing, next Sunday we'll get to finish and we'll do actually back-to-back studies in the book of Philemon. But let's do a quick review. If you've been here before you know all the stuff. If you haven't been here before, this'll catch you up.

The author of this little letter is, of course, the apostle Paul. The apostle Paul when he writes this is in Rome. He is under arrest, probably in this instance, his first imprisonment. He is under house arrest and he's towards the end of his life. In about 62 AD, so he's probably got about five years left before he is taken by an execution for his faith.

The recipient of the letter is the man whose name it bears and is a man named Philemon. Philemon lives in the city of Colossae. Philemon is evidently a well-to-do man. He is a wealthy man. The church of Colossae meets in his home which would be an indication to us that he was a man of means. To have a home in that 1<sup>st</sup> century that was large enough for the church to meet there and so they met in his home.

The mailman has just come and the mailman has brought him two letters from the apostle Paul. One of them we call Colossians and the other one just has his name on it and it's Philemon. I'd be fascinated to know which one of them got read first, but it really doesn't matter because they are like two ends of the same book. They both will speak to some of the same things in Philemon's life.

The occasion for writing it is all about a man named Onesimus. Onesimus was Philemon's slave and we touched on that little bit a few weeks ago. He had run away. Evidently he had stolen and done wrong to Philemon. He had run away and now he has returned. He is one of the mailmen that has brought this letter back. He may very well have been standing right close by as Philemon begins to read this little letter.

The theme of the book is, as we said, forgiveness. The key verse is verse 18, which brings to the front that if Onesimus has wronged you in any way, Philemon, or if he owes you anything, here's what I want you to do. We'll get to see this next Sunday. I want you to charge that to my account. All that he has done by way of wronging you is to come to my account.

What we get to do this morning in verses 8 through 16 is really looking at the appeal of a father. I think every father in this room knows what it is to appeal to their children on some level, at some time, for some reason. That is exactly what Paul is going to do. He is the spiritual father in this context and he is going to appeal to Philemon on that basis. You could almost say verses 1 through 7 underscore what God has done in Philemon's life. That's what we've already seen, and it has been a mighty work that God has done in Philemon's life. Then we get really past verses 8 and 9 and in this next section it is really going to underscore what God has done in Onesimus's life. So here is the father of both of these men spiritually speaking as we're going to see as he writes a letter of appeal.

Let's begin by noting first of all that there is to be love over law. What I want to have you see with me this morning is really the basis of forgiveness. When we're extending forgiveness to someone, even when we're asking forgiveness of someone, we're going to see three strong principles in these verses this morning that really undergird and underscore the basis of this forgiveness. We start off in verses 8 and 9. It's the law that is superseded by love. Love is the highest ethic in the Christian experience. Verses 8 and 9: "Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you – I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus." Let's stop right there. Paul has the authority, doesn't he, but law has its limits. That's what we see in verse 8. Paul has the authority but law has its limits.

You notice again the gentleness of the apostle Paul as he takes on this role of peacemaker. If you want to be a peacemaker, and all of us should want to be because that's who God has called us to be, one of the things that you have to have to be a peacemaker is you have to have a spirit of gentleness. That's what you see here. In this instance, Paul is not relying at all on the authority of his apostleship. We commented a couple weeks ago that in 9 of 13 of his letters, he is very free to say I am the apostle. My name is Paul and I'm writing to you because I have the authority of being an apostle of Jesus Christ. He did so in almost every one of those letters without exception because his apostleship was under attack. His authority was under attack and he reminded people in the front end of who he was. He doesn't need to do that here. He's not doing that here. His apostleship is not in question and he is, in fact, writing as a peacemaker. He is going to come to Philemon and he is going to appeal to Philemon on a totally different level. He is going to try to persuade him on a different set of principles. This first one is the ethic of love and how it is that love takes precedence over law and over rule. I want you to see what he does here in showing us the limits that law has and the higher ethic of love.

The first one, of course, simply is the law is never enough. Law is never enough. You can't write enough laws to cover all of the circumstances that we encounter in life, can you? I would imagine that in every state and in the federal government, if we stacked up the laws of our land, it would be beyond impressive. It would be probably overwhelming. Every time something happens we tend to write a lot to cover that particular issue, that particular problem. We can't do that in relationships. You can't do that in your walk with God. Certainly God has given us laws by which to live our life. He has given us His commands, but the higher ethic always comes back to love because you simply can't write down enough laws to cover every circumstance that we're going to encounter.

The second thing we realize is that there is no power in that law. There is no power in that law. The law can tell us what's right and what's wrong but it doesn't have an inherent enabling and ability and capacity to motivate us and to enable us to obey it. That's the testimony of the apostle Paul in Romans 7. He says that the things that I want to do I don't do those things. The things that I don't want to do, those things I find myself

doing. It is just an inherent admission that within the law, the command, the rules there's no inherent power. That comes from the enabling work of the Holy Spirit.

Thirdly, the external conformity to law leaves the heart unchanged. That's why Paul is not going to command Philemon to do something in this circumstance. That's why he is going to say to him I'm going to appeal to a higher ethic. That higher ethic is going to be the command of love in your life because that ultimately is what's going to bring about the change that he desires. If he would have written to Philemon and said, Philemon, I'm laying down the law. This is the apostle Paul. I'm after you. You've got a situation in your life that you need to be leaving with and this is exactly what you need to do. Philemon might've said this is the apostle Paul writing to me. I better do this. But his heart is unchanged and he does it simply to conform outwardly to what the apostle tells him to do. That's what law and rules do. They may bring about conformity but they don't have the capacity and the ability to bring about internal change. Paul's going to appeal on a different level. He is going to come to Philemon with a whole different understanding of why it is that he should do this.

Secondly notice, Christ is the example. Love is what is supreme. Look at verse 9: "yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you – I, Paul, an old man in our prisoner also for Christ Jesus." Jesus's response. Remember when that young man came to him and said what's the greatest thing I could do? What is the number one thing I could do to please God? Jesus very beautifully and very succinctly said you just love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength. Oh, by the way, the second thing you need to do is you need to love your neighbor as you already love yourself. Remember Jesus basically encapsulated the whole law in those two things, because the highest ethic by which we can live our life is the principle of love. If we'll just express the love that Christ has shown to us and follow the example of Christ, we don't have to get bogged down in all of the rules and the regulations because we are motivated out of the spirit of love empowered by the Holy Spirit to do the things that God has called us to do, which is to love God first and then love each other second. That's the appeal that he makes here. He does it on the basis of what he's already identified in Philemon's life as this very principle, right?

Look back at verse 7. What does he say about Philemon? “For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love.” Back in verse 5, he commends him because he has a reputation for being a man who loves all the saints. Philemon and Paul have a special relationship. They have a deep fondness and affection and a love for each other. Paul here says there's something far greater than the demand that I could place upon you as an apostle. There is a higher calling on your life that you would follow the highest ethic within the Christian life and that is the ethic of love. It is almost like Paul says to Philemon I've already commented, I've already commended you for your love. Can you do it one more time? Philemon, can you do it one more time? Can you do it in in another instance for another person? We all know your reputation is what it is. There's one more situation and there's one more person that I want you to extend this love to for which Christ has already been our example.

Now as if that were not enough, Paul throws in two other persuaders. That seems pretty persuasive, but then he throws in two other persuaders. He says, by the way, I'm an old man. I'm a *presbutos*. I'm a *presbutos*. This is from which we get the word “Presbyterian”, from which we get the word “elder”. Paul is saying by the way, in addition to the highest ethic that is out there, don't forget I'm an old man. I can't wait to use that on you guys at some point. I don't know. Paul was about 60. I'm going to be able to be at a point where I'm going to be able to use this on you guys pretty soon. I look forward to being able to say would you just do this for old Carlo? He's an old man. He is a *presbutos*. Carlon needs you to do this for him. So that day is coming soon and I've already warned you.

Now the second thing he says is he's a prisoner. It's almost like he brings in these two other persuaders. Don't forget I'm an old man. I'm an old man and I'm in prison. I'm under house arrest. Not a prisoner to Rome again. Same thing we saw last time. He is not going to confess that he's a prisoner of Rome. He is a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

So here's the thing. You can't help but wonder if Onesimus having handed off these two letters with Epaphras and Apaphroditis. Philemon has them and you almost wonder if he may very well have been close by as Philemon is working his way through this letter now. He's come through verses 1 through 9 and he's got a sense of

something that Paul is bringing to his attention. He doesn't know yet what, but he's reading this through and you couldn't help but think that some of those thoughts must already be percolating in his head about what it is that Paul is bringing to him. Then we get to it, because the second principle that he brings is love is going to take precedence over law.

Now notice the second one. I want you to be understanding that you are to be useful rather than useless. Useful takes precedence over those that are useless. The gospel changes everything. Let's look at verse 10 through 14 because he lays it out here: "I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me. I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but by your own accord."

Look at this. We're finally to verse 10 and the name Onesimus appears for the first time in the letter. Now the emotion and feelings have certainly flooded into Philemon's heart and mind because here, even though Onesimus has been a part of the bringing of this letter, and we don't know what all that looks like, but now it's getting to be front and center. We're ready to get into the heart of the issue of forgiveness that Paul has been building up to. I just go back to what we've said repeatedly. Forgiven people forgive. Forgiven people forgive. That's the underlying basis because you know what? It's the gospel that changes everything in our life.

Let's look at 3 things here that Paul points to to underscore this idea of that which was useless becoming useful. The first thing he speaks of in verse 10 is salvation. Again, we just read that 10<sup>th</sup> verse: "I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment." Those words just had to jump off of the page for Philemon. I would think those words would've been first the name Onesimus. Now he's finally said it. That's what the letter is about. It's going to be Onesimus. The fact that he says he's my child had to just jump off the page as Philemon's reading. Then whose father I am. This is familiar language with Paul. When Paul speaks of what it means to be the spiritual parent. 1 Corinthians chapter 4 verse 15: "For though you have

countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” We have one physical father. We have one spiritual father or spiritual mother. Someone who was a part of bringing the gospel to our attention. Paul was that one here in the life of Onesimus. From a slave to now he's a son. He has experienced what it means to be born again. Conversion has happened in this man's life. He has undergone the new birth. His eternal destiny has been forever changed. Paul underscores the fact that that change of heart is evidenced in a state of repentance, in a spirit of repentance that Onesimus is in. How do we know that?

The very turning away from what we were trusting before is what repentance is. When the Bible calls on us to repent and to believe, it is really saying whatever it is that you're trusting, whatever it is that you're holding on to, turn from that and go in the opposite direction. If you're trusting in your works to get you to heaven, then repent. Stop that. Believe that it is by faith alone. If you are walking in sin and out of fellowship with God, stop that. Repent and turn away from that and begin to walk in agreement with God. That's what's happened in Onesimus's life. How do we know that? We know that because Paul underscores the fact that he is there with him. He has undergone this new birth, but probably for our purposes, even more importantly, he's there. He went back. He went back to Philemon.

What is the hardest part of forgiveness? What's the hardest part of asking somebody for forgiveness, for how you've wronged them and sinned against them? Or what's the hardest part of extending forgiveness to somebody who's wronged or sinned against you? It probably is the first step. When you have to go and ask someone for forgiveness, it is the first step that is the hardest step. When someone is coming to you and you're processing the fact that they're coming and they're asking you for forgiveness, it's that first response back that's the hardest. So here's Onesimus. He's giving us every indication that God has done a dramatic work in his life. He's there. He went back to Philemon. A very difficult thing to do, no doubt. So there is salvation.

Then noticeably there's transformation. Verse 11. There's a transformation that is going on. “Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.” What you have here is a play on words and that play on words is the word Onesimus. Onesimus means useful and it was a fairly common slave name in the 1<sup>st</sup>

century. If you had someone who was a slave and they were useful to you, you called them useful, which was to say Onesimus. Also, here is Onesimus, who at this juncture in his relationship to Philemon was anything but useful. He was betraying his name. He was not useful at all. He was useless to Philemon when he stole from him, when he ran away from him. He was dishonest. He was unreliable. He was living out the very opposite of his namesake, which is to be useful. But now there's a change. There's been a conversion. There's been salvation. The useless guy whose name meant useful becomes useful again, forsaking this life of being useless. So he comes back a new man. I think about what we looked at in Colossians chapter 3 with regard to a slave's response to his master. This is how Onesimus is coming back. "Bondservants, obey and everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord." So that's how Onesimus is coming back to Philemon. He is coming back having been brought to faith in Christ and now undergoing a transformation in his heart and in his spirit and in his behavior.

One of the things that as you're flipping and going through the channels on TV one of those that I like to watch is those stories about restoration of homes or cars. I mean, it's amazing what these guys and gals do in restoring a home, changing it completely in its appearance, just a total redo. Or when they take some old junker of a car and they take it and they totally restore it. They take it to a level that you couldn't have imagined that it would ever get back to. That's what's happening in this man's life. That which was useless has now truly become useful again. The Bible calls that word the work of sanctification, setting us apart, changing us, transforming us.

Then notice in verses 12 and 13 the third thing, and there is this matter of faithfulness: "I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel." So his salvation, his transformation has brought about this new relationship, certainly with Paul, and this new behavior. I get a feeling that in this very short period of time, Onesimus has grown to deeply love the apostle Paul. He is his spiritual father. He has opened his eyes to a whole new way of looking at life and the world. I get a feeling that Paul's love is being reciprocated and it's coming right back to Onesimus because he sees in this man great potential no doubt as he steps into this

role of serving Paul. After coming to faith, he is staying there and he is serving Paul. All the things that Paul needed and couldn't do for himself, here he has somebody that has undergone this dramatic change and he's ministering to Paul. Paul just says I'd love to keep him here. I'd love to keep him here knowing that you would want him to be here ministering to me because it would be an extension of your love as well.

So he wants to keep him there, but this is what he knows. He knows in this circumstance that's not best for Philemon and he knows that's not best for Onesimus. Those two guys need to get back together and there needs to be a healing of their relationship. When there's been a new birth, when there's been a transformation, new behavior, new relationship, nothing is more inconsistent than to remain stuck in a state of unforgiveness towards another brother or sister in Christ. Now he's dealing not with Onesimus who didn't know the Lord and Philemon who did, but now he is dealing with Onesimus who knows the Lord and is a believer and he is dealing with Philemon who is a believer. So we have two believers. There's nothing more inconsistent in our walk with God than to remain in a state of unforgiveness towards another brother or sister in Christ. At every level, whether that's within our marriages, within our family, within our other relationships in the body of Christ, nothing speaks a more contradictory message than two believers who will not extend forgiveness to each other. That's why he says that I'd love to keep him here, but that is selfishness on my part because I know there's a greater good that needs to be achieved here. The greater good, that greater goal is that these two men would step out in faith and they would believe that a good and sovereign God wants them to be reconciled to each other.

Notice this third and final piece which is a beautiful part of the story. He says thirdly the divine perspective overcomes human perspective. Seeing what the world can't see is ultimately what we need to see. Verse 14: "...but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord." There it is again. That same principle. Love trumps the law. "For this perhaps is why he has parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother – especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord." Now, my friends, what we have here is a beautiful picture of the providence of God. This is a

beautiful picture of the providence of God. We're going to camp on this for just a moment.

Let's start off by just talking about what is providence. When we talk about the providence of God, what is it that we're talking about? The doctrine of providence puts the stress on God's governing and sustaining the world that He has created. When we talk about the providence of God, we're talking about the fact that what God creates, He sustains, and what He creates and He sustains, He governs by His sovereign might and power. We talk about the providence of God and it's almost like it's an umbrella over the affairs of life. It is a picture to us of the fact that we have a God who is overseeing and He is governing and He is sustaining life in all of its many facets.

The Westminster Confession cannot be improved upon in its definition. It says this: "God, the great Creator of all things, doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence according to His infallible foreknowledge and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness and mercy." You can just sit on that definition and meditate on that definition for a while because that is the providence of God. What He has created, He sustains, and what He sustains, He governs from the greatest to the least. In all of His wisdom, in all of His power, God is overseeing all of these things.

Here's the point. The providence of God is like you're in a car and you're driving, but the providence of God is looking in the rear view mirror of life. The providence of God is what we see in the rearview mirror. The providence of God only begins to make sense as we see and look back at the faithfulness of God in the affairs of our life. So we are really saying in the providence of God, we're looking at the faithfulness of God. When we look out through the windshield and we're looking at our present moment in time, we very seldom understand all that God is doing. We don't know. We don't see the hand of God working in all of the different ways in it and the different people's lives and the different affairs that He is governing and sustaining. But, when we look in that rearview mirror, then we begin to see the hand of God and the faithfulness of God. That is why I said a couple of weeks ago regularly just stop and look in the rearview mirror and see the faithfulness of God in your life. I would not be standing here today if it were

not for the providence of God. I wouldn't be married to Bonnie if it were not for the providence of God. I wouldn't be anywhere near who I am if it were not for the providence of God. I can go back and look at high points and low points all through my life and I can say as I look in the rearview mirror that is the faithfulness of God. In both the good things and the bad, that's the faithfulness of God. That is what Paul is saying here and that's why when we're looking out that front windshield, we need to be slow to speak. We need to be slow to speak about what God is or isn't doing because we don't know all the time what God is and isn't doing. We need to be careful to be cautious that we don't complain and grumble and become bitter and angry because we don't see what we're going to see in a given period of time as we get to look back and see the faithful hand of God.

If you are in that circumstance right now much like Philemon was, this is the verse 15. Look at verse 15 again. This is a beautiful statement of God's providence: "For this perhaps is why..." What is perhaps why? The providence of God is perhaps why he has parted from you for a while that you might have him back forever. Philemon didn't see that. Philemon is just like us, right? This circumstance breaks upon his life and he's probably angry and upset and mad and bitter. Maybe at God on some level, but certainly at Onesimus. And Onesimus. What did Onesimus think he was doing? He thought he was running away from it all. He thought he was getting away from it and he was going to run away to the big city of Rome. He was going to become a lost man in a mass of humanity. Except. Except he failed to account for the providence of God in his life. He forgot to account for the Hound of Heaven who would pursue him wherever he went, to bring him to Himself. God had other plans. God had other plans.

Now, the providence of God includes this second point as well. This is the hard part. God doesn't condone sinful behavior, but He works in spite of it and through it. Theologians call this concurrence. Concurrence. It is the coterminous work of God in which He governs our world without violating our freedom of choice. How does God do that? I don't know. I hope there will be a class on the providence of God one day in eternity. We will probably take about 1 million years to get through that one class alone. But that's what God does. He is sovereign over all the details of life without causing us to lose the freedom of choice that we make as we go through life. Some of those

choices that we make, and some of the choices that other people make that impact us, are sinful and they're wrong and they're hurtful and they're tragic, but God uses them in our life for good. I look out at a group of people this morning and I know story after story after story in which you have lived through this truth. Tragedies. Brokenness. Sin. Pain. Heartache. Discouragement. Despair. Verse 15. Maybe, Philemon, as you step back and look at this, you'll see the work of God. We know Romans 8:28 says for God works for good, doesn't He? He works for good all things for those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. All things work together for good.

You can't say what Joseph did in Genesis 50 verse 20 if you don't believe in the sovereign providence of God. As he stood there before those 11 brothers, he said that you guys meant this for evil in my life but God meant it for good. All they had done was hated him, sold him into slavery, hoping to never see his face again. Such was the level of their hatred. He could stand before them, having endured some of the most horrific things that any man has endured, and he could say to them, you meant it for evil but God meant it for good. Paul says to Philemon he has parted for a while that you could get him back forever. It's the beauty of God's work, isn't it? Philemon, do you see now what God is doing in your life and in the life of Onesimus?

How will this relationship be restored? How is it that these two men will bridge this breach that has caused them to be at odds with each other? How are they going to overcome this broken relationship? There's only one way and that one way is when both the forgiver and the one needing forgiveness have the opportunity to display trust in a good and sovereign and gracious, all-knowing God, and both of them in a step of faith move towards each other to see that relationship restored.

What do we take away from this? It seems to me that in this next part of this story, we see that forgiveness is what opens the door to the unknown possibilities of what God is wanting to do. Forgiveness opens the door to unknown possibilities while alienation and the spirit of unforgiveness and hardness of heart forever closes the door to God's amazing grace. Philemon could not have dreamed in a hundred years that God was going to step into this circumstance and bring good out of what was bad. Onesimus could not have thought in a hundred years that his running away and heading to Rome was ever going to result in God restoring him in his relationship with Philemon. I don't

know what your story is this morning but I know this (and if you're living in it at this moment this morning, it's true, and if you step into it tomorrow it's true). I know this. If, as a forgiven person, you do not extend forgiveness to another, then you are denying God the opportunity to do what we cannot even begin to imagine might happen in a broken relationship that you find yourself in right now. That's the nature of the amazing grace of God.

Let's pray. Father God, thank You that Your purposes are "yes" and "Amen" in Christ Jesus. Lord, You're always at work even when we can't see if You're at work or when we think we can see You're at work. Lord, in the good things of life, You're working, and in the bad things of life You're working. You are a God, who in divine providence, sovereign power and grace is always at work in the hearts and lives of Your people. Thank You for never giving up on us, God. Thank You for never quitting this work of transformation that You're doing in our lives. Lord, I pray this morning for each one of us. Father, if there is someone here who does not know You in a personal way, I pray that their relationship to You first and foremost would be restored by faith and trust in what Jesus did on the cross, in offering His life and paying the penalty for sin so that we could have our sins forgiven, and enjoy the gift of eternal life forever. Lord, within the body of Christ, there are always things happening. There are always relationships strained and at other times broken, sometimes what seems beyond measure. But Lord, as You have done here, You can do now in our life. Your amazing grace is available if we will simply open our life to it. We thank You in Jesus's name, Amen.