

Series: Who Was This Guy?
Matthew 5:43-47, 6:12-15

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“Forgiveness”

John Ortberg

In old Roman ruins (there's one in Bath, England that I've actually seen), archaeologists have discovered tons of prayers, ancient prayers, a couple of thousand years ago, that people would actually pay to have written down and then stored. They are called now *curse tablets* because the most common kind of prayer recorded on them, by far, are curses.

People would address a god or goddess and say, "This person hurt me, and here's how they hurt me, and I want payback. I want you to hurt them, inflict pain on them, and here is how I want you to do that." I will read part of one. This is actually found in Rome, because they were all over the ancient Mediterranean world. I'm not making this up. This is somebody's prayer to one of the gods:

"I invoke you, holy angels and holy names, tie up, block, strike, overthrow, harm, destroy, kill, and shatter Eucherios, the charioteer, and all of his horses, tomorrow in the arena of Rome. Let the starting gates not open properly. Let him not compete quickly. Let him not pass. Let him not make the turn properly. Let him not receive the honors. Let him not squeeze over and overpower. Let him not come from behind and pass, but instead, let him collapse. Let him be bound. Let him be broken up. And let him drag behind...both in the early races and in the later ones." Just in case the gods got confused and, you know, let him win one.

"Now, now! Quickly, quickly! Let his breath be bad, and let his teeth not be dazzling white." I just made that last sentence up; that wasn't actually in the curse, but the rest of it was. "This guy hurt me. You hurt him back. I hate him." Okay? This is the most common prayer recorded on these tablets in the ancient world.

Let me name another category for you. A *bless-my-enemy tablet*. A prayer that says, "Eucherios hurt me badly, would you deliver me from my resentment? Would you help Eucherios to find genuine repentance? Would you forgive his sin and mine? Would you heal our relationship?" How many *bless-my-enemy* tablets do you think they have found so far in Roman ruins? Zero. None at all. People did not pray prayers like that to Zeus. Fierce loyalty to your friends and fierce opposition to your enemies are what were considered to be noble. The gods were there to help you get what you want, and if you got hurt, what you wanted was to get even.

In that world, a carpenter from a tiny village in Nazareth was laying a foundation that would change the world. We're in a series about this. Jesus said, ***"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'" They all heard that. "But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons [children] of your Father in heaven. He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."***

Anger, hurt, bitterness, resentment are huge forces in our world and nobody sitting in this room gets a free pass. But Jesus says, *"If you love only those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even the pagans do that?"* He's just describing the way the world worked. And it's so interesting that He chooses something as simple as the process of greeting another human being.

Has anybody noticed what part of the service we usually do that we haven't done so far? It's where we greet each other. We've been saving it until right now. So I'd like you to get up and go find an enemy and greet them. Somebody you just don't like, you wish they were not alive. And tell them, "Glad you're here. Love you in the Lord. Good to have you around." See, even greeting...to acknowledge the existence, to say, "I'm glad you're on this planet," we can't do for somebody we hate. So Jesus just picks something as concrete as this. He's teaching on this kind of thing all the time.

Peter comes to Him one time and says, "Somebody hurt me. If he asks me to forgive him seven times, should I do it?" And Jesus says, "No, you do it seventy times seven." In the main prayer that we remember from Jesus, the Lord's Prayer, there's a line in it that says, *"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."* That little word *as* is really scary. "Forgive me, God, just like I forgive people who hurt me."

At the end of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus goes on, *"For if you forgive [others] when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive [others] their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."* That's kind of sobering. People ask sometimes, "What did Jesus mean by that?" Well, I think it means if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. Jesus is actually pretty good at saying what He actually means.

Now forgive does not mean forget, condone, excuse, tolerate, or overlook; it means to choose the way of love over the way of hate. The way of love might be painful. It might not always be doing what the other person wants me to do, but there will be a way of love. And I know everybody here has hurts, and some are really big.

I've just been thinking through this weekend...there will be some people where there is somebody who wounded you. A parent, somebody in business who cheated you and looked you right in the eye while they're doing it, a spouse that betrayed you and it goes to the core, and you're thinking, *No way! Not him! Not her!* We do forgiveness at the cross where Jesus died for the forgiveness of our sins, and where we remember that I have a bigger sin debt before God than anybody has before me. God's still in the forgiving business. But you might have a really hard one.

Debbie Shaeffer sent some of us a video not too long ago. It's one of the most powerful expressions of forgiveness that I've ever seen. And we all thought, *Man, we all have to see this together as a church.* So if you would, for a moment, just open your heart wide up to God and take a look at the screens.

[Video]

Steve Hartman: In a small apartment building in North Minneapolis - a 59-year-old teacher's aid sings praise to God for no seemingly apparent reason. Indeed, if anyone was to have issues with the Lord, it would be Mary Johnson.

In February 1993, Mary's son, Laramiun Byrd, was shot to death during an argument at a party. He was 20, and Mary's only child.

"My son was gone," she says.

The killer was a 16-year-old kid named Oshea Israel.

Mary wanted justice. "He was an animal. He deserved to be caged."

And he was. Tried as an adult and sentenced to 25 and a half years – Oshea served 17 before being recently released. He now lives back in the old neighborhood, close to Mary.

How a convicted murder ended-up living a door jamb away from his victim's mother is a story, not of horrible misfortune, as you might expect but of remarkable mercy.

A few years ago Mary asked if she could meet Oshea at Minnesota's Stillwater state prison. As a devout Christian, she felt compelled to see if there was some way, if somehow, she could forgive her son's killer.

"I believe the first thing she said to me was, 'Look, you don't know me. I don't know you. Let's just start with right now,'" Oshea says. "And I was befuddled myself."

Oshea says they met regularly after that. When he got out, she introduced him to her landlord, who with Mary's blessing, invited Oshea to move into the building. Today they don't just live close; they *are* close. Clearly, Mary was able to forgive.

"Unforgiveness is like cancer," Mary says. "It will eat you from the inside out. It's not about that other person, me forgiving him does not diminish what he's done. Yes, he murdered my son, but the forgiveness is for me. It's for *me*."

For Oshea, it hasn't been that easy. "I haven't totally forgiven myself yet, I'm learning to forgive myself. And I'm still growing toward trying to forgive myself."

To that end, Oshea is now busy proving himself to himself. He works at a recycling plant by day and goes to college by night. He says he's determined to payback Mary's clemency by contributing to society. In fact, he's already working on it, singing the praises of God and forgiveness at prisons, churches, to large audiences everywhere.

"A conversation can take you a long way," Oshea says to one group.

Which explains why Mary is able to sing her praise of thanks to her audience of One.

[End of video]

So I saw that video, and I thought, *This is real life. These are real people.* And it just wiped me out. I'd love to hear more of their story. I'd love for us, as a church, to hear about this kind of forgiveness. So we actually called them up and asked, "Would you guys tell us more about your story?" And they said they would. It's a huge honor for us as a church. Would you now welcome Mary Johnson and Oshea Israel as they come out and tell us their story?

Well, Mary and Oshea, we're just enormously grateful that you guys would travel this far out to spend these moments with us. We had the coolest time at breakfast yesterday. Scotty and Nance were there, and it was like an hour and 45 minutes. And it was just like holy ground. And so there are a few more folks here now, but we just want this to be real informal. Mary and Oshea will speak sometimes at prisons or schools, at churches, but hardly ever for Presbyterians, and we all need it.

So we just want this to be very much, just kind of at home. We're just going to walk through, because there is just so much depth and richness to this story. All of us, we hang out in church and we hear that word "forgive," it often just sounds like a simple thing or a fast thing or a superficial experience. You know, we saw that clip, and the story is unbelievable. But in the clip, Mary you kind of move to forgiveness real fast. And I know that is not the first place your heart went after you lost your son. So would you tell us what went on in your heart for that long stretch of time?

Mary Johnson: Good morning. Yes, I did not move into forgiveness in three minutes. Actually I was a Christian woman that was full of hatred for Oshea. I wanted him to serve life in prison. I wanted them to take the key and throw it away. He was an animal. And he deserved to be locked up, caged, for the rest of his life. And I carried that hatred and bitterness for many, many, many years.

John Ortberg: You were saying when the trial happened, which was within a year, year and a half, something like that of the death, that, at that time, you said the words of forgiveness, but maybe were not even aware of how deep they needed to go.

Mary Johnson: Right. Yes, it took about a year and a half before we got to the actual trial. And I'm a Christian woman so I know that in order to be forgiven, that I must forgive. So I told him at the trial that I forgave him. And I didn't think it was lip service, but over the years I found out, yes, that's all it was, was lip service. I was doing what the Word says, but it was not really in my heart.

John Ortberg: So it was really a long process, and you didn't know at the beginning how long the journey was going to be. One of the things you guys both said yesterday that was so striking, is that forgiveness is a journey, not a destination.

Mary Johnson: Yes, it is. I took 12 years for me to get to the place to even go and see Oshea. And I had that desire to go and see him; because I knew that there was work that I'd been called to do. And I knew if I couldn't see him, and if I didn't make sure that I had forgiven him, that the work that I'd been called to do, I couldn't do it.

John Ortberg: But 12 years... a long time. You really needed that time.

Mary Johnson: Yes.

John Ortberg: So you talk in the video about how, over time, you came to have a sense that what was going on inside of your heart was kind of like a cancer. How long did it take, and how could you tell internally, my spirit going down a road, that's the wrong road?

Mary Johnson: I think I walked around with hatred in my heart for at least 10 years. Bitterness... I mean, I was just kind of stagnated. My life wasn't moving on. In order to know my life was moving, I remember getting to this place where I had to look at me. And I asked myself, *Who do I think I am for not forgiving?* And this is what the Word says. All I can think of is stagnation.

John Ortberg: Yeah. And, Oshea, one of the things you said in the video is that receiving forgiveness is a process. In fact you said you are still working on that. You're not sure that you're there yet. Tell us a little bit about what that means. How do you work on forgiving yourself or receiving forgiveness?

Oshea Israel: Well it's a process, like pretty much everything in life. When you violate or trespass against someone's personage, you have to... If you want forgiveness, if you want to accept it, you have to first acknowledge what you've done, accept responsibility, hold yourself accountable, and you have to find the strength within yourself to bring yourself to that point. And I'm gaining my strength, so to speak, in doing that.

What I'm doing now is I look at the world kind of now as heaven's movie. Those who made it in are looking down upon us. They're seeing comedy, thriller, action, suspense; they're seeing all of this. And the thing is, when you're filming a movie, you have to play your role; you have to stick to the script. Sometimes you may mess up, make a mistake, but those are just the mistakes in heaven's movie. We get another chance, so...you know.

John Ortberg: Yeah. So, you're going through this process, and we're a community, we're a church. We want to help people is the process of forgiveness. But I know, Mary, you said even though you were a part of the church, there were some people who were not helpful for you in that. Tell us a little bit about what that was like and what the hurt of that was like.

Mary Johnson: I grew up in a Baptist church, and I went to this church for 27 years. I left that church a year before my son was murdered, and I joined a nondenominational church. And when my son was murdered, my pastor said to me, "If you would have prayed more, this would not have happened." Well, I left that church.

John Ortberg: Did it just stun you to have somebody say that to you?

Mary Johnson: Yes! And even though I grew up in church, coming out and joining a nondenominational church, I was really learning some things that I didn't learn in the Baptist church. And I thought, *Wow, this is really something.* Before I left the Baptist church, I was saying, *There's got to be something more to it that what's happening here.* So when she said that to me, I had to think, *Is that really true? Is that why this happened?* Absolutely not. Absolutely not!

John Ortberg: And then you're saying too that there were people where, because it was a long journey for you, some people felt like it ought to be happening faster.

Mary Johnson: Right. A lot of people say to people who are hurting, "Aren't you over that yet? Why don't you just move on?" That is hard to do. When I left that church, I joined another nondenominational church. And the pastor...they weren't really supportive of what it was that I know I've been called to do. Or even really going and visiting him. They were so worried about me getting stuck in grief. But there really wasn't really help for me to move on through that grief.

John Ortberg: A lot of times, we just want to fix people. And sometimes because we get uncomfortable. If you're uncomfortable, I feel uncomfortable, so I just want you to be fixed so I don't have to worry about mourning with you.

Mary Johnson: Right. You don't have to worry about the price that you might have to pay to mourn with me.

John Ortberg: Wow. Wow. Anybody writing this down? Okay, so you're going through this, and then there are lots of different points where something happens to move you. One of them is a poem, another one is a class. Tell us about that.

Mary Johnson: One day I was asked to teach a class out of a book that's called *A Total Forgiveness*. And I said, "Okay." But it just didn't register what was happening, but teaching that class, I began to learn what forgiveness is and what it is not.

The "Two Mothers" poem came into existence after we went through the trial. One day, I opened up a book, and it just fell on the page, "Two Mothers," and I read it, and it was about two angels in heaven, and because of the crown they had on and the colors they were wearing, they both knew that they were mothers here on earth. So they began to talk about their sons.

One mother said, "I would have taken my son's place at the cross if I could have." And the other mother fell on one knee and said, "Oh, well you are she, the mother of Christ." And the mother of Christ lifted her up and kissed a tear from her cheek and she said, "Tell me of your son so I may grieve with you." She said, "My son is Judas Iscariot."

And the poem ended there. So I read it again, and after the second reading, I heard within myself, *I want mothers of murdered children, and mothers of children that have taken life to come together and heal together.*

John Ortberg: That is one of the most staggering sentences I have ever heard in my life. You think this is heaven's movie, but it's real life. Would you say that one more time, what the vision is?

Mary Johnson: For mothers of murdered children, and mothers of children that have taken life to come together and heal together. Well, I laughed. And I thought, *You know what, that is totally impossible. That just cannot happen.* And I didn't want it to happen. But it is a possibility. This group is in existence today; it came into existence in 2006.

John Ortberg: Well we have...there are cards. From Death to Life: Two Mothers, Two Sons. Can you put some of those cards on the corner there, when folks are leaving if they want to get it? And part of what we're doing as a church is just to give to that foundation. But one of the things that did for *you* then, was to say, if you're going to move toward this vision, you have work to do with Oshea.

Mary Johnson: Yes. I had to make sure that I had forgiven Oshea. I couldn't see how in the world I could do this work if I had all this hatred and bitterness still going on in my heart. There would be no way I could do it that way. So I needed to make sure.

John Ortberg: And so the idea came to actually go and visit in prison...

Mary Johnson: Yes.

John Ortberg: ...with the man who took the life of your son.

Mary Johnson: Yes. And that is...what we had was a victim/offender dialogue, and that is a restorative justice process through the Department of Corrections. So I had to contact the Department of Corrections and tell them that I wanted to meet with Oshea. And then a man named Tim Hansen went to Oshea and asked him to meet with me, and he said, "Absolutely not."

John Ortberg: Oshea, what were you thinking? Did this just come totally out of the blue? What did you think that she might want? What was going on inside you?

Oshea Israel: I didn't know what to expect. Of course my initial reaction was, "No, it's not going to happen. What for? What do I need to see her for? So she could cuss me out or call me names or vent on me? I'm not doing it. I didn't want to accept the responsibility or hold myself accountable at that point yet. So... To look in her face and look at what I've done, so... "Nah. I'll pass."

John Ortberg: So when you heard "no," what'd you think?

Mary Johnson: Well I was disappointed, but we decided nine months later...nine months later...we went back and he asked Oshea again, and this time he talked to his family, and he decided that he would meet with me.

John Ortberg: I just want to pause there for a moment, because, again, so often, if we had heard by somebody, you know, if we are going to try forgiveness or reconciliation, it will be with an attitude of, *I want it to happen that fast. And maybe I'll take one step toward you, and if you don't respond in exactly the way I want you to, I'll feel hurt and just erase your name from the list and say, "Well, I tried," and excuse myself.*

And to look at reconciliation as a process where it may take days, weeks, months, years, try, fail, try, fail, again. The persistence for both of you is part of... I mean there is so much to learn from your story but the persistence and the need for work is one of the most remarkable parts of it. So you had to kind of humble yourself, gear up your spirit, and try again. And this time around, you thought about it differently. And it was input from other people that helped you think about it differently.

Oshea Israel: Yeah, I was approached by a case worker in a facility. She came at me again. And she's just as persistent as Mary. So really they didn't leave me an option; I had to do it. I discussed it with some family members, friends. I was in a transition of my life at that time anyway. I was trying to let go of some of the other stuff that I was doing and what I was going through. I said, "Hey, if I'm ever going to be able to call myself a man, I'm going to have to put on a man's clothes; I have to walk in a man's shoes."

The biggest part of being a man is accepting responsibility, holding yourself accountable, facing some of the things that you've done, and as I explained to you earlier, the process of the three R's, which is, I had to retrain myself...retrain my thinking, and my responses. Then I had to retire the nonsense and retire some of the bitter feelings that I had. Just put them in a retirement. Then I had to reposition myself to get ready for something greater, something bigger.

John Ortberg: Retrain, retire, and reposition.

Oshea Israel: And I remembered it this time.

John Ortberg: Yeah, well I was just thinking it'd make a good sermon sometime. And, again, that's where I think God just works in such remarkable ways. Your persistence gave an opportunity. And, Oshea, for you that was a step toward responsibility. It had to take courage. It had to take humility to be willing to do that. And part of what happens through this process is there are so many crossroads, so many choice points where somebody could have pulled back. But you don't. You keep going forward. And that's what makes the presence of grace or healing possible.

Okay, so this day is going to come. It's not something you do casually. So who else is involved...what goes into this first meeting? What was it like?

Mary Johnson: The first meeting...and before that first meeting, I had to do some preparation work on myself. I had to get to a place of forgiving myself. I had to repent for my feelings and the thoughts I had about him. I just had to go and be for real with myself before I could move on any further.

My friend, Regina, and my sister in the Lord who is here with us today. Regina worked with me, talked with me, and got me to a place to see that I was not going to see a 16-year-old boy. He was 16 years old when he took my son's life. But I was going to see a grown man, and I was going to see a human being, not that animal that I supposed he was.

So that day, it was me, Regina, Tim, from the Department of Corrections, and Michelle, who was a social worker. And Michelle and Tim were the facilitators or victim/offender dialogue. We were on our way up the ramp, and I got halfway up, and I just broke down and said, "God, I'm just not ready. I'm not ready to do this. I can't do this."

And I tell you, it's good that He sends us all two by two. And He sends us with the right person. And I tell you, Regina just kind of pushed me up the ramp, and we got inside. And I had to go clean up my face because I was really, really boo-hooing. And we went through the metal detector and the big metal door, and we were inside the prison area.

There was a nice young lady there who was going to be working with us. She was the guard that day. And I had told her, I said, "Look. I couldn't bring my purse in here, I couldn't bring my Bible in here. The only thing I could bring was my ID." And I told her, "I'm a person, I cannot tolerate dryness. So if you don't give me some lotion, nothing is happening here today." Very serious; I was very serious. And she said, "Okay, ma'am, go sit in the conference room and I'll bring you some lotion." And she did.

I used it and passed it on. Michelle used it and passed it on. Regina got the lotion, used it, but then she began to examine the bottle, and she said, "Mary, you better take this lotion back and look at it." I took the lotion back, and I looked at it, and it said, the title was "Beyond Belief." I was like, "Beyond belief? That's exactly what's happening here! It's beyond belief that I'm sitting here, waiting for them to bring in the man that's taken my son's life." And I tell you, that whole meeting was beyond belief.

We went through four two-hour preparation meetings, with the facilitators before we met him, and we had to tell them why we wanted to meet. And that was really the main thing. They wanted to know why we wanted to meet him. And they'd say, such as, "Well, what if you hear this about your son. Would you be able to handle that?" So it was kind of things like that. But they really wanted to know our motives. And I told them, "Hey. I want to know why he changed his name." That seemed to happen immediately after he got to Stillwater. I wanted to know why he had taken my son's life. And I wanted to make sure I had forgiven him.

I always thought that when you go to court, I didn't think there would ever be another side of the story. I always thought that you go to court, the truth and nothing but the truth comes forth. But don't believe everything you read in newspapers, everything you hear on the news. Don't believe everything that goes on in court, because it does not necessarily have to be true. But that's what I told them, those three things. And we only talked about one of those things during our meeting, and that was the forgiveness.

John Ortberg: And I just want to, again pause a moment, because it's like, here in this story, there's a whole craft or discipline around forgiveness and reconciliation. And things like to have four 2-hour meetings before you would come face to face. Where as if you have a hurt with somebody, it may not be wise to just immediately show up without having prepared. And to think about what is going on in my spirit, what do I want, how do I want it said? And I would imagine, Mary, initially thinking, *This is about the wrong the other person has done*, and that you would have to look at things and repent and confess and see stuff in your own heart. And it's not something...

When I first thought we were going to talk about it, I wasn't even expecting that part of the story. So Oshea, you guys meet, and Mary comes in. What do you think is going to happen? What does she say? How does that unfold for you?

Oshea Israel: I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know if, when she came in, if she was going to throw something at me. A book, a chair...if she was going to cuss me out, try to attack me, whatever, which she would have been justified. But I didn't know what to expect. So I just went in there just to see what was going to happen and try to give her the closure that she needed.

But when she spoke those first words, "I don't know you, you don't know me, let's just get to know each other." That just totally set me calm. Because here it is, someone that was interested in knowing the other side of the story or getting to know me before they pass judgment. From that moment on, I went in there to trust the process to allow everything to take place the way it was supposed to without being resistant, without getting in the way as we tend to do sometimes in our lives. We tend to get in the way of our own progress and good things and blessings that happen, so I just decided to get out of the way, remove my ego, which is easing God out, and to let Him do the work.

John Ortberg: Wow. And it strikes me too that the opening line of, "I don't know you, you don't know me." It was the right thing in the sense that it wasn't bitter and vindictive, but it wasn't pretending like things are better than they are. It was kind of creating space where you'd have the freedom to be able to respond, and you could begin to look at what a relationship might be like. And how did it go by the end of the meeting? How did the meeting end up? You want to tell us that or would you rather not?

Oshea Israel: I'd rather not, but I will.

John Ortberg: Okay.

Oshea Israel: Well it's kind of embarrassing. The meeting was so good, so great, that I really didn't want it to end, but wanted it to end on a positive note. So as I was getting up to get ready to leave to be escorted out, I looked across the table at Mary and asked her if I could I give her a hug. Because I just wanted to show her that I was being sincere and genuine. And she agreed, which surprised me.

So as she walked around the table, and I walked around to greet her, and I gave her a hug, it was like everything...the floodgates just opened, and she started crying hysterically. I'm trying to hug her and hold her up, and mind you, I've been in prison for 12 years at this point around hardened criminals, a whole bunch of stuff, and right now is the scariest moment of my life. Like, *This lady is crying, what am I going to do? Somebody help me.*

John Ortberg: Crying ladies can be pretty scary.

Oshea Israel: So I'm sitting here struggling, trying to hold her up, and it was a blessing though. Because I was able to show her that I'm there, in your pain, even though I'm the one that caused it. And I believe that was the moment that our bond started to form.

John Ortberg: So then this relationship begins to develop. Where in the world did the idea come from that you might end up living as neighbors?

Mary Johnson: Well when Oshea was released from prison in December 2009...in March, From Death to Life, some nuns that live in our area, we call them sisters in the hood.

John Ortberg: It's a famous order, yeah.

Mary Johnson: We came together and gave him a welcome-home party.

John Ortberg: Did y'all catch that? Is that cool?

Mary Johnson: And we had about 30 or 35 people that came, and all these people...most of them did not know Oshea, they just knew him through the story that I had been telling. They told Oshea what they could do to support him. And it just went way beyond what I expected. And after that, my landlord talked to me and asked me how I would feel about Oshea moving next door.

Well after Oshea and I met initially, and I started going around sharing a story at the different prisons, someone said, "When Oshea gets out, what if he moves back to the neighborhood?" I said, "Oh that's fine. He can even move next door. And I'll be able to keep a better eye on him." There is power in our words; watch what you say.

So my landlord said, "What do you think about Oshea? Would you have a problem with Oshea moving next door?" I said, "Oshea doesn't want to move next door to me." And he said, "But what do you think about it if he did?" I said, "Well, you know, hey, I think it'll be alright." So he told me that he had asked Oshea and that he had agreed. I found it hard to believe, but he had agreed. So it was fine.

John Ortberg: And that was two years ago?

Oshea Israel: No, last October.

John Ortberg: Last October?

Oshea Israel: Yeah.

John Ortberg: So how's it going, living next door to Mary?

Oshea Israel: I think when I agreed, I had a temporary moment of insanity. But, no, it's going great. It gives someone else to help keep things in perspective for me. So when I go out throughout my day, come home from work, sometimes I may see Mary, we stand on the porch and discuss how the day went, things that we have going on. Right before I head out to school, she gets a chance to harass me about my company or whatever I'm doing, the decisions I'm making, that's the part that I said, when I agreed, I was temporarily insane.

But she's like another mother. So it's like coming home and being able to speak to your mother about how your day is going and finding out about how her day is going, and then proceeding with the rest of your day. So it's a blessing. Sometimes whenever I'm feeling down and out, or I feel like things aren't working, I get discouraged or whatever, I can look at her face and say, *Hey, she gave me a chance, I need to give myself a chance.*

John Ortberg: Okay, now we have to stop because I'm going to start getting emotional, and you're not going to like that at all.

Oshea Israel: And I'm going to leave.

John Ortberg: I know you are...again, we talked for almost two hours yesterday, and I wish we could do that right now, but we have another service coming up so...thank you. But it would be a good thing if our services and sermons were longer every week, wouldn't that be a wonderful gift?

But can we do this? This is a huge gift for our church. Can we all honor and thank...because you all understand for Mary and Oshea to come here and talk about this...this isn't like superficial stuff. This is a huge gift of openness and courage and honesty. They're still in their story, and now we get to be a part of it. And this is our chance to say thank you to these two human beings. So would you do that for Mary and Oshea?