

FORGIVEN

Listen to these words from John Ortberg:

This year we had a daughter graduate from Azusa Pacific University. My wife spoke at the commencement, so we gathered with a group of fifty or so faculty, alumni, and administration before the ceremony. A few dozen people had graduated fifty years earlier, and they were there also to celebrate with their freshly minted co-alums.

At one point, Jon Wallace, the university president, pulled three seniors into the center of the room and told us all they were going to be serving under-resourced people in impoverished areas for several years after graduation. The graduating seniors said a few words about where they were going and why, and we applauded. They thought that was why they were there. Then Jon turned his back to the rest of us, faced the three students, and told them the real reason they were in the room.

"Somebody you do not know has heard what you're doing," Jon said. "He wants you to be able to serve the people where you are going without any impediment. So, he has given a gift. He has asked to remain anonymous, but here is what he has done for you."

Jon turned to the first student and looked her in the eye. "You have been forgiven your school debt of \$105,000."

It took a few moments for the words to sink in. The student shook her head at first. The thought registered. She began to cry at the sheer unexpected generosity of a mountain of debt wiped out in a moment by someone she had never met.

Jon turned to the next student. "You have been forgiven your debt of \$70,000."

Jon turned to the third student. By this time, she knew what was coming. But it was as if she could not believe it was happening until she heard the words. "You have been forgiven your debt of \$130,000."

All three students were trembling. Their lives had been changed in a twinkling by the extravagance of someone they had never met. All of us who watched were so moved, it was as if we had experienced the forgiveness ourselves. There was not a dry eye in the room. (I wanted so badly to say, "I have a daughter who's graduating this weekend....")

Think about it, an unpayable debt. An unseen giver. An unforgettable gift. And the freedom of the debtors becomes a blessing to the world.

That's grace.

The joy of forgiveness.

There is a bigger debt we labor under. We give it labels such as regret, guilt, shame, or brokenness — sin. But God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself not counting their trespasses against them. We know what is coming, yet we need to hear the words just the same:

You have been forgiven your debt.

You've been forgiven your debt.

Forgiven. Forgiven.

Forgiven.

[Source: *The Me I Want To Be*, John Ortberg, pp. 166-167]