

The Forgiveness of Sins

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Date: 06 February 2022

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, for a short while this evening, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, Gospel according to Matthew, Matthew chapter 18, Matthew chapter 18, and if we read again at verse 21, Matthew 18 and verse 21, then Peter came up and said to him, that is Jesus, 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-seven times.

Or seventy times seven. If you're reading another version of the Bible. I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.

In an article by the American psychologist, Dr. Randy Kamen, she wrote about the power of forgiveness. The power of forgiveness.

And she said, forgiveness transforms anger and hurt into healing and peace. Forgiveness can help you overcome feelings of depression, anxiety, and rage, as well as personal and relational conflicts.

[1 : 37] Forgiveness is about setting yourself free so that you can move forward in your own life. Now, as a psychologist, Dr. Randy Kamen teaches that the power of forgiveness is found within yourself.

Now, it's true that forgiveness transforms anger and hurt into feelings of healing and peace. It's true that forgiveness can help you overcome feelings of depression and anxiety and rage.

But as you know, the power of forgiveness is not found within us. Because our Bible teaches us that the power of forgiveness is found at the cross of Jesus Christ.

Boys and girls, the power of forgiveness is found at the cross of Jesus Christ. Because it's at the cross of Jesus Christ that we witness the declaration and also the demonstration of God's love and forgiveness towards us.

More than that, it's at the cross of Jesus Christ that we witness the example of forgiveness towards others. Where Jesus, as you know, he prayed for those who had mocked him and beaten him and spat upon him and flogged and crucified him.

[2 : 49] Jesus prayed for his enemies. And he prayed some of the most powerful and poignant words in the gospel. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. And my friend, the example of Jesus, it should empower and enable us to forgive others.

Which is why we're confessing this evening from the Apostles' Creed, I believe in the forgiveness of sins. I believe in the forgiveness of sins.

So if you have your Apostles' Creed in front of you, or if you've memorized it already, please say it with me. I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried.

He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven. And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

[4 : 09] I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Amen. So this evening we're considering the confession of the Apostles' Creed. I believe in the forgiveness of sins. I believe in the forgiveness of sins because the power of forgiveness is found at the cross of Jesus Christ.

And I'd like us to think about this under just two headings this evening. Seeking forgiveness and showing forgiveness. Seeking forgiveness and showing forgiveness.

So first of all, seeking forgiveness. Seeking forgiveness. Look again at verse 21. Then Peter came up and said to Jesus, 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-seven times, or seventy times seven.

[5 : 14] Now it's not clear here who Peter was referring to when he asked Jesus this question. It could have been towards his natural brother, who was Andrew, the brother who had introduced Peter to Jesus in the first place.

Or it could have been one of his spiritual brothers in Christ, who were, of course, the disciples. But you know, it doesn't matter who the question was about or referring to, because what Jesus says next exhorts and encourages Peter to forgive everyone, regardless of their wrongdoing.

And you know, I'm sure that Peter thought that he was being quite generous when he suggested to Jesus that we should forgive at least seven times. But then Jesus bursts Peter's big-headed bubble and puts him back in his box and brings him back down to earth with a bang when he says to him, no, you need to forgive seventy-seven times or seventy times seven.

Now if it's seventy times seven, it's four hundred and ninety, if my maths is correct. But you know, what Jesus is talking about here, he doesn't actually mean that there's to be a limit on our forgiveness, whether it's seven or seventy-seven or four hundred and ninety times.

No, Jesus is explaining and emphasizing to Peter and to us that we are to be constantly and compassionately showing forgiveness to others.

[6 : 43] Why? Because God has been constantly and compassionately showing forgiveness to us. And you know, in many ways, this is a powerful parable that Jesus tells here this evening.

And it's a powerful parable that Jesus tells in order to impress and imprint upon our minds the need for forgiveness. And Jesus tells this parable, he says in verse 23, Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants.

When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold with his wife and children and all that he had and payment be made.

So the servant fell on his knees imploring him, have patience with me and I will pay you for everything. And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.

And you know, what should immediately be impressed and imprinted upon our minds with this powerful parable is how much this servant owed his lord and master.

[7 : 57] Because we're told there that he owed ten thousand talents. Now one talent was equivalent to six thousand denarii. One denarii, one denarii was what a servant received as a wage for one day's work.

Therefore the servant would have had to work six thousand days before he had paid off one talent. But as we read here, the servant owed his lord and master ten thousand talents.

So he would have had to work six thousand times ten thousand. Any of you know the answer to that? Six thousand times ten thousand. I had to use a calculator.

He had to work six thousand times ten thousand days in order to pay his debt. Sixty million working days. And when you add it all up and when you work it all out, in today's money, boys and girls, in today's money, this servant owed two point five billion pounds.

And in order to pay his debt, he would have had to work every day for two hundred thousand years. Two hundred thousand years he owed two point five billion pounds.

[9 : 15] Which is obviously a debt he could not pay. And that's the point Jesus is imprinting and impressing upon our hearts and minds. That it was completely impossible for this servant to pay the debt that he owed.

He was eternally indebted to his lord and master. And he knew that. Which is why he fell down on his knees and pleaded for his lord and master to have patience with him.

He says, have patience with me and I'll pay you everything. But then Jesus tells us something remarkable that happened. We're told there in verse 27, And out of pity for him, or out of compassion for him, He released him and let him go.

He forgave him the debt. The lord and master of the servant, He moved with compassion. He released him and let him go. And you know, my friend, this is a powerful parable.

Because in that statement in verse 27, Jesus is bringing us right to the cross. He's bringing us to the cross because, as we said, The power of forgiveness is found at the cross of Jesus Christ.

[10 : 28] Because, as you know, you can't earn favor or forgiveness from God. It's a gift of grace. It's freely and fully given. And it's at the cross of Jesus Christ that we witness the declaration and the demonstration of God's love and forgiveness towards us as sinners.

Where Jesus prayed and pleaded on our behalf, Father, forgive them. Father, forgive Murdo. For he did not know what he was doing.

Father, forgive them. For they know not what they do. And you know, the wonder of wonders is that as hell-deserving sinners, we are able to experience and enjoy the full and free forgiveness of our sins through faith in Jesus Christ.

As hell-deserving sinners, we're able to experience and enjoy redemption. Redemption by God. Reconciliation with God.

And restoration to God. You know, as hell-deserving sinners, that's what we should always see ourselves as. As hell-deserving sinners, we're able to experience and to enjoy justification before a holy God.

[11 : 41] Adoption into the family of God. And sanctification to be made like God. My friend, that's the power of the cross.

And that's the power of forgiveness. Because the power of forgiveness is all based upon the promise of forgiveness. The power of forgiveness is based upon the promise of forgiveness.

And as you know, the promise of forgiveness, it is as it is in 1 John chapter 1. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we confess our sins, He will create within us that clean heart and renew a right spirit within us. If we confess our sins, He will wash us and cleanse us and make us white as snow.

But my friend, why? Why is God willing to forgive our sins? Because as 1 John chapter 1 tells us, the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sins.

[12 : 54] There was a man, Judson van de Venter. He was a 19th century American evangelist and hymn writer. And he wrote many hymns.

But he wrote this hymn which beautifully sums up Jesus' teaching on this powerful parable. And he wrote, You know, my friend, the power of forgiveness is found at the cross of Jesus Christ.

And the question that this all brings us back to is, do we know this forgiveness ourselves? Have we come to experience and enjoy the forgiveness of sins at the cross of Jesus Christ?

Have we come saying, nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling. But maybe you're saying tonight, well, Murdo, I've been asking God for forgiveness for many years.

But I just don't think that God is answering my prayers. I don't think He's listening to me. I'm asking Him, but I don't know, I don't think He's doing it. And my friend, I want to ask you, are you asking wholeheartedly?

[14 : 24] Are you asking genuinely? Are you asking earnestly? And I say that because I was once like that. I was pleading and pleading the words of my favorite psalm, Psalm 51.

I was asking the Lord, saying, Lord, create within me a clean heart. Lord, create within me a clean heart. Lord, create within me a clean heart. But, you know, I had to come to the realization that I needed to believe in the power and the promise of forgiveness.

I needed to believe in the power and the promise of forgiveness. Because the power of forgiveness is at the cross. Jesus has the power and authority to forgive sins.

And the promise of forgiveness, as we were saying from 1 John chapter 1, the promise of forgiveness. If you confess, if you confess your sin, He will forgive us.

He will cleanse you. He will make you His because the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sins. And so, from my own experience, I needed to believe that what I was asking, the Lord was doing.

[15 : 31] I was asking Him to cleanse me and forgive me and create within me a clean heart. And I needed to believe that His promise and His power was able to do it.

Because He not only has the promise to forgive, He has the power to forgive. And, my friend, the same is true with you. You need to believe that what you're asking, the Lord is doing.

If you're asking the Lord to forgive you and to cleanse you, you need to believe that the power of forgiveness and the promise of forgiveness is ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you shall find. Knock and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. The one who seeks, finds. The one who knocks, it will be opened. That's the power and the promise of forgiveness.

For forgiveness. But you know what many people struggle with? And maybe you struggle with it. It's not so much the power and promise of forgiveness.

[16 : 34] Because, well, you believe that God can and God has forgiven your sin and created within you a clean heart. But maybe what you struggle with is forgiving yourself.

You struggle to forgive yourself. Because maybe there are things that you've done in your life which no one else knows about. And they're personal sins.

But they're also painful sins. And you know that the Lord has forgiven you because you know the power and the promise of forgiveness is found at the cross.

You know that. But the struggle is within yourself. You struggle to forgive yourself. And you hold on to these feelings. Even these memories of guilt or failure or even responsibility.

And, you know, I sometimes wonder if that's what Paul's thorn in the flesh was. We don't know what his thorn in the flesh was. But I sometimes wonder, were all these feelings of guilt or memories of persecuting and killing Christians, was that what Paul struggled with?

[17 : 39] Was that his thorn in the flesh? Was that what weighed him down all the time? But what we often find out about with Paul is that he always came back to the cross.

He always came back to the cross. Paul, and that's because Paul knew the power and the promise of forgiveness. It lay outside of himself. The power and promise of forgiveness was in the cross of Jesus Christ.

And that's why Paul could confess and say, I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me.

And the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. My friend, the wonder of the cross, and the power and the promise of the cross, is that there is no sin that God can't forgive, bar one.

There is no sin that God can't forgive, bar one. As you know, the Bible talks about one unforgivable sin.

[18 : 54] Now, let me be clear. The unforgivable sin is not murder. It's not adultery. It's not lying or stealing or rape or abortion or drug or alcohol addiction.

It's not homosexuality or transgenderism. It's not blasphemy, and it's not persecution. They are all sins, and of that there is no doubt. And as our catechism teaches, some of these sins are more heinous in the sight of God than others.

But the good news of the gospel assures us that they're all forgivable. They're all forgivable. And they're forgivable because of the power and the promise of the cross.

They're forgivable because the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sins. However, Jesus says in Matthew chapter 12, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven.

But blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. There is one unforgivable sin. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

[20 : 04] And blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is breaking it down, is simply rejecting, refusing, and resisting the full and free forgiveness that's on offer to us through the power and promise of the cross.

My friend, the unforgivable sin is dying without Christ as your Lord and Savior. The unforgivable sin is dying without Christ as your Lord and Savior.

And it's unforgivable because as you know, when you die without Christ, you are too late. When you die without Christ, you're too late.

That's why the message of the gospel is urgent. Because there are people dying without Christ all the time. And my unconverted friend, whether here or at home this evening, tonight, the Bible says you are still on mercy's ground.

You're on mercy's ground. So use your time well. Use your time well by seeking the full and free forgiveness that's on offer to you through the power and the promise of the cross.

[21 : 26] Seek the Lord, says Isaiah. Seek the Lord while He may be found. Because there will come a day for all of us when He cannot be found.

And if we're out of Christ, we will be too late. Too late. The unforgivable sin is dying without Christ as your Lord and Savior.

And so Jesus, He uses this powerful parable to impress and to imprint upon our hearts and minds what it means to be seeking forgiveness. And then secondly, what it means to be showing forgiveness.

That's what we see secondly. Showing forgiveness. So seeking forgiveness and then showing forgiveness. Look at verse 28. It says, When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Now we've all heard the familiar phrase addressed towards the hypocrite. Practice what you preach. Practice what you preach.

[23 : 04] But you know, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says to us, Practice what you pray. Practice what you pray. Because it's in the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus teaches us how to pray using the Lord's Prayer.

And as you know, we recite the Lord's Prayer every Lord's Day morning. And when it comes to the petition of forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer, we all say together, Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And so as those who pray the Lord's Prayer, whether privately at home or publicly in church, Jesus says to us, boys and girls, this is another question, as those who pray the Lord's Prayer, Jesus says to us, Practice what you pray. Practice what you pray. And don't you find it interesting that out of all the petitions that Jesus teaches us in the Lord's Prayer, He gives us a little footnote.

in Matthew chapter 6, a footnote at the very end of the Lord's Prayer where He highlights the impact and the importance of forgiveness. Jesus says in this footnote to the Lord's Prayer, He says, If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

[24 : 28] But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Therefore, says Jesus, Practice what you pray.

Practice what you pray. And you know, that's what Jesus is explaining and even emphasizing here in this powerful parable on prayer. Because as we read, the servant who had been fully and freely forgiven by the Lord, by His Lord and Master, He very quickly, very, very quickly forgets about His own forgiveness.

He forgets about the forgiveness that He had received from His Master and He goes after someone who had wronged Him. But the person who had wronged Him only had wronged Him out of a tiny debt.

A tiny debt in comparison to what He owed His Lord and Master. The other servant, we're told, He only owed 100 denarii, which was just 100 days wages.

It's about 4,000 pounds. And it was a drop in the ocean in comparison to the 2.5 billion pounds that this servant owed his master.

[25 : 38] Which is why Jesus, He drives home the point of this powerful parable in verse 32. He says, Then His Master summoned Him and said to Him, You wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with Me.

And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you? And in anger His Master delivered Him to the jailers until He should pay all His debt.

And then there's the punchline of this powerful parable in the last verse. So also, says Jesus. This is the application. So also, my Heavenly Father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

So also, my Heavenly Father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart. It's a powerful parable.

And in his commentary on this parable, my good friend, J.C. Ryle, this is what he writes. He says, the motive for forgiving others ought to be the recollection of the day of judgment and the standard by which we shall all be tried in that day.

[26 : 59] There will be no forgiveness in that day for unforgiving people. Such people would be unfit for heaven. Let these truths sink deep, down deeply into our hearts, he says.

It is a fact that there are few Christian duties so little practiced as that of forgiveness. It is sad to see how much bitterness, unmercifulness, spite, harshness, and unkindness there is among the Lord's people.

Yet there are few duties so strongly enforced in the New Testament as the duty of forgiveness. The proof, he says, the proof, it's hard-hitting, the proof that we are at peace with God, washed in Christ's blood, born of the Spirit, and made God's children by adoption and grace is our forgiveness towards others.

My friend, we must practice what we pray. And I'm saying this to myself. You have no idea that this sermon was preached to me before it was ever preached to you.

We must practice what we pray. We must practice what we pray. But of course, forgiveness, it's not a feeling. Forgiveness is an act of the will.

[28 : 25] And we need to be taught how to forgive because as we all know, forgiveness is not an instinct. It's not something we do naturally because naturally we hold grudges.

We harbor bitterness. We harness anger against other people, whether they're aware of it or not.

But you know, if we're going to practice what we pray, then we need to learn how to forgive.

We need to learn to trust the Lord that whatever offense or outrage has been caused or committed against us, He is the one who will bring justice and judgment, not us.

That's why the power of forgiveness is not found within us. It's found at the cross of Jesus Christ because it's at the cross that we witness God's justice and God's judgment against sin.

And it's at the cross that we witness the declaration and the demonstration of God's love and forgiveness. and it's at the cross that we witness the example of that love and forgiveness in seeing a person hanging on the center cross where Jesus, we're told that He not only forgave His enemies, He prayed for His enemies.

[29 : 47] Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. My friend, the example of Jesus should empower us and enable us to forgive others.

Because forgiveness is a work of the Holy Spirit in our sanctification. You know, we're looking at this concluding section in the Apostles' Creed where it focuses upon the work of the Holy Spirit and forgiveness is a work of the Holy Spirit in our sanctification.

And Paul reminds us of that because he says we grieve the Holy Spirit when we fail to forgive. We grieve the Holy Spirit when we fail to forgive.

You know, writing to the church in Ephesus, Paul said to the Ephesians, he said, give no place to the devil. Don't give him a foothold. Don't give him an opportunity.

Don't give him an inch because he'll take a mile. He's the devil. He's the accuser of the brethren.

He's the diabolos. He's the divider. He's the one who will sow seeds of disagreement and discord and disunity and disharmony.

[30 : 59] He will cause anger and annoyance between people. He will create frustration and irritation. He'll rob you of the fruit of the Spirit which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control.

And so Paul says to us, don't give the devil a foothold because when you do, you'll grieve the Holy Spirit. You'll grieve the Holy Spirit.

And from that, Paul goes on to say, let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along with all malice.

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another. And what's the basis of doing this? He says, as God in Christ forgave you.

The basis of forgiveness is that as God in Christ forgave you. And you know, I often hear people saying to me, I will forgive, but I can't forget.

[32 : 12] I will forgive, but I can't forget. But that's not forgiveness. forgiveness. Because as we said, the power and promise of forgiveness is found at the cross of Jesus Christ.

It all goes back to the cross. And it's there at the cross that the Lord says to us, I will forgive your iniquity and I will remember your sins no more.

That's what the Lord says. I will forgive your iniquity. I will remember your sins no more. And so my friend, the power and the promise of forgiveness is that the Lord says to us, I will forgive and I will forget your sin.

Therefore, if we're to practice what we pray, we must forgive and we must forget. We must forgive and we must forget.

And I know that is not easy. I'm not saying it is. But that's why we need to keep coming back to the cross. We need to keep coming back to the cross because it's at the cross that we're reminded of

what it took to forgive our sins.

[33 : 22] And it's at the cross that we see the example of Jesus praying for his enemies, praying for those who have hurt him, praying for those who have accused him, praying for those who have abused him.

Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. And it's an example to us that should empower and enable us to forgive others.

If the Lord has said about me, I will forgive your iniquity and remember your sins no more, then I too must forgive and forget.

You know, my friend, if our confession from the Apostles' Creed is I believe in the forgiveness of sins, I believe in the forgiveness of sins, then we must practice what we pray by seeking forgiveness and showing forgiveness.

And I know that's not easy, but that's a work of the Spirit in our sanctification. We must practice what we pray by seeking forgiveness and showing forgiveness.

[34 : 33] I believe in the forgiveness of sins. Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray together. O Lord, our gracious God, we confess that we are so sinful that we have sinned against a holy God that we deserve nothing from Thee but Thy wrath and Thy curse.

And yet, as we were singing this evening, but yet with Thee forgiveness is that fear Thou mayest be. And Lord, as Thou hast forgiven us, help us to forgive one another.

Help us to forgive and to forget. Help us to love one another as Christ hath loved us and gave Himself for us. Help us to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Help us to encourage one another and enable one another to live lives that bring glory to Thy name.

O Lord, help us because as Thy Word reminds us that without Jesus we can do nothing, but with Him all things are possible.

Bless us then, Lord, we pray. Bless Thy Word to us. Help us to be shaped and molded by it. Help us to practice what we pray, that Thou wouldest forgive us our debts as we seek to forgive our debtors.

[36 : 01] Go before us and we pray. Bless us in the week that lies ahead. Watch over us, we ask. Bless us, Lord, even in our fellowship meeting this evening with Robin Gray. Bless him as he speaks to us.

We pray that we would know the Lord's blessing in our gathering. Keep us then, we pray. Go before us for Jesus' sake. Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion this evening by singing in Psalm 32.

Psalm 32 in the Scottish Psalter. It's on page 243. Psalm 32.

We're singing from the beginning down to the verse marked 4. In Psalm 32, it was written after Psalm 51, although they're not numbered beside one another. Psalm 51, as you know, that was David's prayer for forgiveness.

He's asking the Lord to cleanse him and forgive him for adultery, for murder, and for lying. And the Lord forgave him. That's his promise. If you confess your sin, he's faithful and just to forgive us.

[37 : 11] And Psalm 32 was written after Psalm 51, where David describes himself as a blessed man. A man who has received from the Lord what he did not deserve. That's what the word blessed means.

He's received from the Lord what he didn't deserve. He has received pardon and forgiveness. And that's what we all receive when we come seeking forgiveness.

O blessed is the one, is the man to whom is freely pardoned all the transgression he hath done whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not his sin, and in whose spirit there is no guile nor fraud is found therein.

We'll sing down to the verse marked four of Psalm 32 to God's praise. O blessed is the one to whom his freely pardoned whom he hath done who's sin is covered.

His DNA is covered. The grace ■■ and of the verse marked his hand goes sweet and the verse marked as this man europe the Lord When you have brought this in, And in your spirit is so guide, Lord brought this family.

[39 : 06] When I sighed, We prayed my speech, And silent was my tongue.

My bones, the Lord said, And old because my Lord don't belong.

For up on me both day and night, Like hundred heaven belied, So that my voice determined In summer, Drought ne'er I.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen. Have you got the answers?

Yes? Okay. How much did the servant owe in today's money? 2.5 billion. Wow.

[40 : 46] Do you have that in your bank account? No? Oh well. Maybe somebody does, huh?

Okay. Question two. As those who say the Lord's Prayer, We must...

Practice what we pray. Sort... Yeah. And preach and pray. Practice what we pray. You get that, Anna? Good.

Where is the power of forgiveness to be found? At the cross. Power of forgiveness is found at the cross. Well done. You're very good. Very good. Very good. Very good. Very good. Very good. Very good. Very good.