

TEACH US TO PRAY

“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” ...

Matthew 6:11

Next to faith, forgiveness may well be the most important component of our walk with God. Forgiveness is so important that the willingness (or unwillingness) to forgive literally determines whether or not we are ourselves forgiven. This part of the Lord’s Prayer is so important that Jesus elaborated on it in the next few verses following the Prayer:

“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matthew 6:14-15)

To override my thinking, I have often prayed thus: “Father, please forgive me in the same way that I forgive others.” Needless to say, I want all the forgiveness I can get, so I must give all the forgiveness that I need.

“For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.” (James 2:13)

Forgiveness, therefore, includes releasing people from the debts that they owe you, cancelling the need for repayment or even acknowledgement of the debts. Forgiveness effects a release of the emotion of forgiveness, and a receiving of healing.

“Cast your bread upon the water,” as Ecclesiastes 11:1 instructs, and let the seed die. “Forgive” in the original Greek version of the New Testament, means to send, let go, or send forth. We ask God to forgive (leave, let go, send forth) our debts (what we owe, and are under obligation to perform) as we ourselves forgive (leave, let go, send forth) those indebted (those who owe us, and are under an obligation to perform) to us. When we forgive, we “let it go”, in the simplest of terms.

We need, then, to do the following:

- **Ask God to forgive us**

Take the time to confess your sin. Sin leaves by way of the mouth. *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)*

- **Forgive those who have trespassed against us**

We often deal with offense by denying it, burying it, or trying to ignore it. Confess what someone has done to you. They trespassed against you, so you need to declare what they did and then forgive them. *God desires truth in the inward parts (Ps. 51:6)*, so what is inside you must come out.

- **Forgive ourselves**

“...To give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.” (Isaiah 61:3)

We need to forgive ourselves, and we need to receive forgiveness. Isaiah 61:3 explains what I call The Great Exchange Principle - His beauty for our ashes, His joy for our mourning, His peace for our heaviness. In order for this exchange to take place, though, you have to give God your failures. Don't keep them and try to fix them on your own. Instead, offer them up to him.

- **Bless those who curse you**

*“...not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, **that you may inherit a blessing.**” (1 Peter 3:9)*

When it comes to forgiving, you must replace what has been cast out with that which is of God. Blessing restores you into blessing.

*“But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, **bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.** To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. **And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.**” (Luke 6:27-31)*

Forgiveness Truths:

- **Keep short accounts**

The longer the debt, the larger it becomes, and the harder it is to forgive. *“Be angry and do not sin: **do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.**” (Ephesians 4:26-27)*

- **Forgiveness is free**

There is no limit to forgiveness! You can use it often, and continually. It will never run out.

“...Freely you have received, freely give.” (Matthew 10:8b)

- **Forgive until you are free**

When do you know that forgiveness is complete? You are free when the offending person, event, or situation can enter your mind or life without it twisting your stomach. What is the twisting in your stomach? It is the root of bitterness.

- **Bitterness is failed grace and missed expectations**

We become bitter when what we believe should have happened did not happen, and we did not forgive and receive grace for the situation. In such a case, we carry around a bag of ashes with us, nurse a wound, and long for revenge.

- **Unforgiveness is a sin**

Deal with unforgiveness as a sin, not as a friend. It will destroy your life.

- **Bitter people cannot taste sweet things**

“All the days of the afflicted are evil, but he who is of a merry heart has a continual feast.” (Proverbs 15:15)

- **Unforgiveness binds a person to his sin**

Choosing not to forgive ensures that you will always experience the same treatment from the offending person. This is especially terrible in marriages because one literally binds his/her sin to his or her spouse, and then has to live with him or her.

*“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”
(John 20:23)*

- **Forgiveness does not justify the offense; it just makes you free**

Vengeance is God’s responsibility; blessing is yours. *“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written: ‘**Vengeance is Mine, I will repay**’,” says the Lord. “Therefore, If your enemy hungers, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”
(Romans 12:19-21)*

- **Forgiveness unclogs our fellowship with God**

You must be capable of being ‘caught’ before you can be forgiven. Welcome conviction, be quick to confess, and the joy of repentance will continually be yours.

- **Ask God to forgive the sins of others**

*“If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin **which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death.**”*

There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that.” (1 John 5:16)

*“Then he [Stephen] knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, **do not charge them with this sin.**’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep.” (Acts 7:60)*

- **Repentance is a door opener to faith, God’s love, and true worship.** Luke 7:36-50 illustrates these principles in the recounting of the woman who anointed Jesus’ feet, and in the parable of the two debtors.