

Pray Like This (Week 5) - Forgiven and Forgiving Sermon Summary

On Sunday, 2/4, we took a deep drive into the sentence, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." It is the only phrase of the Lord's Prayer that Jesus deems crucial enough to repeat (see Matthew 6.12, then 6.14-15).

The language of these verses in Matthew 6, along with the parallel text in Luke 11.4, is vivid. Our misdeeds, omissions, and poor choices are described with three overlapping words: debts (that which we owe others because of what we did or did not), trespasses (how we have strayed from the right path), and sin (how we have missed the mark, a term from the world of archery). And when we "forgive," we are, as the ancient Greek word signals, releasing someone from the weight of what they've done to us, or asking God to help us drop the weight of what we ourselves have done.

1) When we pray, we ought to be praying for God to release us from our own debts, trespasses, and sins.

But that begs the question - how does God forgive? Forgiveness is about God's character, not ours. God's forgiveness is not contingent – it is not dependent on us in any way. You can't stop God from being forgiving because God is by nature a forgiver. As Isaiah 45.23 puts it, recalling the bedrock hope upon which the Mosaic Law is built, "I (God) am He who blots out your transgressions for My sake, and I will not remember your sins."

Likewise, God forgives us disproportionality, that is, there is a massive discrepancy between how much we will ever forgive others and how much God forgives us. Jesus, using exaggeration to prove His point, tells a story in which God's forgiveness of us is comparable to \$5.6 billion in modern dollars, whereas our unwillingness to forgive others is comparable to no more than just under \$10,000 (click [here](#) to read the story in Matthew 18.21-35).

So how should this influence how we pray?

- God never tires of forgiving us: in fact, we will grow weary of our own voices long before God ever tires of them. There is never a time when God doesn't meet our honest confession with His ready grace. Thus, there is no fear.
- Take time in prayer to get the scale how much you need forgiveness right: you carry an enormous weight with you, only some of which you may be aware of but all of which will be met with God's forgiveness.



2) When we pray, we ought to be praying about forgiving others from how they've sinned against us. (For real - when was the last time we actually did this?)

James Mulholland tells us why this needs to become a part of our prayer life:

"Self-righteousness is a seductive sin. When I glory in my goodness, the sins of others seem more heinous. When I forget my need for forgiveness, the sins of others are more difficult to forget. When I pray like this, I acknowledge I have something in common with even my worst enemy – we both need forgiveness.' Eminent biblical scholar N. T. Wright says it more simply: "To forgive is to admit how much each one of us needs forgiveness."

To forgive is an act of generosity both to the offender and to ourselves. When we forgive, we are releasing someone from the toll they've taken on us, and we are releasing ourselves from the weight of our unforgiveness and anger.

So how can you weave this into your prayer life?:

- On a regular basis, take time in your prayer life to ask God who you need to forgive, or what anger and resentment caused by the ill will and behavior of others from which you need to be freed.

- Forgiveness is both a choice and process; it is a choice, followed by many more choices. So we need to pray for the initial willingness to forgive, and then the fortitude to keep on forgiving. We need to ask for the courage to take the first step on the path of forgiving someone else, and then for the patience to keep walking it, however long the act of forgiving may take.

3) So what's the relationship between God forgiving us and us forgiving others, because there certainly seems to be a connection in Matthew 6.12, 14-15?

American New Testament scholar Ben Witherington III summarizes the connection this way, "If we refuse to forgive, we won't want to be forgiven." Sister Wendy Beckett, an English Christian writer on spirituality (as well as a leading art historian) expands on that simple idea: "What Jesus is saying is that your heart can't turn to God your Father for forgiveness if you're not forgiving other people. It makes God's forgiveness impossible. God cannot forgive a hard heart. He wants to but can't, because you can't receive it. Your heart is closed to Him. Open your heart to other people and you'll be letting Him in too."

So forgiveness in our lives is cyclical, or, as N. T. Wright describes it, like breathing. We breath in God's abundant, ready forgiveness for us, and we then breath out forgiveness for others. Our prayer life should include both halves, and, in fact, Jesus seems to be saying that the cycle breaks down if we overlook either half. After all, again to cite Ben Witherington III, "An unforgiving Christina is an oxymoron."

Praying This Week

This week, most of the ways you can try praying are listed in the sermon summary above:

- You can be bold in approaching God's ready forgiveness
- You can get real about the enormous weight you carry and need God to release you from
- You can spend time at least once a week asking God who you need to forgive and release from the weight of what they've done to you. And when you do this, you can remind yourself that you're really not that different from them - everyone, including you, needs forgiveness.
- Pray about the choice and process of forgiving, starting on the path of forgiveness and then staying on it. Be specific about the who and what.
- Pray both halves of the forgiveness cycle. For those who know the simple practice of breathing prayer, you can literally do what's written about in point 3 of the sermon summary above: with your inhale, imagine breathing in God's forgiveness for you and all you've done/not done, and then with the exhale, ask to forgive others - or a specific someone - the same way.

Resources on Forgiving

Forgiving a person isn't easy, especially someone who has wounded you deeply. We didn't touch on the nitty-gritty of how to do that yesterday, but a couple of good resources would help you, check out the following:

- A host of great, short resources on the psychology of forgiving (scroll down the page to find them all): [Forgiveness | Psychology Today](#)
- A useful article from a Christian counseling center on the process of forgiving: [Learning How to Forgive: 8 Steps to True Forgiveness | Los Angeles Christian Counseling \(lchristiancounseling.com\)](#)
- A summary of a really good book on Christian forgiveness: [F4. Forgive and Forget by Lewis Smedes \(wordpress.com\)](#)
- An article written by the author of that book summarized above (the late Lewis Smedes): [forgiveness.pdf \(cslewisinstitute.org\)](#)