

How to Pray: Forgive Us As We Forgive

Hillsboro Presbyterian Church

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Matthew 6:9-12 *“This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS, AS WE ALSO HAVE FORGIVEN OUR DEBTORS.’”*

Forgiveness is at the heart of the gospel, but it is a difficult concept to grasp. The disciple Peter asked in **Matthew 18:21** *“Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? 7 times?” Jesus answered, Not 7 times, but 77 times.”* We don’t know if Peter meant his *brother* Andrew, but it is the people we are closest to who can hurt us the most. Jewish law required forgiving a person 3 times. Jesus’ response is that we should not be counting...and teaches through a story.

Matthew 18:23-35 The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

18:23-24 *“A king wanted to settle accounts with his servants....a man who owed him 10,000 talents was brought to him.”* Twelve million dollars! We don’t know how it happened, but we know it is hopeless. **18:25** *“Since the servant was not able to pay, the king ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.”* Bankruptcy then meant slavery for you and your family. **18:26** *“The servant fell on his knees before the king. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’”* Really. \$1000 a day for the next 33 years? This is an impossible debt. A little bit more time is not going to make any difference. But the king feels sorry for the servant and he actually releases him from his debt. The king says: “I am letting you off the hook.” **18:27** *“The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.”* Why would the king do that? More important, why must we do that? Why must we let people off the hook when they owe us...big time... far more than they could ever repay? **Why?**

i. We forgive because God forgives us. The king represents God who forgives the servant representing us...and just as the king canceled the debt of this servant, God sent Jesus Christ to pay for our debt. *“The wages of sin is death”* (Romans 6:23) and Jesus Christ died for our sin...our debt. How would you feel if you were forgiven \$12,000,000? Amazement? Relief? Joy? Gratitude? Freedom? Generous? Not this guy. **18:28** *“...that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii (\$10,000). He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ He demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’ (what he had said to the king) But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown in jail.”* Why was this guy so harsh? **Because he did not really believe that the king had let him off the hook.** So he tries to get money thinking, “I’ve got to pay the king back someday...somehow”. He did not believe he was forgiven. **When we feel unforgiven, we are unforgiving. We don’t feel forgiven by God.** If we did then we would be a lot more forgiving... So...are you unconsciously trying to repay God? You have accepted salvation, but you don’t really feel released...and you are trying to be good in order to repay God. Isn’t going to happen. You are too much in debt...plus it has already been forgiven. **Ephesians 4:32** *“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ, God forgave you.”* When you really feel forgiven you’re going to be forgiving. Remember: you will never ever have to forgive anybody else more than God has already forgiven you.

ii. We forgive because resentment is self-torture. You are only hurting yourself. The king hears about this servant putting the squeeze on another and the king is livid! **18:32** *“You wicked servant. I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you? In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.”* Resentment will eat you alive. *Heart Circulation* magazine reported people who carry resentment – are twice as likely to have a stroke, three times more likely to have a heart attack, and four times more likely to have unhealthy levels of cholesterol. Stanford researchers linked carrying a grudge to higher levels of diabetes and to higher levels of cancer...quote, “There is an enormous physical cost to holding on to anger.” So: What hurtful memory are you holding on to? What is it that every time you think about it, it torments you?

iii. We forgive because we need forgiveness every day. *“Forgive us our sins as we forgive.”* The word “as” can mean “while” or “in the same way”. We are forgiven while we forgive...so we aren’t if we don’t. AND we are forgiven as much as we forgive. Both are true. Forgiveness is “living by grace”. We all need it every day. Forgiveness must be accepted and given; constant and continual; enjoyed and employed. The king treats the servant exactly the way the servant treats the other. **18:35** *“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”* Not just an intellectual forgiveness, but an emotional forgiveness. Head and heart. **How?**

i. We forgive by leaving it to God. **Romans 12:19** *“Never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God for he has said he will repay those who deserve it.”* Let God be the God of justice. Forgiveness does not mean the instant restoration of trust. Forgiveness is instant. Trust must be rebuilt over time. Forgiveness is based on grace. Trust is built on works. You earn trust. You don’t earn forgiveness. Forgiveness is built on grace. It is not resuming a relationship with no change. Forgiveness is only on our part whether they respond or not, ask for it or not, recognize they need it or not. You forgive for your sake. Restoration takes repentance, restitution, and a rebuilding of trust.

ii. We forgive by healing it with grace. **Hebrews 12:15** *“Be careful that none of you fails to respond to the grace, which God gives...”* When you say “you make me mad”, you are admitting they are controlling you. The only way you get this person not controlling you is God-controlling you...an infusion of God’s grace. If you don’t, life will make you bitter. We live on a broken planet. This is not heaven. On earth, life is not fair. That’s why I believe in heaven and I believe in hell. One day God is going to settle the score. Is forgiveness fair? Absolutely not. It is not about fairness. It is not about justice. It’s about grace. You don’t forgive a person because it’s the fair thing to do. You forgive a person because it’s the right thing to do and you don’t want your heart full of poison. You don’t want your heart holding on to the hurt and the hate. It is the grace of God that gives you forgiveness. Grace is freely given, but it is costly. It cost Jesus his life...to heal us and set us free.

iii. We forgive by nailing it to the cross. **Colossians 2:14** *“God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins...nailing it to the cross.”* That image is powerful. The cross of Christ has the power to free us...from guilt, grudges, grief, regrets, resentment. Nothing else can heal you like the cross of Christ. It is the very power of God to break the cycle of revenge...to break the bondage of our selfishness, shame, and sin. The cross of Christ is the power of God to forgive. This is why Jesus teaches his followers to pray about forgiveness...it is at the heart of the gospel.