



3/29/2020

“Forgive Us . . . As We Forgive”

Scripture: Micah 7:18-20; Colossians 1:9-14; Matthew 6:12, 14-15

Lenten Series: Living the Lord’s Prayer

Fifth Sunday in Lent

As we continue this Sunday in our Lenten Series of “Living the Lord’s Prayer, **today we reflect on forgiveness, both God’s and ours.**

Unfortunately, there are many people that hold on to personal guilt and shame, or anger and resentment towards another. We can carry them around or within us for a long time, weighing us down or tearing us up. But Jesus tells us and teaches us how we can overcome or let go of those feelings and attitudes.

Or, in times such as we are now facing, with restrictions on our social mobility or having to share family spaces more closely or more often and longer, some have increased fears and anxiety over health or finances. You might be pushed to your limits or lose your temper. Such times and challenges can bring out the best in us or lead us to say or do things we know aren’t right.

† “Forgive Us . . .”

Although the nature of human offences and shortcomings may vary, the good news we can cling to and affirm is that our loving God is full of compassion and mercy.

One thing that has always intrigued me about the Lord’s Prayer, recorded here in Matthew, as well as the shorter version in Luke, is that several different words are used to describe the nature of the offenses we do in our relationship with God and one another. They also describe our need to offer and receive forgiveness.

Matthew records (Matthew 6:12, 14-15) as in the NIV: “**Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. . . ¹⁴ For if you forgive men (others) when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men (others) their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.**”

The NRSV has (14-15): “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

So why the different words and translations? The answer is to be found in the Greek words used in the original manuscripts of Matthew and Luke. There are three different words which can have similar or slightly different meanings and applications.



So, when we look at the words behind the words more closely, we see that all of the English words used in translation may apply to our own lives and circumstances. I believe therefore, it is good to remember and perhaps use all the words on different occasions, and not just be fixed to a particular one, though we may have memorized it that way.

Basically, what they all boil down to is our prayer to God, **asking that our Heavenly Father forgive us as we forgive others – whether debts, trespasses, sins, shortcomings, wrongdoings and so forth.**

We can look to the ideal and example of our loving and merciful God.

As the prophet Micah (7:18 NIRV) said, *“Lord, who is a God like you? You forgive sin. You forgive your people when they do what is wrong. You don't stay angry forever. Instead, you take delight in showing your faithful love to them.”*

Yes, God pardons iniquity (sin) and passes over transgressions. God does not remain angry forever but delights in showing mercy. God promises compassion to his people, to “tread their iniquities underfoot”, and to “cast out all their sins into the depths of the sea”.

As Jesus taught through parables and said plainly as recorded by Matthew (18:14) regarding those who are lost, *“. . . your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.”*

Indeed, God has taken the initiative by sending his Son, Jesus, into the world to seek and to save the lost. That includes each and every one of us. As the Apostle Paul said (Colossians 1:9-14), God our Heavenly Father has *“rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”*

So, as the writer of Hebrews says, **“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”**

“Forgive us” Jesus tells us to pray.

Asking for forgiveness helps move us from possibly obsessing over past sins and being prisoners to guilt and shame. It also acknowledges our “healthy” guilt which can be, as Albert Haase puts it, “a wise teacher and trusted companion in spiritual formation.” (Living the Lord’s Prayer – The Way of the Disciple; IVP, 2009, p.156)

John Wesley emphasized that it is indeed the Holy Spirit, who with prevenient grace, goes before our confession to convince us of our sin and our need for forgiveness.

Then, as Bernard of Clairvaux wrote, “Every soul that stands under condemnation with nothing to say for itself has the power to turn and discover it can yet breathe the fresh air of God’s pardon and mercy.” (Ibid, p. 161)



“Praying for forgiveness,” Haase says, “is a vivid reminder that God frees us from debilitating guilt and forgets our past. No sin is written with indelible ink.” (Ibid., p.155)

That’s the good news. So, if you have not asked for or received God’s forgiveness, do so today. You can use the simple prayer found in your bulletin, giving your life to Jesus.

The next phase of the prayer may be more challenging for us.

† “ . . . **As We Forgive**”

Jesus taught and demonstrated that God’s love and mercy are greater than any wrong or injustice that may be done to us.

Matthew and Luke also both record additional words that Jesus teaches us to pray, words which are for many of us the most difficult to pray, namely this – **as we forgive those who trespass, sin or are indebted to us.**

These are words which, when we really think about the words we are praying to God, may stick in our mouths. We may secretly hope God does not hear or take them literally. We want God to forgive us, but are we really willing to forgive someone else?

Yet they embody a teaching of Jesus Christ which is remembered and recorded in some way in each of the three synoptic gospels. By teaching forgiveness, Jesus is radically departing from the traditional approval and endorsement of revenge. We would rather have justice, or more extremely, revenge. “Vengeance is mine.” Further, I would say, it is placing mercy over justice in the personal sense that makes us truly more like Christ.

Listen again . . .

NIV “¹⁴ For if you forgive men/others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men/others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

Mark 11:25 says, “And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

And in Luke 6:37-38, Jesus said, “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸ Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

It sounds to me like a spiritual law that God has put in place.

By comparison with Jesus Christ, most of us have such trivial grievances, trespasses, wrongs and injustices done to us. And yet it can be so difficult to forgive.



Don't get me wrong, I'm not trying to minimize your hurts and pains or the truly terrible things someone or others may have done to you. My heart truly aches for the persons who come to me and share their stories and feelings. Perhaps someone has abused you, stolen from you, victimized you in some other way. Perhaps you continue to deal with these things on a regular basis.

I don't think God wants us to remain victims of continued abuse. But when we hold on to bitterness and anger, we are twice victims. When we seek revenge, we close our hearts out to God's love and mercy, healing and wholeness.

Jesus taught and demonstrated that God's love and mercy are greater than any wrong or injustice that may be done to us, even death on a cross.

Further, we must have faith and believe that Jesus' words are truth. As difficult as it may be for us to forgive someone, God has a purpose and a plan for each of us on this earth. The bible tells us that the overarching purpose and plan is the salvation and reconciliation of the world. Sometimes lives intersect in painful, troubling or challenging ways to fulfill that purpose.

When it seems like we are just not able to forgive, we should turn to the one who was able to forgive even those who nailed him to that cross.

Even though it is sometimes difficult to forgive, just remember that God wants to bring healing and wholeness to every heart, mind and soul.

In times such as these we are facing in our country and world today, some will look for others to blame, maybe even themselves, for the suffering, loss, and grief that is experienced or felt. Some will even see it as an act of God's judgement and end time.

Friends, while we try to make sense of it all, let us also have faith, hope and trust in a loving God. Perhaps it is a wake-up call, a trial, test or challenge for many or all of us. When I wrote my newsletter message for March last month about change, I really wasn't expecting all the changes that would come from this pandemic. Yet, the truth of finding opportunity in every challenge still applies. As many of you have already experienced and shown, we have many opportunities to accept and show the love and forgiveness of God in Christ at this time.

Here are some **Suggested Intentional or Random Act of Kindness for the week . . .**

- † Listen with empathy to someone who has been hurt or wronged in some way
- † Listen without judgement to someone who has harmed or wronged another
- † Help to be a "peacemaker" or minister of reconciliation
- † Say you're sorry or ask forgiveness of someone you have hurt or wronged



† Make amends if you can to someone you have hurt or wronged

† Forgive someone who has hurt you or wronged you; and if still possible, let them know

By God's grace may you always be able to forgive others from your heart, that you may truly know and realize God's love and forgiveness for you. In Jesus' name. Amen.