

Jesus gave us a model for daily prayer in the Lord's Prayer. He knew that we would benefit from reminders every day of many things. We have a Father in heaven who is good and generous. His kingdom takes priority over our personal agendas. We should depend upon him as the source of our daily blessings. We can ask him to give us what we need as a sign of our dependence upon him. We should never forget how much he has forgiven as we often need to show forgiveness to others.

If someone asked me what message would be suitable to preach to any audience, any time and anyplace, I would certainly include one on the subject of forgiveness. Jesus knew that the enemy of our souls would always seek to attack his future bride with division, bitterness, grudges and unforgiveness. In his high priestly prayer in John 17, Jesus prayed that we his people would be one, just as he and the Father are one. They were always in perfect harmony and full of love toward one another. That is his desire for his church. What would be the effect?

Wonder Working Power on Display

It happened at the creation of the universe. The Holy Trinity were in unity, and when God spoke, there was a big bang as the universe was made out of nothing by the power words from God's breath. Several times in Genesis chapter one we see the pattern, God said...God saw. When the early church was of 'one heart and mind' in the Book of Acts, they spoke with boldness as one and saw demonstrations of God's power. (Acts 4:32-33). This was not just power for miracles but a display of love for God and for one another that captured the attention and allegiance of many Jewish leaders to the kingdom of Jesus (Acts 6:7) Many in the Roman Empire including soldiers and others came to believe in Jesus too! As Edwin Louis Cole (the father of the modern Christian men's movement) used to teach...

The Place of Agreement is the Place of Power

The word agreement in Greek is the root word of our word **symphony**, which emits the most beautiful sounds when **all the available instruments are in harmony**. Jesus taught us that God is pleased to answer the prayers of his people when they are in absolute unity.

'If two of you on earth AGREE (sumphoneo) about anything you ask for, it will be done by my Father in heaven.' - Matthew 18:19

When the church walks in disagreement and unforgiveness, God will limit answers to prayer. We could say: **The Place of Disagreement is the Place of Weakness**. I believe this may have been one reason that Jesus gave us these words in the Lord's Prayer.

"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."

He knew that disagreement and unforgiveness would be one of Satan's chief weapons to make the church spiritually sterile. I have seen its chilling effect on evangelism teams that I have led and also in churches in which I have worked. One pastor told me that he had seen scores of believers come to his church and then move on because they held a grievance with someone else in that place. How sad. I used to call them 'sensitive saints'. At the least offense, they move on to another church instead of trying to be a reconciler.

God has entrusted his church with the 'ministry of reconciliation' - 2 Corinthians 5:18. Yes, there are times when we move on to other places at God's leading, but how we leave a church, job or relationship is often how we enter another one. We should walk in love and seek to live in peace with others. If we leave in bitterness and unforgiveness, we may just be carrying that same attitude (or at least some harmful residue of it) into our new situation. This has been a needed message throughout the church age.

John Bevere is one author I have always greatly respected. He often has written books that deal with topics that are much needed or overlooked by others in the body of Christ. His first bestseller was called: **The Bait of Satan**.

In it he deals with idea of getting rid of 'offenses'. The apostle Paul addressed discord among of two women co-workers in his ministry.

"I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to AGREE with each other in the Lord."
Philippians 4:2

The writer of Hebrews implores us: "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many." - Hebrews 12:14-15.

Forgiven of all my sins and forgiving all others who have sinned against me should be natural for followers of Jesus. Stay tuned my friends as we seek to get all of our instruments in tune with God and one another and thus create a great symphony of prayer that will shake the powers of darkness! Yahoo!

FORGIVEN AND FORGIVING

The writer of Hebrews warned against a root of bitterness that could infect a person who would then defile others with its poison.

"See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. - Hebrews 12:15 NIV

Bitter people end up devouring one another - Galatians 5:15. They lack love and forgiveness. Where does this bitterness come from? It comes from that old serpent the Bible calls '**the devil**'. Even that name includes the word '**evil**'. **Satan's snakebites are poison.** The word bitter and bite go together. It was in the Garden of Eden that the serpent first injected his poison into the human race and brought mankind from grace to disgrace. Cain resented his brother Abel and murdered him. We see other examples in the Bible where resentment led to a murderous spirit. King Saul tried to kill David. When Jesus walked this earth the religious leaders had such hatred for Jesus that they often sought to kill him.

My first mission trip was to the island of Jamaica when I was age 30. I was pleased to learn that there were no snakes there! My last two mission trips have been to India where snakes are common and also can be very poisonous. If one goes high enough in mountains there will be no snakes as they cannot live above the snake line in higher atmospheres. In his book, Freedom to Choose, Ernest Gruen has a chart that lists each fruit of the Spirit and contrasts it with a progressively opposite negative. Here is an example.

Holy Spirit Thought and Influence / **LOVE**

Demon Thought / resentment, bitterness, unforgiveness

Demon Habit / hatred

Demon Control / **MURDER**

Wherever there is evil the devil is somehow involved either directly or indirectly through our sinful flesh or the world systems / Ephesians 2:1-3. Some TV preachers love to quote Luke 6:38 to their viewers in order to induce them to give money to their ministry.

'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.'

This is a principle that can be applied to giving money and resources, but Jesus' main emphasis in this teaching was spiritual. He talked of judging, condemning and forgiving. We reap what we sow. **If we forgive.....we will be forgiven.** In the Lord's Prayer we see God's expectancy that we should walk in forgiveness to all. **'Forgive us our debts.....AS we forgive our debtors'.**

How can a person who claims to be a Christian and thus a follower of him, not walk in forgiveness? We have just asked our Father to **give us** our daily bread. He is gracious to his children and does so generously. In fact, the verb form of grace means..'to deal generously with'. He has forgiven us our sin debt which we could never repay, so we should be gracious enough to forgive others when they have sinned against us. Far too many Christians know that they are saved by grace through faith and yet they are **ungracious toward others.** Matthew 18:23-35 would be helpful to those in such a condition.

The New Testament uses the word **debt** 30 times. In 8 of these references it refers to money. In 25 other instances, the term debt refers to a moral or religious obligation. (reference from William Barclay). Most persons have had to deal with people that owed them money. It can easily cause hard feelings etc. I have collected many books over the years and have given away many. I used to get irritated when people did not return books that I had lent them. However, I sometimes was later embarrassed to discover books on my shelf that I had not returned!

R.T. Kendall has written two superb books on forgiveness. One, **God Meant it for Good**, which is based on the story of Joseph. The other book is **Total Forgiveness.**

When we walk in unforgiveness, we may think we are hurting the other person but the poison is actually affecting us. Some people can forgive others but have trouble forgiving themselves for past decisions and faulty actions. Judas Iscariot would not, and went and hanged himself for his betrayal of Jesus. Peter denied the Lord three times but was able to receive forgiveness from Jesus and became a powerful voice for him in his latter years. Who would be foolish enough to ask God **Not** to forgive their sins? Surprisingly, there are many professing Christians who unknowingly ask God to do just that whenever they recite The Lord's Prayer. William Barclay refers to the word 'AS' in the prayer with this.....

'There is the closest possible connection between human and divine forgiveness, and that he who is unforgiving has cut himself off from the forgiveness of God, we cannot evade the truth that to be forgiven, we must be forgiving.'

Having worked around many different religions, I finally came to realize one key difference that Christianity has from all other belief systems. It is how we are told to treat our enemies.

Jesus taught us to 'love our enemies.....pray for them.....do good to them.' When one leaves other religions, they are shunned, cut off or even subject to death threats. There is no intercession for them as is the practice of Christians towards those who leave the faith.

Paul taught us...'Do not be overcome with evil but overcome evil with good'. - Romans 12:21.

I will be attending a 3 day conference later this coming week called: Heaven Come Down. We could certainly use a lot more forgiveness to one another in this world. It all begins with us connecting with God in heaven who is the greatest GIVER and FORGIVER.

I have been to the Rocky Mountains in Colorado and also to Mount Shasta in California. There is something special that draws people to these higher elevations. Pristine air. Quietness and peace. Fabulous views. Heaven's atmosphere is even better....one of pure love and divine perspective. In this lowly world we will experience the snakebites of snarly people but the poison will not effect us if we remember one thing....living and walking in the atmosphere of God's heavenly love lifts us above the snake line.

God's desire and mine is to be for giving and forgiving,

John

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