

Forgiveness Workshop Matthew 6:12, 14-15

Introduction

This model prayer was not initially intended for public purposes. The Jewish community already required prayer three times daily. However, this prayer was to provide a model for personal, private prayer (Matthew 6:6). Similar to the disciples of John, it was this private prayer that would differentiate the followers of the Lord Jesus from those in the typical Jewish community (Luke 11:1). Most likely, the disciples saw the power that Jesus displayed and His extraordinary prayer life and desired to have the same “connection” to God. This prayer is not only a model for guiding their prayer lives but ours as well.

Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

One of the central elements in the Lord’s prayer is the issue of forgiveness. Forgiveness is central to the Christian faith. First, we have received forgiveness through the cross of Jesus Christ, which allows us to have a relationship with God (Colossians 2:13). This same forgiveness is central in our relationships with one another (Colossians 3:12-13). However, in many cases, we receive the forgiveness of God and never offer that forgiveness to others. In this prayer, Jesus connects the forgiveness we receive with the forgiveness we give to others. This session is designed to show us how the two are intended to be connected and how not practicing forgiveness has both social and eternal consequences.

Definition of forgiveness.

Before we get started with the discussion on forgiveness, let us consider what the words of this part of the prayer mean:

The word that we translate as “forgive” means “to pardon, dismiss or leave behind.” It means we forfeit our rights to respond by requiring payment and retribution from the offender. In essence, we “drop the charges” against the other person.

The second word is the word that we translate as “debts.” This word suggests that a person “owes someone something.” It signifies a debt incurred that must be resolved or repaid by the lender or offender. In personal offenses, the transgressor is a debtor as far as the person injured is concerned. In this case, the debt is not a financial debt but an eternal debt incurred by our sins that God must resolve to regain a healthy relationship of “righteous standing” with God. Until such debt is repaid, we are “indebted” to God.

The third word, “debtor,” points to the person that is the offender. This is the person that causes the injury or incurs debt. This person is the “sinner,” the one that crosses the boundary of righteousness or commits the breaking of the law with a person.

A comma separates two parts of the same sentence. It suggests two parts of a single thought.

The word translated “as” suggests “like, because or as a result of.” This infers that one element is based upon the other element’s manner of completion.

Translation: Only dismiss my sin debts like I forgive the sins of others.

This sounds a lot different. It was designed to cause us to never ask from the Lord what we – as followers of the Lord – are willing to display ourselves. To better put this into perspective, Jesus follows up by echoing His intent in the verse immediately following the prayer. He states in verses 14-15 that the forgiveness of our trespasses or “sins” or “areas where they committed an infraction the boundaries of a healthy relationship” will only be directly reflective of how we handle the trespasses of others. It is saying to God:

“Don’t allow forgiveness to come to me if I’m unwilling to allow it to flow through me.”

Why is forgiveness so important?

1. It reflects the love of Christ – Ephesians 4:32
2. It releases us from the moment of offense – Jeremiah 31:34
3. It removes the bitterness from our hearts and positions us to heal from the incident – Luke 17:6
4. It repairs the breach in our relationships – Matthew 18:15
5. It restores the fellowship – Colossians 1:21-22

To ensure that we understand the dynamic of forgiveness and how forgiving others impacts the forgiveness that we receive from the Lord, Jesus gives us a parable in Matthew 18:23-35. This parable points to several truths about how forgiveness not only impacts us now but also has lasting effects:

1. There are two types of people debt collectors and debt releasers. One person is conscious of their ability to incur debt that must be forgiven because they aren’t able to repay. They are “debt releasers” because they choose to hear and respond to the pure, powerful pathway of restoration and reconciliation. Conversely, these “debt collectors” set out to make people pay for their actions. The other person never considers their debt; the only focus is on what others owe them.
2. God shows us extraordinary forgiveness BEFORE we are expected/commanded to exhibit forgiveness. The first servant is presented with a debt of 3.5 Billion dollars that would take 160,000 years (roughly 1900 lifetimes of working from birth to eighty-five years old) to pay off. In other words, the debt was beyond his ability to resolve. After asking for the debt to be forgiven, the master surprisingly dismissed the debt.

3. We will be allowed to show forgiveness to others. Immediately after his debt was released, he encountered a person that owed him some money. He was presented with the same opportunity, but this time, he would be the one owed the debt.
4. The forgiveness we are called to give will never be as great as the level of forgiveness we have received from God. In the parable, the first servant owes roughly 3.5 Billion dollars in debt, and the second servant owes approximately 58.00.
5. When we choose not to forgive, we choose to forfeit our forgiveness. After confronting the servant about the debt, the man begged for the debt to be ignored. Choosing not to forgive, he choked the man and threw him into prison until the debt could be paid. Upon finding out about the servant's actions, his master decided to retract the debt forgiveness, reinstitute the debt and throw him into prison until it could be paid. When we choose not to forgive others, we also choose not to be forgiven by God. We are saying to the Lord, "treat my debts the way I treat the debts of others."
6. Forgiveness is only counted when it comes from the heart, not just the language. The debt must be released from our hearts (Psalm 103:12). It doesn't mean that the memory won't leave our heads, but it does mean that the resentment and desire for revenge have left our hearts.

As mentioned earlier, forgiving doesn't just impact our human relationships; it affects our heavenly relationship with our Father. Our eternal sin debt is greatly hinged upon our ability and willingness to follow Christ's example of forgiveness. Every time we pray this prayer, it serves as a reminder for us of the high importance that heaven places on our commitment to walk in forgiveness.

We usually forgive based on our mercy ethic.

Mercy usually ends where amnesia begins.

Godly forgiveness requires faith when it does not fit within our mercy ethic.

Three practices of "mustard seed" faith

- a. Faith to believe it can be forgiven
- b. Faith to command the offense
- c. Faith to believe it can be uprooted.

Steps to Forgiveness

1. Determine what "exactly" hurt you
2. Identify how badly it hurt you.
3. Pray for the grace to forgive
4. Ask that the offense is removed from the heavenly record
5. Pronounce blessing on the life of the offender