

Enjoying God // Forgive Us Our Debts

Matthew 6:9–13 (ESV), “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.”

Today we are talking about:

1. The importance of confession,
2. The dangers of unforgiveness, and
3. The practice of forgiving.

“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

What is the biblical definition of debt?

The Greek word is *opheilēma*, which means **something owed**. Something owed to another person such as goods, property, or money. In the Bible, righteous conduct is something one “owes” to God; hence, in theology, sin is described figuratively as being “in debt.” In Hebrew culture, debt was usually connected with usury (the business of lending money on interest).

The truth is: something has been taken from all of us. We wouldn’t need to pray to be conduits of God’s forgiveness unless there is a lot that needs to be accounted for. Things have been taken that can never be replaced. Things are unjust. We have been disappointed and hurt and at times they are not even sorry for what they have done to us. We wait for justice, but it never seems to come. It makes sense that we all feel a sense of loss and like nothing can ever repay it. That is what debt is all about. Oftentimes the debt is so deep, and the interest is so high it can never be repaid.

If God has already forgiven us, why are we praying for forgiveness? I thought that the debt has already been paid! Isn’t this already accomplished on the cross?

Jesus Christ died for all who would put their trust in him. That’s true. But even though we have been forgiven, we still are prone to sin. What do we do when that happens? In one sense, we are remembering what Christ has already accomplished on the cross when we refer to being forgiven. But in another way, we are also keeping short accounts with God by confessing our sin as we go, which helps us to remember what he has already done and strengthens our relationship with God.

Praying forgiveness creates a culture you are a part of. It’s not a one-time event.

That is why forgiveness is about “us,” not just about me.

What is confession and how is it different from forgiveness?

1. Confession is the practical way that we are both aware of our own sin before God and aware of how we sin against one another. Forgiveness is what Jesus has accomplished through his sacrifice on the cross.
2. Confession is acknowledging sin out loud. It is spoken. When we speak something, we have to name it—it’s specific.
3. The primary way that we can live out what this prayer is saying is to confess our sins to God and to one another.

What does scriptures say about confession?

Proverbs 28:13, “Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.”

James 5:16, “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power...”

1 John 1:9, “**If we confess our sins**, he is faithful and just to forgive us **our sins** and to **cleanse** us from all unrighteousness.”

What happens when we confess our sins? We are healed! We will prosper! We are cleansed!

Is it necessary for me to confess every single sin to God or to another person? No. But, if you did confess every sin it wouldn’t do you any harm either.

What if I have a lustful thought and then I don’t confess it, and I die? Would I go to hell?

This is a very common misunderstanding of God’s grace. Do you have a mechanical version of forgiveness or a personal one based on relationship? We’re not forgiven due to our confessing. We are forgiven by God through Jesus!

Is my confession of sin mechanical or relational? **Forgiveness is about relationship.**

It brings clarity. It clears the air in our relationships both vertically and horizontally. Not “for” forgiveness but rather for the good, the healing, and the strengthening our relationships.

When we confess God is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us...the purpose of confession is healing – it is the primary way that we come to God with a contrite heart to acknowledge that we need the blood of Jesus. Without confession- the fact of Christ’s forgiveness would never draw us back to God or to each other when we sin. Confession helps us to be aware of God’s grace, and therefore, to give grace to each other! It is not until we give

it a name that it becomes real. There is something special that happens when we bring our sin to God and confess it. It frees us to forgive others in the same way.

The danger of unforgiveness

Debts are real. They are painful. They are deep. The hurts that we have experienced in our lives bring up feelings of anger, injustice, and sickness. There are many in this room that have suffered at the hands of evil and it is no small thing to talk about. But I need to warn you about the dangers of unforgiveness.

Matt 5:21-26 (ESV), “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.”

Notice how Jesus relates delaying dealing with anger to unforgiveness.

Ephesians 4:26, “In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.”

Anger is not the problem- it is delaying dealing with it quickly that is the problem. It is in the delay of anger that the devil finds a place to dwell. There are actually good things about anger too if it is addressed correctly. Anger can be a creative force, or it can be a destructive force. It can motivate us to do something important, and it can animate us to destroy something precious. Anger is one of the most vulnerable feelings you can have because anger reveals what matters most to us. It’s hard to hide it. If someone knows what matters to you, they see you. The gift of anger is exposing your passions.

You see **anger is like a smoke alarm system** inside of us that is telling us something is wrong. If we don’t tend to it quickly it will burn our house down. Alarms are designed to awaken us if something that truly matters is at stake and something must be done about it. Ideally that would lead us to repair our relationships, fix problems, confess our sins, and be creative to make something new.

Anger is like **the light on the dashboard in your car** that is letting you know where extra grace is required. But when we ignore it, minimize it, and deny it, anger will dwell in us and give the devil a foothold.

Anger is a confusing emotion because it always believes its right. You can't be angry without thinking you are right and someone or something else is wrong. Of course, we can be misled by our anger and believe we are right when we are truly wrong. But there is something deep within us that longs to make things "right."

Forgiveness is the only pathway out of anger. It takes us where we need to go. It is a crucial part of living a life that is oriented towards God. Forgiveness motivates us to heal, to strengthen, to build up something new.

Psalm 13:1-6, "How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death lest my enemy say, 'I have prevailed over him' lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken. But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me."

What about justice?

Joseph is thrown into a pit by his brothers and sold into slavery. After years of wrongful imprisonment, he is put in power just before a great famine. The famine brings Joseph's brothers to Egypt to bargain for food. Joseph had a choice to hold onto the bitterness and anger he had towards his brothers or to forgive them.

Genesis 50:19-21, "But Joseph said to them, 'Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.' Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them."

Joseph chose forgiveness. He doesn't excuse his brother's behavior. He steps back and looks at the big picture. He refuses to sit in God's seat. If you want to be a forgiving person, you don't have to give up on justice. You just must put justice in the right hands.

But it is important to remember that although God is the final Judge, there are things that forgiveness is not.

Forgiveness is not...

- Forgiveness is not absent of consequences.
- Forgiveness doesn't neglect healthy boundaries (Matthew 18).
- Forgiveness does not change the other person.
- Forgiving does not mean you forget.
- Forgiveness is a process not a one-time event.

- Forgiveness is not primarily about “telling someone” you forgive them. You may never have opportunity to tell them. But you can still forgive them. Forgiveness is not dependent on another person’s admission of wrong.

Matthew 18:21-35

Giving up what is owed to you only comes when you fully comprehend what you have been given. It is putting a situation firmly into God’s hands, trusting that he will be a perfect judge. He will handle it. He is the perfect judge. Make no mistake- it will be judged.

The practice of forgiveness

1. *Start with a contrite heart.*

In Luke chapter 7, a sinful woman comes to wash Jesus’ feet with a jar of expensive perfume. Simon the Pharisee thinks to himself that if Jesus knew who this woman was, he wouldn’t let her touch him. But Jesus interrupts his thoughts and teaches this parable about how Grace flows through the forgiven.

Luke 7:36-50

2. Become a conduit of grace

To the degree that you are grieved by your own sin and able to receive God’s grace is the same level you can give grace to others. This is a story that perfectly describes the conduit of God’s grace. God’s grace comes to you, and you can only give as much as you allow in and through you. You can only forgive what you have been forgiven.

Perfect people can’t forgive anyone. Broken and contrite people can be a conduit of God’s grace. They can really love other people because of God’s grace to them is overflowing.

What is the purpose of forgiveness?

The purpose of praying forgiveness is to create a community (family) that is full of grace. A home for God’s children where imperfect people live together overflowing with Gods love. The alternative? Anger, bitterness, sickness, and isolation. What happens when we try to make that culture? We hurt each other- we mess it up.

Have you ever heard someone talk about how they were hurt in church? Or how they don’t go to church because of Christians. Or, how they don’t like “organized” church, but they love Jesus? These are all different versions of the same problem.

The Church would be perfect if it wasn’t for people. But Christ still died for the ungodly! While we were still sinners Christ died for us!

Why must we pray continually prayers of community repair?

Because we are always messing everything up. Jesus knows this. Christians should know this. WE WILL HURT one another. Offend one another. Disappoint one another. That is human nature. What's supernatural is when we confess and forgive one another.

Try to build a perfect church and you will end up with an empty church. Try to "act" like a perfect church and you will end up with a bunch of empty Christians.

What does a culture of forgiveness look like?

It is a place where you admit that you aren't perfect, admit your mistakes, constantly be remembering God's grace, and in light of that grace, forgive one another. It's where you intentionally pursue opportunities for grace. We must do what Jesus said to do: receive forgiveness freely and give out forgiveness freely. You got it for free. Give it away for free.

Forgiveness is not optional.

Matthew 6:14-15 (NIV): "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

Colossians 3:13 (NIV): "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

Mark 11:25 (NIV): "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

Forgiveness Practice: You might try this?

Breathe in God's forgiveness, exhale forgiveness towards others. I have been doing this simple practice: Picture a person, an event, or a major life disappointment and then imagine that thing you need to forgive. That person. That event. That disappointment.

Next, rather than fighting it, I would let my true feelings towards them come up – when the anger gets too far, I stop and breathe in God's forgiveness and breathe forgiveness onto them. Then hit repeat. Then, I imagine running into them somewhere...dread, anger, breathe...grace and breath out mercy...after practicing forgiveness you can do it better and faster the next time!

Mark 14:22-24, “And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, ‘Take; this is my body.’ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.’”