

Prayer – Forgiveness
Matthew 6:12

Good morning. My name is John and I'm happy to share God's Word with you this morning. If you're visiting this morning, I want to express my gratitude for visiting our church family this morning. If you've been here ministering here in Ecuador this past week or this coming week, I want to thank you for coming to Ecuador and serving the Lord through whatever ministry that you have or will be involved in.

We're in a sermon series called "Prayer – A Relational Conversation with God." The disciples saw Jesus do miracles, teach, and preach with authority. However, they never asked Jesus to teach them to teach, preach, or do miracles. The one thing that they did ask Jesus was to teach them to pray,

The first week we touched on the theme, "Don't Worry." The next week we looked at the believer's war room, that private place where you and I meet God every day. I continue to be encouraged by the messages with photos of the place where you have your quiet time with God each day. Some of the photos are beautiful, overlooking the mountain ranges here in Quito. So, if you have a special place where you meet God each morning or day, please continue to send those as they are such an encouragement.

The following week we looked at God, the creator of the universe, wants us to approach him as father. He lives in a dimension that is not limited by time or space. We are to hallow his name as He is in a category by himself. Then we looked at God's kingdom, both his future reign and his present reign from heaven. For us to enjoy all the benefits of his kingdom, we must voluntarily surrender ourselves to him. Then we looked at doing God's will here on earth as clearly shown in the scriptures.

The first several weeks, we looked at the Lord's Prayer as it relates to God our father, or God our daddy. Last week we looked at the part of the Lord's prayer that focuses on us, his children and God's supernatural work in our lives. We saw that God is the sole source of our needs and that everything else is a resource. God may allow the resources to dry up and move us to the next place to meet our needs. But remember, He is the sole source for which we get our needs met.

Please open your Bibles to Matthew 6 and we'll now begin reading God's Word.

Matthew 6:9-13

⁹ Pray then like this:

*“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.^[a]*

*¹⁰ Your kingdom come,
your will be done,^[b]*

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,^[c]

*¹² and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

*¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.^[d]*

The verse that we will focus on today is verse 12.

*¹² and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

Unforgiveness acts as a chain that holds us hostage to what happened yesterday that is destroying us today and ruining our tomorrow. There is nothing like unforgiveness that will keep you and hold you hostage day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year. Many relationships represented here today and everywhere are in crisis because one party have been unable or unwilling to forgive the other person. There are families that are estranged because parents haven't forgiven children, children haven't forgiven their parents, family members haven't forgiven each other.

At this point in the Lord's prayer, the bible says, "***Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.***" After talking about hallowing His name, submitting to His kingdom, and submitting to His will, and having received the provisions from God. Now Jesus says, "***Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.***" So now the question we must ask is, "what does the word forgive mean?" It is important because a false definition will lead you to a false conclusion. So, let me be clear about this. Forgiveness is defined foremost as a decision. Forgiveness is not foremost an emotion. Let me say that again. Forgiveness is a decision. It is not how you feel. Though it doesn't ignore your feelings, it is not the definition of forgiveness. You decide or not decide to forgive. Your emotions need to catch up to that decision. However, if you define forgiveness as an emotion, forgiveness will be determined by how you feel at a particular time or moment. You may feel like forgiving one moment and not forgiving at another moment. And if forgiveness is an emotion, it will be tied to where you are on the emotional rollercoaster of your life.

So, let's define forgiveness as a decision at the heart of the matter. Forgiveness is a decision to release a person from an obligation or debt incurred by a sin or infraction committed against you. Let me say it again, forgiveness is a decision to release a person from an obligation or debt incurred by an infraction or sin committed against you. When you decide to do that, regardless of where your emotions are at any given time, you are operating on the biblical definition of forgiveness.

In the Lord's prayer it says, "forgive us our debt." Why? Because sin rings up a bill. The word debt means to incur a bill. When you go to the store and buy something, you receive a bill. There is a charge that you are expected to pay for the bill that you received for the thing that you purchased. So, when we sin against God, we receive a bill. That bill must be paid. It must be paid by you or someone else who pays the bill for you. Sin or infractions against God incur a bill. That's why Jesus says, "forgive us our debt" because you and I incur a debt to God when we sin. The first part of the prayer is "forgive us our debt" or we could say, "cancel our bill." To push the delete button on my failure. For the bill or infraction because of our rebellion against God.

Forgiveness, let me clarify, it does not mean that excusing, ignoring, or justifying it did not happen. You can forgive if you don't acknowledge the truth of what happened. It deals in the reality of something that happened against you. But it deals with having a debt paid for an infraction committed.

So, before we continue, we need to clarify the kind of forgiveness that we are talking about. There are two types of forgiveness when dealing with our relationship with God. Since we're looking at the prayer, "forgive us our debts" because we are praying to God. The first kind of forgiveness that we're looking at is "legal forgiveness." The biblical word for legal forgiveness is called justification. Justification means to be declared righteous. It is a legal court room term where the judge declares you not guilty for a particular crime. Therefore, when the bible says that we have been justified, God in heaven declares us legally not guilty for the infractions against Him. When we get saved, when we trust Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, God can declare us legally not guilty because He credits the righteousness of Jesus Christ to our account. It is because Jesus Christ on the cross paid your bill. Jesus on the cross paid my bill. It allows God the Father to declare us as not guilty, not because we're not guilty, because we are guilty, but because the debt that was incurred by being guilty was paid on the cross by the

death of Jesus Christ, the sinless son of God, who paid the penalty for our sin. That's legal forgiveness that everyone receives when they accept Jesus Christ as your personal substitutional sacrifice on the cross which was credited to your account that declares you innocent legally. That is an eternal issue that is settled when you come to faith in Christ for salvation.

But that's not what Jesus is talking about here in the Lord's prayer. He's not talking about legal forgiveness because He's now dealing with your relationship with your father. "***Our father in heaven.***" So, when you come to Christ as your Savior, you are already a child. You already are a son or daughter of God. So, Jesus is talking about another kind of forgiveness. In this verse, Jesus is dealing with relational forgiveness. Legal forgiveness is settled forever when you get saved. But relational forgiveness is conditional. Legal forgiveness is about have I accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior. Relational forgiveness is about am I in fellowship with God my father. When you get saved, you're in permanent legal relationship. However, when you sin after being saved, you've interrupted personal fellowship. That's why the bible says in

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Unfortunately, many children of God live their whole lives out of fellowship with God, even though they're on their way to heaven, but because they refuse to deal with the mess, they have in their lives so that they may be forgiven and have that intimate fellowship with God here on earth.

How then do you know that forgiveness has occurred? If it's not a feeling, then how you know because if you're dealing with forgiveness based your feelings, it may be here today, but not tomorrow. But if forgiveness is based on a decision, then you will know that forgiveness has occurred when no retaliation is being sought. Forgiveness occurs

when you no longer seek to retaliate toward the person who offended you. As long as you are reaching back into yesterday to bring it up today, even though it has not to do with what's happening today, yet you bring it up today to bring pain to the one who offended you yesterday, then that means that you have not forgiven yet. Even though you still may feel like forgiving, it is the act desire of retaliation that demonstrates whether you have forgiven or not because you know whether you're retaliating or not.

Many years ago, when I lived in Paraguay, there was a close friend and brother in Christ who deeply hurt me. He betrayed me and stabbed me in the back. He was a person that I had took under my wing, that I had disciplined and helped along in his life. That's why it hurt so much when he stabbed me in the back and deeply wounded me. For two years, I prayed imprecatory prayers like Psalm 109 against him. For two years I prayed that God would send down a bolt of lightning and fry him for the offense that he had committed against me. Then one day, boom, I ran face to face into him while at a shopping center. There we were, face to face, and I had to make a decision to release him from the debt that he had incurred against me or not. And after what seemed like an eternity, after praying imprecatory prayers against him, God allowed me to reach out my hand to shake his hand. And at that moment, I realized that God allowed me to make a decision to forgive him and release him from the debt he had against me. From that moment on, there were no more prayers of retaliation against this person. Though we never reconciled as friends again, it was at that moment that I knew that forgiveness had taken place as a decision was made to not put a charge on his bill.

What the bible says about forgetting is not about forgetting the information, because there may be some ugly scars that was caused, but forgetting the pain associated with the information. It's not forgetting that it happened, but it is now not allowing the impact to affect your life like when it happened in the past. For example, the life of Joseph. When Joseph talks about forgetting what his brothers did to him in

Genesis 41:51

Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh. “For” Joseph said, “God has made me forget all my hardship and all my Father’s house.”

But in chapter 50 Joseph brings it up again.

Genesis 50:19-20

(19) But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?”

(20) 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.”

Joseph never forgot what happened because he brought up the issue again. But he forgot the impact that it had on him. He realized God’s sovereignty in his life even through the evil that had been done to him. So, when you see that person that has offended you or remember that evil and wicked thing was done to you or your family, it no longer destroys your day or your life because you have made a decision to forgive. One of the reasons why the past is still destructive in our lives is because we have made forgiveness an emotion instead of a decision. So, forgiveness is the cancellation of a debt from a sin or infraction that was committed against you.

Forgive us our debts (the infractions that we did) as we have also forgiven our debtors (or the infractions committed against us).

Now I want to talk about two categories of forgiveness.

First is unilateral forgiveness. Unilateral forgiveness is forgiveness that you grant even when the person hasn’t asked for forgiveness. Why would you give unilateral forgiveness? Especially when no one has asked for it, no one has said “I’m sorry”, no one has repented. And you forgive anyway. Why would you do that? Unilaterally, you just don’t it

on your own. One reason that unilateral forgiveness is given because the offense wasn't that serious, and it doesn't really matter. It was something that was small, and it didn't really hurt me so I can just kind of overlook the offense.

Another reason for unilateral forgiveness is because the person refuses to say "I'm sorry" or refuses to confess, refuses to repent. They actually seem glad that their actions have hurt you or destroyed your life. A third reason for unilateral forgiveness is because they can't repent. It's possible that the person that offended or hurt you has died and could not repent even if they wanted to. Or a person has disappeared, or a criminal act has occurred, and it is in your best interest not to see that person in person again.

Therefore, if you don't do unilateral forgiveness, then you'll stay hostage to something that can never be fixed. Because they've died, they're gone or they'll never going to say "I'm sorry." The purpose of unilateral forgiveness is to set you free. It is to forgive what happened even when the person who is not sorry about what happened. You don't want to be held hostage by what happened. It is to set you free! Once you have unilaterally forgiven, then ***"vengeance is mine, says the Lord, and I will repay."*** ***Romans 12:19.***

Now, the next type of forgiveness we'll talk about today is transactional forgiveness. Unilateral forgiveness is to forgive or release the person from the debt that they have to you even when there is not confession or repentance. That is to release you and to free you from being a hostage to what happened. Transactional forgiveness is different. This happens when the person repents what they did to you. They come and confess it first. Confession is saying that I agree that I did you wrong. Repentance takes confession to the next step. Repentance is the decision to make it right or to make restitution, whatever that may mean. The bible calls that "fruit of repentance." An example of that was Zacchaeus. When God saved him, in Luke 19:8, the bible tells us about his repentive heart.

Luke 19:8

And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold."

How do you know if a person is truly repentive? Because words are cheap and mean little. How do you know? You know that repentance was real when there are visible acts to try to make things right in whatever way that is humanly possible to correct the wrong. The purpose of transactional forgiveness gives the possibility for reconciliation. And usually when a type of reconciliation is sought, it requires a type of mediator, or someone that will guide the two parties through the decisions of forgiveness and the process of reconciliation. An example of this is when there is infidelity in a marriage, or a financial defrauding has taken place. Transactional forgiveness opens the door for the restoration of a relationship between two people. A relationship can be restored because repentance has been requested and forgiveness has been granted opening up the opportunity for reconciliation. In unilateral forgiveness, you may forgive, but there is no hope for reconciliation. In transactional forgiveness, you forgive and the goal is to try to reconcile and heal the offense that caused the problem.

Forgiveness, it's legal when you repent of your sin and you are declared righteous before God. Forgiveness is relational when as a child of God you repent of your sin and get right with God your father and come back into fellowship with Him. Now, with all that I have talked about this morning, what does that matter? Let's look at our text again.

Matthew 6:12

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

Now Matthew 6:14-15

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

(15) But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither your will Father will forgive you your trespasses.

Look here in the context, Jesus isn't talking about heaven because I've already been forgiven for all my sins through legal forgiveness. But Jesus is talking about the Father's relationship with you here on earth. So now, let's read the verse again.

Matthew 6:12

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

Let's read it a different way.

Forgive us our debts in the same degree that we forgive our debtors.

Or to put it this way. The refusal to forgive the bill that someone else owes you will cause God not to forgive the bill that you owe him. The bill that you owe him is probably bigger than the bill that someone else owes you. Maybe some has hurt you profoundly and has hurt you often. But let's remember, that you and I hurt God every single day with the thoughts we think, the things we do, and the places we go. We hurt God every day. And God as our father weeps over us every day. But every time we come to him in prayer, He cancels our bill, our debts, our infractions against him. Yet God says not to come to him to cancel your debts when you're unwilling to cancel someone's debt against you.

In the book of Mark chapter 11, Jesus is teaching, and he teaches his disciples this about forgiveness and prayer.

²⁰ As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. ²¹ And Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi,

look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.”²² And Jesus answered them, “Have faith in God.²³ Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him.²⁴ Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received^[c] it, and it will be yours.²⁵ And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”

A mountain in the bible is a reference to the impossible circumstances and obstacles in our lives. He says that if you ask, if you pray and believe, then that mountain or impossible obstacle in your life will be removed. However, in the context, he goes further in his teaching to tell that if you forgive, then God will forgive you your bill that you owe him. He's not talking about salvation, but he's talking about fellowship, our relationship with him, but also connects it to our prayer life for the impossible obstacles that we face in our lives. Unforgiveness will block God's miracles and answer prayer in your life. God wants to answer your prayer and do the impossible in your life. But he conditions it to our willingness to forgive others.

Proverbs 19:11

Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.

Unforgiveness traps us in our own prison. But when we forgive, it takes away the record of offenses that we have toward others.

1 Corinthians 13:5

⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;^[b] ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

When the bill that someone else owes you continues to pop up in your mind, you must make a decision to let it go. And when the devil brings it up to you again, you have the authority on the word of God to tell the devil that the issue against someone else was paid on the cross and that you have decided to move on with your life and live a life of forgiveness to yourself and others.

Now the question that I want to ask you is how long are you going to let the past hold you hostage? You are to be set free! But in a righteous way by acknowledging to God, forgive me my debts on a daily basis to the degree that I release others from their debts toward me. Forgive them either unilaterally or transactionally and cry out to God and say, “God I want to move on with my life from the past. I want to see you answer my prayers to hallow your name, to surrender to your kingdom rule in my life and to submit myself to your will as revealed in your Word.” “God, I’m tired of blocking your blessing and power in my life by my unforgiveness of others.”

Matthew 6:12

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

In the book, *The Hiding Place*, the author Corrie Ten Boom tells this story about extending forgiveness to a German officer that had tortured her and killed her family in a concentration camp during World War 2.

It was in a church in Munich that I saw him, a balding heavy-set man in a gray overcoat, a brown felt hat clutched between his hands. People were filing out of the basement room where I had just spoken. It was 1947 and I had come from Holland to defeated Germany with the message that God forgives. ...

And that's when I saw him, working his way forward against the others. One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat; the next, a blue uniform and a visored cap with its skull and crossbones. It came back with a rush: the huge room with its harsh overhead lights, the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor, the shame of walking naked past this man. I could see my sister's frail form ahead of me, ribs sharp beneath the parchment skin. Betsie, how thin you were!

Betsie and I had been arrested for concealing Jews in our home during the Nazi occupation of Holland; this man had been a guard at Ravensbruck concentration camp where we were sent. ...

"You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk," he was saying. "I was a guard in there." No, he did not remember me.

"I had to do it — I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us."

"But since that time," he went on, "I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fraulein, ..." his hand came out, ... "will you forgive me?"

And I stood there — I whose sins had every day to be forgiven — and could not. Betsie had died in that place — could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?

It could not have been many seconds that he stood there, hand held out, but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do.

For I had to do it — I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us. "If you do not forgive men their trespasses," Jesus says, "neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses." ...

And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion — I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. "Jesus, help me!" I prayed silently. "I can lift my hand, I can do that much. You supply the feeling."

And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

"I forgive you, brother!" I cried. "With all my heart!"

For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then.

Let's pray.