

Forgive Us  
Matthew 6:12  
Lord's Prayer Series #5  
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I want to share a true story with you that will speak to the part of the Lord's Prayer we will consider today. A gunman stepped into a one-room schoolhouse in West Nickel Mines in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania on October 2, 2006 and opened fire. Before he finished he had killed 5 and injured 5 more; then, he killed himself. The Amish families of the girls who were killed were devastated. Their loss was not measurable. The world wondered how would the Amish react? Within hours, a contingent of the Amish came to visit the widow of the shooter. They came because they were concerned about her and her kids; they came to see what they could do to help them. They were living the words of Christ from the second part of the model prayer—The Lord's Prayer—the prayer he gave for believers.

Matthew 6:12

And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors.

The Amish were forgiving the deranged man who had sinned mightily against them within minutes of the horrific act. I have often returned to this incident and marveled at their response. I don't know if I could have done it, at least not that soon, yet Christ says we must.

In my own life, there was a time I held the Japanese as unforgivable for their attack on Pearl Harbor and their beginning of World War II. I felt so strongly about it, I wouldn't even buy a car or anything else made there. I traveled widely as an adult, but I avoided Japan. Then, one day, Jesus' words sank in—if you are going to be a believer and a follower of Christ—then you must forgive, and oh, there's a second part, we will be forgiven, only to the extent we forgive. The forgiveness I thought came easily had a catch.

It's hard to forgive others when they commit wrongs against us, but it is required as a part of our own forgiveness. Just as writing a will or going to court is the job of a lawyer, forgiveness is part of the expectations of a Christian. Forgiveness doesn't just happen, and it's not easy to do. It is a learned behavior. It means forgiving the driver who doesn't move when the light changes; it means forgiving a neighbor who damages your property. It means turning the other cheek, and forgiving a lot, even up to 70 times 7 times if needed. Forgiveness is one of the foundation stones of being a Christian. Without it, you have to question whether you really are a Christian.

I marvel at the story of Joseph, who forgave his brothers even though they kidnapped, held him in a well and then sold him into slavery. They even told their father, Jacob, he was dead. The grief they brought to so many. But one day the tables were turned. Joseph was the

chief administrator of Egypt and his brothers had come asking for food because of a world-wide famine. Joseph had sent them home to get the last brother left behind at Jacob's request. After telling Jacob what Egypt was asking, Jacob died, so the brothers had to go back to Joseph and tell him their father couldn't come. Let's listen to God's word in this story from Genesis 50: 15-21:

- 15 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?"
- 16 so they sent word to Joseph saying, "Your father left us these instructions before he died:
- 17 This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly. Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father. When their message came to him, Joseph wept,
- 18 His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.
- 19 But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God?"
- 20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.
- 21 So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you, and your children. And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

#### The Word Of The Lord!

Forgiveness is not a new concept for those who believe and are committed to God. Joseph forgave, Esau forgave, Jesus forgave—even those who were nailing him to the cross, and when Jesus spoke about his expectations of us, he was clear – we must forgive.

So, if we have to forgive those who trespass against us, what and who exactly is it that we are to forgive.

First, we have to be sure we understand what Jesus is requiring, and the Greek being used is instructive. Jesus had available five different Greek words he could have used to discuss this concept of sin.

The first option was *hamartia*—meaning missing the target, failing to be what we might have been—have I been as good a husband as I could have been? Or as good an elder as I could have been? This wasn't his choice for the Lord's Prayer.

A second Greek word is *parabasis*—stepping across the line separating right from wrong. It's a little different from the word *paraptoma*, which means not stepping across the line intentionally, but slipping across; again, not deliberate, but more like doing something by impulse or passion. Jesus didn't choose either of these, and he didn't choose a fourth word -- *anomi*, which means outright lawlessness—it's where you know the right, but you deliberately



choose to do the wrong. But, none of these is the word Jesus uses in Matthew 6. Instead, Jesus uses *opheilema* – a failure to pay what is due, a failure to do your duty to God. It pulled up the word that describes a failure to do your duty, a failure to meet the requirements we owe God for his gift of grace in saving us and forgiving us.

The Lord's Prayer tells us (1) we need our daily spiritual bread to help us grow in our father-child relationship with God, (2) we must honor God and God's name in all that we do, and (3) we must enter God's kingdom and live within it now and forever. We have duties we owe to God. We are supposed to resist temptation, we are supposed to run from the evil one. The Lord's Prayer lists our duties as Christians for being saved, and when we fail to do what God expects of us, then we have defaulted on the debt we owe. If you consider it to something like a house loan, it is missing a monthly payment. We have a debt to God for rescuing us and shedding His grace upon us and forgiving us, and we must forgive in return.

There are so many bromides that fit this mandate, bromides we can take with us every day:

Stop keeping score  
Let it go  
Turn the other cheek  
Seventy times seven  
Not an eye for an eye  
Don't get even

And, there are some truths that go with this

Forgiving doesn't mean being a doormat—stand up for what is right  
Forgiving doesn't mean acting like it never happened—it did  
Forgiving doesn't mean the relationship can be restored to what it was—it can't  
Forgiving doesn't mean no consequences for the act—there have to be

World War II had consequences—the despots and the maniacs were destroyed, war crimes were punished, the holocaust was exposed and condemned.

In post war America, racial suppression and racial subjugation had to be eliminated and those who practiced it had to be held accountable.

What Christ is saying here is that the wrongs have happened. They must be fixed; there has to be punishment, but then we must forgive and remove the hurt from our heart.

In South Africa, when the black majority finally was able to exercise its majority and take power, it didn't settle old scores; it was willing to forgive; those who came forward and asked for forgiveness were forgiven, their slates were wiped clean. It's what we're supposed to do. Erase the list of wrongs, move on.

But forgiveness is not easy. It is a learned experience, it takes time and practice; it is a process, according to Robert Enright, who wrote the 2001 book, *Forgiveness Is A Choice*. In the book Enright teaches a step by step approach on becoming a forgiver. His 4 phase approach includes:

1. Determine the essence of your anger –it's not necessarily the act you are responding to; it is often something way down deep that is controlling our reaction.
2. Decide to forgive –it's a conscious decision, one that must be made again and again, in every case, until it is a conditioned response.
3. Then, we must work on the way we forgive, we must develop an approach, an attitude we will let control us;
4. And finally, we must end the power of the thing that controls our unforgiving nature, we must let it go, we must ban it from our lives.

Jesus would take Enright's four phases and add to each one an additional requirement. Jesus would ask us to:

- 1      Seek to understand why the other person acted the way they did, and then try to see their action from their point of view.
- 2      Learn to forget
- 3      Learn to love, truly love.

Jesus tells us we must pray regularly for this ability to forgive; if we are going to say we are Christians, if we're going to claim we belong to Christ, or that we have answered Christ's call. Bottom line: we must forgive and we will be forgiven to the extent we are willing and able to forgive others.