

The Lord's Prayer – Pardon – Matthew 6

Have you ever heard what some might consider juicy gossip...but it was about a dear friend of yours? How did that make you feel? Especially if you know it was true or maybe even worse than what other people know, you don't want to be part of that conversation. Do you? It hurts you to hear that a member of your family or your church family has gone to jail or back to rehab or left their spouse. That's embarrassing and you don't want to hear it, much less talk about it.

We are continuing our study of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6 by looking at illustrations of applicable prayers through the Psalms and we have come to the part of the Lord's Prayer that says, "Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors." I knew immediately when preparing for this series that I would use Psalm 51 as the illustration for this because it is such a good model for how our prayers for forgiveness and pardon should be.

The problem is that David is the one asking for forgiveness in this psalm and, as most of you know, I have always felt that David and I were friends. That is silly enough, I know. King David lived thousands of years ago and thousands of miles away...and was a king. He and I are not exactly running buddies and yet, because I grew up reading about David growing up I felt we had a lot in common. Then as an adult I read about him as an adult and I just felt a kinship to him. I like his warrior spirit and I appreciate his passion for whatever it was he was doing.

So, when he is caught in a huge batch of sin, I'm embarrassed for him. Oh, I appreciate the Bible's truthfulness and candor and it ultimately helps me greatly to know what happened and the consequences that came from it but as his friend, I am embarrassed for David. I have a friend right now who is in the middle of rebellion against God, the church and his friends and when people ask me about him, I don't want to talk about it because I am embarrassed for him.

Anyway, I know it's silly, but I hope you can understand that I have struggled coming up with this message. The other reason I have struggled is simply because I have struggled with forgiveness in the past myself. Is there anything harder than forgiving someone, especially someone who not only doesn't care or doesn't want to be forgiven but what they did, they did on purpose to hurt you? That's so hard!

It is also hard for me to ask God for forgiveness sometimes. Do you ever feel this way? I'm the one who made the choice to sin. I made the choice to disobey God and to hurt God and grieve the Holy Spirit and not only that but I have made this choice for the zillionth time and I don't want to have to haul my nasty old self into His holy throne room again and ask Him AGAIN for forgiveness. I'm sure I'm the only one to ever feel that way.

I struggle with understanding God's limitless forgiveness. In the back of my mind, I think that because I wouldn't forgive me if I were God that surely this time is when God decides enough is enough and He is going to teach me a lesson and today is the day He rightfully thumps me off this planet and straight into Hell where I belong! So, I have struggled this week with this topic and I hope you can understand why.

Maybe forgiveness is the hardest thing because forgiveness is the most important thing. I heard it said that if our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator; If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist; If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist; If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer; But our greatest need was forgiveness, so God sent us a Savior. (<http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/f/forgiveness.htm>)

It's good to be loved. It's good to be appreciated. It's good to be respected but it is vital to our spiritual, mental and even physical health that we forgive and are forgiven. Do you have any idea the toll that guilt takes on a person's mind and body? It is a type of stress with no good outlet except forgiveness and forgiveness is hard to give and hard to accept and it's hard to ask for.

People will do anything to not feel guilty anymore. I heard of a guy who robbed banks but felt so guilty about it he went to a psychiatrist for help. A few months later his friend asked him how he was doing and he said he was completely cured! His friend said, "That's great! So, no more bank robbing for you, huh?" The guy responded, "Oh, I still rob banks all the time. I just don't feel guilty about it anymore." That's how the world defines cured. They just do whatever it takes to not feel guilty.

That is exactly what is happening when you start blaming somebody else for your own problems. That's what is happening when you deflect responsibility or point out somebody else's problems. It makes you not feel as guilty and you don't have to go to God for forgiveness. That's what every politician in the world does when they are running against anybody else. When asked about doing something wrong, they point out the wrong in the other guy.

Some people just try not to think about what they have done but when they see the same thing in somebody else, they get all self-righteous. That is exactly what David was trying to do in 2 Samuel 12 when Nathan the prophet first came to David. Nathan made up a story about a rich man who killed his poor neighbor's one little ewe lamb and ate it and David was furious when he heard the story. "That man must die because he did such a thing and had no pity." Then, referring to David's multiple sins with Bathsheba and her husband, Nathan simply replied, "YOU are that man."

In Matthew 6, verse 12 it says in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors." A few weeks ago, we saw that our prayers are to begin with praise if we really want our prayer life to be powerful and effective and we saw just how important that was. Last week we saw how important it is to ask God for His provision for everything we have and everything we are based on His grace and mercy. This week it can't be stressed enough the importance of asking God for forgiveness.

It is something I'm afraid we all take too lightly. We give it a sentence or two and basically tell God to forgive us of some vague issues we have and go about our business of asking Him for what we really want. But David knew better. When David became convicted of his sin, he was broken-hearted toward God. He knew he was sinful and dirty and he felt crushed. It was hard to breathe when he finally came to his senses and asked God for forgiveness and when he did, he wrote the 51st Psalm. Let's turn there.

There are 5000 sermons that could easily be preached on this passage and I don't pretend to think we will do it justice today but nowhere is there a better model for our prayer for pardon than right here. David gets it. He understands what it means to be in debt to Almighty God and how to ask Him for forgiveness of that debt. We need to read the whole psalm, from verse 1-19 and as we do, think of how you might better come to God for forgiveness as well.

- 1 Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
- 2 Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
- 3 For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
- 4 Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.
- 5 Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
- 6 Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.
- 7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
- 8 Let me hear joy and gladness;

- let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
- 9 Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.
- 10 Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
- 11 Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
- 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
- 13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
so that sinners will turn back to you.
- 14 Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
you who are God my Savior,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.
- 15 Open my lips, Lord,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
- 16 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
- 17 My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise.
- 18 May it please you to prosper Zion,
to build up the walls of Jerusalem.
- 19 Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous,
in burnt offerings offered whole;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Even if you don't necessarily consider David your friend like I do, that is hard to read. It should be hard to read. It should be hard to read because it should pain us to have to ask for forgiveness. That is not something that is done half-heartedly. In fact, it should break your heart to have to go to God to ask for forgiveness because we should remember the basis for which we are forgiven and that is the cross of Jesus Christ. Hebrews 9:22 says, "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."

It was that sin that put Jesus on the cross; no greater sacrifice could be paid for the debt that we owe and nothing was ever more needed than a provision for our forgiveness. So, while it should be painful to read, I want us to also see in just a minute the joy, the confidence and the restoration that also comes with repentance and forgiveness.

We will go into more detail with this psalm tonight but this morning I want us to see what true repentance is and also what the effects of it are. Look at verse 1 again and notice, not only what it says but also what it doesn't say. David goes into the holy throne room of the Creator, the Redeemer, the Sustainer and Deliverer and says, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love and according to your great compassion.

Notice that he doesn't say, "Have mercy on me because I'm such a swell guy" or "because it won't ever happen again" or "because I'm a king" or anything else like that having to do with David. He simply throws himself on the mercy of God – because of who God is and because of God's character. This prayer, like the Lord's Prayer can only truly be prayed by you when you know and understand who God is and who you are.

That is so important it may very well be the secret to life itself. When you know who God is and who you are, your prayer life will change dramatically. Your giving will change. Your attitude will change. Forgiveness comes easier, sinning becomes harder and praise and worship will flow out of you like foam from a shaken-up Dr. Pepper.

But it begins with asking God to forgive you based on who He is and not who you are. Notice also that David doesn't mince words. He calls his sin "sin". It's interesting that he also calls it transgression, iniquity, evil, bloodguilt and also sin. He doesn't make excuses for it or try to make it sound less offensive. He doesn't say it's a difficulty or an issue he is working on or a slip-up, a character flaw or an oopsie. For David it was adultery, murder, lying and cover-up to say the least. It was horrible but all sin is horrible. Whatever your sin is, don't try to sugar-coat it to God.

He already knows and as painful as it is, He wants you to admit it and agree with Him that it is sin. That is literally what confession is. It is agreeing with God that you have displeased Him and while that is a painful process to go through, it is the process by which you find freedom and joy. Let me explain.

The first twelve verses of this psalm are David confessing, repenting and asking for forgiveness. The remaining seven verses are David accepting that forgiveness which is almost as incredible as the forgiveness itself. He ends this section by asking God to do a big thing and create a pure heart in him in verse 10 but do you see the change that comes over him in verse 12?

He continues in perfect confidence that his prayer has already been answered and now David asks for the joy of his salvation to be restored. Now, if you went to the county jail over there in Decatur and confessed to a crime, what would they do? They would lock you up, right? That's what you would deserve, isn't it? But when you go to God, the righteous Judge who David calls justified in verse 4 and you confess your sin and agree with Him that you were wrong, what does God do? He forgives you and gives you freedom!

His forgiveness is freedom from guilt. In verse 14 David prays, "Save me from blood guilt, oh God!" When we truly come to God and confess, repent and ask for forgiveness, God's forgiveness brings freedom from guilt and a restoration of the joy that comes with restored fellowship with God.

Notice that David has confessed his sin and asked forgiveness of his sin but he has also turned away from it which is called repentance. He's not just sorry he got caught. He actually has a plan for not ever doing it again. First, he asks God to cleanse him. Then he asks God to create in him a new heart, a pure heart. That word "create" is what God did in Genesis when He created the universe from nothing. Then David asks God to give him a willing spirit to sustain him (v.12).

David knew he was a sinner by birth and by choice and so he is asking God to cleanse him, forgive him, change him and keep him changed. Then David says he will forever praise God for what He has done. Then his tongue, his lips and his mouth will praise and worship God in joy and freedom.

Then David lived happily ever after, right? Well...there are actually two things to remember about forgiveness as we close. The Bible says in 1 John 1:9 that "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." Period. That's the truth. But there are still consequences of sin. David is the poster boy for BOOCOD. There are Benefits of Obedience and Consequences of Disobedience. BOOCOD. His life is the perfect example that there are benefits of obedience and consequences of disobedience and the consequences rarely affect just the sinner. They almost always spill over into the lives of the ones we love the most.

David's life was marked by heartache and grief because of his sin with Bathsheba and so were the lives of his family. There is no getting around that. He lost a child right away. The others were rebellious and we see later that he soon lost them too. His wives were jealous. Don't you hate it when your wives get jealous? Yea, David had that. So, that is one thing we need to remember about forgiveness is that there will always be consequences.

For the second thing to remember, I want us to actually go back to the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6 for just a quick second because Jesus actually has more to say on the subject of forgiveness. Notice in Matthew 6, verse 12 exactly what Jesus says, "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." He is saying that we should ask for forgiveness with the same measure that we have forgiven others. Uh, oh!

Then in verses 14 and 15 Jesus continues this thought. 14" For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." When we sin against God,

there is immediately a barrier put between us that keeps us from fellowship and being right with Him and it is the same with other people when they sin against us.

It is what makes a Christian a Christian that we, more than any other people, are known for our love and forgiveness. Ephesians 4:32 says, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." We don't deserve God's forgiveness but isn't it great when we get it and get to feel that freedom and joy again? It's the same when we forgive others. Maybe they don't deserve it but neither do we.

Now, hear me, my dear and precious church that I love. Nothing will kill a church faster than unforgiven sin. Whether between you and God or you and another person, there is NO room for unforgiveness. I don't care who did what to whom and who said what to...I don't care. Either ask for forgiveness, grant the forgiveness or get out and stop calling yourself a Christian while you give Jesus a bad name.

Trust me. I understand how hard forgiveness is! It is the hardest thing in the world but it is the most important thing as well and we have a model for what it looks like in the 51st Psalm and we have a mandate to do it from the One who has forgiven us. Let's go to God right now and start by telling Him what David said in Psalm 139:23-24. "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. 24 See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Do you mean that? Let's bow our heads and close our eyes as the music plays and really do business with God this morning. Do you have a relationship with Him through His Son Jesus? Start today by confessing your sins, repenting of them and turning away from them. Then ask Him for forgiveness. Name your sins. Call them what they are. Go honestly to God and then accept His forgiveness and the joy and freedom that comes with it. Do that right now.