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Lord's Prayer

Notes

Community (Practicing the way)

In the article, *Forgiveness will liberate you: the lesson of Nelson Mandela* the author writes,

Mandela demonstrated precisely that no one is superior to another because we all have the same dignity. For the South African leader, who had paid for his ideas of justice and equality with 27 years in prison, white domination over blacks was not acceptable, but neither was the opposite.

That is why, when he finally became a free man on 11 February 1990 and, a few years later, was elected President of his country, he radically rejected any temptation of revenge on the part of the blacks and instead embarked on a courageous process of reconciliation and healing of the deep wounds that Apartheid had inflicted on the South African people. This commitment earned him the Nobel Peace Prize and makes him an inspiring figure for generations.

As UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres noted in a message, the South African leader "showed that each and every one of us has the ability – and responsibility – to build a better future for all." For everyone. Not just for one side. Because, as one of his most quoted statements recalls, 'It is so easy to break down and destroy. The heroes are those who make peace and build.' But what enabled Mandela to endure being deprived freedom for almost 30 years of his life and then to be that peacebuilder that everyone admires? Forgiveness.

We have reached the part of the Lord's Prayer where it says, Matthew 6:12 "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." The second petition that focuses on us. The first three were focuses on God's glory — his name, his

kingdom, and his will. Last week was a petition focusing on our daily bread, our first petition, which focused on the here and now. This one focuses on the past. Forgiveness is about what's gone on in the past, but how that impacts today and the future. This was so important that Jesus would quickly come back to it in verses 14-15 saying, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Matthew A Good Jewish Prayer

it sounds like it means "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". Is Jesus really saying that God's forgiveness of my sins is contingent upon my forgiveness of others, as if God were dependent upon me for my salvation from sin? We need to pay attention to the plural form of the pronouns, which are evident in the Prayer ("our debts") but hard to see in Jesus's warning ("your sins")—the entire Prayer is a corporate prayer, employing plural pronouns. We tend to individualize sin, as if my sin is my problem and your sin is your problem. So, we might think, Jesus should have taught us to pray, "Forgive my debts as I forgive my debtors"—which would make more sense since this is the prayer I'm supposed to pray in my closet, all by myself. But Jesus would have us pray a corporate prayer even in our closet. We pray to "our Father" (he belongs to everyone). We pray for "our daily bread" (it takes a village to provide bread: farmers, millers, bakers). We pray, "lead us not into temptation" (when one suffers, we all suffer). Indeed, the Lord's Prayer is as much a prayer for others as it is for me.

As one commentary states:

Matthew A Good Jewish Prayer

Consider the implications, then, of the corporate reality of sin—a common conviction in Jesus's day. What the Jewish people recognized as a given we tend to ignore: sin is a debt to God and to others. To pretend like my sin affects no one else but me is the height of arrogance and foolishness. Therefore, since my sin affects other people (and their sins affect me), it would be equally arrogant and foolish to pretend as if God is the only one who needs to forgive me. Debts, sins, forgiveness—these are social realities that cannot be reduced to individual experience. Therefore, when I pray to God, "Forgive us our debts," I'm not only

asking him to forgive my debts but also to forgive my debtor. And if God has heard my prayer and forgiven both them and me, who am I to withhold forgiveness? To go to God and ask him to “forgive our debts”—all of them, not just mine but the entire community—assumes I’ve already forgiven my debtors since I’m asking God to forgive them. So, the way Jesus set up the Lord’s Prayer, we cannot pray the first part, “Forgive us our debts” without intending the last part, “as we also have forgiven our debtors.” To hold a grudge against my debtor implies I didn’t mean what I prayed.

The Bible emphasizes forgiveness as a core Christian principle, both from God to humanity and from humans to each other, including ourselves. We all need forgiveness, and just as we are forgiven, Jesus is reminding us to forgive others. But you might say, but what they did is way worse than what I did. Doesn’t matter. Or they haven’t acknowledged their wrong. Doesn’t matter. Or they aren’t even sorry for it. Doesn’t matter.

There are many instances of forgiveness in the Bible.

Think to the story of Joseph.

Joseph, the 11th son of Jacob, was favored by his father, which made his brothers jealous. They sold him into slavery, and Joseph was taken to Egypt, where he eventually became a powerful leader under Pharaoh due to his ability to interpret dreams, but initially was held in prison. Put yourself in Joseph’s shoes, you were once surrounded by your brothers, favored by your father, and now you sit in prison without any of your family, betrayed by your brothers. Forgiveness might not be the first thing on your mind, maybe revenge, or at least a longing to go home.

Years later, a famine strikes the land, and Joseph’s brothers came to Egypt to buy food. They didn’t recognize Joseph, but he recognized them. But you know he didn’t seek revenge, Joseph tested them, seeing if they had changed. After a series of tests, Joseph revealed his identity and forgave his brothers, telling them that it was God’s plan for him to be in Egypt to save lives during the famine.

Joseph reassured them, saying, “You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.” He forgave them completely and provided for them and their families.

The story is one of redemption, forgiveness, and trusting in God's plan, even through hardship. It teaches the power of forgiveness and how God can bring good out of even the most difficult situations.

Or look to Saul and David.

David's forgiveness of King Saul is a powerful story of mercy and restraint, found in **1 Samuel 24**.

Saul, Israel's first king, became jealous of David because of David's success and the favor he found with God. Saul tried multiple times to kill David. In one instance, Saul went into a cave, unknowingly where David and his men were hiding. David's men saw this as a perfect opportunity to kill Saul, but David refused. Instead, he secretly cut off a piece of Saul's robe to show that he could have harmed him but chose not to.

Afterward, David felt guilty for even cutting Saul's robe, feeling he had disrespected God's anointed king. When Saul left the cave and started to walk away, David came out and called to him. David bowed before Saul and showed him the piece of the robe, saying that he had not harmed him, even though Saul had been pursuing him to kill him. David then confronted Saul about his unjust actions but also expressed his trust in God to judge and deal with the situation.

Saul was deeply moved and admitted that David was more righteous than he was. Saul even acknowledged that David would one day be king and asked him not to destroy his descendants or his family line. This moment is a significant example of David's character, as he demonstrated both forgiveness and trust in God's timing and judgment. Instead of taking revenge, David left the matter in God's hands, showing mercy even to someone who had wronged him deeply.

Forgiveness was so important to Jesus that he would talk about it in parables. Hear this in Matthew 18, titled The Parable of the unforgiving servant

Matthew 18:23-35

Matthew 18:23-35 NRSV

“For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his

possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

In Matthew 18:21-22, when Peter asks how many times he should forgive someone, Jesus answers, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." Forgiveness should be unlimited and unconditional.

Some of the last words recorded of Jesus on the cross in Luke as Jesus is hanging on the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."

Jesus came to restore humanity's relationship with God, which had been broken by our sin, and to bring salvation to all who would believe in Him. One of the ways he did this was by serving and being a model for humanity. Jesus, God in flesh, came to the world to teach and show us how we should live. He continued this even in suffering and agony while hanging on the cross saying, "Father, forgive them." If you were being tortured would you look at your torturers and say, "God, forgive them." Jesus showed profound forgiveness toward those who were responsible for His brutal death. The ultimate example of forgiveness, demonstrating that Jesus' message of forgiveness extended even to those who had wronged Him to the highest degree. His willingness to forgive those who crucified Him reveals God's boundless love and grace.

And what about forgiving ourselves. Hear the scripture in Luke of the last time

Peter denied Jesus. Luke 22:60–62 “But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about!” At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.” Peter must have felt an overwhelming mix of shame, guilt, and heartbreak after he denied Jesus three times, especially knowing that Jesus had predicted it would happen. His emotions likely ran deep, as he had been so confident earlier that he would never deny Jesus, even if it meant dying with Him (Matthew 26:35). It can be hard to forgive others, and it can be hard to forgive ourselves. Jesus would have known this.

But what did Jesus do after he was resurrected from the grave? He continued to demonstrate how important forgiveness was and is. John 21:15-19

John 21:15–19 NRSV

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

He forgave Peter, Peter had denied Him three times, after being told he would and Peter saying he wouldn't, Jesus forgave him. Jesus restored Peter with the words, "Do you love me?" and gave him a mission, saying, “Feed my sheep.” This act of forgiveness shows that Jesus not only forgives but also restores and gives a new purpose to those who repent and seek reconciliation.

Forgiveness was incredibly important to Jesus, both in His teachings, in His final words, and in how he lived his life. In **Colossians 1:13-14**, Paul writes, “For he

has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Jesus' death made forgiveness possible for all who come to Him in faith.

Mandela did not come to forgive his torturers effortlessly, it was not a 'cheap' conquest. He himself confided that in the first moments after leaving prison, anger was his predominant feeling. But it was at that key passage in his life (and in the history of South Africa) that, as he recounted, he heard this admonition from the Lord: 'Nelson, while you were in prison you were free, now that you are free, don't become their prisoner.' Mandela thus decided not to remain trapped in the past, to let the bitterness go. He was aware, as he later stated, that "Forgiveness liberates the soul. It removes fear. That is why it is such a powerful weapon."

Pope Francis' made a statement that forgiveness must be considered "a human right, because we all have the right to be forgiven." Mandela's daughter Makaziwe when questioned what was the greatest teaching she received from her father, she replied: "That nobody is born hating another because of the color of their skin, culture or religious belief – we are taught to hate and if we are taught to hate, we can also be taught to love because love comes naturally to the human spirit."

As I close, I want you to consider this deeply. What are you hanging on to that needs forgiveness in your life? Perhaps there's someone in your life—someone who hurt you, betrayed you, let you down, said something to you that hurt—you've been holding onto it for too long, someone you have been unforgiving toward. Maybe it's been years, or more recent. Whatever it is, God is asking you to forgive, not for their sake, but for yours.

Or maybe it's to forgive yourself. You've made mistakes, you've sinned, you feel unworthy of God's love and grace. Perhaps, you've been holding onto shame, guilt, regret. God is calling you to forgive yourself as He has forgiven you.

So, let me ask you again: **What are you holding on to?** Unforgiveness toward yourself or someone else?

God wants to heal that. He wants to lift that burden off your shoulders and free you to live the life He's called you to. Just as He forgives us freely, He asks us to extend that same forgiveness to others and to ourselves. Forgive the past, to

embrace today and tomorrow.

Lay it at His feet. Experience peace, experience freedom, experience the heart of God in a powerful way. Jesus cancelled our debt, gives us unearned grace, and calls us to forgive.

Let's pray...