



THE PRAYER CLOSET

Encouraging & Equipping Believers in Prayer

A MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE PRAYER CLOSET MINISTRIES, INC.

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VOLUME XVI

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER, 2013

ISSUE 5

Forgive Us

In the Model Prayer, the Lord Jesus teaches believers how to pray to the Father. By His death and resurrection, Jesus has purchased access into the presence of God the Father. Jesus has blessed us with the amazing, unspeakable gift of a right relationship with God as our Father. We can go to our Father and have fellowship with Him. Not only has Jesus provided us with this opportunity, He also teaches us how to communicate and fellowship with our Father.

Jesus begins His teaching about prayer by reminding us that God is our Father. When we pray, we are not talking to some distant Deity. We are not speaking with an unknowable Sovereign. We are coming into the presence of the Father who loves us and accepts us as His own children. He is the sovereign Father who reigns in heaven and can answer our prayers.

Then Jesus teaches us that we are to focus on our Father in prayer. We are to pray for His name to be set apart and glorified in our lives, our churches, and our world. The glory of our God has to shape our praying. We must desire that God be glorified in all things, including our praying.

Next, Jesus instructs us to pray for the expansion of the kingdom of God. This begins by praying for its growth in our life as we submit more and more to Christ's lordship in our lives. We continue to pray for this by asking for the salvation of people in our neighborhoods and even to the nations of the world. The kingdom expands as more people

yield to Jesus Christ in true faith and repentance. We also pray for the coming kingdom of Jesus. Our regular prayer must be, "Come, Lord Jesus."

Jesus moves on to show us that we are to pray for greater submission to the Word and will of God. We are to ask our Father for grace to know, obey, and submit to the Word of God. At the same time, we pray for grace to submit to God's wisdom in the twists and turns of our lives. We are to confess that God is good in prosperity and adversity

After we focus on God's glory, kingdom, and will, Jesus then reveals that we can pray for our daily bread. We are to manifest our dependence on the Father by asking for the provision of our daily needs. Our Father loves us and longs for us to come to Him with our needs and desires, trusting that He will grant what we need when we need it.

Jesus Christ now gives us the next petition of the Model Prayer. Jesus teaches us to pray, "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (**Matthew 6:12**). This issue of *The Prayer Closet* will focus on our need to pray for God's forgiveness.

The Position Of This Petition

It's interesting to notice where Jesus places this petition, "Forgive us," in the Model Prayer. Jesus places it after the petition for our daily bread. The "and" connects these two requests. Jesus says, "Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we

forgive our debtors” (**Matthew 6:11-12**). Jesus ties these two petitions together.

You may be wondering why this is significant. It’s significant because praying for our daily bread is our greatest physical need, while praying for forgiveness is our greatest spiritual need. Just as we pray daily for our needs to be meant, we are to pray for our sins to be forgiven.

Just as much as we need our daily bread, we must come daily before God with confession and repentance for our sins. It is the duty of every believer to confess and repent of each particular sin of which he is conscious and to do so with particular care. Every day we need our physical needs meant. At the same time, every day we need to come clean with our heavenly Father.

Another reason for the place of this petition is that we cannot enjoy the good things of good with unconfessed sin. We are to ask God to give us good blessings. However, how can we enjoy them if the burden of unconfessed sin hangs over our lives? How can we receive the Father’s good gifts if we are loaded with guilt and shame? To enjoy God’s good gifts of this life, we must confess our sin, asking for the Father’s forgiveness.

There is one more reason for the place of this petition in the Model Prayer. It’s because we are driven to ask for forgiveness if we follow this model for prayer. Think about it. Seeking God’s glory. Yielding to Christ’s lordship. Praying and working for the salvation of others. Filling your life with Scripture and obeying the Word. Submitting to God’s wise plans without grumbling, complaining, doubting, and fearing. Asking for and depending on God for your daily needs.

Who does these things perfectly? Who has completely done these things? If we follow this model, the time has come to confess! We are ready to pray, “Forgive us,” after praying and examining our lives through this model. It is placed here because we now need to confess our sin! We need to hear about the promise of forgiveness as we examine our lives in the light of Christ’s teaching.

The Petition

This petition is rich with meaning. Each phrase of this petition has much to teach us about our seeking the Father.

“Forgive”

The word “forgive” means to dismiss or send away. The word “debts” means what we owe to God. In the parallel account in Luke, it says, “And forgive us our sins” (**Luke 11:4**). Our sins are our debts. We owe God a debt because of our sins. God is the God of infinite justice. We have sinned against Him. Our sins make us indebted to God, for our sins deserve eternal damnation from Him.

This is a very bold and amazing request! Jesus teaches us to pray that the Father will dismiss our sin. We are to ask the Father to cancel our sin. By praying for forgiveness, we are pleading with God to dismiss them from His own heart and mind. We are asking Him to never make mention of them again. We are calling on them to obliterate them in the record of the heavenly court.

Our greatest need is the forgiveness of sins. This happens once we come to Jesus Christ in true faith. When we turn from our sin to trust Him as our Savior, God forgives us! This is the glory of the gospel. We continue to walk in this forgiveness by daily confessing our sin and asking for God’s pardon. By confessing our sin, we are reassured of the Father’s forgiveness in our lives through Jesus Christ.

When we trust in Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, we experience the peace and joy of knowing that God has forgiven us and accepted us as His children. Yet, we sin in our daily life. This obscures our sense of this right relationship that we have with the Father. It disturbs the peace and joy that comes from a right relationship with God. Our sin breaks our fellowship with God. It breaks our hearts because we have sinned against such a good and merciful Father.

This is why we must confess our sin. This is why Jesus teaches us to ask daily for

forgiveness. By doing this, it restores that sense of the forgiveness that we have because of Jesus Christ atoning work on the Cross. It renews that peace and joy that comes from God. It restores our fellowship with God. It brings healing when our hearts have been broken by yield to the sin that displeases our Father.

When Jesus teaches us to pray, "Forgive us," He is actually revealing that God is ready and willing to forgive. Our Father is rich in mercy. It is the mercy of God to give us our daily bread; it is the rich mercy of God to forgive us daily! The fact that Jesus teaches us this ought to show us that God is ready and willing to forgive us when we come to confess and repent of our sin. This phrase points us to God's willingness and readiness to forgive any and all sin.

This phrase points us to many other places in God's Word:

"But thou art a God ready to pardon" (**Nehemiah 9:17**). Notice that God is *ready* to pardon.

"And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, the LORD, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation" (**Exodus 34:6-7**). God declares Himself to be merciful and gracious, keeping mercy, and forgiving iniquity and transgression (every kind of sin possible).

"Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever" (**Jeremiah 3:12**). Even though the people had sinned against Him, God says that He will still have mercy.

"For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee" (**Psalms 85:6**). God now makes it known that He is ready to forgive and has plenty of mercy.

"Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy" (**Micah 7:18**). This is one of the greatest verses in the Word of God. God states that He pardons sin and that He delights in mercy rather than judgment!

The phrase "forgive us" points us to the character of our Father. He longs for us to know that He is ready to forgive, willing to pardon, and delights in showing mercy. Remember that Jesus came to reveal the Father and His will. Everything Jesus said came from the Father's heart. This phrase comes straight from the Father's heart! He wants to forgive. He's ready to pardon. He's willing to cleanse you of sin.

This phrase also points us to the truth that only the Father can forgive sin. If we are to pray to the Father, asking for forgiveness, this means that He and He alone can deal with our sin. This rules out anything that we can do to deal with our sin. If there is something that we have to do to deal with our sin, then why does Jesus teach us to pray "forgive us" to the Father?

No one else can deal with our sin. We cannot even deal with our sin. We owe to God exact and perfect obedience. Not being able to pay what is due, we are in debt to God. Finite obedience cannot satisfy the infinite justice of God. Finite works cannot satisfy the infinite justice of God. Only God can forgive us of sin. Moreover, God forgives us not because we are worthy, but because He is gracious and ready to pardon.

This is why every person must turn to Jesus Christ in true faith. We cannot earn or merit forgiveness. There is nothing that we can offer to God that will satisfy the justice of God. It is only Jesus that has satisfied the justice of God. Jesus lived a perfect life. He

was perfectly obedient to the law of God. When He died on the cross, He bore our sin. He paid the penalty for our sin. This is called the active and passive obedience of Christ. By perfectly obeying God's law and His once-for-all sacrifice on the cross, the justice of God has been satisfied. God has mercy on sinners by faith in Jesus Christ.

With this phrase, "forgive us," Jesus slams the door on any way of forgiveness except through Him. He is pointing us to the fact that there is no forgiveness apart from Him. We must come to God through Christ in order to be accepted and forgiven by God. Walking in forgiveness means that we continue to trust in the work of Christ, confessing and repenting of our sin.

At the same time, we can only walk in the experience of forgiveness daily by confessing our sin to the Father. We must continue to rely on the righteousness and sacrifice of Christ, continuing to come clean before our Father through confession and repentance. When we sin, we have the opportunity to come to the Father for cleansing because of Jesus Christ (**1 John 2:1**).

"Forgive us"

It's interesting that Jesus says, "Forgive us." What does this teach us? It teaches us that the only people who can confidently come to God for forgiveness are those who trust in Jesus Christ. Only believers can boldly come to God for pardon and cleansing from sin. This is the privilege of the child of God.

The only person who has the privilege of calling God "Father" is the one who trusts solely in Jesus Christ. The Model Prayer has also been called the Children's Prayer. It's not a prayer for everybody; it's only for those who have become God's children by faith in Jesus Christ. It is the relationship of child to Father and the moment that we realize that we have offended, grieved, or sinned against the Father, we confess it and ask to be forgiven, and we are sure that we are forgiven.

The child of God can come to the Father because of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has died on the cross for us. He has paid our

penalty. He has suffered in our behalf. We do grieve the Father. We do offend Him. We do sin against Him. However, because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, we can come to our Father and find mercy. We can experience pardon and cleansing. We can walk and live in forgiveness. We can personally experience by faith what Christ accomplished for us on the cross and by His empty tomb. This is our privilege and blessing because of the Lord Jesus Christ – His atoning sacrifice and His glorious resurrection.

Forgiveness of sin is purely an act of God's free grace. There must be faith in Christ before forgiveness comes from God. Yet, once we come to Christ in faith, we can approach God with our sin, knowing that our Father will pardon and cleanse us because of Jesus Christ.

You may be thinking, "How can I keep coming to God for forgiveness day after day? How can I keep coming especially when it's the same sin over and over?" *If that is your attitude, then you are underestimating the gospel.* The gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news of forgiveness through the death of Jesus Christ and His bodily resurrection. Christ died for all your sin. He has paid the debt for every sin. There is no sin that can keep you from God. Whether small or great, there is forgiveness for sin.

Second, this attitude underestimates the character of your Father. As we have already seen, our Father has revealed Himself as full of grace and mercy. He is willing and ready to forgive us of our sin. Jesus further emphasizes this in the Model Prayer. If your Father was not willing and ready to forgive you of sin, no matter how often, why would He send Jesus to teach us to pray daily "Forgive us"? Don't underestimate your heavenly Father. He's always ready and willing to forgive when you come to Him ready and willing to confess and turn from it.

Finally, this attitude underestimates God's way of making us holy. God works in a variety of ways to make us holy. One of the ways that He makes us holy is by forgiving us of our sin, "But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared" (**Psalms 130:4**).

When we come to God with our sin, there's mercy and pardon. When we come again and again, we find mercy and pardon again and again. As God shows us such mercy and love, it emboldens us to fight against the sin. It stirs us to battle against the sin. The mercy and love of God give us the strength and determination to fight against sin. His mercy and love inspire us to go to war with sin. At the same time, as we bring our sin to God, we grow weary of sinning against such a merciful, loving Father. We grow sick of having to confess the same sin to such a gracious, longsuffering God. This stirs us to battle and deal with the sin. The mercy and forgiveness of God are powerful motivations to holy living. Don't underestimate God's way of making you holy. He shows you mercy to empower you to fight sin. He forgives you so that you will love and fear Him and abstain from sin.

"Our debts"

As we said earlier, the word "debts" in our text refers to our sins. We see two truths in this phrase. Notice that the word "debts" is in plural form. The same is true of "sins" in **Luke 11:4**. *This points us to the fact that the believer must deal with sin after conversion.* It's important to understand that He doesn't say "debt" or "sin." He says "**debts**" and "**sins**." This means that the believer will have to deal with many sins in his walk with the Lord.

The Word of God reveals that believers will be susceptible to sin even after coming to Christ. The book of **1 John** is written to believers. Listen to one of the exhortations in this book, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (**1 John 1:9**). The Word of God declares that when believers confess their sins, there is forgiveness and cleansing.

Yet, in making this promise, God's Word is saying that believers will sin. Believers will fail. Believers will need pardon and cleansing. The Word says, "If we confess our sins." Again, notice that "sins" is in the plural form! Sin is going to be a daily reality in the life of every believer. No believer is going to be

immune from sin. The text does not say, "*If you sin,*" it says, "*If you confess.*" This implies that believers will sin and will need confession and cleansing. The question is not, "Will the believer sin?" but "Will the believer confess when he or she sins?"

This slams the door on any notion of sinless perfection. We are called to strive for holiness. We are called to fight sin. Yet, in this daily battle against sin, every believer will have times of failure. When a believer neglects the means of grace (prayer, the Word, worship, etc), he or she may commit grievous sins, hateful to God. This is the reality for every child of God.

To deny this reality is to be deceived, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (**1 John 1:8**). Again, to emphasize the point, the Word of God says, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (**1 John 1:10**). This letter is written to believers. It reveals that believers will have to deal with sin until they breathe their last breath and enter into eternity. **The very fact that Christ teaches us to pray daily, "Forgive us," ought to drive home the point that the believer will have to confront and confess sin all his days.**

Another truth that we need to see in this phrase is that it is our sin. Notice Jesus says, "**our** debts" (Matthew 6:12) and "**our** sins" (**Luke 11:4**). The word "our" is little but is humbling in this context. Our sin has to be confessed. It is ours; we bear the responsibility for it. *Our daily bread comes from God, but our daily sin comes from us.* We can't shift the blame; we can't look outside ourselves. It is "**our**" sin, **our** debts!

I'm amazed at how people view and refer to Jesus, especially in the secular world. People see Jesus as the sweet, gentle, humble teacher. They focus on His good deeds and His compassion for the poor and needy. All these things are true. Yet, most people overlook or ignore that fact that Jesus pulls no punches when it comes to human beings.

You may be wondering, "What do you mean by that?" Jesus told the truth about human nature. An example of this is **Matthew**

7:11, “If you then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him.” Did you hear that, “If you then being **evil**?” Jesus looks at this crowd and calls them “evil.” Jesus did not pull any punches about the human condition.

This is why He teaches us to pray, “Forgive us.” Jesus knows that we are sinful people, even after we come to Him in faith. He knows that we will yield to temptation. He knows that we will say “yes” to evil desires. Jesus is not surprised by our sinfulness. He knows it and makes provision for that sin to be pardoned and cleansed.

This should slam the door on any self-righteousness. No believer is above yielding to temptation. No believer is immune to surrendering to sinful desires. We have to take responsibility for our sin. We have to accept that it truly is “our” sin! This is what ought to drive us to pray daily, “Father, forgive.” The very fact that Jesus teaches us to pray this ought to shatter any self-righteousness on our part.

Perhaps you’re reading this and you’re not a believer. You have rejected Christianity because people who profess the faith have sinned and failed. You imagine that Christianity can’t be true because of this.

Yet, you ought not to miss the significance of Jesus teaching believers to pray daily for forgiveness. Jesus Christ Himself is saying that believers aren’t perfect; they are not sinless. Believers can and will sin. Believers will fail. Even the best of men are men at best. Jesus Christ is the only perfect Person who has ever lived.

The words of Jesus in this text point you to look at Christianity differently. This text should reveal to you that being a Christian isn’t about being perfect. It’s about being forgiven. It’s about confessing sin and asking for God’s help to live a different kind of life. I plead with you to consider this. Jesus is not surprised by the sin and failure of believers. Neither should you. Don’t allow this to blind you to your true need – your need for forgiveness through personal faith in Jesus Christ. You have sinned and you have failed. Yet, it is only

through faith in Jesus that you can experience God’s forgiveness. In addition, it is only by daily trusting Christ and confessing sin that you can walk in a right relationship with God. Believers aren’t perfect, but they can confess their sins to God and be pardoned of sin. They can ask God for His help to live differently. Won’t you do the same?

“As we forgive our debtors”

Jesus now teaches us about our response to praying for and receiving forgiveness. We are to extend that forgiveness to others. Our forgiving others has to be motivated by our personal experience of God’s mercy and forgiveness. Those who forgive are those who have been forgiven by God.

The proof that we have been forgiven by God is that we forgive others. This in no way implies that by forgiving others we make ourselves worthy of God’s salvation. Pardoning the sins and offenses of others does not earn salvation. Our forgiving others is not meritorious. In other words, by forgiving, we don’t earn our salvation from God.

Our forgiveness and acceptance with God is forever based on the sacrificial death and glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ. Once we have experienced this personally, it enables us to offer mercy and forgiveness to others. The prerequisite for us living a life of mercy and forgiveness is trusting in Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior.

When we forgive someone else, it shows us that we understand what it cost God to forgive us. God gave His only Son to die in our place. God placed our sin on His Son Jesus Christ. God punished our sins in Him, unleashing the full fury of His wrath against His Son Jesus. God accepted His death as the payment for our penalty as sinners. God raised Him from the dead to prove that He accepted His sacrifice and to give believers eternal life. What an awful, heavy cost that God paid to grant us full and free forgiveness! Once you come into the experience of this, you are willing and ready to forgive others.

When we forgive someone, it shows that we understand what it cost God to forgive us.

It shows that we savor the mercy of God! By forgiving someone else, it reveals that you have tasted and savor God's mercy and forgiveness in your life.

A hypocrite will read the Bible, come to church, and give money, but he will not forgive others. He wants forgiveness from God but he is not willing to offer it to others. The true believer thinks, "God has forgiven me so much; how can I withhold forgiveness from others?"

This is one of the signs of true salvation – having a forgiving spirit toward others. You don't have to climb up to heaven and see if your sins are forgiven, but only to look into your heart. Do you have a forgiving heart? Are you willing to bury the wrongs of others? Do return good for wrong done to you? If we can find these things in our heart, it is a sign that the Spirit of God is doing a work of grace in our hearts. It is an indication that we have experienced God's forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ.

How Are We To Forgive?

Our forgiveness is to be characterized by three things:

- (1) *We are to forgive from the heart.* We are not to say that we forgive, but we are to truly forgive. The hypocrite can say he forgives, but the true believer is called to forgive from the heart, "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (**Matthew 18:35**).
- (2) *We are to forgive fully.* We are to forgive all offenses, sins, and insults against us. God forgives us all our sins, "Who forgiveth **all** thine iniquities" (**Psalms 103:3**). We are not to withhold forgiveness from anyone for anything. Hypocrites forgive some sins, but retain hatred and unforgiveness concerning others. How would we feel if God chose to forgive some sins and not others? The true believer is called to forgive all offenses.

- (3) *We are to forgive often.* Peter asked Jesus how many times he was to forgive (**Matthew 18:21**). He suggested seven times, which he thought was a gracious number of times. Yet, Jesus answered, "I say not unto thee until seven times: but, until seventy times seven" (**Matthew 18:22**). Jesus wasn't commanding 490 times, but was saying unlimited forgiveness. We are to forgive as often as we are sinned against.

How Can I Forgive?

You may be saying, "How can I forgive others? You don't know who I have to deal with. Or, you don't know what has been done to me." The following are some suggestions on how to grow in forgiving others:

- **Consider how many sins and offenses you have committed against God.** There is no way that we can number our sins. They are beyond our comprehension. Yet, God freely and graciously forgives all our sins. Because of Jesus Christ, He freely pardons all our sins. If He has done this for you, how can you withhold that forgiveness from others?
- **Meditate on the cost of your forgiveness.** Jesus Christ bore your sin. He suffered the wrath of God for your sin. He paid the penalty of death for your sin. What an awful, terrifying cost! God didn't wink at your sin. God didn't forget about your sin. He sent His Son to suffer and die to deal with your sin. This is the only way that you could experience His forgiveness. This sacrificial and amazing love can and ought to melt our hearts. A river of love to others should flow from our hearts when we meditate on the cost of our own forgiveness.
- **Pray for the increase of your faith.** In **Luke 17:3**, Jesus says, "And if he trespass against thee seven times in a

day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.” This overwhelmed the apostles. They said to Jesus, “Increase our faith” (**Luke 17:4**). They were saying to Jesus, “We can never do this without a great deal of faith; increase our faith, Lord.” Ask God to increase your faith to forgive at all times and in all circumstances.

- **Remember that God will avenge the wrongs done to you.** When you forgive others, you are not “letting them off the hook.” God knows what happens to you. In His time and His way, He will deal with those who wound you and offend you, “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (**Romans 12:19**).
- **Look to the example of your Savior Jesus Christ.** Jesus exhibited a forgiving spirit at all times. When His enemies insulted them, He had pity for them. They spat on Him and pierced Him with spear and nails, yet He prayed, “Father, forgive them.” He wept over His enemies. He shed tears over those who shed His blood. There has never such an amazing kindness and forgiving spirit. Pray that you will become like Jesus. Seek to imitate Him, especially in this area. Meditate on His loving, forgiving life.

- **See the hand of God in the insults and offenses of others.** Joseph’s brothers wronged him. Yet, he saw the hand of God in it, “But as for you, you thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive” (**Genesis 50:20**). People may seek to wrong you, offend you, and insult you. Yet, don’t focus on that. Focus on what God can do through it. Look at how God is using it to grow you and change you. See that God can work even through those who sin against you.
- **Seek to do good to those who sin against you.** The inward forgiveness from the heart must give way to doing good in our lives, “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (**Matthew 5:44**). Forgiveness in the heart leads to kindness and doing good to those who offend.

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