

## FORGIVENESS

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### MATTHEW 6:12

Look at the Model Prayer again. We could call it a “teaching prayer” because it’s a model for how we should pray.

There are two parts to the prayer: 1) invocation (worship and praise, vv. 9-10), and 2) petition (requests for self and others, vv. 11-13).

## 1. Prayer is essential to our Christian lives.

Jesus prayed often. He prayed alone. He prayed in public. He withdrew to the mountains to pray. He tried to escape the crowds to pray. He prayed about decisions to be made. He prayed about events that were happening.

If we are serious about following the example of Jesus, we, too, will pray. You can learn to pray. Talk to God every day. This is what the model prayer is about.

As they watched Jesus praying, I’m sure the disciples would sometimes say among themselves: ‘What does He talk about? What does He do?’ They probably also thought: ‘After just a few minutes I’m at a loss for words.’

The disciples knew their prayer life wasn’t what Jesus’ was, so they asked, “Lord teach us to pray.” They understood that prayer is the highest activity of the human soul.

## 2. Prayer is a test of our spirituality.

Everything we do in our Christian life is easier than prayer. We can speak to others easier than we can speak to God. It’s easier to give money to the church than to pray. It’s easier to refrain from certain things—smoking, drinking, cussing, and gossiping—than to pray. It is easier to busy oneself around the church than to pray.

And God knows—it is easier to preach than to pray. We discover the real condition of our spiri-

tual life when we examine ourselves in private—when we are alone with God. Prayer tests our spiritual condition.

Yes, prayer is difficult. But praying v. 12, “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors,” is even more so. Sin just seems to come so naturally. What’s the harm of a little sinning? Well, before becoming a Christian, it is sin that separates us from God.

### 3. Sin separates from a relationship with God.

Everyone is a sinner (Rom. 3:23). The Bible says that the “wages of sin is death” (6:23). Everyone has a sin-debt that has to be paid.

What would be just payment? God is perfect and holy and can have no part of sin. So just payment for sin is eternal separation from God. This is what sin does—it separates us from God.

We can debate all day long the why of evil in the world, and never solve it to our satisfaction. The fact is, not one person can claim to be sinless. And sin always comes between God and us.

Sin is mankind’s greatest problem. Sin dominates the heart and mind of every person. Sin contaminates every person ever born. Because of sin we are susceptible to disease, illness, and every conceivable form of evil and unhappiness. The ultimate effect of sin leads to death and damnation. Sin is behind every crime, every theft, all lies, and murder; all immorality, sickness, pain and sorrow. Sin is the moral and spiritual disease for which humankind has no cure.

Is it any wonder that the Bible tells us that God hates sin! Because of sin, mankind is separated from God. Sin, without forgiveness, leads to hell and all of its terribleness.

During this past year their manufacturers have recalled trucks, cars, tires, toys, window shades and others. The message was similar in every case:

“This product is defective or dangerous and could cause serious injury or even death. Return it to us and we will correct the problem.” Notice that it is up to the consumer to heed the warning and return the dangerous item?

In the same way God has given every person the right to be forgiven. If a person wants what he or she deserves—hell—God will give that to them as their just wages. It’s our choice.

If a person wants what he or she does not deserve—eternal life—God offers that as a free gift—and the only source of that gift is Jesus Christ our Lord. We don’t deserve it, but God offers it because He loves us.

When we accept Jesus, we are forgiven and He becomes our heavenly Father. Even as God’s

children we still sin. And it comes between God and us.

Here's the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian: A non-Christian's sin creates a terrible chasm that is between the person and God. (Swimming to Hawaii illustration) No matter how good a person is, no matter what good things he or she does, if they do not accept Jesus as their Savior, they can never, on their own get to God.

But when a person believes in the work and sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, and believes in His resurrection and accepts Him as their own, personal Savior, the Cross of Jesus Christ becomes the bridge over the terrible chasm to God.

We have been forgiven. We are God's children forever. We can never lose our salvation because God is holding on to us, keeping us in His forever family. When we die we are going to heaven for all eternity.

Yet this prayer reminds us that we sometimes still sin. The difference between when a Christian sins and an unbeliever sins—Christians still belong to God's family.

In spite of our sin, God loves us. But sin does create a kind of barrier between God and us—the barrier is the loss of fellowship.

## 4. Sin separates Christians from fellowship with God.

When a Christian sins it doesn't sever the relationship with God. But it can sure play havoc with fellowship with Him. Remember, the model prayer is not for the lost to pray. It is a model for us Christians.

So when Jesus teaches in v. 12, "Forgive us our debts..." He is teaching that we must acknowledge that we are still sinners. When we accepted Jesus as our Savior and Lord, God gave us the righteousness of Jesus and we became acceptable to God and consequently, God's children. But even though we have been made acceptable to God, as we travel through this world we become soiled and tarnished by sin.

We need to ask forgiveness for sins and failures and wrong attitudes. All of us do!

First John one makes it very clear that though we live a life of faith, we still sin. It also tells us what to do about it . . . confess our sins and God will be faithful and just to forgive us our sins.

This is what Jesus is talking about here. Even Christians sin. God is holy and perfect. God and sin cannot coexist. The blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross provides forgiveness and eternal life to those who confess and believe.

Most of us here have accepted Christ as our Savior. And we are aware, if we're honest with ourselves that we still sin. Our sin interferes with our fellowship with God.

Do you ever feel that your prayers don't go any higher than the ceiling? Maybe it's because of unconfessed sin.

Confession of our sins keeps us in right fellowship with God so that our prayers will be heard and answered; and so that our lives will be blessed and fulfilling.

## 5. Asking forgiveness is difficult.

During one Sunday school lesson, the teacher was trying to teach the children that we all need God's forgiveness. After the story she quizzed one of the girls. "Lisa, when is a time you might need God's forgiveness?" Noticeably perplexed, Lisa was reassured by a fellow student, who whispered, "It's okay, you don't have to tell her." Then he looked the teacher straight in the eye and said, "We don't have to tell you our problems. This isn't the Oprah Winfrey show."

The most difficult part of prayer is when we realize how well God knows us—that He knows our hearts and minds. Then we have to ask, "Father, forgive me." Jesus said it like this in Matt. 6:12, "Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors."

"Debts" is one of five New Testament Greek words for sin. It refers to moral or spiritual debts. Sin is a moral and spiritual debt to God that must be paid.

God's love is so radically different from ours. We love what we like. He loves what is in our best interest. We forgive when we think it's in our best interest. Because of His love for us, God is always ready to forgive.

The fact is that being a Christian requires us to have the same kind of love as God, and the same willingness to forgive as God. Having a willingness to forgive requires a willingness to love.

For me to fail to forgive anyone else who has offended me, or even to forgive myself, implies that I have a higher standard of forgiveness than God. Because whatever it is that has so hurt me that I can't forgive it, God already has.

The only way we can be forgivers, the only way we can love the unlovable and have a forgiving spirit is to have a deepening relationship with God. Every time we forgive someone we reflect Jesus Christ to those with whom we have relationships of any kind. Here's the thing—both the ability to love and to forgive can only begin after we have confessed and been forgiven by God.

## 6. Confession restores fellowship with God.

Who can say, “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors”? Only the person who has the right to say, “Our Father in heaven” (v. 9)—only Christians!

The only ones who have the right to pray this are those who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior. Really, this is the ‘Children’s Prayer,’ those who are children of God.

It is not a prayer for just anybody—but only for those who have become Children of God through Jesus Christ. It is the relationship of the child to the Father—knowing that our sin has hurt Him and we are hurt because we have hurt Him.

God hasn’t moved [Husband/wife in car]. We want to be close to our heavenly Father. We want to be aware of His presence—He’s always there but the barriers we erect because of sin causes us to feel like He is distant.

Our own children were not always little angels. We forgave them. And we’re not angels. We still sin, and we frequently require God’s gracious forgiveness. Now, because we are His children, He forgives not as our Judge, but as our Father.

Steve Brown in *Forgiven and Forgotten* tells this story on himself: Once in seminary, I got an A on a directed study course--an exegesis on the Sermon on the Mount. I should have gotten a C. Let me tell you why. Somebody told me that since I hadn’t seen this professor in the directed study, he was going to flunk me out of the class. I got scared. I sat down and put a bunch of books on the subject on our dining room table. I wrote an 80-page paper in five hours. It was thick! I handed in this paper. The professor was so busy and so impressed with 80 pages, he didn’t read it. He gave me an A. When he gave me the A, did I go back to him and say, “You ought to read that paper. I really wasn’t that good. It was a lot, but it wasn’t good.” No, I didn’t. I accepted the A. Why? Because the one in authority had given me that A. It’s the same way with Jesus Christ. If I tell you you’re forgiven, that doesn’t amount to a hill of beans. But, if he tells you, you’re forgiven, you’re forgiven. He’s the king at the right hand of the Father; his enemies are his footstool.

### Application:

You are a child of God. You belong to Him for eternity.

God loves you as a parent loves a child, but more so because His love is divine love.

God always wants the best for you. You never have to question God’s desire for your life. You belong to Him, and He wants the very best for you.

Sin becomes a barrier between you and God, just as it does between children and their parents. Pray in confidence that your heavenly Father hears you. God is real and personal. Act like you

believe it.

Confess in confidence that your heavenly Father will forgive you. Then live your life like someone who has been forgiven.