

## Lenten Study - The Lord's Prayer

Session 4 – 3/30/2022

Forgive . . . As We Forgive

### SESSION GOALS

Through this session's Bible readings, discussion, reflection, and prayer, participants will:

- Define forgiveness, clarifying what the concept does and does not mean.
- Interpret two of Jesus' parables, found in Luke 18:10-14 and Matthew 18:21-35, dealing with God's extending of and our response to forgiveness
  - Identify at least one way in which they can extend forgiveness.

### BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

#### **Luke 18:10-14**

<sup>10</sup> "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' <sup>13</sup> But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' <sup>14</sup> I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

#### **Matthew 18:21-35**

<sup>21</sup> Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" <sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. <sup>23</sup> "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. <sup>24</sup> When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents<sup>□</sup> was brought to him; <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.'

<sup>27</sup> And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. <sup>28</sup> 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.' <sup>29</sup> Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' <sup>30</sup> But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> 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. <sup>32</sup> Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. <sup>33</sup> Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' <sup>34</sup> And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. <sup>35</sup> So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

(NRSV)

## OPENING THE SESSION

Welcome

Phrase versions

- Sins/those who sin against us
- Trespass/those who trespass against us
- Debts/our debtors

*Forgiveness* “is a word we all think we know and understand, but it’s helpful to clarify what we do and don’t mean by” it. (Hamilton) How do you define forgiveness?

Let us pray: **Merciful God, when we were dead in sin, you sent your Son to reconcile us to yourself. May your Spirit of love fill our listening and speaking today, that we may receive your gift of forgiveness more fully and extend it more freely, for the sake of our Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.**

WATCH *THE LORD’S PRAYER* VIDEO – SESSION 4

CLARIFYING WHAT FORGIVENESS MEANS—AND DOESN’T

Hamilton defines what forgiveness isn’t as:

- Forgiveness doesn’t mean “all the consequences of our sin have been released.”
- Forgiveness “does not excuse the action of the one who wronged us.”
- “Forgiveness is also not reconciliation with the other, though reconciliation sometimes occurs after forgiveness.”
- “Forgiveness is not forgetting, but forgiveness is releasing our resentment, our visions of retribution, our bitterness and hate.”

The bag of rocks.

- Which part of Hamilton’s illustration connects most powerfully with you? Why?
  - The weight of sin, guilt, and shame
  - The relief of remorse and repentance
  - The weight of holding on to bitterness and resentment
  - The relief of letting go.
- How are God’s forgiveness of us and our forgiveness of others alike and different?

## READING A PARABLE ABOUT REPENTANCE

“So much of Jesus’ life and ministry was devoted to teaching, and offering, forgiveness.”  
(Hamilton)

Read together Luke 18:10-14.

Discuss:

- What does this story tell us about our experience of God’s forgiveness?
- “The tax collector went away justified,” writes Hamilton, “not because of his righteous acts, but because of his humble expression of penitence and his longing for God’s mercy.” Is longing for God’s mercy prerequisite for receiving it? Why or why not?
- What do you imagine motivates the Pharisee to pray as he does? How, if at all, do his motives affect the value of his prayer, fasting, and charitable giving?
- First-century Jews in Judea often saw Pharisees as models of righteous behavior (Matthew 5:20; 23:1-3), and tax collectors as collaborators with the Roman government who got rich at their own people’s expense (Luke 19:7-8). How might those who first heard this story have reacted to it?
- How do you imagine Jesus would tell this story in your congregation or community to communicate its message? Why?

## READING A PARABLE ABOUT SHOWING MERCY

Read together Matthew 18:21-35.

Discuss:

- Hamilton states that the king in Jesus’ story performs “an extraordinary gesture” for the servant in debt. What is it, and what makes it extraordinary?
- What makes the first servant’s subsequent behavior toward his fellow servant surprising?
- What do you think about the king’s final action toward the first servant?
- How does Jesus’ apply his parable to our relationship with God? How does his discussion with Peter before the parable shape your understanding of the story?
- Which character in Jesus’ story do you imagine yourself as? How, if at all, would you hear the story differently if you imagined yourself as one of the other characters?
- As do the forgiveness petition and Matthew 6:14-15, Jesus’ words in Matthew 18:35 directly link, as Hamilton writes, “the grace we ask for to the grace we are willing to show to others.” How do you understand this link?
- “To Jesus’ first-century hearers,” writes Hamilton, “most of whom owed debts and knew the consequences of nonpayment, thinking of their sins as debts and others who sinned against them as debtors was powerful and illuminating.” How powerful do you think this economic image of sin is in our century, and why?
- According to Hamilton, some wonder if Jesus’ use of a financial image for sin “is also meant to lead us to practice economic forgiveness when we are owed money by someone who is struggling to repay.” What do you think, and why?

## CLOSING THE SESSION

In the next week, consider one specific way you can extend forgiveness, to others or to yourself.

Close with *The Lord’s Prayer*.