

## **“Forgive Us Our Debts, As We Forgive Our Debtors”**

I have a question for us: is it easier to ask permission or to ask for forgiveness? I remember when I was in the seminary and being told, “It is often times easier to ask for forgiveness than to ask permission.” I questioned that as well as were you really asking forgiveness WHEN you should have asked for permission in the first place. “You mean I wasn’t supposed to be gone overnight without saying something first? I am so sorry!” Now, are you truly sorry or are you only sorry because you got caught? That doesn’t mean that we are not truly sorry about something. It is important that when we recognize that we have hurt someone or even hurt ourselves, we ask for forgiveness.

### **Forgive Us Our Debts**

When we have said or done something to hurt our spouse, significant other, and we recognize how wrong we were to do so, or to recognize the level of hurt, pain, or anger that we have caused, it is important that we ask for forgiveness. It is not an easy thing to do. First of all, we have to admit that we are not perfect, we have made a mistake

in speech or in deed, and we have to do something to repair the damage that has been caused.

We have to do the same thing with God. We have to humble ourselves to ask for God's forgiveness. My advice is that we only do this when we are truly sorry about what we have done. If we look at it as damaging our relationship with God, it may help us to figure out when we have to ask for it. Do we believe that God is upset with us? In my own relationship with God, I am led to believe that God simply waits for us to realize what we have done, ask for forgiveness, and then we will be forgiven, much like in the parable that Jesus told today. However, I believe that in order to feel God's forgiveness, we have to ask for it. Sometimes this is the hardest part, to simply ask.

I feel that another hard part for many of us is to accept the forgiveness that God grants us. The unconditional love that God has for us is so amazing that we as humans cannot fathom that God would do that for us. Imagine how that servant felt when his master forgave his debt! The amount of money that he owed would have taken almost a

lifetime to repay. Jesus uses this example to also show us how we can be forgiven by God. It also shows us what we are to do with others.

### **As We Forgive Our Debtors**

In all my time in education, I don't think I have told kids that they have to apologize, but instead, told them to "fix this." I even used that line with teachers when they came to my office to tell me what they had done. I would hear them out and then ask, "Is this something you can repair on your own? Do you need my assistance with it?" In the end, I was always grateful for the advance notice for the situation at hand.

Have you ever had anyone come to you to ask for forgiveness? It can be a very humbling thing. It has happened in my relationship at home so I can only imagine that it has happened with all of you at one time or another. Those of you who have raised kids and had them apologize or ask for forgiveness. (Or maybe you have had to ask THEM for forgiveness.) Even if we are still angry or hurt, we have to offer that forgiveness. We are NOT like God; as humans, we still have our feelings and emotions that we have to deal with when granting forgiveness.

“It can also affect our health. Current medical research indicates that persons who are unforgiving are more susceptible to a variety of illnesses than are their more tolerant counterparts. The New England Journal of Medicine reports that type A personalities (long thought to be particularly prone to cardiovascular illness) are no more likely than anyone else to suffer heart attack or stroke. The culprit, researchers say now, is anger. Type A persons are in danger only if they carry around unresolved hostility. It is anger, not activity, that places a person at risk.”

Just because we are human, we are not let off the proverbial hook as Jesus explains in this parable. The slave who had just been released from his debts in turn went after someone who owed him a very small amount and did not offer that same forgiveness. We are truly called to forgive as we have been forgiven. We know from our experiences that this can seem to be, times, a herculean task. What some of us have also experienced, though, is an equally large issue with which to deal: forgiving ourselves.

## **I Could Never Forgive Myself If...**

Have you ever uttered the phrase, “I could never forgive myself if...” While this phrase is almost cliché-like, more than a few of us could find ourselves in this situation. And, it is not always a cliché. How many of us have tossed and turned into the night wondering about things that have happened in the past or wished they had done something else so that someone would not have been hurt.

We have to allow ourselves to be forgiven, too! Forgiving ourselves can be one of the hardest things we do. When we ask someone to give us, we have to accept it when they say, “I forgive you.” We have to accept God’s mercy and compassion on us when we have sinned, we have asked for forgiveness, and our minds and hearts can begin to feel the grace of God in our lives.

## **The Lord’s Prayer**

I know that the Lord’s prayer is a go-to prayer for many. We have even used it in our meetings as an opening or closing prayer. People like to pray it together at funerals and other occasions as it brings them comfort. But let’s take a look at it, particularly when it comes to

forgiveness. As we pray as Jesus taught us, we acknowledge the way in which we refer to God. We recognize that God is in heaven. God's name is holy. We pray for the Reign of God to exist on earth as it exists in heaven. We ask to be nourished. And then, we ask to be forgiven of our debts, sins, or trespasses as we forgive those who owe us, or have sinned/trespassed against us. It was a big deal then and it is a big deal today in 2023. I hope we can reflect on this part of the Lord's Prayer this week.

### **What We Need to Remember**

- We need to remember that we are loved by God. God grants us forgiveness any time we ask.
- We are called to forgive others as we are forgiven by God. We may never completely feel God's forgiveness until we do so.
- We have to allow ourselves to be forgiven by our loved ones, ourselves, and by God.
- We are loved unconditionally by God.