

Unforgiveness Hinders Prayer

Mark 11:24-25

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Introduction

1. **Week 1:** God Desires to Answer Your Prayers!
2. **Week 2:** Why God Delays to Answer Our Prayers (14 reasons)
 - a. He's changing our desires to align with His
 - b. He's waiting for us to listen and do our part.
3. **Today:** we'll look at the 3rd reason God delays in answering prayer: **unforgiveness**. We can see that prayer and forgiveness are linked.
4. **The Lord's Prayer has six petitions:**
 - a. **The first three relate to God:** hallowed be YOUR name; YOUR kingdom come; YOUR will be done.
 - b. **The second three relate to us:** give US this day our daily bread, forgive US our trespasses (failures), lead US not into temptation.
5. The 5th is a request for forgiveness. **But it requires us to forgive others!**

A. Forgiving is a command we are expected to obey

1. One day Jesus was teaching on forgiveness ...
2. **Luke 17:3-4 (NIV)** *"If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. ⁴ If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."*
3. See the disciples' reaction to this teaching ...
4. **Luke 17:5 (NIV) [kai]** *The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"*
5. **Note:** in the Greek, the conjunction "**kai**" (translated "and" or "but") links v. 5 with what Jesus had just said to the apostles.
 - a. But most of the English translations don't catch this.
 - b. And so, we think that v.5 starts a whole new teaching on faith. NO!
 - c. V.5 tells us the reaction of the disciples to Jesus' demand to forgive.
6. They thought that Jesus' radical teaching on forgiveness was too hard!
7. So, they retorted (**talked back!**), in essence saying: **"Well then, you better increase our faith, because such forgiveness is just too hard!"**
8. They were right that forgiveness is difficult, but they had bad attitudes!
9. So, Jesus addressed their bad attitudes in the next verse, v. 6.
10. **Luke 17:6 (NIV)** *If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.*
11. Jesus was saying, "You don't need more faith to forgive; you have plenty of that! With just the tiniest bit of faith, you could tell a mulberry tree to be uprooted and planted in the sea, and it would happen!"
12. Then Jesus told them a parable to show them how they **SHOULD** have responded.
13. **Luke 17:7-10 (NIV)** *Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? ⁸ Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? ⁹ Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? ¹⁰ So you also, when you have done everything, you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"*
14. The point of the parable is found in a phrase repeated twice: **told to do**.
15. Jesus was saying to them that when a master tells you to do something you don't need more faith – **you just need to obey!!!**
16. Instead of 'lipping off,' as the disciples had just done, the proper thing would have been to simply say (in our vernacular) **"Yes, sir!"**
17. Is FORGIVENESS hard? YES! Why? Because offense **HURTS!**
18. And everything in you screams out for justice for the hurt incurred!
19. Yet, Jesus **PRESSED** them on the issue, leaving NO wiggle room in this – they (and we) **MUST** forgive! **Why was Jesus so adamant about this?!**

B. Why Jesus was so adamant about forgiveness

Reason 1: unforgiveness imprisons us and affects our health

1. **Tim Keller:** I had a long talk with a teenage girl who had an overbearing and difficult father, who had embarrassed her in front of her friends.
2. She told me that she refused to ever forgive him for that.
3. **Keller countered:** “Yes, he did you wrong, but if you don’t forgive him the way Jesus forgave you, **you will actually give him power over you.**
4. **You’ll do** things not because they are the best things to do but because in your heart you know your father wouldn’t like them.
5. And you **won’t do** other things b/c you know your father would like them!
6. In this way the girl was still being controlled by her father.
7. **Second**, unforgiveness/bitterness affects our physical & mental health!
8. Studies show that when your thoughts are consumed with bitterness, it releases deadly toxins in your body, which affect you negatively.
9. But Scripture told us long ago that sin would affect our health
10. **Psalms 38:3 (NIV)** ... *my bones have no soundness because of my sin.*
11. And so, forgiveness IS therapeutic, setting you free and giving you better physical and mental health.
12. Though valid, those aren’t the ONLY reasons to forgive!
13. So, what are other reasons to forgive, which the Bible emphasizes?

Reason 2: our own forgiveness is conditional

1. Earlier we saw that forgiveness from God was the **5th of six petitions** in the Lord’s Prayer.
2. **This is the only petition that Jesus comments on in the two verses following the Lord’s Prayer, b/c it is a central message of the Bible!**
3. **Matthew 6:14–15 (NIV)** *For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father WILL also forgive you. ¹⁵But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father WILL NOT forgive your sins.*
4. In chapter 18, Jesus told a parable to illustrate what He had said here.
5. Peter had asked how often he had to forgive others to which Jesus said:
6. **Matthew 18:22–35 (NIV)** *I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. ²³“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. ²⁵Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. ²⁶“At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ ²⁷The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. ²⁸“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded. ²⁹“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’ ³⁰“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. ³²“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ ³⁴In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.*
7. What the first servant owed the king in today’s terms would be if someone earns **\$50,000/yr**, that makes his debt **\$500,000,000!**
8. That’s more than the gross national products of 80% of countries today!
9. The point is: it was impossible to pay back! Yet when the servant cried for time to pay it back, the king granted complete forgiveness instead!
10. That servant then went out and found a second servant who owed him the equivalent of **a few dollars** in today’s currency.
11. He seized him and began to choke him! The 2nd servant begged the forgiven servant for time to repay it.
12. But instead of forgiving him that small amount, though he had been forgiven an impossible amount, and not even giving him time to pay, the forgiven servant through the small debt servant in prison!
13. **Can you imagine that?!**

14. Other servants reported the forgiven servant's outrageous behavior to the king, who summoned him saying, "How can anyone who has experienced the lavish mercy I showed you have such a cruel and ungenerous attitude towards others?"
15. And with that the king threw him in prison!
16. Jesus ends his parable with this chilling line ...
17. **Matthew 18:35 (NIV)** "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."
18. **Scholars disagree somewhat:** some believe that the person who doesn't forgive lose their salvation. Others argue that if they don't forgive it proves that they weren't saved in the first place.
19. **But EITHER WAY, this parable makes clear, that the one who doesn't forgive, will face God's judgment.**
20. **Craig Bloomberg** 450 pg **Matthew**: "Frighteningly, many in Christian circles today seem in danger of this judgment because they refuse to forgive their fellow believers, speak kindly to them, cooperate with them, or accept their apologies." (p. 285)
21. With the measure you use, it will be measured to you.
22. **Matthew 7:1-2 (NIV)** "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."
23. What Jesus expects of his people is not a reluctant or merely verbal concession, but a genuine, warm forgiveness "**from the heart**" so that the broken relationship can be fully restored.
24. The less we appreciate the king's forgiveness the less we will forgive.
25. **Luke 7:47 (NIV)** But whoever has been forgiven little loves little."
26. Though the servant in the parable was forgiven much, when this much is not appreciated there is danger ahead!
27. Can Christians who have experienced overwhelming forgiveness really be so hard-hearted? The point of the parable is that we can be indeed!
28. And so, we must pray constantly from the **Lord's Prayer**, "Lord, lead us/me not into the temptation to forget your forgiveness; and deliver us from the evil of heartless unforgiveness!" (Matt 6:13-15)

Reason 3: unforgiveness causes children to go to hell

1. **For this, we have back up from the parable a few verses ...**
2. **Matthew 18:6-7 (NIV)** *If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. ⁷Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!*
3. **Examples:** a convenience store that sells porn; a doctor who assists in euthanizing someone or offers to abort a baby; a teacher who teaches impressionable young minds gender fluidity – that God made it that way
4. It's better for a millstone to be hung around that person's neck and be drowned than to face Jesus at the Judgment, because it may send people to hell.
5. But there is another kind of offense that will send people, especially children, to a Christ-less eternity – UNFORGIVENESS!
6. I wonder how many children who grew up in church will not be in heaven because their parents took offense at someone in the church (pastor, worship leader, S.S. teacher, board member, staff person), got angry and bitter, spoke about it at home and perhaps left the church!
7. And now their children have nothing to do with God, the Bible or Church
8. **That's why Jesus was so upset at His disciples in Luke 17 earlier!**
9. He wants them to obey because if they don't many people's eternity may be on the line!
10. **E.g. Offense at church leaders in Kleefeld**
 - a. Pastor said we couldn't become members because I wasn't a pacifist, and if I couldn't become a member, I couldn't serve
 - b. Fran & I knew we'd have to leave the church, because if we couldn't serve there, we'd have to find a church where we could minister.
 - c. **PROBLEM:** We had teenagers at the time!
 - d. Fran & I agreed that we couldn't leave **UNTIL** our teens would be OK with what happened, because we didn't want them to be OFFENDED and leave the Church and God!
 - e. So we said nothing about what had happened

- f. However, one day they asked: "Heh, dad. You always taught at Faithway that we should become members in the church and get involved. SO, why aren't YOU becoming members! OH BOY!
 - g. So, we carefully explained what happened. We couldn't hide it.
 - h. And sure enough, when they heard the truth, they were offended!
 - i. **But here's the KEY: FRAN & I WEREN'T OFFENDED!**
 - j. We defended the church and argued that they had every right to believe what they did. They had always believed this! They were simply being consistent with their beliefs! We were joining THEM!
 - k. Week after week we happily attended the same church.
 - l. Over time everything was forgotten and in prayer I sensed that it was now OK to leave.
 - m. Carefully, we explained that we would quietly leave to attend a church called Southland! That was over 30 years ago!
11. Perhaps you're feeling terrible, because you didn't handle your church offenses that way, and today you have children who don't want anything to do with the Church or God – what can you do?
 12. **First:** repent. Second: to the best of your ability fix what you did with or to that church. Third: humble yourself & tell your kids you were wrong
 13. There isn't a mom or dad here who hasn't made mistakes. But don't leave it like that! Correct it!

Reason 4: unforgiveness causes communities to reject Jesus

1. How is it that in the new world there will not only be no evil but no residual anger, resentment or bitterness for all the evil done through the ages?!
2. Just as our resurrection bodies will be incapable of death, disease and decay (1 Cor 15:51-57), so too our moral thinking, cognitive, emotional selves will be renewed!
3. And thus, we will be able to fully & forever forgive!
4. The command to forgive is the command to bring into the present what we are promised in the future! **Why?**
5. **John 13:34–35 (NIV)** *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*
6. In Scripture love is never portrayed as an emotion, but as an action!
7. You do not love others if you do not forgive!
8. **1 Peter 4:8 (NIV)** *Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.*
9. And when the watching world sees such forgiving love, it sits up and takes NOTE!
10. But when church members fight and bicker and divide, it proves to the world that the Church doesn't have an answer to its problems.
11. And so it rejects Christ!

Reason 5: unforgiveness hinders our prayers

1. **Mark 11:25 (NIV)** *And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.*
2. **Psalms 66:18 (NIV)** *If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.*
3. **1 Peter 3:7 (NIV)** *Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.*

C. Four steps to forgive others

1. **First:** Journal the initials of the offender and their offense. Call evil, evil.
2. **Second:** List how much God forgave you – repent and be thankful!
 - a. You'll be shocked at how much you can write!
 - b. Repent for having taking God's forgiveness for granted.
 - c. Write out how thankful you are!
3. **Third:** daily ask God for grace to forgive
4. **Fourth:** choose to forgive the offender
 - a. Repent for having been merciless in forgiving someone for what they have done to you. How do you forgive them?
 - b. You don't just mutter to yourself, "I forgive so and so." NO!
 - c. **Luke 6:27-28 (NIV)** *Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*

- d. Forgiveness is an action: **pray** for them; **do good** and **bless them**!
 - e. **Caveat:** It isn't wise to continue relations with someone who has been physically or sexually harming them!
 - f. **But you still have to forgive.**
5. **Story of Corrie ten Boom's forgiveness**
 In 1947, after WW II, Corrie ten Boom, who survived the Nazi's Ravensbrück concentration camp, was speaking at a church in Munich about forgiveness.
 At the end of her talk, a man approached her. She immediately recognized him as one of the cruel guards from Ravensbrück—the very place where her sister Betsie had died. He told her he had become a Christian wanted her to forgive him: "Fraulein, will you forgive me?" Corrie froze. She remembered the suffering, the humiliation, the death of her sister. Forgiveness felt impossible. But she also knew Jesus' command: "*If you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive yours.*" She prayed silently: "*Jesus, help me. I can lift my hand. You supply the feeling.*"
 She extended her hand to him. As she did, she later wrote, a surge of warmth and love flooded her being. She said, "I forgive you, brother, with all my heart." In that moment, she experienced the supernatural power of God's love—something she couldn't have done on her own.
6. **Question:** do you have to forgive if the person didn't say, "Sorry?"
 a. **Jesus said, "Love your enemies." Enemies don't ask for forgiveness!**
 b. Further, when they were crucifying Jesus, He said ...
 c. **Luke 23:34 (NIV)** "*Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*"

Weekly Challenge (take a picture):

- 1. **Journal through your four steps to forgiveness**
- 2. **Attend Noon Hour prayer or Resting Prayer**
 - Wed, Jan 21 – noon or 7 pm
- 3. **Attend Prayer Summit**
 - a. Wed, Jan 28 – 7-8:30 pm
 - b. Attend & invite someone to join you
- 4. **Memorize**
 - a. Mark 11:25