



HG59: Living The Lord's Prayer (6/8) *Pardon: Forgiveness and Forgiving*

Matthew 6:5-15

Home Group Study Notes

6th November 2011 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and
other resources which might be helpful.*



Welcome (10 mins) *Ice Breaker*

You've been exiled to a deserted island for a year. In addition to the essentials, you may take one piece of music, one book (which is not the Bible) and one luxury item you can carry with you (i.e. not a boat to leave the island!). What would you take with you and why?"



Looking Upwards (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read through the text for this study, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, of your answers with your Home Group.

1: Do you see forgiveness as an act of will or an emotion?

2: Discuss whether you agree that: '*Forgiveness is a process rather than a work of a moment*'? What is your response to the example Paul used of the Cardy family?

3: Read the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32. Consider the two sets of relationships at the end of the story. If the relationship between the younger son and the father is a picture of the repentant sinner and God, what does the relationship of the older son and the father represent? With which of the two relationships do you most closely identify?

4: Does forgiveness overflow out of your life or does God have to squeeze it out? How do we learn to live lives where forgiveness comes more easily?

5: Try to think of: a) an instance in which one party (an individual, group or nation) extended forgiveness to a party who had wronged them; b) an instance in which one party refused to forgive the other. What difference did the act of forgiveness or the withholding of forgiveness make in each situation?

6: Read through the section: *Why Christian's must forgive*. Which of these suggestions would you find easiest to put into practise? Which of these would you find the most difficult?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



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Home Group Sermon Notes

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Introduction: *Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us* is probably one of the most difficult petitions of the Lord's Prayer to examine and that's because forgiveness is not a subject that lends itself to a cool, detached, theoretical discussion. There's never been a time in my ministry when I've spoken on forgiveness that someone hasn't came up to me afterwards and said: *It's all right for you to talk about forgiveness, but let me tell you about what happened to me ...* ' Then, of course, they recount some absolutely appalling story of suffering, injustice and tragedy and then ask, if I'd been in their shoes, would I forgive the other person? My response has always been: in my own strength, no; with God's strength (hopefully), yes. But they never believe me – failing to recognise that I, too, might have had to deal with difficult and painful issues in some form or other in my life.

Forgive us our sins: The Bible gives examples of every kind of sin that we need to be forgiven for, almost as if to show us how widespread and varied it is. From the rejection of God's plan for their lives by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden; to the sins of greed; lust; adultery; murder; as well as more subtle sins: envy; betrayal; dishonour; hypocrisy; self-interest; arrogance; cowardice; the worship of people, possessions and activities. Despite the distance of time and culture that separates the world of the Bible from our own, we catch an unflattering glimpse of ourselves don't we? We are no different: we suffer from the same symptoms.

Sin as a terrible infection that has worked its way into every aspect of being human. Sin has enslaved us (Romans 7:14,23), pushed our lives off course (Isaiah 53:6) and made us unclean (Psalm 51:1-2) which, if untreated, will ultimately and eternally destroy us. As Paul reminds us in Romans 6:23: *the wages of sin is death*. Thankfully, God's cure to our sin is forgiveness. Only God's forgiveness is able to remedy the effects of sin. When we think of that forgiveness and what it means, it's helpful to understand that there are two sides to forgiveness: the removal of sin and the restoration of our relationship with God.

Forgiveness as the removal of sin: Many people today have no concept of what sin is. They don't realise it's offensive to God and they don't consider that they are guilty of it. Even if they do think of it, it's considered to be a minor and private matter and because it's so trivial to them they think it must also be trivial to God. This overlooks the fact that our sinfulness is a very serious condition. For sins to be forgiven someone must pay for them and the price of our forgiveness was that in Jesus, God himself suffered death on the cross. The apostle Paul summarises this in 2 Corinthians 5:21: *For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ*. This is what Grace is all about. In forgiving us, God has dealt with our falling short; paid our unpayable debts; let us off our trespasses and pardoned our offences.

Forgiveness as the restoration of a relationship: This is the ultimate goal of his forgiveness - a complete reconciliation to the point that the breach in our relationship is healed. The OT talks about God's relationship with his people as that of a loving father with a child (Deuteronomy 1:31)

or even as a spouse with an adulterous partner (as in Hosea). In the NT, particularly the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), we have the image of God as a loving and welcoming Father. Perhaps the strongest images of the restoration of the relationship are found in Revelation 21&22, when we read about the new heaven and the new earth, how God lives amid his people; how the relationship that was broken in the Garden of Eden has been restored. In terms of relationships God's forgiveness means that, although we were once guilty sinners, we are now God's children; although we were once enemies of God, we are now the friends of Jesus.

Sins removed, and a relationship restored, are complementary and not contradictory. If God's love did not want his relationship with us restored, Jesus would never have gone to the cross. If Jesus had not paid for our sin and so removed it, then God would never have been able to restore the relationship.

What does it mean to forgive those who sin against us? The goal of forgiveness is to restore a relationship that has become broken. 'Forgive and forget' says the proverb, though interestingly we don't find such advice in the Bible.

Forgiveness is a decision, not an emotion: One of the problems with forgiveness is that we confuse what is a decision of our minds with a feeling of our hearts. There's a danger in thinking that forgiveness is all about having good emotions about someone who has done something dreadful to us. Our culture today thinks that love is something you feel; it is a warm, gushing and wonderful emotion. Not surprisingly, if we think of forgiveness like that, we are in danger of dismissing it as being totally impractical and probably impossible. The Bible's view of love, however, is different.

Love is a verb. It's a doing word: It is first and foremost a decision to seek the very best for the other person whatever it may cost. Initially, at least, it is an act of the will. It is a decision we take. We no longer wish to hate or punish the person who has hurt us; we choose to end the matter and take no further action or retribution over a grievance. Once the decision to forgive is made, then we are able, with God's help, to ensure our emotions of anger, hatred and bitterness fall in line with our decision. Forgiveness of the will should eventually become forgiveness of the heart. Of course, in some cases the healing of hurtful emotions may take years. I suspect, however, that the first step on that road is always the same: we choose to forgive.

Forgiveness is a work for which we need God's help: Even deciding to forgive may require a work of the Holy Spirit softening our hearts and strengthening our determination. A major part of the act of forgiving is to take the matter to God for his healing touch. This is especially so where we have suffered deeply. We are to approach God honestly and openly with your hurts and anger, asking him to give you the strength to forgive.

Forgiveness is a process rather than the work of a moment: Every so often we read of people who have managed to forgive dreadful acts against them or their family in a way that we cannot imagine possible. I don't know about you, but I was deeply moved a couple of weeks ago by the interview given by the parents of Jennifer Cardy. You may remember that Jennifer was found murdered, aged 9 years of age, in 1981 and that Robert Black was recently found guilty of her murder 30 years later. Outside the court Jennifer's father Andy, and wife Patricia, said the family's strong Christian faith had sustained them through the years of uncertainty and the trial. 'Robert Black stole the life of our daughter but he didn't steal the lives of me and my family,' he said. 'We've lived a happy, prosperous life, but we miss Jennifer each and every day.' He went on to say that they had prayed for Black in the wake of the verdict.

Sometimes, however, we find this sort of extraordinary forgiveness more daunting than encouraging. However, it's worth recognising that deep and complete forgiveness may take years. For the Cardy family, their forgiveness took root over 30 years. The Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sachs once said on *Thought for the Day* on Radio 4 that: *Forgiveness is the most radical antidote to hate.* It is, he went on to say: *the only way to live with the past without being held prisoner by the past.*

Forgiveness is a lot easier with repentance: When a relationship has been broken, forgiveness is the act of healing. But we need to build a bridge don't we? If the person who has injured you has genuinely said that they are sorry, then it is as if they were building the bridge from their side as well. The task of restoring the relationship is a lot easier. A bridge can be built from one side alone, but it is a lot easier if both sides work at building it. Where someone who has hurt you refuses to apologise, or continues to offend, then reaching the stage of full and final forgiveness may be very hard indeed. Sometimes, having had our efforts rebuffed, we have to clear our conscience before God and leave it at that.

Forgiveness does not mean ignoring justice: To forgive a wrong is not the same as condoning that wrong. For example, if someone has stolen from me and I forgive them, I am not saying that what they did is right. I am simply forgiving their wrong actions against me personally. I see no discrepancy, in theory, in a Christian forgiving a mugger but then testifying against them in court; or a Christian forgiving the driver who injured them, while at the same time seeking fair compensation for injuries.

Forgiveness does not always mean forgetting everything: The heart of forgiveness is the burying of the bitterness and anger over what you have suffered. Nevertheless, to forget everything may be naivety rather than holiness. One of the best examples of this I've come across is in the introduction to RT Kendall's book: *Total Forgiveness*. Professor Washington A.J. Okumu writes about his involvement in the 'Truth and Reconciliation Commission' in SA and the fight against apartheid. He writes: *Bitterness, however justified will just consume our souls and achieve nothing. We must, therefore, learn to forgive even if we don't forget.* Because if we forget the past, he goes on to say, we never learn from the mistakes of the past to build a better future. Indeed, as Desmond Tutu once commented: *Without forgiveness, there is no future.*

Why forgiveness matters: The loss of forgiveness as a virtue in today's society, probably explains why there is so much anger and hate around. We may prize tolerance and acceptance, but forgiveness is far less popular. Forgiveness matters because failing to forgive carries with it a high cost. One wrong committed against someone almost certainly generates another and often stronger wrong in retaliation. Soon an uncontrolled chain reaction has started as grudges are repaid by angry words and angry words by angry actions.

People say that time is a great healer, yet without forgiveness, there is little even time can do. Most of us know people who haven't spoke to each other for many years. When you enquire about the reason for this, you sometimes find out that the problem goes back to some hasty words uttered a whole generation before with no-one knowing what started it in the first place. No one can bear hatred or bitterness without being scarred by it. Anger borne against others, inevitably spills over into the bearer's life. Yet by holding on to that grievance, by dwelling on it, their suffering has grown over the years. Far from reducing the hurt, time has magnified it.

Why Christians must forgive: The Bible doesn't put forgiveness on the Advanced Syllabus of Applied Christianity, with a warning that it's only to be attempted by experienced Christians. It's for all of Jesus' followers, all of the time.

We are commanded to forgive: Quite simply Jesus orders us to forgive and to show love even to those who hate and despise us. In fact, Jesus commanded us to forgive our enemies (Matthew 5:43-44; Luke 6:27-36).

We are to imitate Jesus: As sons and daughters of God we are to 'reflect his truth and light.' Jesus' whole life illustrated forgiveness, especially the manner of his death. Remember his words on the cross: *'Father, forgive these people, because they don't know what they are doing'* (Luke 23:34).

We have been forgiven ourselves for much worse: We need to remember that we ourselves are sinners who have been forgiven in a most extraordinary and costly way by God.

Paul sums this up in Colossians 3:13: *'You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.'* If we do not forgive, we are denying the very principle of forgiveness that has given us peace with God.

We should remember that God is just and that justice will prevail: Forgiving someone should be helped by the fact that God is Judge of us all. The idea that we can leave justice in God's hands, as someone who knows all the facts, and judge with perfect fairness is very liberating.

We should remember that God is sovereign and can use even bad things for our good: Part of our anger over many injustices can be because we feel robbed: money, promotion or property, or it may be of something less visible like honour or happiness. Yet we know that God is sovereign. Joseph saw God's hand in all his when he said to his brothers, Genesis 50:20: *As far as I am concerned, God turned into good what you meant for evil.* This is, of course, a long way from the trite and often insulting 'everything will work out for the best' that you sometimes hear. The point is that God is capable of turning life around us to our good and his glory.

We should remember that a failure to forgive will do us no good: Revenge is a great temptation but offers little long-term satisfaction. To refuse to forgive is to allow an emotional cancer to grow in our life. Forgiveness may be painful and revenge may be sweet, but forgiveness will do us lasting good, while revenge will do us only lasting harm.

Have you forgiven? As I mentioned earlier, anger, rage and bitterness are all too common in our world today. Without forgiveness there are simply no mechanisms for people to deal with hurt and pain and we, as Christians, can make an enormous impact on society in this area. We can stand out by the way we deal with injustices. That is why a failure to forgive one another in the church is so catastrophic.

Paul, for example, used very strong language in 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 when they failed to forgive each other. We are supposed to set an example. In the light of all we've looked at this morning, let me ask a question: Have you truly forgiven those who've hurt you? It's all too easy to say of someone who has injured us, 'Oh yes, of course I forgive them,' but still harbour deep in our hearts some secret 'ill will.' If that's so, then it isn't forgiveness at all, simply the pretence of forgiveness. We may need to go back and make that decision to forgive again.

The Lord's Prayer

*Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name,
Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
Now and forever. Amen.*



Looking Inwards (15 mins)

Caring For Each Other

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins)

Concern For Others

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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