

Community Church of Issaquah
February 16, 2025, 2025
The Gift of Forgiveness
Rev. Vincent Lachina

Do certain verses in the Bible seem to jump out and scare you? Or maybe it just makes you feel uncomfortable? Or maybe you just brush them aside and keep on reading or reciting. I must confess that a line or two in the Lord's Prayer makes me cringe while many questions swirl around in my head. When Jesus offered this beautiful example of how we should pray that we all recited this morning, he did not speak lightly about how we as believers are supposed to behave. This beautiful prayer begins with an acknowledgement that Jesus recognized his own Father and respectfully told God, "Hallowed be your name" or in our modern language, we would begin our prayer with these words, "Holy is your name." Don't we wish that our children might have at some time been so respectful?

Then Jesus goes on to clarify that it is our desire that God's will is accomplished – not ours, but God's. He prays for the gift of food that enables each of us to continue life without starvation. But then it pops up and two things arise that spins my head like an old 78 rpm record player. Here it is – forgive us of our debts or transgressions and we are to forgive others who have done something painful to us. We humbly ask God to offer us forgiveness for anything we might have done in the way of sin.

And then, we're instructed to forgive others just like God forgave us. It seems easy to bow down a bit and say, "O, Lord, I'm so sorry if I've sinned against you. Please forgive me," and then we move on with our daily journey trusting that God took care of that business and our slate is clean again. It's not quite that easy when we are directed to forgive those who have done something harmful to us, regardless of who it might be.

At the core of this message is not the focus on God's forgiveness of us, but on our forgiveness of others. When we choose to forgive anyone else for whatever they might have done to us, there are blessings that come from that decision. Why do we need to forgive others? Can't we just leave that up to God? After all, he's the Forgiver that we serve, so shouldn't we just let Him do His Job? There are some special benefits that come to us when we forgive someone and move past the hurt and resentment to find a place of inner peace. Let me share some reasons why I believe there are truly blessings and benefits to practicing forgiveness and sharing that gift of forgiveness with others.

First, we know that our Lord God is truly a forgiving and loving God. We are told in verses in Psalm 80 that God is not only forgiving but compassionate and slow to anger. When we practice what Jesus told us to do in forgiving as God forgives us, we practice and imitate what God does for us. We show others what our God is like and what we seek to be like, and in doing so, we reflect the heart of our loving Lord.

Second, when we do forgive, we are doing the right thing and that means we are standing up for righteousness. Forgiving someone doesn't mean that you approve of what was done that needed forgiveness. It means that we choose to let God be the one who passes judgement and determines the way God will deal with the person. Please understand that you and I don't ignore what the transgression was but we follow some other words of Jesus who said in Matthew chapter 7 verse 1, "Judge not lest ye be judged, for where in you judge, so shall you be judged." The bottom line is simply, let God be in charge and do His job.

Third, when we practice forgiving others as God has forgiven us, we are engaged in the process of transforming us into the image of Christ. Each of us I hope work diligently to imitate what Jesus did, to follow his teaching. I want to be more like Jesus each day and work to make that happen. When we choose to not forgive, we are saying that we don't want to be like Jesus if that's something we have to do. In our country today, I am disheartened every day to see how many people are pushed into suffering by leaders who have wandered afar from the teachings of Christ. I am not in a position to pass judgement on those who are causing this pain, but if I were, I would say to each one, "Pray and seek God's forgiveness for the evil and hate you have caused." I doubt any would in a positive way, but at some point, each will have to answer our Lord.

A fourth thing to consider is a source of great comfort. Forgiving others begins a process of healing that restores the heart and life of the forgiver and the forgiven. When we

practice forgiveness, we can release the past and move forward with our lives. I love the verse in Psalm 147:3 that says, “He – God – heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” That’s what begins to happen when we decide to forgive. We let go of the pain or anger or anguish and allow healing to begin. If you are struggling with forgiving someone, know that God will open a door for you to find help we you seek it.

A fifth thing I think about when I ponder forgiveness is the reality that when I do forgive, the broken relationship could be restored. The function of forgiveness is not to get the other person to change, but for each of us to do the loving example of Jesus. Even as he was placed on the cross, it was his message of forgiveness that was so evident to those who were there watching and listening. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” It’s doubtful that the persecutors changed at all. Getting the other person to change is not the purpose of forgiveness. Forgiving someone else can help us to grow spiritually and can bring peace and healing to us.

A sixth thought for us to consider is how each of us becomes more Christ-like when we do what Jesus did – forgive. When we follow the example of Christ and forgive others, we are allowing God to step in and take over. We admit that we must surrender to the Lord who will do what needs to be done in each circumstance. We do not seek to get even with someone when we move toward forgiveness, we are seeking to permit God to minister to us as we back away and allow God to do our task for us.

Seventh in our series is recognizing that we are blessed when we forgive someone. Have you thought about how being an unforgiving person damages your own relationship with God? It also ruins our relationship with others and hinders our spiritual growth. If we continue down a path of reluctance to forgive, we will experience more personal pain and heartache. Bearing this suffering creates such a heavy burden for us to bear. Someone once said, "Unforgiveness is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die." How's that for a heavy thought?

To close, let me share one last thought about forgiveness. When we choose to practice forgiveness, we are set free from the burdensome pain of holding onto the past and harboring ill feelings at any level. Forgiveness frees us. When we pray to God for His forgiveness, God sets us free from the bondage of sin and even death. We move from a place of darkness to a place of light. It is the same when we choose to forgive and follow the example of God. We free ourselves from the chains of hatred and deception. We choose to free ourselves from what has weighed us down. We are free and at peace.

A final word of awareness before we close our service on the Gift of Forgiveness. Forgiving does not mean forgetting. Hear these words from someone other than your pastor. Hear these words of Jesus again:

*Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Or,
Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who
trespass against us.*

Go forgive where forgiveness is needed.