

Being Free through Prayer

Read [Matthew 6:9-13](#)

A number of years ago a woman came to my office for counseling. She was a successful businesswoman, intelligent, attractive, and personable. She came to my office for counseling, but she wouldn't tell me what she wanted counseling about. She visited a number of times, and we talked about various things, but I could tell we were skirting around the real issue.

Then one day I asked her, "Have you had an abortion?" That was it, the real issue. Tears streamed down her face. Her boyfriend—*former* boyfriend now—had pressured her into it, but she had gone along with it. She was so ashamed that she couldn't even bring herself to mention it.

She looked more hopeless than perhaps anyone I've ever seen. This was startling, since on the outside she had so much going for her. But inside she had no hope. She had taken a life, an innocent life, her own baby's life. How could she live with herself? How could she face God? Guilt had robbed her of hope.

It was my joy to share with her from the Bible how she could have a new start in life, how God would not only forgive her sin but *forget* it (*For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more*—[Hebrews 8:12](#), emphasis added).

She became a changed person as she accepted this truth. She was eager to read the Bible and learn more about such a loving, forgiving God. She told me I could refer other women in her predicament to her for help (an offer I took her up on)—and you know you've been healed when you become a healer! Hope and joy bubbled out of her. She had truly found new life through God's forgiveness.

She had been set free!

There is no prison like the prison of guilt. Psychiatrist Karl Menninger said that if you could convince patients in psychiatric hospitals that their sins were forgiven, 75 percent of them would walk out the next day. Forgiveness frees us—from guilt, from fear, from denial, from rationalizations, from masquerades, from stress. When we know we are forgiven, we can stop running—from God, from others, from ourselves.

Forgiveness frees us, and here's the amazing thing: *We can be free through prayer.* In [verse 12](#) of the **Model Prayer**, Jesus told us to pray:

*12 Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

Jesus would not have told us to pray a prayer that didn't work. If he said we could ask God to "*Forgive us our debts,*" it's because that's what God will do when we ask him. *We can be free of guilt through prayer.*

But don't pass over the second thing Jesus told us to pray in this verse: "*as we also have forgiven our debtors.*" Not only can we be forgiven through prayer, *we can forgive others through prayer—and free ourselves of the poisonous emotions that imprison us when we refuse to forgive.*

In this line of the Model Prayer, Jesus is telling us how to be free through prayer—free from our own guilt, and free from the emotional baggage caused by other people's sins against us. Let's look at both of these dimensions of freedom.

HOW CAN WE BE FREE OF GUILT THROUGH PRAYER?

By asking! Jesus told us to pray, "*Forgive us our debts.*" Because we know that Jesus would not have told us to pray a prayer that didn't work, we know that when we ask God to forgive us, he will.

How can God forgive me just for asking? Don't I have to do something to *earn* my forgiveness? Don't I have to become a monk, or give a bunch of money away, or fast for a week, or punish myself in some way? How can forgiveness be so free—just for asking?

The reason God is able to freely "*Forgive us our debts*" just for asking is because our debts have already been paid for at the cross. When Jesus died on the cross, he declared, "*It is finished*" ([John 19:30](#)). In the Greek, the language of the New Testament, "*It is finished*" is *teleo*. An alternate translation for *teleo* is "*Paid in full.*" With his death, Jesus was paying *in full* the debt for our sin. Because Jesus has paid the debt for our sin, God is able to freely forgive us when we ask him. Forgiveness is free because someone else already paid for it. It cost him, but it's free to us.

What does this mean to you if you're already a Christian? You don't have to let your failures separate you from your relationship with God. The natural instinct when we sin is to hide in shame from God. This is what Adam and Eve did after the first sin: "*Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden*" ([Genesis 3:8](#), emphasis added). Sin makes us ashamed and afraid before a holy God. But because Jesus has paid our debt for us, we can run *to* God when we sin, ask him to "*Forgive us our debts,*" and he will.

What does this mean to you if you're not yet a Christian? You can come to God for forgiveness right now. Jesus has paid your debt! Forgiveness is available to you if you'll just ask: "*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved*" ([Romans 10:13, KJV](#)).

Does this sound like a wise policy to you, this free forgiveness that God offers? Many object to it, feeling that it gives people a license to sin. But it is the plain teaching of the New Testament, and there are some profound reasons for the free offer of forgiveness:

1) The first and foremost reason, as has been previously discussed, is that our debt has already been fully paid by Jesus on the cross. If it's been fully paid, then we owe nothing. Forgiveness is free to us because Jesus paid the price.

2) The offer of free forgiveness leaves no room for pride. The devil's fall and man's fall were both due to pride (see [Isaiah 14:12-15](#) and [Genesis 3:1-8](#), respectively). Pride must be left behind to come back into a right relationship with God. Free forgiveness leaves no room for pride. No one in heaven will be able to say, "I'm here because I did such and such." No, we will be in heaven only because of what Jesus did for us.

3) Free forgiveness changes the heart. When we realize that God has freely forgiven us, at a cost to him alone (the death of his Son), we can't help but be grateful and *want* to live for him. It changes the heart.

Listen to Paul Varner: "The night I prayed to accept Christ as my Savior, I hesitated right before I did. My worry was: *Will I be able to stick it out? Will I be able to live the Christian life? I don't want to be a hypocrite.* But I took the chance and prayed the prayer. The next day I woke up to a surprise: I *wanted* to live for God. I *wanted* to pray, read the Bible, quit the obvious sins, and go to church. I *wanted* to do these things for the One who had forgiven me so much. It wasn't going to be a burden at all. My heart had been changed."

You can be free of guilt just by asking. If you're a Christian who has messed up, just ask for forgiveness. Quit running off and hiding behind the bushes! Run *to* God. If you're not yet a Christian, before you put this teaching down, bow your head and accept the gift of forgiveness God offers. You can pray this prayer:

"Dear Lord Jesus, I admit that I'm a sinner and need your forgiveness. Thank you for loving me in spite of my sin, and dying on the cross to pay my debt for sin. I ask you to forgive me of all my sins. I ask you to come in my heart and help me to live for you. Thank you for hearing my prayer and saving me for all eternity. Amen."

We can be free of guilt through prayer. That's the first dimension of freedom we can experience by praying this line of the Model Prayer.