

HOW CAN WE BE FREE OF EMOTIONAL BAGGAGE THROUGH PRAYER?

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

By forgiving others. After telling us to pray, “*Forgive us our debts,*” Jesus also told us to pray, “*as we also have forgiven our debtors.*”

Have you been hurt by someone? I’m sure you have. I don’t think it’s possible to live on fallen planet earth and get by without being hurt. Some have been hurt more than others, but all have been hurt.

If you’ve been hurt by someone, then you know it’s a burden. It weighs on your heart. It may have changed your whole life. But there is a way to be free of it: by forgiving the one or ones who hurt you, which you can do through prayer—as Jesus told us to pray, “*as we also have forgiven our debtors.*”

It is vitally important for us to forgive others. That is why this is the only part of the Model Prayer that Jesus tagged with a comment. Immediately after the Model Prayer, he said:

14 *For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.*

15 *But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*

[MATTHEW 6:14–15](#)

If we don’t forgive others, Jesus said, the Father won’t forgive us. That’s a sobering thought. Are you holding someone’s sins against them? Guess what? God is holding your sins against you. Like I said, a sobering thought!

In what sense does God hold our sins against us if we don’t forgive others? Not in an eternal sense. He promised we would be eternally saved if we put our faith in Jesus, and he wouldn’t contradict himself. Our sins will be held against us in an *experiential sense*; that is, we won’t *experience* all the blessings that are ours because of God’s forgiveness of us, blessings such as peace and joy, answered prayer, and intimacy with God. Our unforgiveness toward others disrupts our connection with heaven.

Have you been seeking an answer to prayer and nothing has happened? Check your forgiveness toward others. If you’re withholding it, God may be withholding a blessing from you.

It is vitally important that we forgive—for *our* sakes.

Now I realize it’s not always easy to forgive. Perhaps you’ve heard the story of the woman summoned for jury duty, who said to the Judge, “Your Honor, I can’t serve on a

jury. I don't believe in capital punishment." The judge said, "Ma'am, this isn't a capital charge so that doesn't matter. This is a case where a husband emptied out the wife's savings account of \$14,000 to take a three-day weekend with his girlfriend in Atlantic City." The woman said, "Okay, I'll serve. And I could be wrong about capital punishment."

Or the story of the woman who, after a long illness, died and arrived at the gates of heaven. She looked through the gates and saw the streets of gold and a beautiful banquet table with her friends and relatives rejoicing around it. "What a wonderful place," she said to Saint Peter, who was there to greet her. "How do I get in?"

Peter said, "You have to spell a word."

"What word?" she asked.

"Love," said Peter.

She spelled it, and was ushered in.

Sometime later, as the story goes, Peter asked the woman to watch the gates of heaven for a day. It so happened that her husband arrived while she was there. She said, "I'm surprised to see you. How have you been?"

He said, "I've been doing great since you died. I married the beautiful young nurse who took care of you when you were ill. Then I won the lottery. I sold the little house you and I lived in and bought a big mansion. My new young wife and I traveled all around the world. We were on vacation and I went water skiing today, and fell and hit my head, and now I'm here. How do I get in?"

"You have to spell a word."

"What word?" he asked.

"Czechoslovakia."

As I said, it is not always easy to forgive. There are three truths to keep in mind to help us forgive:

1. When we forgive, we're not condoning the act that hurt us; we're forgiving the person who did it.

Many can't forgive because they feel like it will put a stamp of approval on what was done to them. But God is not asking you to approve of the act. He is asking you to forgive the person who did it.

You may have been abused as a child. When you hear the command to forgive, that memory comes to mind, and you think, *How can I forgive that? It was evil.* You're right, and God is not asking you to condone the act, or to not think of it as evil. He is not asking you to pretend the memory doesn't hurt you, or to pretend that there weren't negative consequences in your life because of it. He's asking you to forgive the person who did it.

2. When we forgive, it doesn't mean the other person is "getting away with it."

Many can't forgive because it offends their sense of justice. But we don't need to worry about this. There's a spiritual law that rules in the affairs of earth, the law of sowing and reaping:

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.

[GALATIANS 6:7](#)

According to the law of sowing and reaping, every act is like a seed sown in the ground. That seed will bring forth a harvest for the sower—maybe soon, maybe down the road. But a harvest will come. No one gets away with anything. We can forgive, leaving judgment up to God. "... *'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord*" ([Romans 12:19](#)).

3. When we forgive, we are freeing ourselves.

The ironic thing about refusing to forgive is that we're allowing the original wrong done to us to continue to hurt us through our resentment and bitterness. We're allowing it to keep us in an emotional and spiritual prison. It is through forgiving that we free ourselves.

Listen to the following testimony from a fellow pastor:

"One of the happiest people in my church, an energetic senior citizen named Betty, has no right to be. Or so it would seem. After 18 years of marriage and a few children, her husband ran off with another woman—and the other woman was *her sister*.

They ran off permanently, leaving Betty and the children behind.

Betty was devastated, betrayed by the two people closest to her. She was, understandably, bitter to the bone. She said, "When I die, I'm going to be cremated, and send the ashes to my sister with best wishes!"

Sometime later, she visited her son in Washington, and went to a church service with him. The preacher's topic: forgiveness. Betty talked to him afterward, telling him what her sister had done. *Certainly the preacher couldn't mean her?* But the preacher asked her if her sister was still alive. Betty said she was, and the preacher said, "Well, Betty, I think you should tell her that you forgive her. It's not hurting her. It's hurting you."

And Betty did! She went to Oklahoma and told her sister that she forgave her. She forgave her ex-husband as well.

Betty would tell you that, next to receiving Jesus as her Savior, this act of forgiveness is the most important thing she ever did. She said she felt wonderful after doing it, like a weight had lifted from her shoulders. It set her free. She would not be the happy person she is today if she had not forgiven."

When we forgive, we are freeing ourselves.

Is there someone you need to forgive? You can do it right now through a prayer.

SUMMARY

There is no prison like the prison of guilt. We can be free of guilt through a prayer for forgiveness. Forgiveness is ours just for asking because Jesus has paid the debt for us. We can also forgive others through prayer—and free ourselves of the emotional baggage caused by their sins against us. It's not easy to forgive, but we must if we want to experience all the blessings God has for us. It will help us to forgive if we keep in mind that we're forgiving the person, not condoning the act; no one really "gets away" with anything; and when we forgive, we're freeing ourselves.