

HOW CAN I FORGIVE YOU?

“Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us” (Luke 11:4)

“Forgive us our debts, as we have also forgiven our debtors” (Matthew 6:12)

OBSERVATIONS

This phrase in the prayer links our forgiveness with God’s. God will act toward us in a way that is consistent with our treatment of others (Matthew 6:14-15). A similar connection between our activity and God’s is found in Matthew 5:7 and 7:1-2.

Luke 11:4 uses the word “sin”, and Matthew 6:12 uses “debt”. In Jesus’ time, corrupt money lenders regularly imposed high rates of interest that kept people trapped in poverty. Followers of Jesus were called to release people from such crippling debt, or else face God’s anger. Jesus illustrated this in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt 18:23-35). Praying this means that we set people free from both spiritual and material burdens.

We can (and should) forgive others for sinning against us even if they do not ask forgiveness. The value of extending such forgiveness is that it prevents us from being poisoned by the hurt inflicted on us. Jesus modeled this on the cross, when he asked God to “forgive them for they know not what they do” even though repentance was not taking place (Luke 23:34). Forgiving someone *may* lead to reconciliation with that person, but not necessarily. For reconciliation to occur, the sinner must confess and seek to rebuild trust with the person they have hurt. The same principle applies between a sinner and God. God forgives, but reconciliation happens when the sinner confesses and asks for God’s grace (2 Corinthians 5:14-21).

Jesus instructed the disciples to never stop forgiving people (Matthew 18:21-22), including our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48). In doing so, we will continually grow into the image and likeness of Christ. To keep forgiving should *not* be taken to mean that we must remain in abusive or unhealthy relationships – God also wants us to pursue healthy living (Matthew 7:6).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the truth in this phrase that is most helpful for you? What is most challenging?
2. Why do you think Jesus links our forgiveness of others with how God forgives us?

MOVING FORWARD

If you have people in your life – past or present – who have hurt or sinned against you, consider a creative way to forgive them. One way is to write down the hurtful action, forgive the person, then burn the paper. You may need to do this many times! If memories of your *own* past failures come back to haunt you, practice forgiving yourself the same way.