



FORGIVEN
SINNERS
FORGIVE
SIN

WEEK OF PRAYER

APRIL 2013

SOVEREIGN GRACE CHURCH TORONTO



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INTRODUCTION

“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. – Matthew 6:14-15

Forgiveness is at the heart of any relationship. It is at the heart of how we relate to God because we need His forgiveness to even begin having a relationship with Him. Forgiveness is also at the heart of how we relate to others, because without forgiveness, it is impossible to have a meaningful relationship with anyone. We can see that forgiveness has both a vertical and a horizontal component.

In Matthew 6:14-15, Jesus teaches us that the vertical and horizontal components of forgiveness are inextricably linked. One necessarily flows from the other. You cannot have one without the other. You cannot be forgiven by God if you do not forgive others. You cannot forgive others unless you have been forgiven by God.

Christians typically have a strong understanding of God’s forgiveness. After all, the forgiveness of our sins is a pillar of the gospel. However, we generally don’t have a mature grasp of the necessity of forgiving others. We tell ourselves that forgiving others is ideal but not always possible. We try to forgive but sometimes it’s just too hard. But Jesus teaches us that forgiveness is not just ideal. It is necessary. And if it is necessary, then there is grace to make it possible.

Throughout our week of prayer, we want to meditate on this relationship between the vertical and horizontal components of forgiveness. We want to explore the wonderful and mysterious truth that forgiven sinners forgive sin. Each day will lead you through two devotional readings that will guide you through your time of prayer. The morning reading will consider an aspect of God’s forgiveness towards us. The evening reading will consider an aspect of how we are to forgive others. We have tried to choose topics each day that relate to one another. The morning reading about God’s forgiveness should encourage you to practice the forgiveness contained in the evening reading. We organized the readings this way because we believe in the theme of this prayer week. Forgiven sinners forgive sin. We can only forgive others if we have a deep awareness of how God has forgiven us. And the more we understand and cherish God’s forgiveness, the more willing and able we will be to forgive others.

This prayer guide was prepared by a team of five men from Sovereign Grace Church Toronto. The themes for each day were selected as a group, but the content of each day was left to the Spirit-guided discretion of the man assigned to that day. As you will see, the daily devotions will be different as they reflect the unique voice of the person writing it. Some will be short. Others will be long. Some will seek to teach. Others will simply facilitate Scripture reading. We pray that the diversity contained in this prayer guide will be helpful to you as you begin your prayer week journey.

FASTING

There are many different reasons that Christians fast. Some fast when they seek God's will. Others fast as a way of interceding for others. Still others fast to grow in godly character. Each of these reasons for fasting are biblical and we encourage you to put them into practice in the future. Whatever the reason for fasting, it is always the case that fasting is done together with prayer.

For our week of prayer, we have two objectives in mind when we encourage you to fast: (1) to make extra time for prayer; and (2) to increase our sense of dependence and intimacy with God during our times of prayer.

In Matthew 13, Jesus teaches a parable about seeds that fail to bear fruit. Each seed represents a different kind of person who hears the gospel. For example, one seed falls on rocky ground. It grows for some time but ultimately dies under the scorching sun. This represents a person who hears the gospel but never matures in his faith. When the times of trial and suffering come, he falls away because he never developed solid roots in the gospel.

The kind of seed we want to focus on is the seed that falls among thorns. This seed grows at first but is choked off by the thorns that surround it. Jesus says this about this seed:

As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. – Matthew 13:22

Jesus doesn't say the thorns represent sexual immorality or greed or selfishness. Instead, He explains that the thorns that choke the seed into unfruitfulness are "the cares of the world" and "the deceitfulness of riches". The thorns are the things that occupy our busy minds and prevent us from

seeking God and meditating on the gospel. The thorns are the comforts of life that our riches have bought us.

These are not bad things per se. The riches that we enjoy are gifts from our Heavenly Father. The things that occupy our minds on a daily basis are often the routine, mundane tasks of the day that need to be done. But when these things choke out the gospel in our lives, some pruning may be in order.

During our prayer week, we want to fast from the things that weigh heavily on our minds and/or the riches that distract us from God. Traditionally, this has typically meant fasting from food. Food once took longer to prepare, which means that it took more effort and care to eat three square meals a day. Food was also once the predominant form of comfort. While this is often still the case – and it may be desirable to you to fast from a meal per day, certain types of food, or solid food altogether – there are many more distractions and comforts available to us today. Perhaps you stress about getting the kids to their weekly appointments. Why not cancel them for the week? Maybe you spend your evenings after work in front of your big-screen TV. Why not fast from television for the week?

Fasting is never a goal in itself. One can fast twice a day and never be justified before God (see Luke 18:9-14). If one is not careful, fasting can give you a works-oriented attitude. That's why Paul said this to the Colossians about their fasting:

“[W]hy...do you submit to regulations (such as) ‘Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch’? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.” – Colossians 3:20-23

Instead, we must see fasting as a means to an end. Fasting will open up more time during the week to pray. It will also create in us a sense of longing and desire that we can bring before God to fulfill. Fasting removes the things that give us comfort so that we can find comfort in God instead.

If you choose to fast from food, the following pages contain some helpful guidelines on how to transition into and out of fasting.

INFO ON FASTING

Helps for Fasting

1. Stop drinking coffee and tea 3 days before a fast. You may experience withdrawal headaches.
2. Drink 4-8 glasses of juice throughout the day. Apple juice and white grape juice are especially good. If you crave salt, have some beef or chicken broth at night.
3. Try to dress warmly because you will feel colder when fasting
4. Give yourself enough rest...especially if on a longer fast (longer than 4 days). Try to get 8 hours of sleep a night.
5. The hardest part of a fast is the first 3 days. After that your body stops fighting as hard and the hunger pangs decrease.
6. Fasting often results in headaches and irritability on the first day or two. That is because you are hungry... but also because your body is getting rid of the toxins that your regular diet produces. Once these toxins are washed away, you will typically find a special calm comes into your body and your mind will get clearer than it has been in a very long time. Praying at this time can be very fruitful and listening to God can become a true joy!
7. Fasting has been practiced by Christians around the world since the earliest days of the church. It is only in our wealthy and pleasure-loving Western world that many Christians have never fasted. Jesus said, "when you fast" (Matt 6:16) not "if". He clearly expected his followers to fast (Mark 2:20).

Breaking a Fast

1. For every 3 days on a fast, you should take one day breaking it. So on a week-long fast, you should break the fast over 2+ days.
2. Make your first meal something like chicken noodle soup and maybe a small portion of soft vegetables.
3. Eat small portions of vegetables, fruit, and salads & soups. AVOID bread and meat until after the first 2 days. Drink lots of liquid as you break a fast. Avoid junk food completely.

MONDAY APRIL 22: MORNING

Forgiven Sinners: Why do we need forgiveness?

This morning we will be asking ourselves a rather personal question - Why do I need forgiveness?

Forgiveness is only needed if we have hurt or insulted someone. Forgiveness is the first step in healing the relational rift that forms between two people when one sins against the other.

Read the three passages below. What is the cause of the relational rift between God and ourselves? Are there any exceptions? Psalm 143:1-2, Isaiah 64:5-7, Psalm 130:3-4

Let's look at one way that this shows itself in our day-to-day living: one of the most insidious and pervasive ways that every living person sins against God is by looking to some created thing for the depths of joy, peace, hope, meaning, and love that God alone can satisfy. The Bible calls this idolatry, and it is the most serious and the most damaging sin that is possible for us to commit, because it is a rebellious attempt to cast God from His rightful throne.

1. What do I love? What captures my imagination? (Jeremiah 2.2,5)
2. What do I trust? Sometimes it helps to think of the things that we are most afraid of, or anxious about - it reflects what our hope is rooted in. (Psalm 40.4)
3. What do I obey? Where are my efforts and time focused? (Jonah 2.8)

Let's ask ourselves the question again: why do I need forgiveness?

Finally, read the passages below, and as you read, ask the Holy Spirit to help you to grasp the stunning depth of the forgiveness being offered to you. Micah 7:18-20, Psalm 103:8-14, Hebrews 9.22, Matthew 26.28.

4. God's forgiveness is astounding because we rejected Him so completely, and yet He has stepped forward to heal the rift that exists between us and Himself. Was this forgiveness free, however? Does it cost us? Or did it cost Him? How?

Prayer Application

Identify and confess to God specific ways that you have pursued and valued other things and people above Him. Use the passages above to thank and praise God for pursuing you with forgiveness and reconciliation.

MONDAY APRIL 22: EVENING

Read the following passages together as a family:

“Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in one day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.” - Luke 17.3-4

“And Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’” - Luke 23.34

1. What is the goal of rebuke?
2. Who is being sinned against in Luke 17.3-4? Who is being sinned against in Luke 23.34?
3. What does it mean “to repent”? While it certainly covers the emotions of feeling “sorry” and remorse, there is more to this word; repentance is characterized by “turning about,” by change. If someone says to you, “I repent,” they are pledging to not sin against you that way again. So, if a person tells you this seven times in one day, and keeps sinning, how sincere do you think they are? Does Jesus take into consideration the sincerity of the person when he commands us to forgive (“you must forgive him”)?
4. Luke 17.3 almost seems to suggest that we are not obligated to forgive until a person demonstrates repentance. Is that what this means, though? Look again at the role of rebuke, the occasion of forgiveness, and the circumstances of Jesus’ forgiveness in Luke 23. Do you think that God is concerned about the circumstantial details of forgiveness (e.g., “he hasn’t apologized yet,” or “she has sinned eight times today!”), or is He more concerned about the heart that is quick to forgive and offer grace to a straying sinner?

5. Think back to this morning. Is there any failure or sin in your life that God has not forgiven? Is His heart towards you, under Christ, inclined towards punishment and condemnation, or towards grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation? Now look at yourself. Think of the last uncomfortable or angry exchange you had with someone. Is your heart currently inclined towards their God, and extending forgiveness and/or repentance? If not, why not?

Prayer Application

Pray together as a family, being sure to confess sins, and ask for, and extend, forgiveness wherever a relationship has been impacted by someone's sin or selfishness. Pray together, asking God to pour out the reconciling power of the Holy Spirit to create strong and vibrant relationships in your family. Pray the same for other relationships outside the family.

TUESDAY APRIL 23: MORNING

Forgiven Sinners: The Cost to God in Forgiving Us

Yesterday we learned that as sinners we need to be forgiven, and that our Triune God, in his great love and mercy, has set out to do just that.

But how has he done this? How has he made sinners, forgiven? Has he constructed certain forgiveness-creating tasks for us to complete? Has he created a seven-step program that we are to start and find success in to be pardoned? Is it that our every word, thought and deed in this life will be taken into account, carefully tabulated, weighed and measured, and on the judgment day, we will out find if we have reached the forgiveness-conferring score or not? Is there something else on the other side of death that we must accomplish or endure to finally be made right? Or, has God simply decided to look the other way, to let by-gones be by-gones, and imagined our sins away?

No.

He himself [that is, Christ] bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. – 1 Peter 2:24-25

God in Christ has made us forgiven sinners by substituting himself in our place. As we learned yesterday, our sinful rebellion against our loving Creator has merited his just wrath and eternal condemnation. In his joyful holiness, he hates all that is evil, and has promised to put away all such evil forever and in furious judgment. But, as John Stott puts it, “Divine love triumphed over divine wrath by divine self-sacrifice.”

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. – John 3:16

Read Isaiah 53, and keep this in mind: God has in love chosen to forgive sinners by faith... but at great cost to himself. This chapter is the great Messianic chapter of the Scriptures, speaking of Jesus’ coming and how as our substitute would bear our grief and carry our sorrow (v. 4), be wounded for our transgressions and be crushed for our iniquities, and that by this substitution, we would be healed (v.5).

1. According to Isaiah 53, what did it cost God in Christ to achieve our forgiveness (e.g. enduring suffering, shame, wounds, etc.)? Record your answers.

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God...- 1 Peter 3:18 -

We who have justly deserved death, have been given life. The one who should have taken our life, has given his life for us.

Karl Barth said it this way: “It is the Judge who in this passion takes the place of those who ought to be judged, who in this passion allows himself to be judged in their place... The passion of Jesus Christ is the judgment of God, in which the Judge himself was the judged.”

God forgave sinners at great cost to himself. Our forgiveness cost us nothing. And with Paul in Romans 8:31-32 we exclaim: What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not graciously give us all things? What besides forgiveness (glorious forgiveness!) has our Lord graciously given us?

Compare 2 Cor. 5:21 and Galatians 3:13-14 for a sampling.

Hear John Stott comment on these two passages: “The sinless one was ‘made sin for us’ (2 Cor. 5:21), which must mean that he bore the penalty of our sin instead of us, and he redeemed us from the law’s curse by ‘becoming a curse for us’ (Gal. 3:13), which must mean that the curse of the law lying upon us for our disobedience was transferred to him, so that he bore it instead of us.

Both verses go beyond these negative truths (that he bore our sin and curse to redeem us from them) to a positive counterpart. On the one hand he bore the curse in order that we might inherit the blessing promised to Abraham (Gal. 3:14), and on the other, God made the sinless Christ to be sin for us, in order that ‘in him we might become the righteousness of God’ (2 Cor. 5:21). Both verses thus indicate that when we are united to Christ a mysterious exchange takes place: he took our curse, so that we may receive his blessing; he became sin with our sin, so that we may become righteous with his righteousness.”*

*Commence your dancing with shouts of joy or your sober hallelujahs with grateful tears.

At a very great cost to himself, God in Christ has not only forgiven us but has also been made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30).

The objectivity of Christ's crucifixion and what the Scriptures tell us about it is of great comfort when as forgiven sinners, our soul condemns us, and tells us God's wrath remains on us.

Look again at your recorded answers from earlier and recall what Christ paid in your place.

John Calvin says: "This is our acquittal: the guilt that held us liable for punishment has been transferred to the head of the Son of God (Isa. 53:12). We must, above all, remember this substitution, lest we tremble and remain anxious throughout life [in fear of God's judgment]."

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins...- 1 Corinthians 15:3

Prayer Suggestions

1. Confess a specific sin that you feel condemns you, and ask God to see it in the light of his Son's substitution for you
2. Meditate on the recorded answers from Isaiah 53. Prayerfully thank God for the totality of your forgiveness seen in the great cost he paid to forgive and redeem you
3. Thank the Father for your righteous standing before him in his Son because of his substitution
4. Ask God to give you greater gratefulness for his costly work for you!

TUESDAY APRIL 23: EVENING

Forgive Sin: The Cost to Us in Forgiving Others

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

– Colossians 3:13

Forgiveness is not a difficult process for three types of people: Those who have never been sinned against, those who have resolved to never try to forgive, and those who live secluded in the mountains or underground somewhere. For everyone else, forgiveness is hard, hard work.

When someone sins against us, when there is actual and real harm at our expense, not only does that hurt us, but so does the reality that we are, as Christians, called to forgive them.

Darrin Patrick says: “If you think forgiveness is not painful, you have never forgiven someone who hurt you deeply.”

When you think of being sinned against, which events rush to your mind?

Forgiveness is not easy. And yet, our Father commands us to do so!

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. – Ephesians 4:32

And there is one clue to what forgiveness will be like: “Forgive... as God in Christ forgave you.”

We learned this morning that God in Christ forgave us at a very great cost to himself. That he suffered to forgive. That the people he forgave were sinful, undeserving people. That the forgiveness he provided was at the end of an agonizing, sweaty, and deadly affair.

...if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. – 1 Peter 2:20-21

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” – Matthew 16:24-25

We forgive those who sin against us at great cost to ourselves. This is because, as Ken Sande writes in his fantastic book *The Peacemaker*, while forgiveness is not a feeling (it is an act of the will), it is not forgetting sin, and it is not excusing sin, forgiveness is a costly activity: To forgive someone means to release him or her from liability to suffer punishment or penalty. *Aphiemi*, a Greek word that is often translated as “forgive,” means to let go, release, or remit. It often refers to debts that have been paid or cancelled in full (e.g. Matt. 6:12; 18:27, 32). *Charizomai*, another word for “forgive,” means to bestow favor freely or unconditionally. This word shows that forgiveness is undeserved and cannot be earned (Luke 7:42-43; 2 Cor. 2:7-10; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13).

As these words indicate forgiveness can be a costly activity. When someone sins, they create debt, and someone must pay it. Most of this debt is owed to God. In his great mercy, he sent his Son to pay that debt on the cross for all who would trust in him (Isa. 53:4-6; 1 Peter 2:24-25; Col. 1:19-20).

But if someone sinned against you, part of their debt is also owed to you. This means you have a choice to make. You can either take payments on the debt or make payments. You can take or extract payments on a debt from others’ sin in many ways: by withholding forgiveness, by dwelling on the wrong, by being cold and aloof, by giving up on the relationship, by inflicting emotional pain, by gossiping, by lashing back or by seeking revenge against the one who hurt you. These actions may provide a perverse pleasure for the moment, but they exact a high price from you in the long run. As someone once said, “Unforgiveness is the poison we drink, hoping others will die.”

Your other choice is to make payments on the debt and thereby release others from penalties they deserve to pay. Sometimes God will enable you to do this in one easy payment. You decide to forgive, and by God’s grace the debt is quickly and fully cancelled in your heart and mind. But when there has been a deep wrong, the debt it creates is not always paid at once. You may need to bear certain effects of the other person’s sin over a long period of time. This may involve fighting against painful memories, speaking gracious words when you really want to say something hurtful, working to tear down walls and be vulnerable when you still feel little trust, or even enduring the consequences of a material or physical injury that the other person is unable or unwilling to repair.

And so in prayer this week you are invited to begin this battle to forgive, with God's help and the cross in sight. Forgiven sinners forgive sin. Again, Ken Sande counsels with this: Forgiveness can be extremely costly but if you believe in Jesus, you have more than enough to make these payments. By going to the cross, he has already paid off the ultimate debt for sin and established an account of abundant grace in your name. As you draw on that grace through faith day by day, you will find that you have all that you need to make the payments of forgiveness for those who have wronged you.

...forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. - Matthew 6:12 -

Prayer Suggestions

1. If the Holy Spirit has brought it to light, confess to the Father unforgiveness you have towards others.
2. Ask the Lord how you have been unfaithful to the command to forgive your debtors.
3. Thank the Son for his substitution for the sin of unforgiveness and unfaithfulness, and the Father's commitment to you as you grow in Christ-likeness.
4. Meditate on Romans 8:28-29 – how do you think God is working through difficult situations in your life needing forgiveness to make you more like Jesus?
5. Ask the Father for the grace to begin the hard work of forgiving sinners.

WEDNESDAY APRIL 24: MORNING

Forgiven Sinners: The Barriers God Overcame to Forgive

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. Ephesians 2:13

Read and quietly meditate on Ephesians 2:1-3, 11-22; Galatians 3:7-14, 23-29

These Scriptures describe our previous condition of hopelessness as Gentiles (non-Jews). But God overcame these barriers for us in Christ. Which of these verses is especially encouraging to you right now in your life? Why?

Notes

Suggested Prayer

Father, thank you for being rich in mercy. Thank you for the great love with which you have loved me, even when I was dead in my trespasses. I was separated from Christ, alienated, a stranger, having no hope and far off from you in this world. But now, in Christ Jesus, you have brought me near, by the blood of Christ. I praise you, Father, that Christ himself is my peace, and has reconciled me to you through the cross. I was under a curse, but Christ redeemed me from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for me. Thank you that now, in Christ Jesus, I have received the promised Spirit through faith. Amen.

WEDNESDAY APRIL 24: EVENING PRAYER MEETING

Forgive Sin: Seeking the Forgiveness of the Nations

Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations. You are witnesses of these things. – Luke 24:46-48

Read and quietly meditate on Genesis 12:1-3; Isaiah 49:1-6, 53:10-12, 66:18-23.

These Scriptures describe God's plan to extend his salvation (forgiveness) beyond Israel to the Gentile (non-Jewish) nations, through his Servant, Jesus. Which of these verses is especially encouraging to you right now in your life? Why?

Notes

Example of a sin to forgive - Neglect

Do you sometimes feel neglected by those closest to you? Has that caused you to be bitter or resentful toward them? Or perhaps you have neglected to love or forgive those closest to you. Let us remember that Jesus was despised and rejected, and it was our sin that caused him to be neglected (forsaken) by his Father. Let us extend forgiveness to others for neglecting us, just as God has forgiven us in Christ. Or if you have neglected those close to you, seek their forgiveness and be reconciled to them, just as you have been reconciled to God in Christ.

1. Thank God for...

- a. including us in his eternal plan to extend his salvation (forgiveness) to the nations, just as he promised. (see Genesis 12:1-3)
- b. forgiving our sins through the cross, just as he promised. (see Isaiah 53:10-12)
- c. entrusting us with the gospel of forgiveness of sins, just as he promised. (see Isaiah 66:18-23; Luke 24:46-48)
- d. giving us the Holy Spirit to empower us to be his witnesses to the nations, just as he promised. (see Joel 2:28-32)

2. Pray for...

- a. the advance of the gospel in your life, family, church, city, nation. (see Colossians 1:3-6; 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5; 2 Thessalonians 3:1)
- b. your partnership in the gospel to increase. (see Philippians 1:3-5, 27-30, 4:14-15)
- c. your life to imitate Paul's total commitment to the gospel. (see Romans 1:1-4; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, 11:1)
- d. your readiness to engage in spiritual warfare.
 - i. Defensively, standing firm in the gospel (see Ephesians 6:13-17)
 - ii. Offensively, ready to share the gospel by the power of the Spirit (see Ephesians 6:17)

THURSDAY APRIL 25: MORNING

Forgiven Sinners: God Forgave the Full Extent of the Depravity of Our Sin

...no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

- Hebrews 4:13

As we learn about the good news of our forgiveness, we must know the bad news of our sin that needs forgiveness.

Wayne Grudem explains: It is not just that some parts of us are sinful and others are pure. Rather, every part of our being is affected by sin—our intellects, our emotions and desires, our hearts (the center of our desires and decision-making processes), our goals and motives, and even our physical bodies. Paul says, “I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh” (Rom. 7:18), and, “to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure; their very minds and consciences are corrupted” (Titus 1:15). Moreover, Jeremiah tells us that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9). In these passages Scripture is not denying that unbelievers can do good in human society in some senses. But it is denying that they can do any spiritual good or be good in terms of a relationship with God. Apart from the work of Christ in our lives, we are like all other unbelievers who are “darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart” (Eph. 4:18).

How have you seen sin affect your intellect, your emotions and desires, your decision-making processes, your goals and motives, and your physical body?

The totality of who and what we are as fallen humanity is dark and hopeless... apart from the work of Christ in our lives.

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. – Titus 3:2-8

... put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, [and] put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. – Ephesians 4:22, 24

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. - 2 Corinthians 5:17

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. – Romans 6:11

But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. – Romans 6:17-18

Christ's substitution and resurrection on your behalf has, by faith, done away with your old self, your deadness, and your slavery to sin, and brought about the new self, with new life, and has set you free to become a slave to righteousness!

...as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. – Psalm 103:12

...[Jesus] is able to save to the uttermost [that is, completely]... – Hebrews 7:25

Prayer Suggestions:

1. Confess and repent of a specific sin that you might feel condemns you, and ask God to see it in the light of his Son's substitution for you
2. Meditate and pray over some of the verses quoted above. Prayerfully thank God for the completeness of his forgiveness to you.
3. Pray for a Christian brother and sister who these truths cover as well; pray that they would know and experience to completeness of their forgiveness in Christ
4. Ask God to give you greater gratefulness for his saving you far as the curse is found!

THURSDAY APRIL 25: EVENING

Forgive Sin: Those who have been forgiven much love much

Read Luke 7:41-50

Milton Vincent writes in *A Gospel Primer* that one of the effects of remembering frequently that we are forgiven sinners as seen in the gospel is that we will be stimulated to love others:

When my mind is fixed on the gospel, I have ample stimulation to show God's love to other people. For I am always willing to show love to others when I am freshly mindful of the love that God has shown me. Also, the gospel gives me the wherewithal to give forgiving grace to those who have wronged me, for it reminds me daily of the forgiving grace that God is showing me.

Doing good and showing love to those who have wronged me is always the opposite of what my sinful flesh wants me to do. Nonetheless, when I remind myself of my sins against God and of His forgiving and generous grace toward me, I give the gospel an opportunity to reshape my perspective and to put me in a frame of mind wherein I actually desire to give this same grace to those who have wronged me.

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. – Ephesians 4:32

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. – John 13:34

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. – 1 John 4:11

Prayer Suggestions:

1. Ask the Lord to show you any fickle or insincere for fellow forgiven brothers or sisters in Christ
2. Pray for the people God might have brought to mind; ask the Father for a fresh understanding of his love for you and how that ought to impact your love for them
3. Meditate and pray over some of the verses quoted above, thanking God for his love for you!
4. Pray for a Christian brother and sister who these truths cover as well; pray that God would use you to share Christ's love for them

FRIDAY APRIL 26: MORNING

Forgiven Sinners: Christ Humbled Himself to Forgive Us

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?

– Psalm 8:3-4

The creator of all things cares for us. He cares so deeply that two thousand years ago He forgave our sin through the One through whom all things were created. From His eternal glory, Christ “humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross”. Philippians 2: 8. He left His place at the Father’s side, stripping away His glory to take on human flesh. He did all this so that He could suffer and die for us. He humbled Himself to forgive us.

Morning Prayer

Help us Lord to understand the lengths to which you went to forgive us. You humbled yourself to suffer death for us – even death on a cross. May your forgiveness be especially precious to us as we cherish Your humility.

FRIDAY APRIL 26: EVENING

Forgive Sin: Forgiveness Requires a Humble Heart

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. – Philippians 2:3-4

Just as Christ humbled Himself to give us forgiveness, we also need humble hearts to forgive others. We need to forgive as Christ forgave us because we exist to bring pleasure to God. All we do is not for us but for God. Selfish people look to their own interests. They withhold forgiveness because they are not concerned about the other person. Humble people look to the interests of others. In this way, they are able to forgive. Only God can make us humble as Christ was humble, for “it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.”
– Philippians 2: 13.

Evening Prayer

Thank you God for Jesus who gave himself to pay for our sin. We are forgiven in Jesus Christ, so help us not to be selfish. Help us not to think that all we do is for our glory and for our own interests, because it is not. All we do is for your glory and will because we belong to you. Prepare our hearts to forgive those who sin against us.

SATURDAY APRIL 27: MORNING

Forgiven Sinners: The Justice of God Forgives Us

Q. Why does God forgive our sins? Is it because He loves us? Is it because we confess and promise to change? Is it because we are His children?

A. There are a variety of reasons why God forgives us, but ultimately it comes down to this:

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” – 1 John 1:8-9

God forgives our sins because it is just for Him to do so. This is counter-intuitive, because forgiveness typically involves mercy. The just response to sin is punishment. The merciful response to sin is forgiveness. So why is it just for God to forgive us?

The reason is simple: Jesus Christ paid the full penalty for our sins already. The punishment that we deserved was laid on Him, and there is no wrath left for us to face. God’s justice was completely satisfied on the cross, as Jesus drank the full cup of God’s wrath towards us on our behalf. As Paul writes in Romans 3:25-26,

“God put (Christ) forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith ... This was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

God’s justice required a punishment for our sins. God’s mercy cried out for forgiveness. Both were satisfied on the cross. God poured out His just wrath on His Son so that He could pour our mercy on us. He did this so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Q. What else does 1 John 1:9 tell us about God’s forgiveness?

A. It tells us that God is also faithful to forgive us our sins. God does not reconsider whether He should forgive us when we continually sin against Him. He does not falter or fail to forgive us no matter how many times we sin against Him. He is faithful to forgive us.

God's justice and faithfulness in forgiving us go hand in hand. He is faithful to forgive us because He is just to forgive us. If God were to justly refuse to forgive us, it would be because we deserved punishment. But there is no punishment left for us to face. All of it has been paid by Christ on our behalf. Therefore, God never withholds forgiveness from those who trust in Christ.

Q. Finally, what is the relationship between confession and forgiveness?

Some may read 1 John 1:9 to require confession before forgiveness is received. For example, before Martin Luther understood justification by faith alone, he lived in the constant fear that he would be judged for sins that he had failed to confess. As a result of this fear, he visited his priest repeatedly throughout the day to confess every potential sin that came to his mind.

As Martin Luther studied the Scriptures, however, he learned that forgiveness does not depend on confession. Christ paid for all our sins – past, present, and future.

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. – Colossians 2:13-14

What 1 John 1:9 tells us is that, when we confess our sins to God, He never fails to give us a sense of His forgiveness because our sins have already been forgiven. Every time you confess your sins to God, God will meet your confession with forgiveness. Confession is part of the loving relationship that we have with God through Christ in which we encounter, again and again, the riches of His glorious grace towards us.

Prayer Suggestions

1. Praise God for sending His Son to pay the full penalty of our sins so that God's forgiveness could be justly given to us
2. Ask God to give you faith to believe that, no matter how many times you sin, He is faithful to forgive because His justice was satisfied on the cross
3. Ask God to help you confess known and unknown sins in your life, and praise God that He will forgive them

SATURDAY APRIL 27: EVENING

Forgive Sin: Forgiving Others is a Matter of Justice

This morning we learned that God forgives us out of justice. He must forgive us because His Son paid our penalty. This evening we will see that forgiving others is also a matter of justice. We must forgive others because He forgave us.

Q: Is forgiveness a matter of personal choice?

In 1994, William Mullins-Johnson was convicted of murdering his niece. The conviction was mainly the result of the testimony of Dr. Charles Smith, a renowned child pathologist at the time. He was sentenced to life in prison as a child-killer.

In 2007, Mr. Mullins-Johnson's conviction was overturned following a review of Dr. Smith's evidence. A court found that Dr. Smith had committed several significant errors. In light of these errors, the court found that Mr. Mullins-Johnson was wrongfully convicted. He had spent 12 years of his life in prison.

An inquiry was launched to investigate the evidence that Dr. Smith gave in a number of child death cases. The inquiry found that his evidence had led to the wrongful convictions of many others, including parents, family members, and babysitters.

During the inquiry, the court gave Dr. Smith the opportunity to apologize to Mr. Mullins-Johnson. He did, and Mr. Mullins-Johnson said this in reply: "For my healing, I'll forgive you but I'll never forget what you did to me."

There is no doubt that a person in Mr. Mullins-Johnson's shoes would have had a very difficult time forgiving Dr. Smith. Indeed, the way in which the forgiveness was expressed makes one question the extent to which the forgiveness was offered. It seems that Mr. Mullins-Johnson was willing to forgive for his own sake. He needed to forgive and move on.

Today, this is a popular view of forgiveness. We must forgive for our well-being. Bitterness, resentment, and anger are unhealthy, so it's best to jettison them from your life. But what if someone finds some satisfaction in clinging to bitterness? Any small motivation to forgive would evaporate. In short, forgiveness under this paradigm becomes a matter of personal choice.

This is not a biblical model of forgiveness. Jesus teaches us that we must forgive, no matter how we feel or how many times we have been wronged:

Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. – Matthew 18:21-22

Q. Why is it that we must forgive?

There are two ways of answering this question. Both are correct, but one answer is more complete than the other. On the one hand, we must forgive others in obedience to Christ. As Christians, we are called to live as Christ lived. Since Jesus forgave sins, we must forgive sins. This is right, but it doesn't tell the full story.

Jesus tells us exactly why we must forgive in the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:23-35:

“Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

The central theme of this passage is justice. The unforgiving servant was severely punished because his decision to seek justice from the other servant was unjust. People have a right to collect the debt owed to them. In this case, the other servant owed a sizeable debt amounting to about 3 months of salary. But the right of the unforgiving servant to collect on his debt was relinquished when his master forgave the great debt that he owed (ten thousand talents was about 200,000 years of salary!). What was just for the unforgiving servant to do became unjust because of the great mercy he had been shown.

In the same way, it would be unjust for us to withhold forgiveness or seek justice against those who wronged us in light of the forgiveness we have received. The One who paid our infinite debt calls us to pay the debts of those who wrong us. Since Jesus forgave our sins, we must forgive sins. That is the lesson here. Anything less would be unjust.

Prayer Suggestions

1. Ask God to give you a heart of unconditional forgiveness.
2. Praise God for paying a debt that you owed but could never pay.
3. Ask God to forgive you for the injustice of withholding forgiveness from others.
4. Ask God to help you see the great mercy that you have been shown so that you may show mercy to others.
5. Ask God to help you see how small the sins that have hurt you are compared to the greatness of the sins we have committed against Him.

SUNDAY APRIL 28: MORNING

Q. What is the ultimate purpose of forgiveness?

As we come to the end of our prayer week, we would like to end by pointing to our great God who forgave us and empowers us to forgive others. There are many reasons why God forgave us. He forgave us to reconcile us to Himself. He forgave us out of love. He forgave us to restore all creation from the curse of sin. He forgave us to restore His image in us.

Ultimately, God forgave us for one simple and profound reason:

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. – 1 John 1:12

Our sins are forgiven for His name's sake. We were forgiven so that He would be known as merciful. We were forgiven so that we would marvel at the cost that He paid to forgive us. We were forgiven so that we could see the great love He has for us in humbling Himself to die a sinner's death. We were forgiven for His glory.

May our hearts resound with praise to the One who forgave all of our sins:

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. – Psalm 103:1-5

Prayer Suggestions

1. Review the morning sessions in this prayer guide about how God has forgiven us. Praise God for each of the ways in which He forgave us.
2. Review the evening sessions in this prayer guide about how we are called to forgive others. Pray that our church would forgive others as Christ has forgiven us.

Notes

Notes

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

– Colossians 3:13

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

– Psalm 103:1-5



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