

A normal human tendency is to want others held to standards that we ourselves struggle to maintain. Most of us want a measure of grace extended to us when we fail. But when someone else fails - think about when a public figure fails in some way, the vitriol can explode against them and those who want grace themselves easily pile on. When we're having a bad day we want people to be patient, but when a mistake is made with our order or we get cut off in traffic or when someone is rude to us we have a hard time being patient. More often than we'd like to admit, people like to be treated better than they sometimes treat others. But as Jesus taught us to pray, that's not the way of the kingdom. The kingdom way *seems* to make a correlation between how we treat others and what we can hope for from God. That's our topic on the Covenant Weekly Podcast Season 2 Episode 22 - Forgive.

### *Theme Music*

As we have been doing each week in this series, let's begin by reading a contemporary translation of The Lord's Prayer.

*Our Father who is in heaven, uphold the holiness of your name.*

*10 Bring in your kingdom so that your will is done on earth as it's done in heaven.*

*11 Give us the bread we need for today.*

*12 Forgive us for the ways we have wronged you, just as we also forgive those who have wronged us.*

*13 And don't lead us into temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.*

Today, we are considering the second request in this prayer:

*Forgive us for the ways we have wronged you, just as we also forgive those who have wronged us.*

Let me begin by stating the obvious. What is *actually* true about God is not dependent on our understanding of God. God is. And God is revealed most clearly in the person of Jesus.

That being said, there is ample evidence in the Bible that God meets people in ways that they understand because God wants to be in a relationship with humanity. And in order to meet people in ways that people understand, sometimes the reality of God gets obscured. Because God created us to rule over creation in some kind of partnership with the divine - and God remains committed to that partnership - *how* God acts in the world is limited by humanity's beliefs, choices, and actions.

In short, we have more power than we often imagine. Because God limits the exercise of divine power to prioritize a relationship with us, our actions actually play a role in shaping how (and if) God exercises divine power in the world.

We know, through Jesus, that the heart of God is to love – and out of love, to offer forgiveness and grace. God offers it freely and generously to all who will receive it. And love – shown in forgiveness and grace – becomes a hallmark of those who are a part of the kingdom of Jesus.

Because earlier in this prayer, we have prayed, “Bring your kingdom so that your will is done on earth...” there seems to be an assumption that those who are praying this prayer are *participating* in the kingdom. That is, they are people who are loving in the way of Jesus and therefore extending forgiveness and grace.

In light of that, we pray, “Forgive us for the ways we have wronged you, just as we also forgive those who have wronged us.” This isn’t meant to be a prayer of desperation. It is a prayer of confidence. “God...we’re living this kingdom way out in our relationship with others so we’re trusting that you will live this way towards us.”

This is an invitation to a sense of peace and rest in our relationship with God, *despite* our failures in that relationship, because we are working to live with peace with those around us. This prayer is a deep breath leaning into one who is filled with love and grace. At least it is *if we are in fact* working to live in peace with those around us. If we are living out what this assumes we are.

This idea that how we treat others has a direct correlation with how God treats us is not limited to this prayer. In Matthew 6, where this prayer is recorded, the author follows up Jesus’ recitation of the prayer by him saying these words, “For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

To put it bluntly, this seems to say that how we treat others sets the stage for how God engages with us in the world. This idea fills the pages of the Old Testament. When Israel chooses to act with violence toward each other and others in the world, God releases other nations to act with violence toward them. Not because it is God’s heart, but because that is the world Israel chooses to live in. When Israel wants to live with a king “like all the other nations have,” God gives them a king. And it

doesn't go well at all! The *best* kings use the people for their own gain and struggle to lead them well to honour Yahweh. And *God uses the kings* to represent him to the people. Is it because they are the best way for God to lead and rule and be represented to the people? No! It is because that is the world they chose to live in and God wanted to relate to them.

I think this parallel's what is going on with this language of forgiveness. God's heart is for there to be forgiveness and peace in the world. That is what is in line with his kingdom. But God's not going to force that on anyone. And if we want to live in a world where judgement is firmly based on our mistakes and failures, God will meet us there. He's not going to force us beyond that, but he's also not going to give us the luxury of a double standard - where we can judge others and hold grudges, but get off scot-free for our stuff.

Jesus tells a story in Matthew 18 about this. In the story, there is a king who has a servant who owes him millions of dollars. When the king calls for payment the debtor begs for the king to be patient and promises he'll pay back everything. The king goes far beyond patience and says that he'll wipe the debt out. It will be erased from the books. Then he sends this servant away. This servant leaves and immediately bumps into a fellow servant who owes him a couple of thousand dollars. The first servant grabs the second servant by the throat and demands immediate repayment of this much smaller debt. The second servant begs in exactly the same way as the first servant did before the king. But instead of showing forgiveness or even patience, the first servant has the second servant thrown into debtor's prison. When word of this got back to the king, the king was irate. He said that this servant *should have* shown mercy, just as the king had. But because the servant wants to live in a world where forgiveness wasn't practiced, he will now go to the debtor's prison until his millions in debt have been paid off. Jesus finishes his story with these words: "That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart."

God's heart is for forgiveness and mercy. But God gives us the ability to set the agenda based on how we live, and how actively we partner with God in bringing his kingdom to bear on earth as it is in heaven. Embedded in this prayer is a cautionary tale. "Forgive us for the ways we have wronged you, just as we also forgive those who have wronged us." There is a submission here to God engaging with us based on how we treat others. If we are content with just receiving forgiveness, this is a dangerous prayer.

But as we lean into God's forgiveness and grace, not just as something we *receive*, but as something we *live*, this prayer is one of deep rest leaning into the one who longs to offer more forgiveness and grace than we can usually imagine.

### *Announcement Music*

- Thanks to everyone who participated in our annual meeting on Sunday. Some highlights include:
  - We are in a good financial position and we have set our budget for next year.
  - Our 2023 board has been affirmed. Your board members are Pat Counahan (who is our Treasurer), Cookie Harrison (the Board Secretary), Wilfried Hahn (who is returning to the board as the Maintenance Chair), and four congregational reps – Joel Robitaille, Jill Denbutter, John Caldwell, and Letitia Jefkins. Please be in prayer for these men and women as they serve on your behalf in this role. Their first meeting together will be in March.
  - The other thing to mention from the meeting is that those present approved moving ahead with an accessibility addition to our building. There is still a lot to work out, but the heart of this addition is to create an on-grade entrance to the building with interior stairs up and down and a lift being installed inside so that can get people with mobility challenges to all levels of the building. We'll be working to finalize the scope of a proposal; get bids to determine what contractor we would be best to work with on the project; and have a final project ready for approval. In the meantime, we will be fundraising so that we can move ahead with this project as soon as we can! If you're interested in seeing our working plan (by no means our final plan), you can look at it in our annual meeting documents which are connected to the event page from this past Sunday on our website. Contributions to this project can be made online or in person by designating to our "Capital Fund."
- Two more things before we pray together to close. Our Inspire Maker Space Camp is coming on the evenings of July 10-13! An initial planning and brainstorming meeting is happening this coming Sunday, March 12 following our morning gathering. Even if you just want to understand more about the program, please feel free to attend this meeting!
- And finally, this Sunday is a time change as we "Spring ahead." If you forget, you'll get to church just in time to sign up to help with our Inspire Camp!

Now, as we close today, we will again pray the traditional version of The Lord's Prayer. I encourage you to pray it with me paying close attention to what we are praying together.

*Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done;  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass  
against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever.  
Amen.*

May you know the presence and peace of Christ as you move through the remainder of this week.

*Theme Music*