



Condensed Milk (Matthew 6:9-13 Series)

How to Pray, 'Forgive us as we have forgiven' (6:12).

SUMMARY: When we pray this petition, we examine ourselves for sins and ask God to forgive them. At the same time, we consider the sins of others against us and grant to them the forgiveness we want from God.

Every Christian enjoys the presence, love and favor of God only through his forgiveness. The whole ground of our relationship with him is based on the penalty-bearing death of Jesus on the cross. The Bible reveals that by the death of Jesus, when by grace we believe, we are justified, that is, our sins are pardoned and he accepts us as righteous. Jesus pays our sin-debts and, when we believe, places his perfect righteousness into our account.

We might ask, "If justification secures our pardon *and* righteousness before God, why do we need to seek God's forgiveness?" The answer to this is that Christians sin every day. And while our sins do not affect our justification, before God, they do affect our relationship with him and our spiritual experience. Sins alienate us from God just as in do human relationships. A father does not cease to be his son's father when his son defies his will but the two are not happy with each other until things are made right. Similarly, repentance and forgiveness restore us to an enjoyed harmony with God.

Winston Churchill once said that there was only one thing that frightened him during the Second World War -- the German U-boats. Lying hidden under the surface of the ocean they were decimating the ships bringing men and supplies to the front. He feared that unless they found a way to find and destroy them, the war would be lost. For that reason, he created a task force whose sole work was to solve that problem. They did and the tide of the war changed. In the same way the only thing that can defeat us spiritually, is sin. This petition is our task force by which we find and destroy them.

¹ Bible verses on forgiveness for sins:

Micah 7:18. Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.

1 John 1:8-9. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. **9**If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

In this prayer Jesus looks upon sins as unpaid debts. We owe both God and people uncompromising love at all times and sin is the failure to pay what is owed. When we pray, "Forgive us our sins" we are to examine ourselves not for sin, that is the principle of sin within us, but for sins, the specific sins of omission and commission. We consider our interactions and activities of the day with the questions, "Was there some righteous thing I should have done but didn't? Was there some unrighteous thing I should not have done but did?" When this is practiced it will free us from the tyranny of sin.

Augustine, in the fourth century, referred to this petition as "the terrible petition", terrible in the sense that if we are not forgiving someone else, we are asking God to treat us the same way – "Forgive us... as, or in the same way, we forgive others". If we forgive begrudgingly, harboring resentment and withholding kindness, we are asking God to forgive us in the same way. This should motivate us to give generous forgiveness to others as we ask God to forgive us.

Does this mean that we earn our forgiveness? No. The willingness to forgive others is proof that we have seen our own sins (and their sinfulness) and have laid them before God in genuine repentance. The inability to forgive others is proof that we do not see our sins (and their sinfulness) and so our prayer for forgiveness is disingenuous. Pray this petition carelessly and we are actually asking God to discipline us for our sins.

The good thing to remember is that God invites us to ask for forgiveness because he is happy to give it. His forgiveness is both easy, in the sense that it is completely unearned, and generous. We don't have to earn it by first feeling a certain degree of remorse, or by asking for the same forgiveness often enough and "sincerely" enough to wear down his resistance. No, God wants to forgive even more than we want his forgiveness.

Practice Exercise: If this theme is too personal to write out, simply pray silently in your own mind. The verses below can help you with this.¹

Matthew 26:28. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Matthew 6:14-15. 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.

Colossians 3:13. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.



Condensed Milk Questions For...

How to Pray, 'Forgive us as we have forgiven' (6:12).

Content Questions:

1. What are we praying for when we pray, "Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors"?
2. How does forgiving others tie into the good news of the gospel?
3. Why do we have to seek God's forgiveness if he has already taken away our sins through the payment made by Christ and credited the righteousness of Christ to our account?
4. In what sense is sin a debt?
5. What value is there in taking time to search ourselves for sins?
6. Why did Augustine regard this petition as "the terrible" petition?

Discussion Questions:

7. What stands out to you in this article and why?
8. How do you feel about examining yourself for sins and then seeking God's forgiveness for them?
9. Why do you think God focuses so fixedly on our sins?

Take-Home Practice:

In the prayer journals you've been given try to journal a prayer that expresses the first seven phrases of the Lord's Prayer, each day this next week. This last one can be done silently, in your own mind.

