

Learn to Pray, Part 6

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If you have your Bibles, you can turn to Luke 11 as we are continuing to learn [from Jesus] how to pray. This was one of those sermons that could have been ten, and it came on communion Sunday, too—a *Reformation* communion Sunday. [The sermon] was so [gigantic] that I basically just hacked off half of it [and then] I had to get rid of some more of it today on the fly. I'm sorry, but I will steer you to a resource [on this topic] that will help you.

R. Kent Hughes, in his commentary on Luke, tells the story that he learned from reading Robert Lewis Stevenson, about two Scottish sisters who were both single, unmarried, living together in a little one-bedroom apartment. Over the course of time, they had gotten in[to] an argument over some matter of doctrine, of all things, and they got so mad at each other that they basically just decided never to speak to each other again. They were so proud that they wouldn't separate—they stayed together in that one-bedroom apartment, [and] drew a chalk line on the floor. They each had their own half of things—one half [of] the sink, half [of] the fireplace, half [of] the stove, and even half [of] the door. This is the way they continued, in hateful silence. Both professed to be Christians, [and] both regularly attended church. I mean, obviously, if you're going to hate somebody over doctrine, you [have] to have some sort of religious interest. At church, they would regularly say the Lord's Prayer, and at the end, they would pray,

as a habit, “Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us” [see Luke 11:4]. Think about that. Thomas Watson said, “A man can as well go to hell for not forgiving as for not believing.” Spurgeon said, “Unless you have forgiven others, you read your own death-warrant when you repeat the Lord’s Prayer.” Those are some pretty harsh statements.

Look at Luke 11:2–4 [and] follow along as I read.

And He said to them, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.’”

This morning, we come to a fourth prayer request in the Disciples’ Prayer, which has to do with our relationship with God and our relationship with others. We’ve already looked at those requests [that] relate to God specifically, [to] His glory, and [to] the coming of Christ’s kingdom. Then, we left there, [but are] still under the umbrella of that, to [address] our personal needs and the personal needs of others. Now we’re talking about relationship needs. From [Luke 11:]4, you will see embedded three applications for prayer, all focusing around forgiveness, which all of us need to incorporate into our prayer live[s] if we are going to give God glory in how we pray.

The first [application for prayer] is this: We need to be asking God to forgive our sins. If you look at [Luke 11:]4, Jesus says [that] we should pray to the Father, “And forgive us our sins.” Through the ages, this verse has been the battleground of gnat [strainers] and camel swallows [see Matthew 23:24], people who say, “We should pray, ‘Forgive us our debts,’” and other people say, “No, we should say, ‘Forgive us our trespasses,’” and there has [also] been [discussion about whether the second part of the verse should be] “trespassers” [or] “debtors.” Our text settles it once and for all,

because Luke uses the word for “sin” and uses the word for “debtor,” telling us they are both talking about the same thing, [which] is when somebody sins against us. That’s the whole idea.

But the question is: [Yes,] we need to forgive, [but] what *is* forgiveness? There are some little definitions for forgiveness floating around [that] aren’t quite as good as they could be. I think they should be laid to rest in the cemetery of bad theological clichés. For instance, maybe you have heard this, maybe you have [even] stated this: that we need to “forgive and forget.” That is so close because if you did forgive and forget then you wouldn’t bring it up again, would you? You wouldn’t think about it anymore. It wouldn’t change the way you treat other people. But have you ever tried to erase your memory? I don’t know about you, but I tend to remember all those things I wish I could forget [and] I have a very difficult time remembering the things that I want to remember. All the sins, and every bad joke I heard since I was four years old, they’re all there, but try and stick a piece of Scripture in there and it’s like pounding a nail into oak—it just doesn’t work very well.

So, when you look at it, forgetting is not really the best term to use because we just can’t erase our memories. When somebody does something little against you, you may forget. (Or, if you get old enough, you’ll probably forget everything eventually [anyway].) But, when somebody *really* sins against you, and sins against you hard, you never forget that. Although you may never forget something [that is] a great offense, you can still forgive. You can still choose to treat that person as if the offense had not occurred. You can still have a relationship with him, and not treat him in a mean, vengeful, bitter, angry way. You can let all those things go, if you forgive [that person].

When you look at the Scriptures, you’ll see that our forgiveness is based [on] God’s forgiveness of us, and we know that God really can’t forget anything, though He [does] forgive. If God ever didn’t know anything, He would cease to be all-knowing, and He wouldn’t be God anymore. Yes, I know Isaiah 43:25 says that He will remember our sins no more, but all

that's saying is [that] He won't bring them up [and that] He won't use them against us anymore. When He forgives somebody, that's just it. It never comes up again, but it's not like God has erased His mind.

[There are] different definitions of forgiveness. For instance, the *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* defines three different pieces of forgiveness. In general, forgiveness, according to the *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, is “pardon, involving restoration of broken relationships; ceasing to feel resentment for wrongs and offenses.” So, you pardon the person, and you choose not to feel resentment, bitterness, [or] anger toward him. That's just in general. When it's talking about God [in relation to forgiveness, *Tyndale* says], “Primarily, forgiveness is an act of God releasing sinners from judgment and freeing them from the divine penalty of their sins. Since only God is holy, only God can forgive sin.” We have God forgiving us so we can escape hell. That happens at salvation. [The third *Tyndale* definition is]: “Forgiveness is also a human act extended toward one's neighbor, a manifestation of one's realization and appropriation of God's forgiveness.” I just think, “Could you say that in a more technical way? ‘A manifestation and realization of the appropriation of. . .’” It just means that we forgive others because God forgives us, OK?

Let me read you another definition. [The previous definitions] are some general truths about forgiveness, but this is a very good definition because we can forgive each other, and we need to, and we forgive as [well] as we can, but God's forgiveness is just really great. It is huge. As a matter of fact, when you begin to study doctrine, and this is why this sermon begged for a whole series, you see how comprehensive [is] God's forgiveness of us. He stacks up things to make sure we're absolutely forgiven. In the *New Dictionary of Theology*, it says this:

Divine forgiveness means more than pardon. The pardoned criminal is still a guilty person. Everybody knows that he committed the sin for which he has received his pardon. It is the punishment, not the guilt that is gone. But Christ's forgiveness

also means that the sin is gone. The sinner has been cleansed as well as pardoned. Sinners were dead in their trespasses but God has made them alive together with Christ, “having forgiven us all our trespasses” [(Col. 2:13)]. Our sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake [(Eph. 4:32; 1 Jn. 2:12)].

That is good because what we need to understand is [that] when God saves a person, He not only says, “I pardon you,” and your guilt remains though pardon is granted. No, He pardons, He takes the sin away from you, [and] lays it on Jesus. Jesus then, having died for it, gives to you His infinite and perfect righteousness so that in Christ, before God, you are perfect. That is really good. We could never do that ourselves. We need God to do that by His grace.

It’s important to understand that there is a difference between a holy God forgiving a sinner *by* grace, and a sinner forgiving another sinner *because of* grace. In other words, let’s say somebody sins against you; he does you an evil. It hurts. You may be sitting there [thinking], “Wow, that person should come groveling to me. After I kick him a few times, I may extend some forgiveness to him.” In our minds, we actually think that we are righteous and [the other person] is a sinner against us. But let me ask you this: How many people do you love perfectly? You could put them all on one hand. I know the answer. Though you may love some people better than others, you never love anybody to the degree that you should, which means [that] you sin against him.

So though someone may do a big offense that really bothers and hurts you, [you] also need to remember that [you’re] sinning against him because [you] haven’t loved him like [you] should [have]. [You] haven’t prayed for him, [you] haven’t encouraged him, [you] haven’t admonished him, [you] haven’t done all those things that God says we need to do for one another. Let’s just face it: there is a whole difference between one sinner forgiving another sinner and a holy, infinite, perfect God forgiving a sinner. So keep that in mind.

Now, when you start getting into this whole topic of forgiveness, it becomes like this huge batch of cooked spaghetti. You have to kind of figure out how to get all those noodles pulled [apart], untangled, and straightened out again. It is a chore. I sat down and probably in five minutes, I typed out fifteen questions [about forgiveness]. I just [clicked away], and then I thought, “Well, we’ll see how many I can get to.” So I cut off three, and cut off two, and then cut off two more. So I’ve got eight [questions] now. Oh, there are some good ones that I wanted to ask, but I just couldn’t do it. I can’t even do the eight this morning, but I’m going to anyway.

Let me just tell you that if you want to learn more about this, specifically the idea of forgiveness in relation to people and how reconciliation fits into that, I would encourage you to get online (or call the office) and go to Classes/Key Social Issues. We just did a class on forgiveness and reconciliation, which will help you a great deal to [understand] more about this, especially because what people struggle with is with other people—“I’ve got this relative. . . . I’ve got this person, this boss,” or whatever.¹ We’re always wondering how we are to do forgiveness, so [the information from that class] will give you a lot [of] material that I can’t cover this morning at all or in the same detail.

Let me just ask you these questions [that I came up with about forgiveness]. The first [few] are going to be pretty easy. Try and answer these in your mind quick[ly]. As I go through them, just [think], “OK, I know the answer to that one. I know the answer to that one.” [Then] all of a sudden they [will] get a little bit more difficult. [Question] one: What are the conditions for a sinner to receive God’s forgiveness? You’re probably [thinking], “Well, that’s easy.” Good. [Two]: What is the extent of forgiveness we receive at salvation? That’s easy, too. [Three]: What are the consequences of God’s forgiveness? That’s pretty easy, too. [Four]: If we are forgiven of our sins when we first believe, then why does Jesus tell us here in our text [in

¹Available from http://www.calvarybiblechurch.org/teaching.aspx/key_social_issues_2007

Luke 11] to ask the Father for forgiveness? That gets to be a little more interesting. [Five]: If only God can forgive sin, then why are we told to forgive those who sin against us? That's also a little more interesting.

Here's one that [when I read it] in the first service they all looked like deer [caught] in [a car's] headlights. We'll see if it works here. [Six]: If our forgiveness of others is predicated on God's forgiveness of us, then why does our text say that God's forgiveness of us is predicated on our forgiveness of others? These are some great questions, aren't they? Here's another one—[seven]—If we are forgiven when we are saved, then why do the Scriptures teach that God will not forgive us unless we forgive others? [Eight] How many times must we forgive others?

OK, those are the eight [questions]. Sorry I couldn't do all fifteen, but we're going to try to get these [eight] done. These are important things to ask [and] to know the answer to because you know what? Forgiveness is hard, and because it is hard, we need to know what it is and we need to know how to do it because God tells us to do it.

So let's answer some of these easy [questions] and just pop through them so we can spend a little more time at the end. [One]: What are the conditions for a sinner to receive forgiveness from God? Well, that's easy. We receive forgiveness from God when we understand that we are sinners; that God is holy; that we deserve His judgment; that Jesus is the Son of God, who was born of a virgin, lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins as a substitute, was buried and rose again on the third day; when we repent of our sins, we believe in Jesus Christ alone for salvation and we receive forgiveness from God. Bingo.

[Two]: What is the extent of forgiveness? Does God forgive us of *most* of [our] sins? Some people say, "Listen, if you sin, you lose your salvation." Well, then, what did Christ die for? How sufficient was the death of Christ? Does it just forgive us *most* of our sins or *all* of our sins? Well, the Scriptures tell us, rather plainly. I'm just going to read two texts. Ephesians 1:7 [says]: "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace." [There is] no qual-

ification. How rich is God? He's infinitely rich. How much forgiveness do we have? "According to the riches of His grace." [We have] complete, total, comprehensive forgiveness.

Here's my favorite text—Colossians 2:13–14. I love this, where [it] says:

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

Mmm. I love that. [We have] complete, comprehensive, total forgiveness of all sins past, present, and future. Hallelujah! That's good. Other texts could be cited, but these are sufficient [for] the testimony of two witnesses [see 2 Corinthians 13:1].

[Three]: What are the consequences of God's forgiveness? Well, this is where there are just a ton of things [that I could discuss, but] I'm just going to give you two basic ones. [First]: It helps us to be reconciled with God [so that] we can have a personal relationship with Christ or God or the Father, everyone the same. [Second], we escape hell. Those are the two biggies, and they kind of all weave together in other doctrines [that] we aren't going to mention. You get to be friends with God. You get to escape the wrath of God to come. Those are the two great consequences of forgiveness.

Four: If we are forgiven of our sins when we first believe, then why does Jesus tell us here in [the Disciples' Prayer] to ask for forgiveness? This is a good question. Some people have actually taught that when you're a Christian, because you have that complete, total, comprehensive forgiveness in Christ, you should never ask for forgiveness again and if you do, you're actually sinning against God because by asking for forgiveness you're denying the forgiveness that God has already extended to you in Christ. Well,

that is interesting, and that seems logical, it's just false, because Jesus, speaking to believers [in Luke 11:4], tells us that when we pray we need to ask for forgiveness of our sins. So that kind of settles the issue. Obviously, Jesus wouldn't tell us to sin.

We see the same thing, for instance, in 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." If we do this, He will do that. If we confess our sins, He is faithful to forgive us our sins. Well, that almost sounds like there's a condition. No, it doesn't *sound* like it, there is. That's what "if" is—[a condition]. Where would John ever get that idea? Well, maybe from Psalm 32:5. David prays in his psalm of confession: "I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord'; And You forgave the guilt of my sin." Here, David does the same thing. He confesses; he receives forgiveness.

Now, when John is speaking to believers, [he] includes himself, "If we." He's talking to believers, he's including himself, he has already received forgiveness. David [was also] a believer [and] he had already received forgiveness. So then, why would he ask for forgiveness? That is the question, isn't it? The answer is very important to understand. There are actually two different kinds of forgiveness discussed in Scripture. One kind of forgiveness is the forgiveness we receive when we are saved. That is what is called "judicial forgiveness," [which means] that God, in the court of God, has His justice satisfied by the sacrifice of Christ. When we place our faith in Christ for salvation, He is then willing to judicially and completely forgive us because of what Christ has done. That is comprehensive, it is complete, and [it] happens once.

Then there is a second kind of forgiveness, [which] has been described in several ways: "family" forgiveness, "parental" forgiveness, or "relational" forgiveness. This [is the] kind of forgiveness [that] God *keeps on* extending. It's based on judicial [forgiveness], but it's a different kind [of forgiveness]. God gives us promises in His Word, and those promises are

absolute, but just because something is absolute doesn't mean [that] you get it all at once, or that you don't get it in pieces, or both.

For instance, [imagine that] I [walk] up to a believer, and say, "Are you saved?"

They say, "Yes."

"When did that happen?"

"When I was fourteen years old," or whatever. They have been saved. But, why do the Scriptures say we are "being saved" [see 1 Corinthians 1:18]? [It is] because it is true. Why do the Scriptures say we wait for a "future salvation" [see Lamentations 3:26]? [It is] because it's true. Well, which one is right? *Were* we saved? Are we *being* saved? Do we *get* saved? Yes. Though the promises of God are absolute, yet we are in process, aren't we? We are moving toward a time when we're not only saved from the eternal consequences of sin, and the power of sin, which is what we have now, but we will be saved from the presence of sin, and from sinning ourselves. It's not an either/or, but a both/and answer. In the same way, we have complete forgiveness—judicial forgiveness—in Christ, through faith in Him, at salvation. And, we continue to receive relational forgiveness.

Why would you call it "relational forgiveness"? [It is] because it helps us maintain our relationship with God. You know what happens when [we] sin. When we sin, we basically say, "Hi, God. I know this is what You want me to do, but I'm turning my back on You now. I'm becoming my own lord, I'm committing idolatry, and I'm doing my own thing. So, please excuse me while I indulge in my rebellion against You." Then you do this [turns his back to the pulpit]—you turn your back on God. God says that every sin is that act, an act of unbelief, an act of idolatry, an act of rebellion against Him.

We're already believers, so we already have complete forgiveness, and we're going to skip the eternal consequences of sin. But now what has happened is [that] your turning your back on God has created a wedge, a rift, between you and God. It's not that God isn't going to forgive you. He's going to forgive you, but what He wants you to do is turn from your

sin, repent, confess, and say, “Father, I did this thing that was wrong”—that’s what confession is, admitting—“will you forgive me?” so that you can acknowledge to God that you’ve done what was wrong and so He can extend forgiveness to bless you so that your relationship can remain tight [and] be maintained.

We know, because we’ve seen this over and over again, that God doesn’t hear the prayers of the wicked. David [said just that]: “If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear” (Psalm 66:18). [You may be thinking,] “I thought He already had forgiven us.” [David] had judicial forgiveness, but as long as he was in rebellion against God, God was [holding back that forgiveness], waiting for [David to say], “OK, Lord, I blew it.” [Then God says], “OK, OK, OK. I forgive you.”

Let’s say a mother has a young son and he frequently disobeys, like all young sons do. (I think [they rebel] more than little girls, but maybe not. It was [that way] in our case [with our son].) What does that mother teach her child? If she’s a faithful mother, what’s she going to teach her son? She’s going to teach her son [by saying], “Now, son, when you disobey Mommy, then you come to Mommy, you look me in the eye, and you say, ‘Mommy, this is what I did. Will you forgive me?’ And then Mommy is going to forgive you.” There is never a doubt in that mother’s mind that she’s going to forgive her son, [so] why does she want her son to come [to her and confess]? Why does she want her son to ask for forgiveness? [It is] because he needs to [do it] for his good, not to earn her forgiveness. She’s going to give the forgiveness, but it’s for his good [that he confesses and asks for forgiveness] because it is good to acknowledge our sins and to ask forgiveness from those we have offended.

[As we have learned], there are two different kinds of forgiveness: judicial forgiveness and parental/family/relational forgiveness. One is absolute, [which] only God can do and does at the time we are saved. The other is ongoing and God does it for us as we sin, confess, and ask forgiveness, and we do it [for] others who sin against us—at least we should.

Second: Ask God to forgive others. This is the second point [or application for prayer]. Notice [that Luke 11:4] says, “forgive us our sins.” [That] little “us” there not only includes us, personally, but others [also]. So, not only are we to be asking the Father in prayer, “Father, forgive me,” because of the offenses that [we’ve] given to Him, but [we are] also [to] forgive others. The question is: Who are these other people? Well, since it’s unqualified, I think it means [all] other people. If you look at the text, [Jesus] goes on to say, “Everyone,”—“forgive everyone” [Luke 11:4]. I think that’s what He’s talking about. It’s about others in the most broad, universal sense. But how could that be? In what way do we forgive others?

First, let’s talk about believers [in the context of this prayer]. [We’re not talking] about “forgive,” but [about] pray[ing] that God would forgive. Why would we pray that God would forgive other believers if He has already forgiven them judicially? [It is] because those believers, like us, are going to sin against God, right? We want to see them have a close walk with God, right? So, we pray that they, too, would ask for forgiveness because we want to see them have a close walk with God because we love them [as] fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. That’s easy.

But what about an unbeliever [in the context of this prayer]? Should we pray that God would forgive an unbeliever? When you think about it, you [would probably] think, “Well, yeah, I guess.” How does an unbeliever get forgiveness anyway? There’s only one way: He needs to get saved. So, if you are asking God to forgive other people, then what you’re really doing is you’re asking God to save them if they are unbelievers, right? You’re saying, “Lord, I want You to forgive these other people who don’t know You,” and that is just a synonym for saying, “Will You save them?”

This is what amazed me, and this will just fit right in with celebrating communion this morning. I was thinking about this today, and I [thought], “OK, let me just think about some examples of people asking God to forgive other people?” One primary example was Stephen. [Do] you remember when they were stoning Stephen in Acts 7? As they’re pelting the life out of him, [do you] remember what he says? He says, “Lord, do not hold this sin

against them!” [Acts 7:60]. He prays for his persecutors as they’re killing him. I mean, who ever saw or thought of anything like that? Jesus on the cross [did]. [Do you] remember what Jesus said to those who had crucified Him, who were hurling abuse at Him? He said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing” [see Luke 23:34].

What really hit me this week is that as those people [were] killing Jesus, Jesus [was] praying for their salvation. Isn’t that amazing? That is just so amazing. I don’t know about you, but when people are hurting me, I think about getting back [at them], getting even, [getting] revenge, you know? [But in this instance,] they’re killing the Savior, and as He’s nailed on the cross, they don’t just leave Him alone to die in peace. [No,] they hurl abuse at Him: “Come down from there! Oh, so, if you are the King [and] you did miracles before, [why] can’t [You] do them anymore?” [see Luke 23:35–37]. Jesus [was] looking at those people, and He ask[ed] the Father to forgive them because they didn’t know what they were doing. The only way an unbeliever can ever receive forgiveness is if he comes to salvation, and then he receives judicial forgiveness, and then that judicial forgiveness gives him the ability to [receive] ongoing forgiveness. That is amazing. That is so amazing.

I want to just say another thing. When you’re talking about forgiveness, a lot of people think, “Well, if we [already] have forgiveness, are you sure that we need to do this?” A lot of people have this idea that maybe the only way we need to forgive is if people come and ask us [for forgiveness]. Otherwise, we can just continue on in anger and bitterness toward them. No. We’ll see why that is [the case] in a minute. Others think, “Are you sure that there [are] two kinds of forgiveness?” Well, yeah. Here’s the biggest argument for two kinds of forgiveness. Are there any places in Scripture that talk about consequences that come upon believers because of their sin?

Think of that text in 1 Corinthians 11, which we often go through at the Lord’s Supper. Speaking to believers, what does [Paul] say? “For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly” [1 Corinthians 11:29], right? Doesn’t he say, after that, that

many are sick and some even sleep—have died, have been killed by God—because of their sin [see 11:30–31]? Doesn't Scripture say we can grieve the Holy Spirit [see Ephesians 4:30]? Don't ever think that [having] forgiveness means [that there are] no consequences in this life. Eternal consequences [are] no problem, [but] in this life, [there are] consequences.

Do you remember what happened when Nathan, the prophet, came to David and [gave] his little parable and confronted him? David repented of his sins, and Nathan said, "The Lord forgives you" [see 2 Samuel 12:13] and then what? [He gave a] huge list of [consequences]: "And then this is what's going to happen, and then this is going to happen, and then this is going to happen, and then this is going to happen." So, forgiveness does not mean there are no consequences. Yes, you have to treat the person [nicely] and not be angry, not be bitter, not resent him, [and] pardon him, but there are sometimes consequences that remain, and remain, and remain in this life. Those things even affect the life to come. Because of that, we know that just because you have complete forgiveness in Christ doesn't mean God turns a blind eye and a deaf ear to everything you do. Believe me, [if] He sees you sinning, He's going to get out the paddle. He's going to come after you because He loves you.

[The] third [application for prayer is]: Forgive others first before asking God to forgive you. This is where it just becomes really fun. Look at the middle of [Luke 11:]4. So, yes, we are to ask the Father to forgive us and ask the Father to forgive others. Jesus says, in the same breath as "And forgive us our sins," "For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us." This raises the rest of the questions we want to answer.

[Question] five: If only God can forgive sin, why are we told to forgive those who sin against us? If I were to come to you, and say, "Hey, let me ask you this. It's an easy theological question: Is it true that only God can forgive sins?" You would say, "Yes," because that would be the right answer. Turn back to Luke 5:[17-]21. When Jesus sees the paralyzed man, and all the leaders are coming around, He wants to let them know He's God, [so] He comes up to the man, and says, "Your sins are forgiven." [The religious

leaders gasp, and say], “He blasphemes because who can forgive sins but God alone?” They were correct. That was the whole point. “The Son of God has the authority to forgive sins. I’m God,” is what He was telling them.

Now, when we ask that question, “Why does God tell us to forgive sins if He alone can forgive sins?” now we know the answer. God is the only one who can extend *judicial* forgiveness, but we can extend *relational* forgiveness. There you go.

[Question] six: Here’s the deer-in-the-headlights question. If our forgiveness of others is predicated on God’s forgiveness of us, then why does our text say that God’s forgiveness of us is predicated on our forgiveness of others? Did you get that? Everybody’s [thinking], “What?” Look at our text [in Luke 11:4] again. Notice it says, “And forgive us our sins, For.” What does that little word “for” mean? It means that the reason we can ask the Father for forgiveness is being given. But notice [that Jesus] doesn’t even put a condition there—“if.” He doesn’t say, “*If* you do this,” He just says, “Christians, do this. Believers, do this.” “For” what? “For we ourselves,” notice He uses [the] emphatic here—“we ourselves”—“also forgive.” He [also] uses the present-active verb [meaning that] we are always in the process of forgiving “everyone,” universally, “who is indebted to us.” He says [that] as we know that we’re always in the process of forgiving those who are always in the habit of sinning against us, we can ask the Father for forgiveness. That is interesting because now it’s saying here that we go to the Father, and say, “Father, will you forgive me?” knowing that we are right now, as believers, always and continually forgiving other people.

Then the question is: But what if we don’t? What if I refuse to forgive Aunt Mildred? What if I refuse to forgive my boss? You don’t know what my brother did to me. You don’t know what my sister did to me. When my parents died, you don’t know what happened in our family. [I can’t forgive] my dad, my mom, my whatever—fill in the blank. So, [question seven is]: If the reason we forgive others is because God forgives us, then why does God say, “Before you go asking Me for forgiveness, make sure you’re continually forgiving other people”?

We could go in to those many texts [that] you know exist, where Jesus says things like, “Unless you forgive your brother then your heavenly Father is not going to forgive you” [see Matthew 18:35]. It appears all the way through the gospels. What’s all that about? Answer: Jesus is talking about parental/relational forgiveness, not judicial forgiveness. He’s not saying, “If you don’t save other people. . . .” Of course He’s not saying that. He’s saying, “If you don’t maintain your relationship with other people, then,” and then you’ve got one or two options. First option: Jesus is saying, “Listen, when you pray, say, ‘Forgive us our sins,’ and only say, ‘Forgive us our sins’—only ask the Father for forgiveness—if you can finish the sentence, ‘for we ourselves are forgiving others—everyone—who sins against us.’” Do you see that? Don’t ever just pray the front part and not do the next part. Don’t come to [Jesus] and say, “Hey, you know, I want You to forgive me, but I’ve got grudges against other people.” He says you can’t pray that. Why? [It is] because it would be to sin upon sin, wouldn’t it? If God commands you to [forgive], and you don’t forgive other people, then you can’t come to God and ask for forgiveness when you yourselves are unforgiving. You just can’t do it. It is to sin in the face of God while you’re asking God to forgive you of sin. It just won’t work.

So that’s one option. The other option is [that] we don’t know Jesus, and that’s why we’re unwilling to forgive other people. If we did know Jesus, we would have judicial forgiveness, and we would have the grace of God to forgive those who sin against us. One of those two [options] is true. So, we know that we need to love each other, right? I mean, that’s plain. Even though there are some people who [say], “Well, I don’t know. I don’t need to forgive unless somebody comes to me and *asks* for forgiveness.” The question is: Do you need to love other people? For instance, 1 John 2:10 [says], “The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him.” The one who loves his brother is walking in the Light. First John 3:10 [says], “By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not

of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.” If you do not love your brother, you’re not of God, the Scriptures say. First John 4:20–21 [says]:

If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

That’s about as crystal clear as you can get, right? We need to love each other, we need to love our enemies, unbelievers, everyone. [You may think, however], “Yeah, but we don’t need to *forgive* them.” What is love, anyway? “Love is patient, love is kind, it is not provoked, it is not jealous. Love does not take into account a wrong suffered” [see 1 Corinthians 13:4–6], which means [that] love forgives. You cannot love and not forgive. [You can’t say], “Well, you know what? I’m going to love you, but I’m just going to continue on in bitter, angry resentment [and malice] toward you [for] you the rest of my life.” What is that? That’s not love. That’s sin. God calls you to love.

Now, I don’t want you running out of here today, saying, “Pastor Jack said that forgiveness saves you.” No. I didn’t say that. “Pastor Jack said [that] if you don’t forgive you lose your salvation.” I didn’t say that, either. “Well, that’s what you told us!” I was just reading you the verses. You take it up with God. But listen, you don’t lose your salvation. If you have a pattern [in] your life of not forgiving somebody, and you haven’t forgiven somebody for a long time, you’re angry, bitter, [and] resentful toward him, maybe you’re snubbing him and avoiding him, and just treating him in an ungodly way, you need Jesus. [That’s] what the Scriptures are saying. You need Jesus because Christians are those who, because of God’s grace in their lives, have the capacity [to] and do regularly forgive other people. If you find yourself in ongoing hatred toward somebody else, “how does the love of God abide in you?” [see 1 John 3:17]. [The] implied answer [is]: It doesn’t.

Finally, [question eight]: How many times do you have to forgive somebody? Do you have to keep on forgiving? You know the answer to this, but turn to Luke 17. I can't wait to get to this passage—in 2012. How many times do we need to forgive others? What's neat about it is [that] this passage is actually about just obeying, but forgiveness is given as an example of something that's difficult to obey. We all know as Christians [that] when people sin against us it's hard to forgive [them], isn't it? Not only is it hard to forgive, but even though we may forgive them, and even tell them we forgive them, and we want to forgive them, there may be times when, in our lives, all of a sudden anger and bitterness keep popping up, and we're reminded of what they did to us. That's hard. That's when we need to go back to the Lord and ask the Lord to forgive us and help us to have right thoughts about that person who has sinned against us, and to keep going back to the Lord. So, as long as you're pursuing forgiveness, then that's a great indication that you love God. But when you're content with not forgiving, then really you're content with not being a Christian because Christians forgive.

Look at Luke 17:1–10. I'm just going to go through here and give you a quick commentary because this is just so great. “He said to His disciples,” first one, “It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to him through whom they come!” which means the stumbling blocks are people who will sin against you. Verse 2: “It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he would cause one of these little ones to stumble.” One of the greatest sins you can commit is to lead somebody else into sin, to either participate in sin with him, tempt him to sin, [or] lead him into sin. That is one of the greatest sins you can commit. Jesus says [that] it's millstone-around-the-neck and swim-in-the-sea time if you do that.

Look at [Luke 17:]3: “Be on your guard! If your brother sins,” implied, if he sins against you, tempting you to sin, what are you supposed to do? “Rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.” Now, some have said, “See? See the ‘if’ there? *If* he repents, and *if*

he sins against you, and *if* he returns—that means [that] you don't have to forgive *unless* the person comes to you and repents, because, after all, that's what we have to do to get forgiveness from God." Well, that's judicial forgiveness, and God's perfectly holy and we're not. Notice, Jesus doesn't say here, "Don't forgive them if they don't ask." He's merely using this in the illustration [in which] the guy does come [asking for forgiveness]. He doesn't say, "Don't extend forgiveness if [he doesn't come to you]." He's trying to create a story that stretches such a huge matter of obedience.

Let me just give you an example here. At 8 a.m., a friend calls you up on the phone and he insults you. He calls you names, insults you, accuses you, and hangs up. You think, "Man, what was that? I thought that guy was my friend! He was really mean!"

All of a sudden there's a knock at your door, and [it's your friend, and he says], "I'm really sorry. I was mad. I repent. Will you forgive me?" Forgive him. So, he gets ready to leave, and he sees your car. He's kind of jealous that your car is nicer than his. He pulls a little can of gasoline out of the back of his car, dumps it on your car, and lights your car on fire.

You come out, "Hey, hey! What are you doing?" You call the fire department, they come, and squirt out the car.

[Your friend says], "Listen, man, I am so sorry! I am so sorry. Will you forgive me?" You forgive him. So, he's walking back [to his car, saying], "Thanks, brother. Thanks for forgiving me," [and] you have this dog. It's kind of barking through the fence in the backyard. It offends him, [so] he pulls his shotgun out of his trunk, and shoots your dog.

[You yell], "Hey! That's my dog! What are you doing?"

"Oh, man, I am so sorry. It was irritating me, but I know I shouldn't have done it. I shouldn't have done it. I'm so sorry. Will you forgive me?" You forgive him.

You say, "Come here. I'm going to forgive you. Let me give you a hug."

You hug him, and he [says], "You hugged me too tight[ly]," and he pulls out an ice pick and stabs your right eye [out].

[You scream], "Ah! Ah! My eye!"

He [says], “Oh, I’m so sorry! Will you forgive me?” Now, listen, that’s only four sins. Jesus says [that] if he comes back seven times a day, you keep forgiving him. When Jesus tells us to do that, what comes to your mind? Look at verse 5, and see what comes to the apostles’ minds. “The apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith!’” [They’re thinking], “How can we ever do that? We can’t go forgiving like that! Are you kidding me? Seven times a day?” They got it, man. They got it perfect[ly]. They realized, “Man, no way. [There is] no way can we forgive that much.” So, they [said], “Jesus, we need more faith.”

Look at how Jesus answers [in Luke 17:]6: “And the Lord said, ‘If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, “Be uprooted and be planted in the sea”; and it would obey you.’” What is Jesus’ answer? “You don’t need any more faith. If you have tiny, little, microscopic, mustard-seed faith, you have all you need to have a mulberry tree ripped out by the roots,” by the way, mulberry trees have [more] extensive root[s] than any other tree, “out of the ground, and cast into the sea. You don’t need more faith to obey Me in this way.”

“Well, then,” [you may ask], “what do we need?” [Luke 17:]7: “Which of you,” it’s a little parable here, “having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come immediately and sit down to eat?’” No. Masters don’t serve slaves; slaves serve masters. “But will he not say,” verse 8, “to him, ‘Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink?’” That’s what masters do. [Luke 17:]9 [says]: “He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he?” Slaves are expected to obey their masters. Period. [Verse 10 goes on]: “So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.’” Get the point? God says, “You better forgive other people. I command you to forgive other people. Period.” Don’t expect thanks after you’ve done it the seventh time that day. It’s right because God has forgiven you an infinite debt through the death of His Son.

Because God has forgiven you so completely and thoroughly, you can offer your little, pusillanimous forgiveness to another person.

So, when you leave here today, and you're praying your ten minutes of prayer a day (some people said, "Pastor Jack, I'm having trouble praying only ten minutes." You can pray more. Just try and do at least ten [minutes]. Somebody said, "Yeah, I always pray longer." Oh, too bad. I'm not saying [that you should] *only* pray ten [minutes, but that you should pray] at *least* ten [minutes]—[that's the] bare minimum), make sure you include in your prayer, "Father, forgive me of my sins and forgive other people of their sins because I know in my heart I am working to forgive those who have sinned against me." That's what Jesus wants you to pray. He only wants you to pray for forgiveness if you know in your heart [that] you're forgiving other people. That's God's will. That's what pleases Him. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You for the instruction that we received here. Father, forgiveness is such a fascinating topic, with so many important applications and principles. I pray for all of us that we would learn to be quick to forgive, that we would learn to lay aside our own weak justice, our own thoughts of being a victim, Father, that we would remember that we never love others like we should, therefore we need to be quick to forgive them since they don't love us as they should. Father, help us to keep in mind the great forgiveness that we have in Christ at salvation, and, Father, may we readily extend forgiveness to others because of the great grace You have extended to us, not only forgiving us that we can be saved, but for giving us the grace so we can forgive others. Father, if there [are people] here who realize they aren't forgiving, may they examine their hearts right now to see whether they be in the faith, for maybe, just maybe, they have gone on for years in an unforgiving, hard-hearted spirit, and now they realize they don't know you. So, may they cast themselves on the Lord Jesus Christ, focusing on His death, and the great forgiveness [that] He offers to those who believe. And, Father, in receiving Him as their Savior, that they would find the grace in their hearts to forgive others. Father, we pray all of this in Christ's name, Amen.

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