

“Breathing In Forgiveness: The Lord’s Prayer, part 4”

by Scott Runyon

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FBCB

Matthew 6:7-15

CHILDREN’S TIME

What do you do with a marker board? Yes, draw pictures or write things on it with dry erase markers.

If I am drawing a picture or writing on this marker board and make a mistake, what do I do? I use the eraser right?

If I make a mistake, I can erase it and start over, right.

Now, there is a really big marker board twice this size I found in the church that someone wrote on with permanent marker, so this eraser won’t take the marks off that board. What do I do with it?

I looked it up online and found that there are ways to even take permanent marker off, so even that board can get clean!

We all do bad things every once in a while and make mistakes, and we can feel bad. But God is always ready to forgive us. God's

forgiveness is a lot like this eraser. When I make a mistake and do something wrong, God will make me clean again. Then I do my best to do better next time.

Sometimes we think that our mistakes are so bad that God could never forgive us, like we’ll have to live with the mistake forever.

Well, God’s forgiveness is SO great that God will still forgive us, no matter how big our mistake. Our job is to accept God’s forgiveness, and then do our best not to make more mistakes.

SERMON

Today is the fourth part of our series on the Lord’s Prayer. First we talked about how Jesus’ prayer, called the Lord’s Prayer, summarized his teaching. Jesus’ disciples followed him, imitating his thoughts, actions, and life, including studying this prayer. Their new life in God, included “others” as part of their community — “others” they would not have thought to include.

Then, we looked at the Kingdom of Heaven that Jesus established in this world and about which he taught his disciples. This Kingdom is founded on values and principles

lived by Jesus and taught in this prayer. The Kingdom of Heaven looks like you and me doing the will of God in this world. That's how we participate in building the Kingdom of Heaven.

Last week, we discussed how, in his prayer, Jesus honored not only our spiritual wellbeing, but also our physical bodies. Jesus wanted his disciples to trust God for enough each day, and also to work to provide enough for others.

This week we are talking about the next phrase:

“...and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.”

Forgiveness is central to God's work.

I would like invite you to take a moment to bring your attention to your breath. Take several deep breaths. Notice how your body moves as you breath in. If you are attuned to it, you will feel your breath not just in your chest, but through your whole body. as you breathe, you'll also be able to feel restrictions where there are tight spots in your body.

By awareness and breathing alone, over time you can learn to release

that tightness and pain in your body, and increase your lung capacity, and some would say even extend your life.

Breath is life! Without it we simply can't live. Here are a few the many benefits of breathing:

- * Breathing expels toxins from your body.
- * Breathing gives relief to emotional problems.
- * Focused breathing relaxes your body and quiets your mind.
- * Breathing massages organs in your body to bring them into balance.
- * Breathing enhances your immune system, nervous system, lungs, and heart.
- * Breathing boosts energy levels, improves stamina, and elevates endorphins promoting good moods.
- * Focusing on your breath helps to bring you into the present moment, because most of the time we are living in the past or the future, instead of the present.

These happen more optimally when we breath deeply.

It could be life changing to plan just five minutes each morning after getting up, and five minutes in the

evening before going to bed to sit and focus on deep breathing.

Consider that forgiveness is just as essential to life as breathing. Jesus taught that forgiveness was a way of life in God's Kingdom.

When we give and accept forgiveness it frees us from those things that hinder our full expression as human beings. And when we live without forgiveness, our humanity is stifled and our life shrinks.

Forgiveness is powerful. It works to restore what has been lost, heal what has been wounded, rebuild what has been torn down, and brings us in alignment with God's Kingdom.

When someone does some wrong to another person we often glue together the person and the act. Forgiveness recognizes the human being is separate from the act. Instead of being defined by the sin, when we live in forgiveness, the person is honored as God's good creation and the human being is restored.

Some have said that forgiveness allows the person to die with the sin, and then to be resurrected to a new life, free from the sin.

Many of us know what it is like to be hurt badly by someone who is not sorry for what they did to us. This makes it very hard to see them separate from the act. Then it is easy to hold hatred in our heart for them. Not many feel this more than the families of those 26 people shot and killed at the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, Texas this past November.

... or the families of those who were shot and killed at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, NC in June of 2015.

Many of you will remember the news reports of the Charleston Church Massacre when a 21-year-old white supremacist man went into a Bible study with a gun and killed nine people, including the pastor.

The shooter, Dylan Roof, declared himself in sound mind and wanted to represent himself in court. He put forth a consistent message about his intentions from the point he was captured. A year ago this month he declared in court:

"I would like to make it crystal clear, I do not regret what I did. I am not sorry. I have not shed a tear for the innocent people I killed."

He pleaded guilty and then in March of last year he was sentenced to life in prison without parole.

Even so, it was remarkable to hear right after the shooting, that some family members and people in the church community said that they forgave Dylan Roof for this act of violence.

This quick response raises many questions about forgiveness:

- Is forgiveness cheapened when it is offered so quickly?
- Does this quick forgiveness neglect the pain the act has caused and pave the way for re-victimization?
- Can quick forgiveness be authentic when given seemingly so “easy”?
- What about the longer process of forgiveness?

I’m not going to question the authenticity of those folks in Charleston. After all, instead of forgiving, they could have lingered in anger and incited revenge and thereby perpetuate violence in the world.

Forgiveness includes separating the person from the act. It is also a

process and a way of life — not something completed in a moment.

For example, have you ever been hurt by someone and you wanted to forgive them, but anger lingered in your heart? Maybe you came to the point one day when you could genuinely offer forgiveness, but then the next day you woke up with anger again. You needed to work more at forgiving. Then you forgave ... then resisted ... then you forgave ... and it goes on and on.

Forgiveness isn’t easy!

But most of the time this is how forgiveness works. It is both a process, and a way of life. It requires a change in the way that we live, the way that we breath.

In the Lord’s Prayer, there is a little connector word “and” between the request for daily bread and forgiveness. “Give us this day our daily bread AND forgive us our debts...”

In God’s Kingdom, forgiveness is something that we need on a daily basis, like food.

In Matthew 18, Peter came to Jesus asking about how often he was to forgive someone who

sinned against him. Up to seven times, he wondered? Peter recognized that forgiveness wasn't a simple one-time thing. He knew it was a process and thought that perhaps forgiving seven times was going out of his way, above the call of duty, and would get him off the hook.

Jesus said not to forgive seven times, but seventy times seven!

Essentially, in God's Kingdom, there is no limit or end to the forgiveness offered. Perpetual forgiveness is to be a way of life, the way we breathe.

Paul wrote in Romans that while we were still unrepentant sinners, Jesus died for us in the ultimate act of forgiveness. This is the pattern in the Kingdom.

Forgiveness isn't only offered once someone repents and shows that they are sufficiently sorry for what they have done. No, God's forgiveness is not contingent on our faithfulness. Rather, God's forgiveness overcomes our shortcomings. God's forgiveness has no bounds.

This is expressed in a story that Jesus told about a father and two sons, often called the Prodigal Son.

In the story, the younger son wanted his inheritance early. Essentially, he wished that his father was dead so that the estate could be divided and he could get his share.

The father gave him his share and immediately the son went away and squandered it in the most awful of ways. He then found himself without anything and eating from a pig's trough.

He resigned himself to go back to his father and beg to be a hired hand, because he knew he wasn't worthy of anything more, and at least he would be able to survive.

While he was far off in the field his father saw him coming. He hiked up his robe (something disgraceful for a man to do) and ran across the field to meet his son (also something unbecoming of a respectable man).

Before the son could say a word of his rehearsed plea, the father threw his arms around him, forgave him for whatever he might have done, and ordered that he would be restored fully as a son with all of his rights and benefits. And then he ordered a feast be prepared to celebrate.

This is a picture of God's extravagant, over-the-top, unconditional forgiveness.

God is not like a parent who is ready to scold their kid for what they have done wrong, but rather one who runs with reckless abandon across the field, not worrying about how ridiculous it might look, ready to embrace a son who is suffering from shame and sin.

God is not one who demands sternly "What have you done?" but one who throws his arms around the wayward child and says without condition, "I love you! You are my child! You are forgiven!"

When experiencing this unconditional expression of love and forgiveness, the child who had sinned grievously is able to let go and exhale — exhale the weight of all of the toxic guilt and shame he had been holding.

Then inhale from the Spirit of life — that all of his body, mind, emotions, and spirit would be nourished by the unending and radical love and forgiveness of the God who never quits pursuing us and forgiving us, even if it requires more than 70 times seven times.

This is a picture of Heaven on earth. We also hold this power of restoration when we forgive.

Jesus expressed this unconditional love, when, as he hung there dying on the cross, he called out for God to forgive those who were at that moment in the process of killing him. Even when they had no idea the sin they were committing, he forgave them.

God's very essence is forgiveness.

Over time, may we learn to breath out all the needless anger, sin and shame ...

... and breathe in the cleansing, healing, and renewing power of forgiveness, that the place where we are might truly be Heaven on earth!