

Talking with God - Part 4

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 March 2024

Preacher: Sam Bunnell

[0 : 0 0] All right, church, would you stand with me if you're able to take the Word of God and turn to Matthew chapter 6. Matthew chapter 6, we are continuing our second to last sermon here in our series on talking with God.

Talking with God. Matthew chapter 6, we read in verses 5 through 13, what we call the Lord's Prayer.

And we say the Lord's Prayer is less of a prescription and more of a pattern. Less of a prescription and more of a pattern. Jesus wasn't saying this is how you always have to pray.

But he was saying this is a pattern or a recipe for praying. Section 1 focused on God. God-focused petitions.

And now we're in section 2, which focuses on life-focused petitions. I'm sorry, definitely not man-centered petitions. All of our prayers should be God-centered.

[1 : 0 8] And yet, these prayers to God, these petitions are focused on life. So let's pick this up in verse 12. Let's read it together. You follow along as I read verse 12.

I'm reading from the Christian Standard Bible. We finished up last week saying, Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, verse 12, and forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Like we mentioned earlier in the service, the subject this morning is on forgiveness. And God spends quite a bit of time talking in this passage and throughout the scriptures on the principle of forgiveness.

So let's ask him to speak to us today. God, we come to you in prayer and we thank you. First of all, for who you are. We thank you for how great, how mighty, how majestic you are. And yet, how personal, how loving, how intimate you are with us.

I pray that you would speak to us each from your word. Let us not miss anything that your spirit has for us today. And if someone here does not know you and have that personal relationship with you, let it begin today.

[2 : 1 8] It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. You may be seated. Thanks for standing. I want to share this quote with you. How many of you thought you'd come to church this morning and hear a quote from Will Smith?

Throughout life, people will make you mad, disrespect you, and treat you bad. Let God deal with the things they do, because hate in your heart will consume you too. That's what Will Smith had to say about forgiveness.

And then just fairly recently... Look, I'm not trying to just pick on Will Smith, all right? That was a tough spot.

Maybe not his most shining moment. If any of us holds us to 100% to the words we say all the time, none of us are going to measure up. But the truth of it is, forgiveness is hard.

Sometimes we know the right thing to do, and sometimes it's hard to do the right thing. Even when we know we should. So, let's look at the Bible. Leviticus 19, verse 18.

[3 : 17] Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against members of your community, but love your neighbors as yourself. Don't take revenge.

Don't bear a grudge. Why? Because it'll eat you up. Before long, you're on a national stage slapping somebody on worldwide TV. Nelson Mandela said it this way, an interesting quote.

Resentment is like drinking poison and hoping then that it will kill your enemies. Anybody ever done that before? I'm going to drink this poison of resentment and hope that you suffer for it.

Well, good luck with that. It doesn't work that way, of course, right? Now, in our heads, we know that. We know that forgiveness is the right thing to do. We know that resentment, bearing a grudge, is the wrong thing to do. And yet, it is so difficult to live that out in day-to-day life.

So, number one, if you're taking notes in your bulletin, there's spots there for you to fill in. Forgiveness is God's nature, not ours. Forgiveness is God's nature, not ours.

[4 : 23] Now, we know that to be true. We know it is not natural for us to forgive. What's the quote? To err is human, to forgive is divine.

There's a reason that that has existed for so long, because it is true. Forgiveness is divine. It is God's nature. It is not your nature, nor is it mine.

But, we should forgive. But it's hard, right? C.S. Lewis had several quotes on forgiveness when I was researching for this sermon today.

And this is the first one I wanted to share with you. Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive. Isn't that true? It's easy to tell others to forgive. It's easy to want others to forgive us.

It is a much harder prospect when we are the ones who have to forgive. Why? Because we were wronged. Whether in our own heads or in reality, we were wronged.

[5 : 28] And in those moments, we don't want to think about how much we've been forgiven. We don't want to think about all the times that we've wronged others. We just want to live in that moment of justification and self-righteousness, saying, I was right.

They were wrong. They hurt me. How can I possibly be expected to forgive them for that? That's our natural attitude. Let's go to Matthew 6.

We're not going to have it on the screen. But back in your text, Matthew 6, we're going to jump down past the Lord's Prayer. And let's read verses 14 and 15.

I think it's very interesting that when Jesus is teaching his disciples how to pray, he gives them verse 12. Forgive our debts, God.

As we also have forgiven our debtors. But then he comes back, circles back around to this idea of forgiveness in verse 14. For if you forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well.

[6 : 31] That's good news, right? If you forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well. But verse 15 is in there too. If you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your offenses.

Well, what do we do with that? Does that challenge the entire understanding of the gospel, the good news of Jesus, the free gift of salvation and eternal life, does this erode this now?

Does it shake it? Does it mess it all up for us? No, it doesn't. Let's look at Mark 11. Mark 11 verse 25. When you are praying, first, forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins too.

Very similar, isn't it? Very similar reading to what we just read in Mark, I'm sorry, Matthew 6, 14 and 15. First, forgive those you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will then forgive your sins too.

Again, this is a little scary to read. So what you are saying is, if I don't forgive them, then God is not going to forgive me? How many of you all have read this passage before and maybe struggled with it a little bit?

[7 : 56] Yeah, thank you. Thanks for being, yeah. The rest of you just haven't read this passage before. I get it. No, I'm kidding with you. I'm kidding with you. Let's go back to Matthew and jump over to Matthew 18.

Matthew 18. This one isn't going to be on the screen either. We're turning our Bibles a little bit today, all right? Sometimes we put it on the screen if it's a quick reference to a verse, but this is a little bit longer passage, and if you've got a Bible in front of you, if you didn't bring one, there's one in the pew in front of you.

Matthew 18, verses 21, down through the end of the chapter. This is the parable of the unforgiving slave, okay? Then Peter approached him and asked, Lord, talking about Jesus, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me?

As many as seven times? Jesus says, I tell you, not as many as seven, Jesus replied, but 70 times seven. Jesus is saying there's no magical number 70 times seven, but the point he was making to Peter is there's never an end to the amount of times that we extend forgiveness to someone else.

Verse 23. For this reason, the kingdom of heaven can be compared to a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle accounts, one who owed 10,000 talents was brought before him.

[9 : 22] You understand that this amount of money, he would never be able to pay back. In his lifetime or many others, he would never be able to pay back this 10,000 talents that he owed to this king.

Verse 25. Since he did not have the money to pay it back, his master commanded that he, his wife, his children, and everything he had be sold to pay the debt.

You think our world is in rough shape now? This was how you settled debts back in the Bible days, okay? A little scary. You, your family, everything would be sold to pay off your debt.

Verse 26. At this news, the servant fell face down before him, humbling himself, falling down before this king, and he says, be patient with me, and I will pay you everything.

Then the master of that servant had compassion, released him, and forgave him the loan. That massive debt that he could never repay, the king took compassion and forgave him the whole thing.

[10 : 35] So what happens? The servant jumps up and throws his arms around the king and says, you're my savior, I owe you forever, and then went out and was as nice to everyone as he could possibly be, right?

No, not at all. Verse 28. That servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, a very small amount, owed him just a little bit of money.

But the guy didn't have it. So he grabs him, starts choking him, and says, pay what you owe. At this, the fellow servant fell down and began begging him, be patient with me and I will pay you back.

But this other servant, who had just been forgiven so much, he wasn't willing. Instead, he went and threw him into prison until he could pay what he was owed. How does that work?

If you're in prison, how are you going to go out and raise the money, right? Because other people have to go raise it for you to get you out of prison. When the other servants saw what had taken place, they were deeply distressed.

[11 : 43] They went and reported to their master everything that had happened. Verse 32. Then, after the master had summoned that first servant back again from jail.

I'm sorry, not from jail. The other guy was in jail. My bad. His master then says to him, you wicked servant. I forgave you all that debt because you begged me.

Shouldn't you also have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you? And because he was angry, his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured until he could pay everything that was owed.

His world just got a whole lot worse. So also, verse 35. I would love if the story just ended right there.

But verse 35 says, so also my heavenly father will do to you unless every one of you forgives his brother or sister from your heart.

[12 : 41] Y'all, these are hard passages. What do we do with these passages? Again, I ask the question, does this undermine everything that we believe about God's once for all death, payment for our sin, on that cross?

Does it undermine everything we believe about God being willing to forgive our sin once and for all? Not forgive our sin until we mess up again and then His forgiveness is withheld?

Is that what this is teaching us? No. That's what someone who doesn't understand the God we read in the Bible could think.

That's what someone who doesn't take the whole counsel of the book and not just select passages could think. If you just read those passages and left the rest of the Bible on the shelf, then sure, you could think that if anyone ever chooses to not forgive someone else, then God will never forgive them.

But that's not true. 1 John 1-9 is in the book. If we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and He is just.

[14 : 10] He is correct. He is right in doing this. He is justified in forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all wickedness. All wickedness.

Even the wickedness of unforgiveness. Even the wickedness that that wicked servant showed to his fellow servant after he had just been forgiven so much.

Even if we reach that level of wickedness and selfishness, God says if we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and He is just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from that wickedness.

So, let's go to number two. Forgiveness is a key part of God transforming us.

This is the answer here. Number one, presented us with a problem. God says forgiveness is a big deal. If you don't forgive others, I won't forgive you.

[15 : 13] What do we do with that? Number two, forgiveness is a key part of God transforming us. Here's the secret. The work of the Holy Spirit within us will cause us to forgive others.

Does that mean that if you continue to harbor bitterness and will never forgive someone else, does that mean that you are not a child of God? That's between you and God.

I'm just reading to you what Jesus said about the matter. But I do know that forgiveness is a key part of God transforming us. So God's transforming work within you will bear the fruit of forgiveness.

C.S. Lewis said it this way, to be a Christian, if you call yourselves a Christian, how many of you in the room today would say, I'm a Christian by uplifted hand? Yeah, awesome. You can put your hand down.

I want to make sure most of us are on the same page here. If you couldn't raise your hand, that's alright. To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.

[16 : 23] Now, oftentimes we don't see ourselves that way, do we? Well, it's easier to point our fingers at someone else and say, what they did is inexcusable, but it's a lot harder for us to look in the mirror and say, I have done the inexcusable and God has forgiven me.

I can promise you that. It's really hard. It's really hard, especially when you've been trying to live a clean, moral life and have as few mess-ups as you can and then you realize the truth is you are dirty, rotten, wicked, to the core.

And apart from God, there is nothing good about you. And you have been forgiven by God so much. And not just by God, you've been forgiven by so many others of so much.

So that is what being a Christian leads you to understand that God has forgiven the inexcusable in me and so then I must forgive the inexcusable in others even when it's hard because God will help us.

His Spirit within us will bear that fruit. Ephesians 4.32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another just as God also forgave you in Christ.

[17 : 41] Just as God forgave us when Jesus died on the cruel cross and endured so much pain, so much heartache, so much sorrow as God, His Father, turned His back on His Son.

Jesus went through all this torment, all this suffering so He could forgive you and me. so then we are to be kind and compassionate to one another.

We are to forgive one another. God isn't asking us to hang on a cross and go through what Jesus went through. He's just asking us to forgive each other when we are wrong just as God forgave us.

So how does that look? It looks like forgiving your spouse. It's one of my favorite quotes on this. A happy marriage is the union of two good forgivers.

How many of you all have been married a little while can testify that it's important to forgive one another? Yeah? Anybody? Yeah, of course. Usually, the problems become bigger problems because we won't forgive each other and move on.

[18 : 56] Say, yeah, I've got to teach them a lesson that their behavior was wrong. You know who's really good at teaching lessons? God. You know who's really not good at teaching lessons to others?

Us. We just make things worse most often. But if we leave the lesson teaching to the Holy Spirit and we just take the Christ-like attitude of forgiveness and we've got a happy marriage, whether that's a husband and wife or two church members or parents and children or a boss and an employee, neighbors, friends, co-workers, whatever the relationship is, we must treat it with the spirit of forgiveness.

And then we'll have the happiness that the fruit of the spirit brings. Not based upon the other person, but based upon God working in us. Romans chapter 12.

Would you go there with me again? Romans 12. How many of y'all are starting to recognize this passage now? Romans 12 too? We've been doing it for months.

Like almost every Sunday going to Romans chapter 12 and verse 2. Any translation that you read, any Bible translation that you read in this passage is going to be good.

[20 : 28] But my personal favorite, just for the wording's sake, is the New Living Translation. So that's what I'm going to read from right now. Don't copy the behavior and the customs of this world.

But let God transform you. There's that transforming work of God leading us from not being willing to forgive to forgiveness through the work of the spirit.

So, verse 2, let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. I'm not, now I'm no longer looking for revenge. That was my old way of thinking.

I'm not bitter anymore. That was my old way of thinking. I am purposing in my heart to let God transform me. And maybe He hasn't fully transformed me yet, but He's working on me and I'm going to let Him change the way I think.

Then you will learn, verse 2, to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. Look down at verse 3. Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning.

[21 : 35] Don't think of yourselves. Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us.

That's a great reminder. Be honest in how you look at yourself when someone else has wronged you. Remember that you've wronged others. You've been forgiven much and so you must then forgive much.

Go down to verse 9. Go down to verse 9. Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good.

Love each other with genuine affection and take delight in honoring each other. We would say we love each other as members of the body of Christ in Henrietta, Texas.

We would say we love each other. But so often we don't show that genuine affection and love. That comes from the Holy Spirit of God. And He's not transforming us.

[22 : 37] Changing the way we think like He wants to because we're throwing up those walls. Down to verse 14. Bless those who persecute you.

Recognize this from the sermon from the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus talked about this. Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them. Pray that God will bless them.

Verse 15. I'm sorry, verse 17. Never pay back evil with more evil. Now we're getting really down to it here with the forgiveness theme.

Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the scriptures say, I will take revenge.

[23 : 38] I will pay them back says the Lord. Yeah, but God, you haven't done it according to my timeline. You haven't done it fast enough. They're not suffering. They're loving their life. They don't feel one bit sorry for what they did.

Leave that to God. Leave that to God. Don't let them eat you up inside any more than they already have. Don't let them ruin your life any more than they already have.

Leave that to God. He said, I will pay them back. Instead, verse 20. Boy, this is a mind shift. Such a mind shift.

If your enemies are hungry, feed them. Anybody want to invite your worst enemy over for dinner tonight? Me neither. I got them.

I don't want to invite them up here. I just gave you a clue. Instead, if your enemies are hungry, feed them.

[24 : 38] If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads. Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

You realize that it's not about you. It's not about me. It's not about us. It's about the greater work of the kingdom of God. And sometimes, evil will come against us.

But the victory is not in winning against that person. The victory is God's work going on anyway.

The victory is God's love outshining that dark anyway. The victory comes when God still continues to see your heart chasing after Him and saying, yes, I was wrong.

Yes, I was mad in that moment. Yes, I hated it and I struggled not to hate that person. But I understand that though my flesh is weak, I want the Spirit within me to truly make me different than Joe Blow next door.

[25 : 51] And I want the love of God to shine through forgiveness to this person in this situation. I'm still working on this, y'all. There's people that I still struggle to forgive in my life.

But God can. He is strong enough. He can help us through that struggle and we can reach a place of forgiveness. Corrie Ten Boom, a woman who was persecuted because she was a Jew, suffered things that you and I probably never will.

She said a profound quote on forgiveness. Forgiveness is an act of the will and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. Our heart is weak.

Our heart is deceitful. It will deceive us. It will lead us astray. But when we make God's will our will, we can be strong enough to overcome the temperature of our heart which might be ice cold toward that person.

And instead, we can feed them. We can give them something to drink. We can show love to them which will absolutely confound them, confuse them. Like, what? Why are you being this way to me?

[27 : 07] By the power of God. C.S. Lewis, this is his last quote on forgiveness that we're going to share today. Getting over a painful experience is much like crossing monkey bars.

Kids in the room just perked up. Monkey bars? I like monkey bars. Some of y'all got to think back a little bit to the last time you did monkey bars. We're able to do monkey bars without just immediately dropping off.

You have to let go at some point in order to move forward. Isn't that true? Remember when you're teaching your kids monkey bars for the first time or when you were a kid and doing monkey bars for the first time and you just kind of freeze?

It's like, man, I know, I know I got to let go but I feel like if I let go I'm going to fall. At some point you've got to let go to move forward. So here's the application.

Are my prayers being limited because I'm not letting go and letting God change me? I can't move forward because I'm not letting go.

[28 : 12] What they did was too hurtful. I'm still suffering for what somebody did to me. and you're going to continue to suffer.

We are going to continue to suffer until we let go and let God change us. He can do it but he's got to change the way we think. He's got to change us from the inside and let his will be stronger than ours.

Would you pray with me in this moment? God, whatever is going on, whatever bitterness, whatever anger, whatever resentment is being held tightly in hearts in this room this morning.

I don't believe it's any accident that you laid it on my heart to preach through the Lord's Prayer and lead our church into a season of prayer and I'm confident that there is forgiveness that needs to happen in this room.

For the next few minutes we're not going to stand. Sometimes we stand and sing. We're going to keep our seat this morning. For the next few minutes would you work on hearts just to keep their heads bowed, keep their eyes closed to shut out distraction and just focus on what you would have them to do in forgiving.

[29 : 31] I'm going to do the same thing, Lord. Start with me. Go throughout my family, throughout the other families in this church, the individuals in this church and let this community be impacted by a forgiving body of believers at First Baptist.

Maybe there's phone calls that need to be made after this service. Maybe there's conversations face to face that need to happen. But God, I pray that you would go ahead and work in us, Lord.

The music plays. We're going to sing one verse of a song and then just have some quiet prayer. And we'll be out of here in a couple minutes and we'll go to lunch.

But I pray that God's Spirit would lead us to forgiveness. Maybe there's somebody in this room that needs to be forgiven of their sin. We talked about Jesus dying on the cross.

Easter's coming up. We're going to celebrate him rising from the dead and we know that he's alive today and hears us when we pray. But while our heads are bowed, would you be bold enough to slip your hand up and say, I need Jesus to forgive me of all my sin.

[30 : 42] I need to become his child today. Thank you. Anybody else? You can put your hand down. Thank you. If that's you, while everybody's seated and praying, I'd love for you to slip out the back doors and I'll be in the back to talk to you just for a moment about how you can know that you're forgiven and that God is your Father.

For the rest of us, would you continue on in prayer? Brother Greg's going to lead us in a verse of a song. You can sing along softly while in your seat if you'd like to. But right now, let God have his way in your heart.