

Session 5 A Conversation about Forgiveness and Generosity (Chapter 7 in *The Only Prayer You'll Ever Need*)

"And Forgive Us Our Debts as We Forgive Our Debtors"

This petition connects with the previous petition for our life with the word "and," perhaps reminding us that life is about more than bread. This petition is the first of three assignments given to us that make life more impactful, meaningful and joyful. While each of the three petitions asks God for something, these requests of God also suggest assignments for us. They suggest that life is not a meant either to be a passive expression of piety or a solitary endeavor. The first assignment is *forgiveness and generosity*.

We had moved our furniture from the house we sold in Austin into a small apartment. Our plan was to save storage costs and still have a small place to stay when we were in town. Our belongings almost filled the whole apartment, leaving a bedroom and the kitchen open for us to live. We were about to move to Virginia where we had been invited to live on the beautiful farm of friends.

The plan was to stay in the apartment for a week before leaving for the farm. Then I got a call from my wife, Wesla. One of her best students had come up to her after class to tell her she had to drop out of college. While she was at work, her abusive husband had taken all of her possessions and burned them in their driveway. She lost all of her clothes, textbooks and notes for class. The student had moved out of her home and was in a shelter with her baby. Wesla offered her our apartment and bought her new textbooks so she could stay in school.

I wasn't happy about the change of plans. She didn't even ask me first. One day, sometime later on the farm, I looked out over the Blue Ridge mountains and a Bible story flooded my thoughts. It was the story of the unforgiving steward, who had been forgiven much and did not forgive (Matt 18). I knew it was me and it was about the apartment. I had received the gift of this incredible place to live and I had begrudged giving up a tiny apartment I didn't really need. I prayed for God's forgiveness and to become a better person. Months later, when the young mother moved out of the apartment, she left a beautiful letter for us about how the gift of a place for her to live had saved her life. We have more power than we know to be a blessing in the lives of others. God's forgiveness can free us to live to higher aspirations and calls us to live from them. It is a grace intended to make us more gracious.

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Open the time with prayer, inviting God to be present, and then praying the words of the Lord's prayer through the fifth petition, concluding with the words "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."

Opening questions

Did you grow up saying "trespasses", "debts", or "sins"? How did you understand those words?

How important is it in life to have a path to forgiveness? What difference does it make?

Why do you think people who have more are often less generous than those with less? What makes us generous?

Our experience

What makes forgiveness difficult for us to receive and to give?

Where have you experienced forgiveness in your life? Was it difficult for you to accept it?

How have you experienced generosity in your life? How did it impact you?

The prayer

How is accepting God's forgiveness freeing and a laying down of burdens?

How is Jesus' teaching about forgiveness different from common understandings?

Why do you suppose Jesus never spoke of "forgiving yourself?"

How does this prayer relate to Jesus' command to "love our enemies?"

How are forgiveness and generosity related? How are they distinct?

Where do you feel especially challenged by this petition of the prayer?

Our aspirations

How do expressions like "it is easier to get forgiveness than permission?" or "love your enemies because nothing could annoy them more," miss the mark?

How might we accept God's forgiveness more deeply into our lives?

Is there someone in your life whom you need to forgive or whose forgiveness you need to seek?

What difference would it make in your life if you were a more forgiving person?

What power and possibilities do forgiveness and generosity create for life and relationships?

Is there a person who models for you what it means to be a forgiving person? A generous person?

Can the practices of forgiveness and generosity change you? Change the world? Become a reason for hope?

Close with prayer for deeper acceptance of forgiveness already given, for forgiveness and generosity to fill our life and for each other.

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30)

"Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2)