

A Sermon Series on the Lord's Prayer
Part Eight: *“forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us”*
Matthew 6:9-15; Luke 11:4a
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Matthew 6:9-15 (NRSV)

⁹ *“Pray then in this way:*

*Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.*

¹⁰ *Your kingdom come.*

*Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.*

¹¹ *Give us this day our daily bread.*

¹² *And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

¹³ *And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.*

¹⁴ *For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

Luke 11:4 (NRSV):

And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

Did you grow up saying “forgive us our debts”? or “forgive us our trespasses” or “forgive us our sins”?

John Dominic Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer: Rediscovering the Revolutionary Message of ‘The Lord’s Prayer’* (NY: HarperCollins, 2010).

MARK: earliest Gospel, Lord’s Prayer is found in a nutshell version. Jesus, facing his arrest, trial, and crucifixion, in the Garden of Gethsemane, *“fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him.”⁶ ‘Abba, Father,’ he said, ‘everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.’* (Mark 14: 35-36). A little later on, Jesus says: *“Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses”* (Mk 11:25).

Trespasses, used by the Episcopalians / Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists; Book of Common Prayer. Paul Meier defines trespasses as: *“an action where you’re violating the rights, privileges, property, personal space, or dignity of another person. Another way to put it, you’re getting into their bubble—the personal boundaries they’ve established that protect them from possible harm, whether the harm is*

real or imagined.” (*The Lord’s Prayer: Finding New Meaning Within the Language Jesus Spoke* [Benton: Malcolm Creek, 2015], p. 52.)

MATTHEW: drew on Mark. “*And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors*” (Mt. 6:12). **Debts** used by Dutch Reformed, Presbyterians, some Disciples of Christ. Influenced by catechisms of the Westminster assembly. Word “debts” have monetary, material connotations based in the real world of work and commerce, going back to ancient Jewish times. Jewish people concerned about three interrelated issues: debt, slavery, and slavery for debt. Loans were given out with interest and secured with pledges. If someone could not pay they might not only lose their land but be sold into “debt slavery.” Nehemiah established laws preventing both interest and pledges, although one could still lose land and be taken into debt slavery by defaulting on a loan. However, because of Jewish “Jubilee” laws after seven years both debts were forgiven and those in debt slavery were released. Crossan believes that, when we understand this petition in the Lord’s Prayer within the biblical matrix of Jesus’ Jewish followers, we should take the phrase “forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” literally at face value. How does this apply to our contemporary world? Is excessive debt not a kind of slavery?

See “The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant” (Matt 18:23-35).

But what debts does God forgive us of?

Matthew goes on to use words trespasses and sins, in addition to debts. After Jesus has taught them the Lord’s prayer in its entirety, he says this: ¹⁴ *For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you;* ¹⁵ *but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.* (Mt 6:14-15). A little later in Matthew’s Gospel, his follower Peter comes to Jesus with this question: “*Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?*” ²² *Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times”*” (Mt 18:21-22). Matthew moves from debts, to trespasses, ultimately to sins.

LUKE: “*And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us*” (Lk 11:4). What is sin? When we go back to the original Aramaic word **khtahayn** we see that “sin” is best understood as mistakes, failures, shortcomings, accidental offenses, frustrated hopes, or tangled threads. (Neil Douglas-Klotz, *Prayers of the Cosmos*, p. 31.)

How can we forgive? Wuellner explains: “*Ultimately forgiveness is not our power at all but God’s power flowing toward us, in us, through us, like a mighty river. When we start the journey of forgiveness, we enter that great current. ... How is forgiveness possible? Forgiveness exists already—now and eternally. We do not create it; we enter it.*” (Flora Slosson Wuellner, *Forgiveness, the Passionate Journey*, p. 22.)

Closing Prayer: Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your name. Amen. (*Book of Common Prayer*)