

## The Prayer of Release

Sterling UMC  
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Matthew 6:9-13

Someone sent me an email recently that had a long list of humorous things that children say. One of those funny sayings had to do with the Lord's Prayer of all things. One particular four-year-old was in church one Sunday as the congregation joined together in the Lord's Prayer. The little lad began to say the prayer in his young voice. As they got near the middle of the prayer his mother heard him say,

"And forgive us our trash baskets,  
as we forgive those who put trash in our baskets."

Well he may not have gotten it exactly right, but there was some profound wisdom in his four-year-old understanding of what was said.

How often do we allow the offenses that occur in our lives to collect like trash in a basket? What happens when we do not take out the trash? It begins to rot and smell and cause lots of unpleasant problems.

Well two of the most damaging things that we often allow to collect in the trash baskets of our lives, the two greatest barriers that keep us from experiencing genuine peace of mind are guilt and resentment. I call them the misery twins. Guilt and resentment do more messing up in your life than anything else. Here's how they work. When you hurt God or other people then you feel guilty. And when other people hurt you then you feel resentful. Jesus must have known that because in this the fourth phrase in the prayer that He taught us to pray He deals with both of these issues in a very powerful way.

Jesus says pray like this, "Our Father in heaven hallowed be thy name. Your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread." And then we get to this fourth section of the Lord's Prayer. "And forgive us our debts as we have also forgiven our debtors." This is the Prayer of Release. And in this prayer of Release Jesus deals head on with the guilt and resentment that we seem to so easily collect.

What does it mean to sincerely pray this Prayer of release?

Well first it means that we first have to confront head on this issue of guilt. Millions of people are tortured by guilt. They are stuck in the past. They are a slave to regrets, a slave to shame, a slave to things they can't get out of their mind. They don't know how to get out of the past so they can get on with their life in the present and get into the future. You cannot have peace of mind and guilt at the same time.

And the problem is guilt is an incredibly destructive emotion. It is probably the number one cause of low self-esteem. It is probably the number one cause of depression. And

it's probably the number one cause of anxiety. When you are filled with guilt and you're trying to keep something a secret in your life that you're ashamed of it curses all kinds of emotional difficulties in your life.

Most of all though guilt is a warning light. It is a warning light that says something is wrong in my life and I need to get it corrected. In order to find peace you have got to get rid of that guilt. You have got to release it. But it's not so easy is it? Sometimes no matter how hard you try it keeps popping back up. That's what happens with guilt. You can't keep it down in your life, no matter how you try to rationalize it, justify it, blame somebody else, make excuses, push it down, forget it, or escape it. None of these things work. None of these will help you to get rid of guilt in your life.

Fortunately you don't have to live with it. Fortunately nobody in this room – I don't care what you've done –there's not a single person who needs to walk out of here on a guilt trip. There's not a single person who needs to walk out of here without a clear conscious.

Why because there is one and only one antidote to guilt and it's in the first part of this Prayer of release. Matthew 6:12, *"This is how you should pray: forgive us our debts."* There's only one antidote to guilt and it is forgiveness.

When you pray this prayer of release and pray it faith and sincerity God forgives us, he removes the trash from our lives, he releases us from the prison of our guilt.

Let me share with you four facts about the way God forgives: When I pray this prayer...

1. God forgives me instantly.

He forgives me instantly. The moment that I ask. There is no hesitation. There is no delay. God forgives instantly. The Bible tells us in Isaiah 55:7 *"Let the wicked leave their way of life and change their way of thinking. Let them turn to the Lord our God. He is merciful and quick to forgive."* He is quick to forgive. The moment you ask, without delay, God forgives.

We have a hard time understanding this. As human beings this is the exact opposite of how we often forgive. We're often slow to forgive. We like to hold it over people's heads a little bit. We have to think about it a little bit. We wait a little bit to forgive because the truth is we want them to suffer a little bit first before we forgive them. We want them to beg a little bit. We want them to grovel. We want to rub it in just little bit before we forgive them. We don't want to let them off that easy.

But God is always quick to forgive. The moment you and I go to Him, He forgives us that instant. He never holds it over our head. He never makes us wait. 1 John 1:9, *"If we confess our sins to God He will keep His promise and do what is right. He will forgive our sins and make us clean from all our wrongdoing."*

There's second truth about how God forgives us. God forgives me, not only instantly...

## 2. He forgives me repeatedly.

A quick survey. How many of you have committed the same sin more than once? We all have these areas of perpetual failure in our lives where we keep struggling. We're caught in this cycle of defeat. We keep stumbling. The good news is God forgives repeatedly.

The Bible tells us in Nehemiah 9:17 *"You are a God of forgiveness, always ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, full of love."* Did you hear that? "Always ready." Not just the first time you struggle with sin and commit a sin, but always ready to forgive. In fact, God is more eager to forgive you than you or I are to ask Him for forgiveness. That's the kind of God that He is. There is no limit to His forgiveness.

The third way that God forgives when you come to confess your sin to Him is...

## 3. He forgives freely.

You say, "Free? That's too good to be true! There's got to be some catch to it. A price tag for it. It doesn't seem fair to go scott free. I blow it and God just forgives me freely? He just lets me go scott free? Somebody needs to pay for this."

You're right. Somebody did. His name is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has already paid for all your sins. Romans 3:23-24, *"All of us have sinned yet God declares us not guilty of offending Him if we trust in Jesus Christ who freely takes away our sin."*

Free means free. That means you can't buy your forgiveness. You can't pay God off through church attendance or tithing or doing good things. It's free.

It means you don't get it from bargaining with God. You can't say, "If You'll forgive me I'll never do it again." It's free.

You get by trying to bribe God. "God if You'll forgive me, I'll serve in junior high ministry. I'll give twenty percent tithes." It's free.

## 4. He forgives completely.

Colossians 2 says this, *"He has forgiven all your sins. He has utterly wiped out the evidence of the broken commandments which always hung over our heads. And He has completely annulled it by nailing it to the cross."* Did you hear those words? "All", "utterly wiped out", and "completely annulled." It's all gone. Nothing is hung over your head so you don't have to keep carrying it. It's not partial forgiveness. No, it's complete forgiveness. Utterly wiped out and completely annulled. That means Jesus was nailed to the cross so you could stop nailing yourself to the cross. It was all taken, all of the punishment was taken for your sin by Jesus Christ.

Wouldn't you like to let go of, to release that load of guilt, that trash that has been collecting in the basket of your life? You can do it today. How? The Bible says you just *believe*. That's how you get forgiveness, by believing. Ephesians 2 says this, "*For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith it is not your own doing but it's God's gift. There's nothing to boast of since it's not the result of your own effort. It's just God's grace.*"

It's that simple. As simple as A, B, C. If you want to have every sin forgiven in your life:

A – Admit. I admit my sin. I quit trying to make excuses, blame other people, etc. etc. I just admit it.

B – Believe. I believe that God wants to forgive me. That He wants to forgive me freely, instantly, repeatedly, and completely. I believe in His grace. I believe that Jesus Christ died for my sins so that I wouldn't have to pay for them. I believe that.

C – Commit. I commit my life to God. I release my sins to Him. I give myself completely to Jesus Christ and say, "God, You take charge. You be number one. You call the shots." And I commit it to Him and seek to live according to His will.

What happens if I do that? You'll receive forgiveness.

I don't know what guilt you're carrying but I do know this. It's stupid to keep carrying it. It's foolish. It's dumb. There is no reason for you to keep carrying guilt in your life when God has offered forgiveness through His Son. Free, total forgiveness. God is waiting to forgive you no matter what you've done in your life.

But that brings us to the second part of this Prayer of Release.

Guilt comes from what we do to God and to other people. Resentment comes from what other people do to us. The only antidote to guilt is really to receive the forgiveness of God. In the same way the only antidote to resentment is to offer the forgiveness of God to other people.

Jesus said we should pray, "*Forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors.*" There is one little word in this prayer that we need to really pay attention to. It's a small word but a scary one! The word is, "as." "Forgive us our debts, *as* we also have forgiven our debtors." Jesus is saying we are to forgive others just like we have been forgiven.

It's a very important part of the prayer because the fact of life is you're going to be hurt. In life you're going to be hurt many times. Sometimes intentionally. Sometimes unintentionally. It really doesn't matter the source. But much more important than your hurt is how you choose to respond to it. If you don't respond to it in the right way you will never have inner peace or peace of mind. The only way you can get inner peace when you've been hurt is to release it, let it go, to forgive.

And that's the hard part, because so often we don't want to let go. "They hurt me. They hurt me bad. I don't want to let it go. I don't want to forget it. I want to hold on to that hurt and I want to hold on to my anger and resentment against them."

You've got to let it go. You've got to release it. And you need to do it for three reasons.

1. Because God has forgiven me.

Here's the clincher. God expects you to do to others what He has done to you. If you want to be forgiven by God, God expects you to forgive other people. He says, "I want you to pass it on."

So if you're ever going to let it go and get on with your life, the people who've hurt you you've got to realize first that God has forgiven you. And the first key to understanding forgiveness of others is to remember how much you've been forgiven. No condemnation. It's all been wiped out. God is not mad at you. He's wiped out all your sin as you've put your trust in Christ. You will never have to forgive anybody else more than God has already forgiven you.

*"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ, God forgave you."* That's the first reason you've got to let it go.

2. Resentment makes me miserable.

Resentment always hurts you more than it does the other person. It makes you the victim. Some of you have been hurt by people in the past and you're continuing to allow people from your past to hurt you in the present. That's dumb. They can only hurt you if you choose to continue to hold on to the hurt with resentment. That's your choice. You can let it go. Forgiveness is not a feeling. Forgiveness is a choice. You just say, I'm going to release it. I'm going to let it go. For your own sake. For your own good. Not because they deserve it but because resentment makes you miserable.

Holding on to resentment is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die. Nothing tortures your life more than resentment. Nothing will mess up your life more than a grudge. Resentment. Bitterness. It is a poison that will eat you alive. Resentment robs you of peace. Resentment robs you of joy. It robs you of happiness. It messes you up physically, spiritually, emotionally.

So the question is, what memory is torturing you? What are you holding on to that's torturing you?

I don't know what you've gone through but you've got to let it go. Because God has forgiven you and because resentment doesn't work. It only makes you miserable. It only prolongs the pain. But there's a third reason why you've got to let it go.

3. I'm going to need forgiveness again.

I will need forgiveness in the future. I'm going to need it today, tomorrow and the day after that. In Matthew 18 Jesus tells the parable of the unforgiving servant. You know the story...

At the end of the parable Jesus says this in Matthew 18:35 *"This is how My heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."* We cannot receive what we're unwilling to give. If you want forgiveness you've got to offer forgiveness. That's the equation. This is the prayer of release. *"Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us."*

Do you realize what you're praying when you pray the Lord's Prayer? "God, I want you to forgive me as much as I forgive everybody else." Do we really want to pray that prayer?

One day a guy came to John Wesley and said, "I can never forgive that man!" Wesley said, "Then I hope you never sin." Forgiveness is a two way street. Don't burn the bridge you need to get to heaven. Forgiveness is a two way street. Don't burn that bridge.

Matthew 5:7 Jesus said, *"Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy."* Do you want mercy in your life? You've got to show it. What you give out you will get back. It is a reciprocal process. Forgiveness is a lifestyle. It must be continual and it must be constant. You get to enjoy it but you also must employ it. You must ask forgiveness, you must offer forgiveness and you must accept forgiveness. We accept it and we offer it. It is what being a Christian is all about.

Friends, today is the day to take out the trash. Today is the day to stop allowing all of the garbage of sin to continue to poison your life. *"Lord, Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."* Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us. That is the path to peace. That is the Prayer of Release.