

Why unforgiveness can hinder prayer.

by Larry Smith — Pray Big Ministries — 06/18/03

This lesson can help set people free by working through forgiveness. Unforgiveness is such a great stumbling block to answered prayer that it must be addressed. Our prayers to God are hindered if we harbor unconfessed sin in our hearts.

Isaiah 59:2 But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that He will not hear.

Psalms 32:5 I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.

When praying deliverance prayers and prayers of healing for others I have seen many people set free when they understand unforgiveness and the way it hurts them. Then in obedience to God's Word, they are able to forgive those who have wronged them. We work through forgiveness first opening the door for healing.

Proverbs 17:22 A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

Proverbs 18:14 A man's spirit sustains him in sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear?

I struggle everyday with forgiveness.

I heard a noted Bible teacher say that she "selfishly" forgave others quickly because she did not want to suffer. Unforgiveness can hurt you. Unforgiveness may be the greatest struggle in our churches today. Interesting.

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray in Matthew 6 — He included the little section about "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." Oh? Does that mean I will be forgiven like I forgive others? I guess just about everybody wants to be forgiven (God tells us we're all sinners)— it just gets sticky when we are asked to forgive others. Scoundrels who have wronged us, or offended us, or worse yet — hurt us — physically and/or emotionally. Strangers, enemies, friends, best friends, brothers, sisters, parents. Surely God does not expect us to forgive these people if they have hurt us.. But He does.

And as if Jesus knew the disciples very thoughts, immediately after He taught them the Lord's prayer, Jesus goes on to tell us even more about forgiveness. He clarifies what He had already told us. He tells us quite bluntly that God will forgive us if we forgive others who have trespassed against us, and God will not forgive us if we do not forgive others. I guess that clears that forgiveness thing up.

Matthew 6:9-15 ⁶ After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. ¹⁰ Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread. ¹² And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. ¹⁴ For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: ¹⁵ But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

In Matthew 18, Peter asks Jesus to how many times we are to forgive someone. Peter says “seven?” Jesus says “seventy times seven.” I don’t think Jesus was thinking 490.

Jesus then tells Peter a story about forgiveness — the story of two servants. One who was forgiven much but who refused to forgive his servant who owed him a little. Basically, the parable says if we don’t forgive others and have compassion on them, we are going to be thrown into prison and then turned over to the “tormentors.” Yikes!

Matthew 18:21-35 ²¹ Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? ²² Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. ²³ Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. ²⁴ And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵ But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶ The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. ²⁷ Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. ²⁹ And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. ³⁰ And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. ³¹ So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. ³² Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: ³³ Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? ³⁴ And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. ³⁵ So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

In Luke 6:35-37, Jesus tells us to love our enemies. This is a way to nip that ‘struggle with forgiveness’ in the bud. We are called to be merciful like God. To have compassion. Not to judge. Not to condemn — so we won’t be condemned. To forgive, so we will be forgiven.

Luke 6:35-37 ³⁵ But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. ³⁶ Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. ³⁷ Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:

Jesus Christ’s sermon of forgiveness on the cross.

Christ’s last recorded sermon before His death on the cross was on forgiveness. Jesus asked God to forgive those who were crucifying Him.

Luke 23:33,34 ³³ And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. ³⁴ Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.

Jesus forgives us.

In John 8, when Jesus was asked what to do with the woman who was caught in the act of adultery, he said “those who are without sin cast the first stone.” I believe this was a teaching on forgiveness. Jesus told the woman that He did not condemn her and that she should go and sin no more.

John 8:1-11 ¹ Jesus went unto the mount of Olives. ² And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came

unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. ³ And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, ⁴ They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. ⁵ Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? ⁶ This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. ⁷ So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. ⁸ And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. ⁹ And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. ¹⁰ When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? ¹¹ She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.

In Colossians we read that we are to forbear one another. (Like Jesus did with us.)

Colossians 3:12,13 ¹² Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; ¹³ Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye sires.

God forgives us.

God forgave us for crucifying His Son. God forgives us when we confess our sins. If we are to be Christ-like, we are called to forgive.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

In Acts we see that bitterness (unforgiveness' first cousin) can make us captive to sin.

Acts 8:23 For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

In Ephesians we are told to get rid of bitterness.

Ephesians 4:31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

In 2 Corinthians 2:10,11 we read how Satan can use unforgiveness to scheme and outwit us.

2 Corinthians 2:10,11 ¹¹ If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven --if there was anything to forgive --I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, ¹¹ in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

James says that bitter envy and selfish ambition are earthly, sensual and demonic.

James 3:14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.

Revelation 8:11 the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter.

Hebrew 12:15 See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

Isaiah 59:1-2: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not so short that it cannot save; neither is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear."

Anger is the opposite of forgiveness.

In Ephesians we are told not to stay angry, least we give Satan a foothold.

Ephesians 4:26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold.

In Matthew 5:22-24. If we are offering a gift at church and we are angry with a brother, we are told we should get up and go make it right with him.

Matthew 5:22-24 ²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, "Raca, ' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, "You fool!" will be in danger of the fire of hell. ²³ "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

Which list are you on?

Galatians 5:19-23 ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, ²⁰ Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, ²¹ Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, ²³ Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

A prayer for the ability to forgive others.

Father I am struggling with forgiveness. Please come and give me the ability to forgive those who have harmed me. I am willing to be willing to forgive. But I need Your help.

Father I know You have commanded me to forgive. I need You to give me the strength to forgive. I am willing Father. Lead me. Show me. Thank You Jesus for dying on the cross for my sins. Thank you for forgiving me of my sins.

Father I forgive _____ for all that _____ did to me. Father I ask that You to bless _____. Do not let me be captive to unforgiveness, bitterness, anger or hate. Fill me with Your love for everyman.

In Jesus' name I pray.

Thank you Father.