

**“Forgive us as we forgive... forth petition.”**

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Let's face it, we all need God's mercy. But over and over again God's Word makes it clear that the biggest block to his mercy is resentment. Anger and resentment, treasured and kept in our hearts, are poisons that lead to spiritual death.

Jesus considers this point important enough to include a reminder in the main prayer that he teaches his disciples. And to emphasize the point, he tells them the parable of the ruthless servant, which they will later have the opportunity to reflect on.

First of all, it must be said that forgiveness is a decision and not a feeling. I think it is unlikely that our Lord Jesus Christ, in his sacred but human heart, cared for those who mocked him as his blood was shed on the cross. However, he expressed the decision he had made when he prayed: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 20).

In other words, there was no desire for revenge, no retaliation to cause pain, suffering, and destroy those who delighted in harming him. Rather, Jesus prayed to the Father for their good, even as they caused him harm.

The fourth movement of the Our Father leads us to confession and forgiveness. Different traditions use different words here—transgressions, debts, sins—but no matter how we say it, we are telling God that we have done something wrong and that we need forgiveness. We also recognize that we are a people called and empowered to forgive others. We must receive and offer forgiveness.

All people have sinned against God (Romans 3:23). If we believe that we have not sinned, then we are only fooling ourselves. Have you ever lied? Did you lose your temper? Insulted someone? These are things we've all done. We cannot escape the fact that we don't always

do and say the right things. By confessing our sins to God, we acknowledge this truth with the confidence of one who has the assurance of God's forgiveness.

Jesus regularly called people to repent, which means to turn away from sin. This is what we do when we ask for forgiveness for our sins; we turn away from the ways we have wronged God, people, and the world, and align ourselves with the way of Christ. We admit that we have made mistakes and strive to live according to God's commands.

We must pay special attention to the use of "we" in this petition. As we consider our personal and individual sins and ask for forgiveness, we are also asking God to forgive all of humanity. We ask God to forgive us for our social and communal sins and for the way we are implicated and influenced by those corporate or systemic sins. We also ask God to forgive others for their sins. We do not ask for forgiveness just for ourselves, but we ask God to forgive humanity collectively.

As we ask God to forgive "us," collectively asking for the forgiveness of all people's sin, we confess that we are called to also forgive those who sin against us. As Christians, we regularly sin against God, and we sin against other people as well. In Matthew 22:37-39 Jesus tells us that the greatest commandment is to love God, and "the second is similar: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" In this verse, we are called to a life of love and forgiveness. Just as God has forgiven us, we must forgive others (Colossians 3:13).

Each of us can think of a time when someone did us wrong. We can all remember a really hurtful act that another person carried out against us. Can we really be expected to forgive those who have offended, slandered, and even hurt us or our loved ones? The answer is yes.

Because that's how God loves us; God does not give us what we deserve based on our actions, but he forgives us out of an abundance of grace: God's unmerited favor. As followers of Christ, we pray this prayer as a reminder and a call to action: Lord, help us to forgive those who have sinned against us.