

Forgive All Offenses

The Power of the Forgotten Line

By Jody Mayhew

Our first session began with worship, each woman responding as the Lord led. I waited expectantly for a prayer of thanksgiving; a song of humble surrender or grateful, exuberant praise.

Silence. Nothing happened.

Forty women gathered for a prayer summit—a four-day worship and prayer experience—just sat there. I have facilitated hundreds of prayer summits across the world in the last 22 years, but none quite like that gathering in the Pacific Northwest in the fall of 2019.

We responded to an invitation to worship a holy God . . . with nothing. It was a silence we all felt. Not a holy and reverent silence, but troubled. It persisted until we closed the evening session.

As I engaged the Lord in prayer the next morning, with my own Moses moment (“If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here,” Ex. 33:15), I heard two sentences from the Lord:

- The whole world is offended right now.
- Offense interrupts worship.

He had my attention. We had deliberately stopped the prior evening, and the Spirit was engaging us with a matter of great importance in the Body of Christ.

The Issue of Offense

The core issue is right there in The Lord's Prayer—the training manual for the people of God. In the middle of this prayer are words that can unlock prison doors and set captives free. It's often the forgotten line of the most powerful prayer:

"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt. 6:12).

This is not a command with a threat, but an invitation with a promise—an opportunity.

When we gathered after breakfast, I shared what I heard about the importance of dealing with offense. I then sent the women out for a time alone. I gave them Matthew 18 as their Scripture meditation and released them with two questions to ask the Lord: *Am I offended with anyone? Do I find anyone to be offensive?*

We were to ask and listen for whomever He might bring to our minds. Then, without defending ourselves, we were to agree with what God said.

When we came back together, we came as debtors, all 40 of us. We spent the rest of the morning confessing and repenting.

Expose Our Hearts

Until we asked for the Spirit to expose our hearts, we were unaware of the obstruction we faced when we attempted to worship. We needed to, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it" (Prov. 4:23).

Our offenses are like a beaver dam that grows one stick (offense) at a time, until the flow of water is reduced to a trickle. As we endeavor to remove our offenses by seeking forgiveness for our debts as we forgive our debtors, we will

breech the barriers to the flow of life in the church.

I believe the Lord always prepares us in one season for the season to come. The hostility over recent elections revealed the extent to which our hearts had become divided. It was the precursor to the contentious season of COVID that was to follow.

The prayer summit, taking place just prior to the pandemic, was our opportunity to re-order our hearts and allow the cleansing work of forgiveness to begin before we were battered by the storms of the next two years. In the final session of the summit, we challenged ourselves to an “offense-free” year.

Image Bearers

As God’s creation, we are to bear His image and likeness. We reflect His nature as Spirit and Love. But all that changed at the fall of man in Genesis. Separated from our Creator because of sin, humanity owed a debt it could not pay and lost the ability to reflect His nature in the world.

But in Christ, the debt of sin is paid. We regain the ability to reflect His character. The question is, *will we?* We have received His forgiveness and mercy. Will we display the mercy extended to us, in our relationship with others—and forgive as we have been forgiven (Matt. 18:21-35)?

In The Lord’s Prayer, there is some disagreement about what is being forgiven. Sins? Debts? Or is it trespasses? If we use the term “debt,” we understand our sins of omission. If we use the term “trespass,” we see where a violation of relationship has occurred. Most translations use the term “debt.” Matthew 18 helps us draw that conclusion.

In the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matt. 18:23-35), Jesus teaches about unforgiveness by comparing it to an unpaid loan. The story captures the state of our hearts when, having

received mercy for our debt of sin, we turn to our own debtors with hard hearts. We instead stand as accusers. Like the servant in the story, when we fail to give what we have received (namely forgiveness), we surrender ourselves to the influence of the one who has come to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10).

Understood in this way, forgiveness is a vital practice in the church. More than that, it is essential for life in the Spirit.

The New Testament often uses the human body as a metaphor for the people of God. Have you noticed, as you consider the various systems of the body, that each has a cleansing element? If we suffer kidney failure, our body is not able to cleanse itself. Without treatment, sepsis is inevitable. The same is true if our immune system is compromised.

It is similar among the community of believers. Giving and receiving forgiveness helps cleanse the body. This is especially important if we have been hurt.

If we are injured, we know we need to cleanse the wound so infection won't set in. When we apply antiseptic and cover the area, we expect it to heal. If left exposed, there is danger of infection.

Bearing offenses is like that. Sometimes our hearts are damaged through betrayal, rejection, and abandonment. Left unattended, the injury will, over time, begin to deform us in the ongoing grip of the offense. It is no longer just a wound. It has become part of us as we try to compensate for the pain. We develop a spiritual "limp."

Unforgiveness can limit the mobility of individuals and whole churches.

Steps to Forgiveness

Grace is the applied work of the cross of Jesus in our lives. Forgiveness reflects this when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit as He heals our souls. This means that forgiveness is not a mechanism in the church and not a checklist—it is a continual rhythm of asking for and granting forgiveness.

Take a few moments to consider the state of your relationships, and even your attitude toward what is playing out on the world stage. Here are five keys that will help unlock forgiveness.

First, ask:

Conviction: Allow the Holy Spirit to bring thorough conviction concerning the state of your heart regarding any sin and how it has affected those around you. The Holy Spirit is given to us to convict concerning sin and can indicate what needs to be confessed.

Confession: Confession means that we come into agreement with God. We admit our sin and the way our sin has affected others. Confession of our sin to God brings about forgiveness. James 5:16 says that when we confess our sins to another, we can pray for healing.

Contrition: Take a position of humility before God and the one whom you have offended. You are asking for mercy to be extended to you.

Receive: Forgiveness is a gift. It is not something that can be worked for or earned. We must receive it as a grace bestowed and a response of love.

Repent: Repentance begins when we turn from our wrong actions to a Savior who will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

Then, grant:

Take a full account of the pain and loss incurred through the sin of another.

Invite the God of all comfort to address the state of your heart—the thoughts and feelings you are experiencing. Too often we jump to the “have to” forgive and try to accomplish it in our own strength. In 1 John 4:19, we acknowledge, “We love because he first loved us.” We extend love, having first received it. This is a critical step to walking in forgiveness.

Acknowledge that the one who sinned cannot remove the offense and you cannot erase the event. But *you can* forgive the offense.

When you choose to grant mercy, you reflect the nature of the Father toward you—displaying compassion and love, not estrangement and withdrawal.

Full forgiveness means we no longer hold others responsible for this sin and give up our “right” to future offense. Be prepared to ask God repeatedly to forgive an offense no matter how many times it comes to mind.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are different matters. Forgiveness is a spiritual transaction that can be completed between you and the Lord. Reconciliation is accomplished when both parties can approach one another with cleansed hearts. There are times when reconciliation is not feasible. It is not possible to reconcile with another’s sin or judgment.

As forgiven people, Christian community is not about our perfection, but our common commitment to Christ. When there is conflict among brothers, Jesus holds the one who is sinned against just as responsible to take action toward restoration as the offender. This is in stark contrast to retaliation, which is a deliberate action fueled by a defensive attitude.

Releasing Power

The Lord's Prayer declares, "Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

So, how is His will done in heaven? The triune God—Father, Son, and Spirit—operates in a Holy Oneness that accomplishes His will.

At the close of His earthly ministry, Jesus appealed to His Father for His disciples, "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (John 17:21). Jesus desired to see us restored to our original design, our oneness reflecting His will on earth. Anything that breaches oneness opposes His will.

Restored to our true identity as "image bearers," we are to display to the world the quality of mercy we received from the Father.

From the cross Jesus said, "Father, forgive them." And then, after the resurrection, He told His disciples, "If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven." Do you see the picture? With His last breath He offers forgiveness. Then He comes to the disciples and breathes on them, saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit"—and sends them to forgive others in the Spirit's power (John 20:22-23).

Today, we share that same commission—to move out into the world under the banner: *we forgive as we have been forgiven*. May we exercise the power of "the forgotten line."

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Bringing Heaven to Earth

By Dave Butts

No matter how long I teach on prayer, I don't think I'll ever plumb the depths of the teaching of Jesus on prayer that we call The Lord's Prayer. It is simple but packed with practical guidance for effective prayer.

The focus of this prayer is the heart of Jesus' other teaching as well—the Kingdom. Jesus' lifestyle and teaching all pointed toward the Kingdom of God: "Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Those simple, familiar words should both motivate and populate our prayers. As I hear those words I am motivated to pray for the advance and eventual triumph of the Kingdom of God over all other pretenders. I know I will someday see Jesus crowned as King of kings and Lord of lords—and I want to see Him acknowledged as such in the here and now of everyday life.

As Kingdom praying dominates my daily prayer life, I find I shift from the "gimme" prayers that used to be pervasive, and now I want more than ever those things that please the Lord. The prayers seem to be "bigger" and less selfish. Even if the prayers deal with my own needs, they are now couched in terms that deal with Kingdom values.

Perhaps a good place to begin is to ask the Lord what is happening in heaven that He wants to occur on earth. That is, after all, the way He phrased this prayer for us.

From Scripture it appears that heaven is, most of all, a place overwhelmed by an awareness of the Presence of God. The continual worship seen in heaven is the natural response to the Presence of God. Praying for an increased awareness of the Presence of God brings heaven to earth and can result in an amazing revival for the Church!

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