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## THE LORD'S PRAYER

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### Part 47 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 11:1-4 | September 26, 2010

*Luke 11:1-4*

<sup>1</sup> Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." <sup>2</sup> And he said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. <sup>3</sup> Give us each day our daily bread, <sup>4</sup> and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation."

### INTRODUCTION

All right, howdy Mars Hill. We are in the fall season and this is for us a great time. It was fourteen years ago, in the fall, that we got our very humble beginning and God has been, as I said, very, very gracious to us. In the coming weeks, you're gonna get to see all the various campuses. We're one church in multiple locations, and by God's grace, many more to come.

In the meantime, today we find ourselves in Luke 11:1-4. We've been in Luke for about a year. We've got over a year left and today we are looking at the Lord's Prayer in Luke 11:1-4. So, while you find that place in your Bible, I'm gonna go ahead and pray. It only seems fitting, since we're going to be examining Jesus' prayer.

So, Father God, we thank you that we get to call you Father, or Dad, just like Jesus told us to. And we thank you Lord Jesus that because of your death, burial, resurrection, you reconcile us to the Father. You mediate between us and the Father. And Holy Spirit, we thank you for taking up residence in every one of the children of God and allowing us, enabling us, teaching us to pray like Jesus did. So, as we examine Jesus' Spirit-filled prayer to the Father, Lord God, we ask that you would teach us to pray. We come asking what the disciples asked, "Lord, teach us to pray." In Jesus' name, Amen.

We'll start by just reading the Bible. We like to just start with the Bible, Amen? Luke 11:1-4, "Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John'" —that's John the Baptizer, his cousin— "'taught his disciples.' And he said to them, 'When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.'"

### ASK JESUS HOW TO PRAY

Four initial observations before we unpack the text, in succession. Number one, some of you, in hearing this prayer, might find it to be a little different than the way you are accustomed to. Let me explain to you why. This prayer of Jesus is also recorded in Matthew's gospel. In Luke, we have a more succinct summary of the prayer. There's a longer version of it in Matthew's gospel. Luke is writing after Matthew, already knowing that Matthew has written his gospel, and so I think, rather than including the whole prayer, he gives us a brief summary of it. So if you are familiar with the Lord's Prayer, you say, "Well, this doesn't sound like the way I learned it." That is probably why. The longer version is in Matthew.

And some of you may have grown up going to churches that perhaps said the Lord's Prayer aloud and you were accustomed to concluding it with this line: "Thine be the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever, Amen." And you may go home or to your community group and read Luke and read Matthew and say, "They don't include it. Where did that last line come from?" Well, it was actually borrowed from the Old Testament book of Chronicles by the early church in some expressions of the Lord's Prayer, added to it for corporate worship. So it's not bad, but it's taking one verse and connecting it to the section in Matthew. That's one thing that you may be curious about.

A second initial observation is that prayer is simply communicating with God. And so for us as Christians, Scripture is how God primarily speaks to us, so Bible reading, Bible study, Bible memorizing. Also, the hearing of God's Word in prayer, as faith comes by hearing, so preaching is very important to us as a people that God speaks to us through his Word and we speak to him through prayer.

So prayer is, by definition, communicating with God. So don't let this become overly complicated to you. You could pray to God, communicate with God, by speaking and God hears your words. Your prayers can be silent and from the heart, because God knows your thoughts. Prayers can include journaling where you're thinking and talking with God. In addition, it can include singing, and as we sing congregationally, primarily after the preaching of God's Word, so God speaks to us through his Word in the sermon, and then we speak to him through singing together corporately and

congregationally, that is another form of prayer. So we are speaking of prayer in the broad context of communicating with God, who communicates with us.

Number three, Jesus prayed. And Jesus is, for us, the perfect example of the perfect prayer. And as we hear Jesus pray in this and other sections of our Bible, we are eavesdropping in on sacred conversation held among the three members of the Godhead, one God in three persons, the Trinity, and here it is Jesus being filled with the Holy Spirit. We've already learned in Luke's gospel that he's filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking to God the Father. So this is Trinitarian dialogue. Our God is not lonely. He speaks in and of his own essence, one God, three persons, in the Trinity, and when Jesus prays aloud, we are getting this sacred glimpse into the discussion and prayer life of the Godhead. It's amazing. It's amazing. What a sacred opportunity God has granted to us today, to eavesdrop on a conversation among the Trinity.

Number four, people don't know how to pray and they need to learn. People are not naturally born as prayers. We have to learn. It's a skill that has to be developed over time. So here, even though they've been with Jesus for some time, they have already prayed, they have heard Jesus pray, the disciples themselves come to Jesus and ask, "Lord, teach us to pray." Because it doesn't matter how long you've been a Christian, there's always something new to learn about prayer and it's something that, in our relationship with God, we can always humbly grow in.

And so, in hearing this sermon, we all come at different points in the prayer continuum. Some of you are not Christians and you don't know how to pray like Jesus prayed. Don't be embarrassed. We're glad to have you. In addition, some of you are new Christians and you're just figuring it out. Some of you are Christians and you've been Christians awhile, but you don't pray that much or that great. And even in hearing about prayer, you immediately feel guilty because you may be used to a lot of teaching about prayer that just makes you feel bad. I remember this as a new Christian. People would say, "Oh, I read this book about this guy who prayed so often that the wood floor next to his bed had deep rivets where his knees were for hours." "Yeah, my floor doesn't look like that," right? You hear these stories of prayer warriors and intercessors and all it makes you feel is like a total loser.

My goal today is not to just make you feel guilty and guilt you with prayer, but to help you learn how to pray. Perhaps starting prayer or growing in prayer. And let me say this, I'm really sympathetic, because I didn't know how to pray. I was raised a marginal, jacked, Irish-Catholic boy. So the prayers I knew how to pray were all formal prayers by important dead people. So I knew how to pray the Act of Contrition and the Hail Mary. I did learn the Our Father, the Lord's Prayer. I also did learn the Prayer of St. Patrick and the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi, but I didn't know how to pray from my heart. I had no clue.

And God saved me in college and so I thought, "Well, I need to go figure out the Bible and how to pray." And the pastor got up and said, "We have groups," basically like our community groups, "and everybody needs to be in one." "Okay, I'm a Christian now. I'm gonna go to a community group." And we were all sitting in a circle. It was my first ever Bible study group. I felt more than a little bit awkward. I didn't know what was going to happen. I hope we serve you better than I was served. I was loved at this church and it was awesome, but this Bible study wasn't a roaring start.

They looked at me and they said, "Okay, well since you're new, you can open our time in prayer." "Uh, that's sort of why I'm here. I don't know how to pray. I have never prayed out loud. I've never prayed in a group. I don't know what I'm doing. You guys pray." They said, "Oh, okay, sorry, sorry." They were very nice about it. They said, "Well, everybody close your eyes, we're gonna pray." I was like, "Pssh, I grew up in Sea-Tac. I'm not closing my eyes. I'm not gonna close my eyes. You'll wake up in a bathtub at a hotel with no kidney. You know? That's not—I'll pray with one eye open, but I'm not closing both eyes. So with this eye I'm meditating on the Lord, and with this one I'm protecting myself. I'm new to this Christianity thing." So they all prayed and over time I learned how to pray.

If you don't know how to pray, ask Jesus how to pray. The disciples did. Be with those who do pray. Get into community group. Build Christian friendships. Hear others pray as the disciples got to hear Jesus pray. And that's how we learn to pray. And if you're a parent or a grandparent, pray with your kids and they will learn to pray by hearing you pray. Prayer tends to be caught, not taught. Here Jesus is modeling for us prayer.

## **GOD IS OUR FATHER**

Now, as we unpack prayer, we're gonna look at exactly what Jesus said in his model prayer. And I believe the first is the most important, and that is that God is our Father. Luke 11:2, Jesus says this, "When you pray, say: 'Father,'" or Dad, or Daddy. This cannot be overstated.

Some of you struggle in prayer because you're too focused on prayer. If you want to grow in prayer, don't focus on prayer. Get to know the Father. In the same way, if you're focused on the windshield, you will not drive well. Amen? The goal is you look through the windshield to see where you're going. You don't focus on prayer, you focus on the Father. It is through prayer that we connect with the Father, but our focus should not be prayer. It should be Father.

Let me explain this to you. Up until this point in the world's history, God was not commonly referred to as Father. This is a cataclysmic shift in the history of the world from the lips of Jesus. From the thirty-nine books in the Old Testament that covered, let's say, a few thousand, roughly, years of human history, on only fourteen occasions do we find that God is called "Father" by his people. Every time it is national, not individual. There was not a concept of God being our personal Father. Jesus comes along, and on sixty occasions says, "Father." And they actually realize the magnitude of this statement and they seek to put him to death, saying, "You keep calling God your Father. You're making yourself equal with God." Which, as the second member of the Trinity, he was and is. And so Jesus teaches us, "Hey, don't just listen to me pray to the Father. You can do it, too." This is a great invitation. And of all the words that could have been chosen to reveal to us who God is, "Father" is the one that was chosen.

And so let me explain this to you. The more you get to know God as Father, the easier it will be to talk to your Dad. I'll give you an example. Let's say there was a child who was abandoned, abused, an orphan, neglected. And one day, a loving father, a gracious, kind man came to that child, got down on

one knee, and looked that child in the eye with a big smile and said, "Today, I've chosen to adopt you. From this day forward, you're my child. You will receive my last name. You will inherit everything that I have. You're being adopted into a large family. You've now got a lot of brothers and sisters who love you and can't wait to meet you. I love you with a never-ending love. There's nothing you can do to make me love you more and there's nothing you'll ever do to cause me to love you less. I love you with a perfect love that I'll never, never take back. Additionally, no matter what you do, I'll always pursue you and forgive you. And I'm gonna serve you and I'm gonna teach you and I'm gonna love you and I'm gonna feed you and I'm gonna help you. And for the rest of your life, I'm gonna do very good things for you and I'll never abandon or betray or harm you. Now this is all something called grace, and I know right now that's just a word to you. You probably don't understand it. But I'm gonna love you so much that eventually that word is going to start to make a lot of sense to you. So, come with me now. I'm your dad."

Now, do you think that child will ever speak to that father? Yeah. Now, if they've had a hard life, that child will begin tentatively. "Is this father really trustworthy? Is he safe? What's the catch?" But as he approaches his father and talks with his father and he realizes, "My father really does love me! I've acted up a few times, he loves me the same. Every time I've initiated with him, he stops everything that he's doing and he makes me a priority," over time that child will speak to their father more frequently about deeper matters of the heart. And it won't be because the father in any way pushed the child, but revealed himself to the child and the child was drawn in by the love of the father. He sees the father's heart.

See, when I first became a Christian, I started reading books on prayer that made me feel very guilty. And people started saying things like, "Well, there's prayers of adoration, there's prayers of intercession, there's prayers of supplication." And I'm trying to keep it all straight in my head. And I'd get, "Oh, is this an adoration? A supplication? An intercession?" I'd get all my -ations and -essions all confused. And then I look through prayer, "Oh, there's the Father." It becomes very natural to talk to him. "Hey, Dad, I really need help. Dad, I don't know what I'm doing. Dad, I blew it again." It's getting to know God as Father.

So, let me say this. If you want to learn how to pray, don't look to religious people. Don't look to religious— "Oh, look at that person! They're on a rug. They're facing a direction. They're doing aerobics." Not that, right? Look at children with a father who adores them. Because God is a perfect Father, beyond, infinitely beyond even the best moment of a great father.

Now, I can tell you this as a dad. Children approach their father continually without any apprehension if they're well loved. I say this because we were at the fair yesterday. And my kids, they just ask. "Hey, can I ride the Ferris wheel? Hey, can I have an elephant ear? Hey, can I ride a pony? Hey, can I have a cowboy hat? Hey, can I have a hamburger?" Ask, "Hey, can I go pee? Hey?" And they just ask. There's no pretense, no guile. You know, my four-year-old doesn't come up, "Dearest father, I beseech thee for an elephant ear." No. Right? No. "Hey, Dad!" Pull on the leg. "Dad! Look! Look, snow cones! Snow cones! Snow cones!" "Do you want one?" "Yep." "I kinda figured that. Gift of discernment here. Okay, you need a snow cone."

And what the children learn is, "My dad loves me. Anything I need, any time I desire, I just walk right up to Dad and ask and talk. Hey Dad, we need to talk about this. I'm working on that. I'm frustrated here. What is that?" I got that all day at the fair with the kids, especially the little ones. We're going to all the exhibits, "What's that? What's that? What's that for? How did that happen?" That's just children with a father who loves them. So if you want to learn how to pray, don't look to religious people. Look to children who have a father that adores them.

## **WE ONLY PRAY TO GOD AS FATHER**

And here's what it means when we pray to God as Father. It means we only pray to God as Father. We don't pray to ourselves because the issue's not prayer. The issue's the Father. We don't pray to ourselves. See, Eastern non-Christian religion says, "Through yoga and meditation, you go into yourself. You connect with yourself." No, no, no. We don't go into ourselves. We go out to our Father.

Additionally, some seeming Christians would take even a pagan practice like a prayer labyrinth and try to use it for Christian prayer. And a prayer labyrinth is basically a circle where you start on the outside and as you pray you walk inward and the whole point is that you're going deeper and deeper and deeper into yourself until you stand alone at the center of your existence. That's pure paganism. We start there as sinners and it is through prayerful repentance that we walk out toward God and the love of others.

This also means that we don't believe that all is God and God is all and that God is this impersonal force that's in the mountains and the trees. We don't believe that. We don't believe radical environmentalism or Avatar-ism or pantheism or panentheism or God-is-my-mother-ism. We don't believe any of that at all. And prayer, in that understanding, is that there is no Father Creator God who is separate from creation, that God is just a force that flows through everything and so prayer is living in the flow of this unnamed, impersonal force. We don't believe that. We don't pray to a force. We pray to a Father with a name, who is a sovereign Father who loves his whole family.

And it also means that we don't pray with members of other families. We don't. We can love Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses and Buddhists and Hindus and Muslims. We can pray for them, we can't pray with them. We cannot pray with them. Why? Different father. Different father means different family. Those other religions are not our family because they do not have our father. We're adopted into the family of God through the death, burial, resurrection of Jesus, our big brother, and that makes us, as Christians, the family of God. And we are spread across many denominations and churches, but other religions have a different father. They're part of a different family. And we can pray for them, but we can't pray with them.

Some of you say, "That's very offensive to those people." But if we pray with them, we're very offensive to our Father. And though we don't want to unnecessarily offend people, our allegiance to our Father is what is primary. And so we can tell them, "We would love to pray with you! Repent of your sin, trust in Jesus, become a Christian and pray to the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit. We'd love to pray with you! That's how it's going to happen." So we put evangelism as a primary driving force by which, as people meet Jesus, we can pray with them. But until then, we pray for them.

Some of you will struggle with this. The more you get to know the Father, the more sense this will make. The more you get to know the Father, the more sense this will make. Your Dad is so great that everyone needs to meet him, and if you don't remain devoted to him you will discourage others from investigating him. And so we want to stay loyal to Dad and invite others to meet him.

### **YES, NO, OR LATER**

Now let me say a few things as well about God as Father. Every parent answers the requests of their children, "Yes, no, and later." Some of you have been at Mars Hill, you've heard me say this. How many of you are parents? Especially fathers, right? Those of you who are parents, do your children ask you for things? Now, would you be a good parent to always say, "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. "Bedtime? Totally. You need a Red Bull and you need bottle rockets. For bedtime, that always should happen. Yes, yes, yes. Oh, yes. You can date him. That's totally fine. He's almost done with rehab. That's a great idea." You know? No, a good parent has three answers, "Yes, no, later."

Some of you would say, "Prayer's not working! I asked Dad and it didn't happen." No, it worked. Dad just said, "No." Or Dad said, "Later." Your father hears and answers every prayer. Sometimes he says, "Yes." Sometimes he says, "No." Sometimes he says, "Later." All right?

We had this discussion recently with Gideon. He recently got the training wheels off his bike. So now he is rocking a big boy bike. He's four years old. He's going off ramps and he's feeling pretty manly about the whole thing. So he came to me recently, he said, "Dad, I'm doing good on my bike. Now I need a motorcycle." Okay? I said, "Gideon, you are four. You do not need a motor. Maybe later. Maybe later." So, he's thinking like, "Later today." "No, much later than that." And I tried to explain to him, "You're not ready yet." But he thinks he is, so he went in to my wife, he said, "Well, I talked to Dad about the motorcycle, but it's not working." "No, it is working. I heard your request and out of love I said, 'No.'"

So as you get to know the Father, sometimes you will feel like, "Father, I need this." And Father says, "No," or, "Later." "Well, prayer doesn't work!" It sure does. Trust your Father. Wait. In time, you'll see that your Dad was right. We pray to God as Father. How fantastic is that?

### **OUR FATHER IS HOLY**

Secondly, he goes on to teach us our Father is holy. Luke 11:2, "Hallowed," or holy, "is your name." This is God's essence and character. We're talking here about the magnificence of God. Again, some Eastern lines of non-Christian thinking will say, "God is good and evil. God is darkness and light. God is yin and yang." And the answer is, "No, God is holy." God is light and there is no darkness in him at all. God is holy.

Now, the Bible does say things like God is love and God is sovereign and it speaks of what the theologians like to call the attributes of God, but the attribute of God that is mentioned more than every other attribute of God in the whole Bible is the holiness of God. This means that God is distinct and different than us, that God is altogether, continually, and only good, that there is no sin in God.

And this is very important because, were God not this way, you couldn't really trust him. He might be good today, bad tomorrow, tell the truth today, lie tomorrow, love you today, but harm you tomorrow. God is not that way. God is only, altogether, consistently holy, righteous, just, and good. So when we pray to God, we pray to a God who is unchanging and altogether perfect.

And as we pray to God, acknowledging him as holy, it invites us to examine our own lives and the ways in which we are unholy and we have sin that we need the Father's help for. And so it glorifies God and it humbles us to begin with an acknowledgement of how good our Father truly is.

### **OUR FATHER IS A KING**

He proceeds from there to tell us that our Father is a king. Again, in Luke 11:2 we read, "Your kingdom come." Now, back to my original analogy, how fantastic would it be if you were a kid who got adopted and your new dad was taking you to his home, say, "Okay, it's time to come home now." "Well, where do you live?" "I have this huge palace and I sit on a throne and I'm a king." The kid would be thinking, "This could be a huge benefit for me. This is quite a bonus. My dad's a king." He's a benevolent, loving, good king. The perfect king.

Our Father happens also to be the King of Kings. He rules and reigns over all kingdoms. His authority is over angels and demons and presidents and politicians and races and nations and the past and the future. He has a kingdom that cannot be thwarted and a kingdom that will never end. That's our Father.

And right now there's a great war between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light, and there's a great enemy who has declared battle against our Father, but our Father has and will prevail. He will crush the uprising of Satan and demons and there will be a day when the nations come to an end and all there will be is the unveiling of the kingdom. That's a fantastic gift that the Father is going to bring us his kingdom.

And in that kingdom, there will be justice and love and mercy. The hungry will be fed. The poor will be provided for. The marginalized will be esteemed. Those who have wept will have every tear wiped from their eyes and every unrepentant bully and thug and dictator and abuser will be cast out of that kingdom forever and we will all, together, as the children of God, enjoy our Father King in his resurrected, glorious, perfect, eternal kingdom forever. *[Congregation applauding]*

And so Jesus says, "When you pray, pray, 'Father, show us the kingdom. Show us the kingdom. Your kingdom, come!'" And this is the heart's cry of the believer, that the world as we know it will come to an end and the kingdom of God will be unveiled at the second coming of Jesus upon the resurrection of the dead. And this means that, in the meantime, we live as the church seeking to make, as John Calvin says, "the invisible kingdom visible," by fighting injustice and feeding the poor and caring for the marginalized and loving those who hate us and forgiving those who do evil against us.

When the question is asked, “Why?” the answer is, “You should get to know our Father and his is a glorious kingdom. It’s a kingdom of love and light and truth and forgiveness and respect and generosity and anything good that you see through his people is simply a reflection of him.” “Thy kingdom come.” There will be an end, friends, when there will be no elections, there will be no politicians. There will be one king on one throne forever.

## **OUR FATHER IS GENEROUS**

He goes on to say as well that our father is generous. Luke 11:3, “Give us each day our daily bread.” Our Father is generous. He is not stingy or greedy. He is generous. And in praying for our daily bread, Jesus is acknowledging that there are those who are hungry, struggling, and suffering. In our world today, there are many who are praying for their next meal. There are people in our city who are praying for their next meal.

But among many of us, our problem is not starvation but gluttony. We’ve had our daily bread and tomorrow’s daily bread and we ate next week’s daily bread today as well. We probably should cut back on the bread. And so for us, we may miss the significance of this prayer. “Why do I need to pray for my daily bread? I have food in the fridge. I have food in the pantry, food in the cupboards. I have lots of food.” That’s because the Father has already provided.

And as we acknowledge that some of us do need daily bread, the Father then sends the Holy Spirit to compel us to be part of the answering of that prayer. Mars Hill, this is where soup kitchens, food banks, homeless shelters, and also just the simple work of community groups and individual Christians giving money, humbly, giving groceries, provision, meals for the mom who just had a baby, those kinds of practical demonstrations of love, those are kingdom works. Those are kingdom works. And we acknowledge that the food that the Father has given to us need not all be consumed by us, that he has entrusted extra to us that we might share it in love with those who right now are praying for their daily bread and, were we to help provide it, then we would be part of the prayer being answered through God using us, which is to his glory, their good, and our joy.

How’s your generosity, Mars Hill? How’s your generosity? Because what he’s asking us to do here is to bring our needs to the Father. But let me distinguish this. He is asking us to bring our needs to the Father, not our greeds. Not our greeds, but our needs. And we find ourselves economically as a nation in what has been called the great recession. People are struggling and even today on the front page of the newspaper, the lead story is, as we head into election season, Americans are struggling financially, they have grave concern about their future, they don’t know who to blame, they don’t know who to trust, the Democrats or the Republicans.

I’ll tell you who we can blame. Ourselves. And it doesn’t matter who we elect—Democrat or Republican. If we don’t repent of our sin and pursue our needs instead of our greeds, then no functional savior will save us from ourselves. No functional savior in the form of a politician can save us from ourselves. As a people who have lived beyond our means, pursued our greeds not our needs, we have to acknowledge that repentance is the only way to make change in life.

But see, this is not politically expedient. There is no politician running for office who would get on television and say, “America, you’re all greedy. You worship mammon, most of you are fat as well. You’re not generous, you’ve lived beyond your means, your credit cards are racked up, and as a people you all need to repent,” and then win an election. That’s not much of a sales pitch for a politician. The Democrats will say, “You’re victims. The Republicans ruin everything.” The Republicans will say, “The Democrats ruin everything. You’re victims.” And everybody has to lie so that we’ll vote for them because otherwise we’d need to repent.

And the truth is, as Christians, we’ve got to look at our finances and ask, “Are we stewarding the resources that the Father has entrusted to us in a way that shows that we believe that the kingdom starts coming in our lives by our obedience and stewardship?” How’s it going? How’s it going? And it allows us to live simply and generously, helping others get their daily bread.

## **OUR FATHER FORGIVES SIN**

In addition, he then tells us that our Father forgives sin. It’ll take awhile to unpack this. Luke 11:4, Jesus prays, “Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.” Jesus prayed a lot and we need to pray like Jesus, with one exception. Jesus never prayed for the forgiveness of personal sin because Jesus never sinned. And it’s something we have to do all the time. Right? 2 Corinthians 5:21, “God made him, Jesus, who knew no sin.” 1 Peter 1, “He’s the lamb without spot or blemish.” Jesus has no sin. So he is teaching us how to repent of sin, which is something that he himself never had to do.

### **SPIRITUAL DEBT**

So let’s unpack this. First, let me start with a definition of sin. Sin includes thoughts because God knows your thoughts; words because God hears your speech; deeds because God sees your acts; and motives, God knows why you do what you do. Sin includes commission, where you do what God tells you not to do, and omission, where you do not do what God tells you to do.

The result is that we’re sinners by nature and choice and when the Bible asks, “Who can say, ‘I have kept my hands pure and clean and I’m without sin?’” well, the obvious answer is no one. So we’re all sinners. And when we sin, we sin against God and others. Psalm 51:4, he says, “Against you only, Lord God, have I sinned.” When you sin, you sin against God, friend. And we sin against others. And so Jesus here is saying that we need to be forgiven for our sin. We need to be forgiven for our sin.

And he likens our sin to a debt. Now, how many of you, you don’t have to raise your hand, but how many of you right now, you’re in debt? You’re in debt. And that debt just keeps growing. And every month there’s a reckoning. You get a statement in the mail or in the e-mail. Oh, my college loans, my

car loan, my house loan, my credit card debt, my light bill, whatever it is, you get a reckoning. You say, "You know what? I'm in debt."

Now imagine if every month God sent you a letter of reckoning, "Here's all the sins you've ever committed. Here's how in debt you are. Oh, and by the way, that thought you had at 3 a.m.? I saw that. I'm up at 3." "Oh, you're kidding me." "Nope. You don't believe me? Well, there's another one." "Oh, no!" Imagine if every month you got a statement from God. "Here's how in debt you are." "Oh, no."

You say, "I gotta do something about this debt. You know what? Karma. I'll do like Earl did, I'll karma this. That's what I'll do." Karma's dumb. Karma makes no sense at all. Karma is, "You did a bunch of bad things so come back and do more bad things. That'll fix it." Really? See, if you sin, die, come back, and sin some more, that doesn't pay off your debt. It adds to it. Right? I mean, okay, I can tell that you're not a deep thinking audience, so just ponder this with me. Karma says, "You do bad things, die and come back to do more bad things." All you're going to do is add to your debt. And if karma were true, the number of people on earth would be going down because somebody would be working off their karmic debt, going into nothingness. As it is, the population is increasing. Karma doesn't make any sense functionally, theologically, practically.

Some of you tried karma for a while, you realized, "That's not going to work." So you're going to try religion. Some of you get very religious. "Well, you know what? I'm going to go into church, I'm going to be very religious, and I'm going to stop sinning. And tomorrow, I'm going to stop sinning. I'm never going to sin again." You realize, "Man, I can't stop sinning. And even if I think I stop sinning, then I'm being religious and that's the worst sin of all." That'll really bum you out the next month, after you've been really religious for a whole month, you get a bill and it's bigger than ever and the largest category is religion. You're like, "Oh, man! I was in major debt until I became religious. Now I'm really upside down. Apparently God hates religion. Oh, no! How am I going to pay my debt?"

And see, we tend to be very keenly aware of all of our financial debt and conveniently unaware of all of our spiritual debt. And Jesus uses the language of indebtedness to explain sin. And so Jesus comes, our great God and Savior, he lives without sin, he dies in our place for our sin to pay our debt to God because the wage for sin is what? Death. So payment in full is death. And so Jesus goes to the cross as our substitute and savior. This is the good news of the gospel. And he suffers and dies in our place, for our sins, as our savior. He pays our debt to God and he rises as the pattern of our new life. And he cancels our debt. So all of our debt, past, present, and future, sin we haven't even committed yet, is forgiven at the cross of Jesus. That's why, as he is being crucified, Jesus says, "Father, forgive them." It is only through the cross of Jesus that sin can be forgiven because the debt must be paid.

And this is in the context of Luke's gospel, where Jesus had been working in the rural region of Galilee. Chapter 9, verse 51, it says that he set his face toward Jerusalem. Here Jesus is moving toward Jerusalem on a few-month walk. He is literally going to his cross to pay our debt. To pay our debt. And so not only does Jesus teach us that we must repent of sin and be forgiven, he makes that forgiveness possible. That's what we do with sin. We apologize to God and people, we call that repentance, and we through faith have Jesus pay our debt.

## **FORGIVENESS OR BITTERNESS**

Number two, Jesus also here deals with sin that is committed against us. Now let me explain this. What tends to happen when preachers preach and teachers teach is they only explain half of the gospel, and that is, if and when you sin, repent to Jesus and he will forgive you. That's totally true. But what happens when you're not the one who sinned but you were the one who was sinned against? You weren't the rapist, you were the victim. You weren't the adulterer, you were the betrayed. You weren't the thief, you were the one who was robbed. You're not the one who lied, you're the one who was lied about. You're not the one who walked out on their kids, you're the kid who was walked out on.

What do you do then? What do you do when you are the victim of sin? Because the truth is we all sin and we're all sinned against. Jesus says that those who have been sinned against must forgive. You can't say, "God, I want you to forgive me, but I refuse to forgive them." So for this to be helpful and practical, I need the Holy Spirit now to bring to mind for you the name, the face of the person who has sinned against you most grievously, perhaps even most repeatedly, wounded you most deeply. And what I'm about to share with you, I need you to apply to them.

There are only two options: forgiveness or bitterness. And if you choose unforgiveness, which leads to bitterness, you will become like the person who hurt you because the same root that is in their life will take root in your life. The Bible calls bitterness a root. Unforgiveness causes us to become like the people who hurt us. And God loves you. He wants you to be freed of that.

And I say this pastorally and lovingly. I'm not just a theoretician and a clinician. Even today, in talking about forgiveness, I have had women crying on me, I have had snot all over me from people who absolutely were losing it, I have talked to women who have been raped and abandoned and abused, I have met women who were held hostage and knifed and left for dead, I have met husbands who were betrayed by their wives, I have heard horrendous evil. I'm a pastor. I in no way want to just make this cold and clinical and categorical. Not at all. So I come with a tremendous sense of love and empathy and compassion and hope for you. But you need to forgive that person or those people who have wounded you most deeply.

## **WHAT FORGIVENESS IS NOT**

And some of you will have resistance and let me try and disarm that resistance by telling you what forgiveness is not. Because I think many Christians do not rightly ascertain what forgiveness truly is and is not, and so I've got a long list for you.

Forgiveness is not approving or diminishing sin. It's not saying, "Well, it's okay. Nobody's perfect. Everybody makes a mistake," or, "It's not a really big deal. Worse things have happened." No, it is a big deal! It's so big that God died for it. So don't dishonor the cross of Jesus and approve or diminish something that required the death of God.

Number two, forgiveness is not enabling sin. It's not. I see this frequently with wives who misunderstand submission. "Okay, the husband is the head of the home, he's supposed to lovingly lead." Great. He's supposed to lovingly lead by following Jesus, and if he's not following Jesus, the wife shouldn't follow him because her ultimate allegiance is to Jesus and the first job description of the wife is to be a helper. And sometimes husbands are foolish. They make stupid decisions financially. They make reckless decisions spiritually. They buck godly, spiritual authority trying to correct them. And in the name of forgiving them, the wife comes along and enables him. She just is complicit in his rebellion and sin and folly. You can forgive someone without enabling their sin, participating in it. You can have a friend or a family member who is an addict, for example, you can forgive them without enabling them. Forgiving is not enabling. Forgiving can even include confronting and rebuking, and sometimes it must.

Forgiveness is not, number three, denying a wrongdoing. "It didn't happen. I forgot all about it. I just moved on. I pretend like it never happened. I didn't let it affect me." That's not true. It's not the denial of a wrongdoing. Forgiveness is not denying that you were sinned against.

Number four, forgiveness is not waiting for an apology. Some of you say, "I will forgive them as soon as they say they're sorry." I hate to break it to you, some people are never going to apologize. Some people are going to continue in their destructive, rebellious, and foolish life course. Some people will be stubborn and religious and self-righteous and they'll never confess or admit. Some people will move away, you'll never speak with them again. Some people will die before they articulate repentance. And so you forgive them before they apologize.

Forgiveness, number five, is not forgetting. This is one of the great Christian myths. "Well, we forgive and forget." No we don't! You can't forgive and forget. You can't. You were raped, molested, abandoned, beaten, abused, cheated on, betrayed, lied about. Forget it? You can't forget it. It's impossible. And some will appeal to Bible books like Jeremiah, where it says that God will remember their sin no more. And they'll say, "See? God doesn't remember our sin." And let me tell you this, God does remember our sin. He's omniscient, he's all knowing, he forgets nothing, he knows everything. Right? It's not like God's in heaven going, "I forgot a whole bunch of things." He would cease to be God.

What does it mean that God remembers their sin no more? It means that God chooses not to interact with us based upon what we've done, but instead interact with us based upon what Christ has done. It means that he chooses to see us as new creations and he chooses to work for a new future. It means that at the forefront of God's thinking toward us is not all of the sin that we've committed, but all the work that Jesus has done for us and in us and, by grace, will do through us. But it's not like God has no idea what you did yesterday. He forgets nothing.

And I see this sometimes in counseling, where one person will sin against another person and they'll say, "Well, you shouldn't even remember that." It's impossible. I had one situation recently. I looked at the husband, I was like, "You slept with her best friend. She's not going to forget that ever. Now, she can choose not to interact with you in light of that. She could choose to forgive you. She can choose to not be stewing on that every minute of every day and seething. But she's never going to forget that this happened because it was cataclysmic."

Number six, forgiveness is not ceasing to feel the pain. Just because it hurts doesn't mean you've failed to forgive. It still hurts. Some of you have had horrible things done to you. Horrible things done to you. With all sincerity, I'm sorry. And it would be so cruel to say, "Well, if you've forgiven them, it shouldn't hurt anymore." Well, sure it does. See, we don't hear in the Bible that all the tears are wiped from our eyes until the resurrection of the dead in the final unveiling of the kingdom. It means people are crying all the way to Jesus. It still hurts. It's okay for it to bother you.

Number seven, forgiveness is not a onetime event. It's not like you forgive someone and it's over. Sometimes, they keep sinning, so you need to keep forgiving. Or sometimes you forgive them, but there are emotional moments where it feels fresh. There's one woman that I know, her husband committed adultery on her. And he earnestly repented and she honestly forgave him and they have sought biblical counseling and they have worked it out. But she confesses there are times, sometimes even at church, where her husband is doing nothing wrong, and it's been some years, that she'll just see him talking to another woman, maybe even a mutual friend, and just the sight of him with another woman causes her to feel all of that betrayal again and it rises up in her soul. And she needs to forgive him again for what he did in the past. Sometimes forgiveness is something that is regularly required.

Number eight, forgiveness is not neglecting justice. You can forgive someone and call the police and have them arrested. You can forgive someone and testify against them in court. Romans 13 says to obey the government. They'd say, "I thought you forgave me." "I do. I forgive you. But you've committed a crime. You've broken the law. And so these are the consequences." If you've stolen, you need to pay it back. If you've lied, you need to go tell the truth. It's not a neglecting of justice. You can forgive and pursue justice.

Number nine, forgiveness is not trusting. I get this all the time. "My dad molested me. He said he's sorry. Can he babysit my kids?" Answer? No way. No way. "My boyfriend or husband hit me, but he said he's sorry. Should we just pick up where we left off and keep going?" No way. See, trust is built slowly. It's lost quickly. Trust is built slowly. Those of you, now hear this, I'm your pastor who loves you. Let me put an airbag around this. For those of you who are naive and gullible, trust is to be given slowly, lost quickly. Some of you give your whole heart away and never take it back. Give it away slowly and if someone sins against you grievously, trust has to be rebuilt over time. It's not trusting. It's not trusting. Some people can be trusted in time with fruit and keeping with repentance after they've gotten help. Other people should never be trusted because the risk is simply too high. This is particularly true with children who are vulnerable. We need to be exceedingly careful with who we trust.

And number ten, forgiveness is not reconciliation. It's not that you're friends and you hang out and everything's okay. You're close and it's back to normal. Not at all. It takes one person to repent. It takes one person to forgive. It takes two people to reconcile. That's why Paul says, "In as much as it is possible with you, seek to live at peace with all men." Here's what he's saying. Do your best, but you can't be at peace with everyone. But if it doesn't work out, make sure it's their fault, not yours. Right? It takes two people to reconcile.

This is where I've got a friend right now who's in the midst of a divorce because she is acknowledging her own sin, her husband really is the problem,

and she's saying, "I love you, I forgive you. If you'll meet with counselors, if you'll submit to the authority in our church, I extend a hand to you and we can reconcile and save this marriage." He's saying, "No. I don't think I did anything wrong. I don't think I need to listen to the pastor. I don't need to meet with a counselor. I don't need to listen to anyone. It's your fault." There will be no reconciliation. Not with a man like that. Repentance takes one, forgiveness takes one, reconciliation takes two.

Now, in hearing this, some of you, like me, will have strong sense of justice. You say, "But if I forgive them, where's the justice?" Justice comes, friends, ultimately from Jesus. Either they will come to faith in Christ and you will get your justice at the cross, where Jesus' blood was shed in their place for their sins as Jesus' blood was shed in your place for your sin, because Lord knows we've hurt people too, or, if they remain unrepentant, your forgiving them does not mean that they are ultimately forgiven. They've sinned against you and God, and as you forgive them, you're leaving them to Jesus. And if they live in a state of unrepentance and they don't come to Jesus for forgiveness, they will stand before Jesus in the end. And they will be judged and sentenced to the conscious eternal torments of hell to suffer forever for all of their sin, paying their eternal debt to the living God. So, in forgiving someone, we are not neglecting justice. We're leaving it to the perfect judge to enact perfect justice, either at the cross or in hell, but either way justice will be served. And we forgive in light of that.

## OUR FATHER LEADS WELL

He closes then with this: our Father leads well. Luke 11:4, "And lead us not into temptation." He is not here inferring that God the Father leads us into temptation and sin. James 1:13, penned by Jesus' own brother in the book bearing his name, says, "God is not tempted and God doesn't tempt anyone else." But what he is saying here is that the world is filled with trouble and sin and temptation and folly, and the kingdom of darkness is at war against the kingdom of light. And our enemy is out to harm us because we're members of the Father's family.

And so the picture here is like a child grabbing the hand of their dad, saying, "Dad, just lead me. Because you see what I don't see and you know what I don't know. And rather than being anxious and stressed and distressed and troubled and tempted, I just wanna stick close to Dad." We talked about this a little bit last week, with those Mary moments of life where, like her, we get time in prayer and community and study and time with Jesus. That's taking the Father's hand.

And let me close with an analogy that I think illustrates this well. As I told you, yesterday we went to the fair and we go to the fair every year. I don't like the fair. I don't like crowds, mullets, corn dogs, none of it, right? But my kids like the fair and my wife likes the fair, so I go to the fair every year. That's what I do because I really love my family and I'm not sending them to the fair all by themselves. And so we get out of the car and we're heading toward the main gate, where it's very busy, and instinctively and immediately my two youngest children, Gideon who's in preschool and Alexie who's in first grade, they just walk right up and they each grab a hand. I'm like, "Oh, this is fantastic."

All of a sudden, though I really didn't want to go to the fair, all of a sudden I'm really happy because I realize, "Well, this is just an opportunity for me to enjoy, protect, lead, love, serve, and fill with junk food my children, whom I adore." So I'm cool with that, actually, because I really love being a dad. And so my children instinctively knew, "We don't need to know our way around the fair. We don't need a map. We don't need to see over all the people who are far taller than us. Our dad will keep us safe. We just need to hold Dad's hand and we'll be fine. We'll get through this complicated place. We'll get through these crowds of people and these potentially dangerous scenarios." And they weren't distressed at all. They kept laughing and smiling and asking for things and having fun and asking questions and literally for hours I just held my kids' hands, their little hands in my hand.

And I get the picture here, when Jesus is saying that our Dad is God and we need him to lead us. It's kinda like a kid just grabbing their daddy's hand. And so it started raining and we went into all the various barns and we go to see the, you know, the cows and the rams and the horses and the bunnies because we're from the city and that's all fascinating. And we were coming out of one barn and it's kinda where all the barns came together. There's this big open area, where there are a lot of people in this open area, dozens, maybe a hundred or more. I mean, there were a lot of people.

And I'm walking with my kids, we're going to see the pigs because my kids love the baby pigs. And we're going to see the baby pigs and I hear a dad yelling, cursing, "You little eff-er, you need to blankity-blank you son of a—" I'm, "What the heck?" I turn around, I see a dad grab a little boy who's about two or three years of age by the wrist and literally yank him up in the air. I mean, I don't know if this kid's shoulder came out of socket, but if not, it was a miracle. And the kid is hanging and I counted six blows from the father, full, over the head, full blows to the back of the child. Not just to the bottom, which would have been bad enough, but to the lower back as well. I counted six blows. Full strikes from a grown man to a boy. And as he hit his boy, his boy literally just swung, and he'd wait for him to swing back and then he'd hit him again. And his boy cried out, and he said, "You need to toughen up!"

And I could not believe it. I mean, the thought that this man would do this to his child in public—I was thinking to myself, "What happens at home when nobody's looking?" And everybody recoiled and Alexie immediately grabbed my leg. She was very scared. I mean, all she knows is tea parties and snuggling. She's never seen a violent man. She doesn't understand this at all. And everybody was recoiling away from this man, sort of shocked, and so I told Alexie and Giddie, "You stay here with Mom. Daddy's gotta go take care of this."

So as everybody else was walking away from him, I'm walking toward him. And I'm trying not to escalate things. I know that he's obviously got some serious problems and I know everybody's got a camera phone and I'm going to end up on Larry King if I go *Bully Beatdown* on this guy. And so I looked at him and I said in a—actually, for me it was a good voice. *[Congregation laughing]* Grace confirmed that. She said, "That was really good."

I said, "Sir, that needs to stop right now. You're done." He looked at me, said, "So what? You don't believe in disciplining your kid?" I said, "Sir, I have five kids. I do believe in correcting your children. But you're beating your child. You're assaulting them. You're abusing them. That's not



correction.” “Well, he’ll just wander off, stupid little son of a what.” I said, “I’ve got five kids and hold their hands. You’ve only got one. Hold his hand. Be his dad.” Then he said, “Mind your own eff-ing business.” I said, “Sir, you made it my business when you beat your child in front of my children. You made it my business.” I said, “Sir, put the child down. You’re done now. You have a serious problem. You need help.” And he said, “You want me to beat you next?”

Here we go. Here we go. Because, see—and in the moment, man, I was conflicted. Because my first thought was, “I grew up in the hood. I fought a lot. I’ve slammed Marines’ faces into the trunks of Impalas and split them wide open. I’ve never picked a fight. I’ve never lost a fight.” I’m immediately sizing this guy up. “He’s got reach on me, but he’s skinny. I need to get inside, get my hands on him, close the distance.” And I’m literally thinking in the moment, like, “He’s beating his child in public. So out of love, for discipleship purposes, I should beat him in public.” *[Congregation laughing]*

But then I’m thinking, “Aw, man, but everybody’s got a camera phone. My daughter’s going to freak out. My family’s going to freak out.” And then the Holy Spirit showed up and I thought, “You know, two things. Number one, I had very short temper that God convicted me of when I first became a Christian. Very short fuse, and the difference between that guy and me is Jesus.” I would have been a lot like that guy. I think that’s why it bothered me so much. And so, since my conversion, other than a little boxing and the occasional football game, I’ve not put a lick on anybody. And it’s only by the grace of God that I’m not a guy who’s violent.

Number two, it was obvious to me that he just was not teachable and this was not going to go well. And the woman who was with him, kind of an enabler, gets in the middle and tries to break it up—and I’m walking away. I’m saying, “Sir, you just need help.” And I told him, I said, “Please get some help.” And he kept blowing up and asking me to fight him, and I said, “Sir, I’m not gonna instigate or escalate this. But if you wanna finish it, I’ll be over there. Otherwise, I’m done with you.”

And Alexie came up and she grabbed my leg. She was really scared. And she grabbed my hand, and I looked down. She’s got big blue eyes, she looks like Tinkerbell, and she says, “Daddy, thank you for standing up to that man. Thank you for loving us. Thank you for protecting us, and thank you that you don’t hit us or scare us.” And I got very choked up, like, man, the thought of assaulting your own child. I said, “You’re welcome, sweetie. Daddy loves you very much.” And, see, I want to love my kids with the Father’s love, but apart from the Father’s love, I don’t think I could love as a good father. And she said, “We need to pray for him that he would meet Jesus because that man is scary.” “Yeah, he is. We need to pray for him.”

A couple things in closing. Number one, for those of us who are fathers, or one day God would give us the great gift of being a father, gentlemen, we share a sacred, divine title with God. And we want to love our children, protect, lead our children with the Father’s love so when they hear God is a Father, that sounds like a good thing. I shudder for that little boy, thinking when he hears that God is Father, he would be prone to run from God rather than to him.

Number two, some of you come here and you have been considering God to be an abusive, violent, mean, unstable kind of dad. He’s not. There’s another father, the Bible teaches. In John 8, Jesus says that the devil’s a father too and there really only are two families, and those families really only have two fathers. And Satan is a horrible father and God is a perfect, loving father. And I do believe, even for this man, the real issue is not a war against flesh and blood, but powers, principalities, and spirits, that for him, his father is the devil and his father the devil abuses him, sometimes through the hands of others. And as a result, he is harming his own child. And the answer to that is repentance, faith in Jesus, forgiveness of sin, newness of life, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Father’s love, to allow us to love as he has loved us. For those of you who are not Christians, this is the day when you take your Father’s hand. And by faith, you walk with him until he safely leads you into his kingdom.

And so, Father God, we pray against the enemy, his servants, their works and effects. Father God, we take your hand and we ask you to lead us. Father, we pray for those who don’t know you as Father. We pray against the father of lies and the father of deception and the father of death. And God, we pray for that man and that little boy. And God, we pray that you would teach us to pray as Jesus taught his disciples to pray. Lord Jesus, teach us to pray to the Father who loves us. Amen.

*[End of Audio]*

*Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.*