



**DATE:** Sept. 6, 2020 (15th Sun. after Pentecost)  
**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 6:9-16  
**TITLE:** Forgive us as we forgive

This week we move into the only part of the Lord’s Prayer that asks something of us. The prayer that Jesus taught us is a series of requests to God, with this one exception. Here we ask God to “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” It is a challenging idea—that we are forgiven by God only as we forgive others. It is so challenging, in fact, that Jesus gives us an appendix to the prayer, explaining in verses 14-15, “If you forgive others their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you don’t forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your sins.”

Forgiveness is a fundamental aspect of what it means to follow Christ. Forgiveness is also a complicated, multi-faceted concept that must be treated with caution. Later in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells his followers that we are to forgive “Not just seven times, but rather as many as seventy-seven times.”

Forgiveness is a key element to a healthy relationship and a vital part of Christian community. Jesus is clear, we are to forgive one another. We are to offer the same grace that has been offered to us.

Forgiveness though, is like a fire. There are times when a fire is an important part of a healthy ecosystem. Fires in both forests and prairies serve an important purpose. A fire can clear away the dead plant and animal material that is blocking the sun from the soil. Fire can enrich the ground with nutrients and allow new growth to happen.

This is what forgiveness can do in our lives. It can clear away what is dead and make room for new life. Like a fire though, forgiveness can be destructive. In a relationship where one person consistently harms, abuses, or exploits the other, forgiveness can become a mechanism for continued abuse. For cen-

turies, women in particular have been forced by “biblical teachers” to remain in relationships that are deeply harmful in the name of forgiveness. For forgiveness to happen, the sin must first stop. Abatement of harm has to be the first step to forgiveness.

Another mistake people make when thinking about forgiveness is equating it with reconciliation. We are called to forgive, and truly any sin is forgivable with time, prayer, and counsel. Not every relationship though, must be reconciled.

**Forgiveness is a chance at new life. It is a chance to let go of bitterness, anger, and pain. Holding onto hurt does no one good. Forgiving someone and then returning to be harmed again does no one good either.**

I believe that God’s ultimate goal for all relationships and indeed all of Creation is reconciliation. On this side of eternity, however, some relationships must end. The victim of harm can

forgive the perpetrator without re-entering into relationship.

In this way, forgiveness is a chance at new life. It is a chance to let go of bitterness, anger, and pain. Holding onto hurt does no one good. Forgiving someone and then returning to be harmed again does no one good either. Forgiveness can be given to someone without them ever asking for it. Reconciliation can only happen with repentance and reparation.

An important aspect of the Lord’s prayer is the simple word “as.” We are forgiven “as we forgive.” Jesus did not say “After we forgive.” In other words, forgiveness is a process. Forgiveness is not a switch we flip. It is not something that can be rushed. It is something to work on over time, in prayer, and in community and counsel.

We are forgiven as we forgive, and the more we work on forgiveness, the more we can feel it and experience it for ourselves. Forgive and be forgiven. We are to live a life of forgiveness, practicing it, working on it, living into it over time.