



Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Matthew 6.12

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I. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue our summer series Pray Like Jesus, turning our attention to the petition, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors," the longest and most involved petition in the Lord's Prayer.

II. Connecting with One Another

Have you ever been asked to forgive someone? How did you respond?

Have you ever asked someone to forgive *you*? How did *they* respond?

III. Study the Text

a. Read Matthew 6.9-11.

Which line of the Lord's Prayer do you think differently about as a result of this summer series?

b. Read Matthew 6.12.

What questions or concerns come up as you read this fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer? If you're working through this study guide in a group, spend a few moments discussing these questions or concerns together.

c. Jesus' instruction to ask for forgiveness right after daily bread is interesting, as a number of instances of sin and forgiveness in the Bible take place surrounding food. Look through each of these passages, noting the connections between food, sin and forgiveness:

i. Genesis 3:

ii. Genesis 43-45:

iii. Luke 7.36-50:

iv. Luke 15.11-31:

v. John 21:

vi. 1st Corinthians 11.17-34:

vii. Revelation 3.20:

- d. Years ago a study of guilt complexes was undertaken on various college campuses. It was designed to uncover the levels of anxiety of students regarding unresolved guilt. Surprisingly, students at a Christian college involved in the study ranked in the ninety-ninth percentile of those with unresolved guilt.

Why do you think this is? What could contribute to the study's findings?

Should it be this way? Why or why not?

- e. If you've ever prayed the Lord's Prayer in a large group of Christians from various church traditions, you may have noticed that some pray "Forgive us our *trespasses*..." Which makes the most sense to you? Which word do you prefer when you pray? Why?

- f. One commentator writes, "Literally Jesus invites us to ask God to release the debts that we owe against his account book. The image of debts was a graphic one to most of Jesus' contemporaries. While debts include money, most of Jesus' hearers would have been borrowers rather than lenders, so Jesus probably includes more than merely economic debts. It is clear that *debts* before God represent 'sins,' as they normally did both in Jewish teaching and in the Aramaic term used for both concepts."

Since Jesus would have been speaking in Aramaic, how does the idea that "debts" includes both sins and money alter your understanding of this petition?

- g. Will Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas write, "Our books are in the red, as far as our relationship to God is concerned. We have run up a debt with God so large that all we can do is ask for forgiveness. We can never hope to pay it back."

No doubt this impossibility of paying back our debts is countercultural. What debts do you have before God?

- h. Willimon and Hauerwas continue, "The one who has experienced forgiveness is the one best able to forgive."

Do you agree or disagree? Why?

- i. Reread Matthew 6.12, then skip down to verses 14-15. How does Jesus' statement here build on the forgiveness we receive from God?

Jesus offers a brilliant elaboration on verses 14-15 in Matthew 18.21-35. After reading it, spend some time quietly reflecting upon it alone – or in discussion with your group.

- j. N.T. Wright writes,

One of the most vivid images in the whole New Testament is that of a man running... But in Jesus' world, the more senior you were in a community, the less likely you were even to walk fast. It shows a lack of dignity, of *gravitas*.

So when Jesus told a story about a man running, this was designed to have the same effect on his audience as we would experience, if, say, the Prime Minister were to show up for the state opening of Parliament wearing a bathing costume. It's a total loss of dignity.

And when we discover why this man is running, the effect is even more shocking. This man is running to greet someone: someone who has put a curse on him, who has brought disgrace on the whole family.

Turn to Luke 15.11-31 and read this story. N.T. Wright concludes,

We call it the Parable of the Prodigal Son, but it might equally be called the Parable of the Running Father. And only when we understand why his man is running will we really understand what Jesus meant when he taught us to pray: Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

How do N.T. Wright's words alter your understanding of this petition?

Is there repentance in this story? Where do you see it?

IV. Pray

- a. Thank God for his unending forgiveness through Jesus Christ!
- b. Confess any way that you're "in the red" with God or others,
- c. Pray that we would be and continue to become utterly dependent upon God's grace, not only forgiveness, but also for empowerment to live righteously, following after Jesus.