

## Day 5 – Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors

**Preparing:** *Teach me, LORD, the way of your decrees, that I may follow it to the end.*  
- Psalm 119:33

**Pausing:** Enjoy a time of silent rest in God’s presence.

**Reading:** Matt. 18:21-35; 1 John 1:8 – 2:2

**Reflecting:** After our need for provision, Jesus moves us to pray for our need for pardon. While everyone is forced to acknowledge our need for provision, not everyone would acknowledge a need for pardon. “What’s the big deal?” we might hear people ask. Can’t we just tolerate one another? Perhaps, in our liturgies, we’ve even wondered about the need for a prayer of confession (see below). Should we expect everyone to say that? What if we’ve had a particularly good week?!

But, looked at a little more closely, everyone needs that prayer. If Jesus calls us to love God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and also our neighbor as ourselves, then none of us will ever really have a “good week!” Sin is like an “infection of nature,” declares one of the prayer books. It breaks down our relationship with God, neighbor, self, and creation. For such an infection to be dealt with, we need the vaccine of forgiveness that Jesus provided on the cross, on Good Friday, to bring us healing now and the hope of living as God’s children forever. When we pray this prayer, forgive *us*, and when we say words of confession together during worship, we are not socially distancing ourselves from others, but standing side by side with them in recognizing our shared need for grace—for the undeserved favor of God that forgiveness is.

Such grace Jesus pictures in his parable, in response to Peter’s desire to find a limit on how much he should forgive another. The debt (sin) the servant carried was well beyond his ability to repay. But though the amount he owed, spiritually speaking, exceeded his assets, it didn’t leave him in a state of negative net worth. For, in an act of unconditional love, the king wiped it out all of the servant’s debt! However, while the servant had begged for the king’s mercy, it was apparent he didn’t fully understand it for he then failed to offer the same mercy to another.

Jesus isn’t linking God’s forgiveness of us with our first having forgiven our neighbor. Rather, the latter is to arise out of our understanding of the former. It’s actually a commitment we make in response to having received the grace of God to us. Forgiving another releases them into God’s healing care (not our job), and stops the spiral of bitterness and violence that revenge can bring. It is the foundation on which good community living needs to be based. As Paul put it: “Be kind and compassionate toward one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Eph. 4:32).

