

# Lord's Prayer

The Seven Stages of a Marriage Cold. Maybe

you can identify with this, some at least. This is the attitude that a husband has toward his wife's cold through the first seven years of their marriage.

First year: Husband says to his wife, who has a bad cold, "Sugar dumpling, I'm worried about my baby girl. You've got a bad snuffle. I'm putting you in the hospital for a general checkup and a good rest. I know the food's lousy, but I'll bring your meals in from the Murray's Steakhouse. I already have it arranged."

Second year: "Listen darling, I don't like the sound of your cough. I called Dr. Miller to rush over here. Now, you go to bed like a good girl for me."

Third year: "Honey, maybe you better lie down. Nothing like a little rest when you feel sick. I'll bring you something to eat. Do we have any soup in the house?"

Fourth year: "Look dear, be sensible. After you feed the kids and get the dishes washed, maybe you better hit the sack for a while."

Fifth year: "Why don't you get up, get yourself an aspirin, and stop complaining so much."

## Forgive Us Our Tresspasses

Sixth year: "If you just gargle or something instead of sitting around and barking in my face like a seal, I'd appreciate it."

Seventh year: "For Pete's sake, stop sneezing. What are you trying to do, give me pneumonia or something?"

There can be no question that marriage is in trouble in America today. The divorce rate has fallen off a bit in recent years from the 50% high we reached but even that is a bit deceptive because the numbers of couples who live together out of wedlock has soared exponentially over the last 20 years. In 1970 the number of cohabitating couples was virtually nonexistent but today about 1/2 of all adults 30 to 45 have been in a cohabitating relationship at least for some period of time. And the dissolution rate of cohabitating couples is about 69%.

There are several evidenced based marriage and family researchers who, for about the last 20 years, have been examining the data to determine what we are missing.

John Gottman, who without question is one of the leading researchers on marriage today, has discovered that couples in troubled marriages display what Gottman calls the four horsemen: criticism, stonewalling, defensiveness, and contempt. In America today, researchers note that women are more likely to be critical than men and men are more likely

to be stonewallers which is why about 2/3 thirds of all divorces today are initiated by women. Both men and women are defensive. Gottman argues that couples in healthy marriages display criticism, defensiveness and stonewalling, so Gottman insists that solving problems should not be the primary goal of counseling. Rather, he contends that healthy marriages are marked by an absence of contempt but in high-risk couples the presence of contempt becomes an accurate predictor of long-term dissatisfaction and dissolution of the marriage. You know you hold your spouse in contempt when you feel that they will never change their bad behavior and if you don't get a divorce, it would be impossible for you to ever be happy. So, if you want to save a troubled marriage, couples need to first and foremost learn how to avoid holding one another in contempt.

Jacobson and Christensen are new behavioral therapists who developed what they call Integrated Couples' Therapy. Jacobson and Christensen insist that acceptance is one key for successful marriage therapy, change

is the other. With the ICT method, the therapist utilizes BE (Behavioral Exchange) as the primary technique for affecting change. A typical "BE" task might be for everyone to develop a list of behaviors if done more or less frequently would provide a greater level of satisfaction for their spouse. For this task, couples are advised to ask what they could do for their partner not what their partner could do for them.

Susan Johnson is the author of Emotional Focused Therapy. In a day and age where most couples' therapists are seeing marriages saved at 30% success rate, her EFT therapists are enjoying a 70-73 percent recovery rate! Why is her method so successful?

She has learned that in the 21st century, marital distress is essentially about being flooded by negative emotions and trapped in narrow constricting interactions. Thus, she argues that helping individuals get past the emotional pain caused when a spouse is hurt is the secret to restoring marriages.

Are you seeing a pattern here? The leading evidenced based couples' researchers note that the pattern in unhealthy marriages

is that a spouse gets hurt to the point where they feel contempt for their mate and then their emotional pain becomes so acute, they conclude they just can't stand the pain anymore, so divorce is the only option they see to get rid of the pain.

In biblical terms what is missing then? Forgiveness! We hurt so badly we feel contempt for our mate and even if we say we forgive our spouse still our forgiveness does not lead to restoration and reconciliation. So, my question is "do we really understand biblical forgiveness?" I direct your attention to the words of Jesus, our master teacher, when he said, "When you pray say, 'and forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.'"

J. I. Packer a renowned New Testament scholar has said the petition "and forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors" is one of the more troubling passages in the entire Bible. He has no problem with the first half of the verse. He gladly longs for God to forgive his debts. It is the last part of this petition that troubles him. "As we also have forgiven our debtors." Packer notes that this

statement implies that it is expected that somehow, we are supposed to forgive like God. Our forgiveness from Him even depends on it. Would you be so bold to say that you forgive just like God? Are you prepared to say when you pray the Lord's Prayer that you want your Heavenly Father to use your standard as the means of Him forgiving you? How can we as mere sinful mortals ever forgive like God? This surely seems like an exercise in futility. It even seems sacrilegious to think that our practice of forgiveness is every bit as good as God's. How dare we say, "God, I believe that I am as good as you when it comes to forgiveness, so you feel free to judge me according to your standard. And if I fall short, you just feel free to judge me by my standard of forgiving."

That is not what I want to pray! I want God to ignore my practice and show me his grace that I don't deserve or have never earned. I am going to plead for God to judge me by his standard alone and leave my practice out of it.

Matthew gives a bit of a commentary on the meaning of this petition in vv. 14, 15.

*For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*

If you don't forgive men their trespasses, God will not forgive you your trespasses. Does that statement bother you just a little bit? What does that mean? Is our salvation dependent on our forgiving others? Are we eager to receive forgiveness in the way we show grace to others? Do we really believe that we can forgive like God can?

I am sure there is something inside of you that says this can't be true. We know we are saved by grace and that not of ourselves lest anyone of us should boast. That is in fact what Paul says in Ephesians 2:8, 9.

So, what are we praying for when we say these words in the Lord's Prayer?

### **THE TRUTH I FORGET "I HAVE A DEBT I CAN'T PAY"**

There are two results of my forgetting:

### **My forgetting hurts my understanding of who I am.**

The word debt means to be in the position of owing something. This word does not mean trespass as we like to translate it in the protestant church. It is the word normally used to describe a financial debt. So, debt and debtors is more accurate to the original meaning. It is what I owe. We have a debt we owe to God.

"Trespass" is the word that Protestants like to insert into the Lord's Prayer. A "trespass" (v.15) is what creates the debt. The original word in v 15 is a slip. If we don't forgive the slip ups of others against us, God will not forgive us our slip up against him.

Luke 11:4 is the restatement of the Lord's Prayer, and we have a 3rd word. Luke 11:4

says forgive us our "sins." The word here is "harmartia." It means to miss the mark with an arrow. The rich young ruler said I have kept the commandments from my youth. How could he say he had not broken any of the Ten Commandments. We should not be amazed. People Magazine produced an article on Sin written by D. Keith Mano on May 23, 1986. If sin is missing the mark, how do Americans describe the mark?

Overall, readers said they commit about 4.64 sins per month, although churchgoers felt they commit a lot more (6.80) than non-churchgoers. Seventy percent of readers said they are more tolerant of sin than their parents were, but 40 percent also believe they commit more sins than their parents did at the same age. Most readers said they were significantly more tolerant of homosexuality, abortion, mercy killing, revenge, pornography and premarital sex than they were 15 years ago.

Four sins a month. Really? Clearly Americans have no clue what God calls sin. Accordingly, we assume that we are not missing God's mark by very much and most days

not at all.

Leo Tolstoy once said, "What counts in making a happy marriage is not so much how compatible you are, but how you deal with incompatibility."

Leo Tolstoy is the author of two of the world's greatest novels, War and Peace and Anna Karenina. Leo Tolstoy was, during the last twenty years of his life, "probably the most venerated man in the whole world." (Dale Carnegie, *How To Stop Worrying And Start Living*, New York: Pocket Books, 1984, p.99). For twenty years before he died in 1910, an unending stream of admirers made pilgrimages to his home in order to catch a glimpse of his face, to hear the sound of his voice, or even to touch the hem of his garment. Every sentence he uttered was taken down in a notebook, almost as "divine revelation." Sadly, however, his wife and most of his children did not share the awe of these devotees.

Tolstoy and his wife started their marriage well. Tolstoy married a girl he loved very dearly. In fact, they were so happy together that they used to get on their knees

and pray to God to let them continue their lives in such utter heavenly delight. But Tolstoy could not find continued happiness in his marriage. He was convinced that there had to be a higher purpose. He needed a divine mandate for his life. Ultimately, he had a religious experience that led him to denounce his property and possessions. The problem was that his wife did not share his religious convictions. He wanted to spend more time with peasants. She did not wish to give up the good life with their rich friends. They grew apart and the girl Tolstoy married became jealous. She used to dress herself up as a peasant and spy on his movements even out in the woods. They had explosive arguments. She became so jealous, even of her own children, that she grabbed a gun and shot a hole in her daughter's photograph. She once rolled on the floor with an opium bottle held to her lips and threatened to commit suicide, while the children huddled in a corner of the room and screamed with terror.

And what did Tolstoy do? It is hard to blame the man for smashing their furniture. But

he did far worse than that. He kept a private diary. Yes, a diary in which he placed all the blame on his wife. He was determined that coming generations would exonerate him and put the blame on his wife for their failed marriage. What did his wife do? Why, she tore pages out of his diary and burned them, of course. She started a diary of her own in which she made him the villain. She even wrote a novel, entitled *Whose Fault?* in which she depicted her husband as a fiend and herself as a martyr.

All to what end? Why did these two people turn the only home they had into what Tolstoy himself called "a lunatic asylum?" Obviously, there were several reasons. One of those reasons was this couple, who once were so in love, forgot how to talk to one another. Certainly, their breakdown was not because they were not aware of the power of words. Few have ever been more gifted with words than Tolstoy. It wasn't lack of culture or training. They had the best of each. Their story reminds us that we can have great verbal skills, a wonderful education, but if we do not determine to forgive one another even what once was a great marriage can fall apart.

That is why Billy Graham said, "A good marriage is the union of two good forgivers." And when asked his secret of love, being married fifty-four years to the same person, he said, "Ruth and I are happily incompatible."

## My forgetting hurts my relationship with God

The second result of my forgetting that I have a debt that I can't pay is that my forgetting hurts my relationship with God. Two kinds of forgiveness:

1. Salvific or judicial forgiveness
2. Relational forgiveness

Salvific forgiveness most of us understand. That is the clear biblical truth that our sins have been forgiven by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The story of Peter recorded in John 13 helps us understand relational forgiveness.

13 It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

2 The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7 Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." 8 "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

9 "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"



10 Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." 11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean.

So, what was Jesus trying to teach Peter? Peter seems to assume the foot washing was all about service. He concluded then it would not be appropriate for the master to wash his feet. That is a task for a servant. Furthermore, there is more to the story that just wiping the physical dirt off these disciples' feet, because Jesus asserts in v 11 that not everyone is clean referring to Judas.

This is a spiritual cleansing. He who has been bathed only needs a foot washing. What does he mean here? They already have judicial forgiveness. But they did commit daily sins that would hamper their relationship with God and one another. They needed forgiveness for those daily sins to remain in right relationship with God. This is like what David confessed in Psalm 51. When he sees that he has sinned, he asks God to create a new

spirit in him and to restore what? Not his salvation but the joy of his salvation.

So, when we pray forgive us our trespasses after we have become Christians, we are praying for a foot washing. We are asking God to remove the spiritual dust so we can experience the joy of our salvation. Thus, if we ask Jesus to remove the dust off our feet daily, we will be graceful. We will be forgiving to others, and we will display joy, peace, patience, gentleness, self-control etc.

The problem we have in marriage doing this is illustrated by the following:

## The Husband Store

Imagine a store that sells husbands to aspiring brides has just opened in New York City. Among the instructions at the entrance is a description of how the store operates. "You may visit the store ONLY ONCE! There are six floors, and the attributes of the men increase as the shopper ascends the flights. There is, however, a catch: You may choose any man from a particular floor, or you may choose to go up a floor, but you cannot go

back down except to exit the building." So, Jane went to the Husband Store to find a husband.

On the first floor, the sign on the door reads:

Floor 1 - These men have jobs and love God.

The second floor sign reads:

Floor 2 - These men have jobs, love God, and love kids. The third floor sign reads:

Floor 3 - These men have jobs, love God, love kids, and are extremely good looking. Jane looked at that sign and thought, "Wow, I could stop here", but she continued on to the fourth floor where the sign read:

Floor 4 - These men have jobs, love God, love kids, are drop-dead good looking, and help with the housework.

"Oh, my!" she exclaims. "I can hardly stand it!" Still, she goes to the fifth floor and the sign reads:

Floor 5 - These men have jobs, love God, love kids, are drop-dead gorgeous, help with the housework, and have a strong romantic

streak.

She is so tempted to stay, but she goes to the sixth floor and the sign reads:

Floor 6 - You are visitor 4,363,012 to this floor. There are no men on this floor. This floor exists solely as proof that women are impossible to please. Thank you for shopping at the Husband Store. Watch your step as you exit the building and have a nice day!

If you have been deluded into thinking the goal in marriage is finding a soul mate who is wonderfully compatible to you, that may have been a theme of romance novels of the 1980s, but a reality check will confirm that what Billy Graham has said has always been true! A good marriage is the union of two good forgivers.

So, there is a truth I forget: I have a debt that I cannot repay.

## The Attitude I Forsake: I Forsake a Forgiving Spirit

We find an illustration of the principle of biblical forgiveness in Matthew 18:21ff

21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"

22 Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

23 "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with

his servants. 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. 25 Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

26 "At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' 27 The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

28 "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

29 "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.'

30 "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

32 "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' 34 In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

35 "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother

or sister from your heart."

A denarius is what a common laborer makes in one day. 6000 denarii equal one talent. One talent then is the equivalent of 19 years of labor for a common laborer. This man owes amount equal to 190,000 years' wages. He had a debt he could not pay. Notice what he says. "Be patient I will pay all I owe." Is there a chance he can do it? Of course not.

This man, who had a debt he could never repay, had a servant who had a debt that it would take 100 days to pay. Could he have paid it? Of course, he could. Nonetheless his boss who owed so much more to his master refused to give any relief on his debt. Jesus says those of you who have the attitude of the forgiven man who refuses to forgive should be turned over to the tormentors.

CORRIE TEN BOOM in her book, *TRAMP FOR THE LORD* shares her story of what it took for this message of Jesus to sink in for her. (pages 55-57)

"It was 1947 in a church in Munich, Germany that I saw him- a balding, heavyset

man in a gray overcoat. He was working his way forward. One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat; the next, a blue uniform and a visor cap with its skull and cross-bones. It came back with a rush: the huge room with its harsh overhead light; the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor; the shame of walking naked past this man. I could see my sister's frail form ahead of me. Betsie, how thin you were!

The place was Ravensbruck and the man had been a guard -one of the most cruel guards. Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out: "A fine message, Fraulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!"

And I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my purse rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course - how could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women? But I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. I was face-to-face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze.

"You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk," he was saying. "I was a guard there." No, he did not remember me. "But since that time, I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well, Fraulein," -again the hand came out - "will you forgive me?" And I stood there -I whose sins had again and again to be forgiven -and could not forgive. Betsie had died in that place - could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?

It could not have been many seconds that he stood there but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do.

For I had to do it - I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us. "If you do not forgive men their trespasses," Jesus says, "neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

I knew it not only as a commandment of God, but as a daily experience. Since the end of the war, I had had a



home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality. Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able also to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives. Those who nursed bitterness remained invalids.

And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. "JESUS, HELP ME"! I prayed silently. "I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling."

And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes. "I forgive you, brother!" I cried. "With all my heart." For a long moment we grasped each other's hands. I had never known God's love so intensely. But I realized it was not my love. It was the power of the Holy Spirit!

That is the attitude Jesus hopes we will have when it is our turn to forgive someone who has hurt us. So then, if we are praying "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" how will that change the way we pray?

1. Think about the 190,000-year debt you owe. Jesus says if you do, you will relate to people differently. Notice you are not forgiving because someone has earned your forgiveness or has deserved it. It does not matter if they have not gotten down on their knees and begged for your forgiveness. That

may be Hollywood's definition of forgiveness but that is not what Jesus is talking about in the Lord's Prayer. It may be that your family member or work colleague or neighbor may continue to behave poorly. There are two reasons why we forgive. One is that the Lord Jesus commands it and our fellowship with our heavenly Father is dependent on it. And the second reason is that our own well-being is at stake. That leads me to my second application.

2. Pray often and with sincerity, "Dear Lord, please remove the dust off my feet. Restore to me the joy of my salvation. Keep me from allowing the root of bitterness to put a stranglehold on my heart." The Bible teaches that when we do not forgive there is a root of bitterness that grows within us and chokes off the joy God desires for us to know. When we refuse to forgive, we are making someone miserable but ironically it is not the person who hurts us. We are the ones who suffer. It is as if we have placed a huge burden on our own back that we carry until we choose to release the burden by forgiving whoever has hurt us. Proof that we have forgiven then will be the joy we experience even though we may have a spouse who continues to behave poorly toward us.

3. When anyone irritates you or sins against you, pray "Lord, enable me to forgive in the same way that you continue to forgive the huge debt I owe you!" So, get your eyes off the person who hurt you and get your eyes on Jesus until you can say with the apostle Paul, "I will be kind and compassionate, forgiving even as God through Christ Jesus has forgiven me."



