

LORD TEACH US TO PRAY V

Forgiveness

This week we will examine the phrase "Forgive us our sins as we forgive others! and later examine 2 bible characters in prayer.

The concept of forgiveness is very easily misunderstood

Richard Foster gives a helpful guide to what forgiveness is and what it is not. It includes the following points, which are essential to understand if we are to grasp the full meaning of forgiveness.

- ◆ Give, in our Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread ..." comes before **forgive** in the Lords prayer – we cry out forgive in response to Gods good gifts to us.
- ◆ This is the only petition Jesus amplifies (Matthew 6: 14-15).
- ◆ He understood therefore that it would be difficult of us to get a hold of this.

What forgiveness is not. Discuss

- ◆ Forgiveness does not mean that we cease to hurt. Just because we still feel sore does not mean we have failed to forgive.
- ◆ Forgiveness does not mean we will forget but we do not use the memory to hurt others.
- ◆ Forgiveness does not imply that the offence really did not matter.
- ◆ Forgiveness does not mean acting as if things are the same as before the offence.

What is forgiveness? Discuss

- ◆ Forgiveness is a miracle of grace whereby the offence no longer separates us from the one who has hurt us.
- ◆ God has bound himself to forgive when we forgive. No matter how guilty we feel, when we forgive others, God freely forgives us.

C.S Lewis points out that people often find it hard to forgive because they think this means they are excusing the person. He writes ...

There is all the difference in the world between forgiving and excusing. Forgiveness says, 'Yes you have done this thing, but I accept your apology. I will never hold it against you..'. But excusing says, 'I see that you couldn't help it or didn't mean it, you weren't really to blame. 'If one really was not to blame then there is nothing to forgive. In that sense excusing and forgiveness are almost opposite.

Examples of People in Prayer

Hannah

Read 1 Samuel 1: 1-20 Hannah's prayer

Hannah's prayer is the prayer of desperation. As with all desperate prayers it is not wordy, but short and to the point. She is not afraid of crying out to God about her need. Notice the expressions used in her prayer (NIV): *In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the Lord* (verse 10); *Hannah was praying in her heart.... Eli thought she was drunk* (verse 13); *I am a woman who is deeply troubled* (verse 15); *I have been praying here out of my deep anguish and grief* (verse 16). Hannah's pain is a pain of longing but she directs this longing not to self pity and bitterness but into heartfelt cries before God. Although her prayer is finally and gloriously answered, it is not before years of longing and hurtful ridicule from Peninah (verses 6-7).

- When you yearn for something and it doesn't happen, what do you do?
 - (a) complain
 - (b) Get depressed
 - (c) get mad at God
 - (d) ask God to help you carry on.

- The most reassuring point of this passage for me is that:
 - (a) God answers prayer
 - (b) God hears prayer
 - (c) God accepts me even when I am desperate and bitter
 - (d) God cherishes me as a person of value
 - (e) God has sent encouragers into my life

Prayer

Spend a few moments reflecting on Hannah's prayer. How do you pray when you feel desperate or hurt? Is there a longing in your heart that needs expression before God today? There may be others who you know who are longing for God to hear them. Pray for them today taking Hannah's prayer into their situation.

When you have finished your prayer read 1 Samuel 2:1-10, which is Hannah's prayer of praise and thanks following answered prayer.

Ananias Prayer

Read Acts 9: 10-19

Here we have an example of conversation prayer. Ananias, like Abraham, feels secure enough in the love of God to argue with him. Surely God can't be telling him to go and lay hands on the one man who is set on exterminating all the Christians! Ananias was available for God to call him and use him. Following his time of hearing God, he went and prayed for Saul.

- What do you learn about prayer as you think of this story?

- How would you feel if you were Ananias being given such a command?

- What is significant about the way Ananias addresses Saul?

- Saul becomes famous, but we never hear of Ananias again. Why did God involve him at all?

Prayer

Pray for your local prayer need today. As you pray and listen to God, is he directing you to take any action today to be part of his answers to your prayers? Ananias may have well been praying about the situation of Saul coming to Damascus, when God called him to take action about it. Be open to God, even if he calls you to do something surprising!