

The Prayer of Forgiveness

By Kim Butts

“Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us” (Luke 11:4).

Scripture is very clear that sin is a hindrance to answered prayer. Isaiah 59:2 states, “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.” In Psalm 66:18 we read, “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened”

One of the most pervasive, tenacious sins in the Christian culture today is unforgiveness. It is disobedience to Christ, and it renders our prayers ineffective and powerless. Many times, an unforgiving spirit comes from a heart filled with pride. We often feel justified in our unforgiveness because of the wrong done to us. Or, the sin against us was so grievous in our own mind and heart that we cannot possibly forgive.

Probably the most common stumbling block in this area is when we say that we have forgiven someone outwardly, while still harboring the resentment or anger in our hearts. Jesus effectively illustrates God’s viewpoint on this matter in Matthew 18:23-35 when the king’s servant, who had been forgiven his debt, turned around and refused to forgive the debt of a fellow servant. The king turned his anger towards the man, threw him in jail and ordered him to pay back all that he owed. “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart” (Matthew 18:35).

If you are struggling with your prayer life, could an unforgiving spirit be one area that is keeping you from

effectively touching the heart of God with your prayers? From time to time, each of us must take a deep look into the dark places of our hearts, asking the Lord to reveal our sin to us. We can find healing from the sin of unforgiveness in the Scripture, for when we truly understand how strongly God feels about forgiveness, we can seek to be more like Christ in our response to those we need to forgive.

Beth Moore, in her excellent book, *Praying God's Word*, has a chapter devoted to "Overcoming Unforgiveness." Using Scripture, she has a threefold way to become more like Christ in this area. First, she has an extensive section of scriptural prayers which ask God to do a deep work in us that we might forgive as He forgives us. Next, she recommends praying "about" the person or persons we need to forgive. In essence, she says, we are "tattling" on the person to God. We express how we feel about what that person has done through venting our anger, our exasperation, etc. This was the very way that David dealt with those who were persecuting him. As you read through the Psalms, you will see clearly how David talked "about" those persons to God. He did not hold back from expressing his displeasure: "Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with destruction. Their throat is an open grave; with their tongue they speak deceit" (Psalm 5:9).

"Two important things happen," Moore states, "when we learn to pray honestly about the person who has hurt us: 1. We pour the hurt out rather than allowing it to remain and turn bitter. . . . 2. We articulate our own feelings, thereby placing them in view before our own eyes as well as God's. This way, we also get a chance to see if something seems ridiculous, out of proportion, or right on target. Our prayers can sometimes help us gain a little insight into our own hearts."

If we pour out our grievances to God, we won't be as likely to pour them out to others, which could then cause them to stumble too. Praying "about" those who wrong us saves us from

compounding our sin by turning it into gossip, or causing others to harbor the same resentments we do.

Moore says, "Envision your heart like a pitcher . . . Praying about the person we need to forgive is the means by which we tip that pitcher heavenward and slowly begin to pour our negative feelings and frustrations out to God. As we pour out, a wonderful thing happens: we make room for God to pour in. Our omniscient God knows that a heart heals when a heart changes. Until we make room for fresh contents that change our hearts, we will never be healed from the injury and subsequent feelings of unforgiveness."

The third area of prayer is to pray "for" those whom we need to forgive. Most of us are already aware that we need to do this; however, we often stubbornly hang on to our "right" not to. If we are to be like Christ, we relinquish our "rights" and take on humility, being obedient to the Lord, who says in Mark 11:25, "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

If unforgiveness has been a hindrance to your prayer life in the past, remember that Satan will attack you in this area again—until your victory is firmly established in the strength of Christ Jesus. "If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes" (2 Corinthians 2:7-11).

Kim Butts is the co-founder of [Harvest Prayer Ministries](#) and the author of [The Praying Family](#).