

May 3, 2026

Pursuing the Kingdom: The Posture of Prayer

Matthew 6:14-15

Vernon Advent Christian Church

Introduction...two kingdoms, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world. How we live our lives reflects which kingdom we are pursuing.

Now, before we get into the Gospel of Matthew 6:14–15, I want to remind us, once again, with the simple, yet important, concept that we have seen in Jesus' teaching on prayer in this chapter. And that is that prayer is not just about what we say, but it's about the posture of our hearts. That's really what Jesus has been getting at throughout this section. In the verses leading up to our passage today, He has already addressed how we give, how we pray, and how we fast, not just the actions themselves and doing them for the applause of others, but the heart behind them. Because you can say all the right words and do all the right things and still approach God with a heart that is closed, guarded or misaligned.

When Jesus gives us the model of the Lord's Prayer, in the passage we looked at last week, Jesus is shaping a posture of prayer. A way of approaching our Heavenly Father with humility, dependence, surrender and trust. But as soon as the prayer ends, Jesus zeroes in on one posture in particular, the posture of forgiveness.

Right in the middle of the Lord's prayer we find this line, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." That's not a throwaway line. And it's not a small detail. It is central. And Jesus knows it. That's why, when He finishes the prayer, He does something striking. I want you to notice that He does not expand on daily bread. He does not elaborate on temptation. But He circles back to forgiveness. It's as if He's saying, "If you missed everything else that I just said to you, don't miss this point." This is where Jesus goes from "preaching" to "meddling." Because it's easier for us to say "Our Father" or "Give us this day our daily bread," or even "Forgive us our debts." It's much more difficult to live out the second part of that phrase, "as we also have forgiven our debtors." And it's here where we are going to spend our time this morning. If you are able, please stand in honor of God's word as I read from Matthew 6:14-15. [Read Passage]

There are few statements in all of Scripture that hit us with this kind of directness. There's no softening here. No immediate explanation. Just a clear connection between receiving forgiveness and extending it. And if we're honest, it unnerves us a little bit. Because it touches something deep within us.

There are few things more powerful than being wronged by someone, especially those closest to us, and few things more difficult to let go of. Maybe for you it's not theoretical or abstract. It's a name, a face or a moment you can replay in your mind with painful clarity. Something that was said that cut deeper than anyone realized. Something that was done that drove a wedge in your relationship with someone else. A betrayal. A dismissal. A wound that didn't just happen once but lingered over time.

And even now, even though time has passed, the wound hasn't fully healed. You've learned how to function. You've learned how to carry the burden and how to move forward in some ways. But underneath, there's still a quiet weight you carry. Not because you enjoy

it, but because it feels justified. In your mind, they don't deserve your forgiveness. They haven't earned it. They haven't even acknowledged what they've done. And into that very real, very human place, Jesus speaks these words that we just read.

Now before we apply them, we need to understand them correctly. Because at first glance, it can sound like Jesus is saying that God's forgiveness is conditional, that we earn God's forgiveness by forgiving others. That if we forgive, God forgives us. And if we don't, He withholds His forgiveness from us. But that interpretation would put this passage at odds with the broader message of Scripture, which consistently teaches that forgiveness is a gift of grace, not something we earn.

As Martin Luther once said, "We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone." In other words, forgiveness is not achieved by our actions but it is revealed through them. What Jesus is addressing here is not the basis of our forgiveness, but the evidence of it. He is not saying, "Forgive so that you can be forgiven," but rather, "If you have truly been forgiven, it will show up in how you forgive others."

And this is consistent with the logic of the gospel as a whole. When the grace of God transforms a person's life, its purpose is not to be contained to that person only, but that person is to be a channel of God's grace and mercy to others. It reshapes how we see others. So if someone claims to be a follower of Jesus and to have received God's forgiveness but that same person refuses to extend forgiveness to others, something is out of alignment.

Think about it this way. Imagine someone has been forgiven an unpayable debt, millions upon millions of dollars wiped away in an instant. They were bankrupt, with no hope of repayment, and suddenly they are debt free. And then that same person walks out and finds someone who owes them a few dollars and grabs them, demands repayment, and refuses to show mercy. Something doesn't add up. It reveals that they have not really grasped the magnitude of the gift that they've been given.

This is exactly the point Jesus makes in the parable of the unforgiving servant, which we will return to when we get to Matt. 18. Forgiveness received is meant to become forgiveness extended. Grace is not meant to stop with us, it is meant to flow through us.

And this is where it gets personal. Because it's one thing to agree with that in principle. It's another to live it out when the wound is real. Forgiveness does not mean pretending the hurt didn't happen. It doesn't mean minimizing sin or avoiding justice. And it certainly does not mean putting yourself back into harmful situations without wisdom.

What it does mean, is choosing to release the right to hold that offense over someone else. It is a decision, often repeated over time, to entrust justice to God rather than carrying it yourself. Its saying, "I will not make you pay for this in my heart anymore." Now, again, this doesn't erase the memory. It doesn't erase the consequences. But it does release the grip of bitterness.

As C. S. Lewis once wrote, "Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive." That's where this teaching moves from theory to reality. Where the rubber meets the road, so to speak. Forgiveness sounds noble until it becomes necessary. And when it becomes necessary, it becomes costly.

Because when you forgive, you absorb the debt. You let go of the repayment. You relinquish the right to get even. And everything in us resists that. We want fairness. We want acknowledgment. We want justice on our terms.

But here's the deeper truth, unforgiveness also costs you. It doesn't stay neatly contained in a tiny little box on a shelf in the back corner of your heart. It begins to shape you in ways you sometimes don't even notice. It hardens your heart. It alters your perspective. It keeps wounds open and active. And it becomes a kind of emotional and spiritual bondage. What you think you are holding onto is, in many ways, holding onto you. As has often been said, holding onto unforgiveness is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. It doesn't free you, it traps you.

Jesus' words, then, function both as a warning and an invitation. The warning is clear. A refusal to forgive reveals a heart that has not fully embraced God's forgiveness. It is not that God is unwilling to forgive, but that an unforgiving heart is out of step with the very grace it claims to have received. As the British Pastor and Theologian, John Stott, once said, "Once our eyes have been opened to see the enormity of our offense against God, the injuries which others have done to us appear, by comparison, extremely trifling." That doesn't mean they are insignificant. It means they no longer have control over us.

But the invitation is just as powerful. Because forgiveness is not something you manufacture on your own. It flows from what you have received. When you begin to grasp the Gospel and the depth of your own forgiveness before God, it changes you. It humbles you. It reminds you that you stand before God, not on the basis of your righteousness, but His mercy.

Think back on the cross for a moment. That is where my debt, and yours, was dealt with. And we owned way more than a few million dollars. The debt was our sin and the wages for that sin debt was death, as Paul tells us in Romans 6:23. The debt was not ignored. It was not minimized. But it was paid in full as the full wrath of God was poured out on Jesus as the just penalty for our sin that was laid on Him. And as Jesus bore that weight, He prayed, "Father, forgive them."

That is the source of our forgiveness. We forgive, not because others deserve it. Brothers and sisters, you and I did not, and do not, deserve the forgiveness of God. But He gives it to us freely through faith in His Son and His atoning work on the cross. No, we do not forgive others because they deserve it, we forgive others because we have been forgiven far more than we could ever repay.

So what does this look like in practice? First, it begins with honesty. Naming the hurt before God. Not pretending it didn't happen. Not burying it. But bringing it into the light. And once we've done that, then we have to make a decision to release that person and situation to God. You may still feel the pain. You may still need to establish boundaries because forgiveness does not remove the need for wisdom. But it does remove the poison of bitterness that takes up room in our hearts.

There may be burden you've carried for years. You've rehearsed what happened over and over again in your mind. You've justified your position. And in many ways, you've built part of who you are around that wound. And yet, if you're honest, it has also been shaping you in ways you didn't want.

Today, you need to hear the words of Jesus and forgive and let go of the pain and the hurt. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote, “Forgiveness is the Christ-like suffering which is the Christian’s duty to bear.” That may sound harsh, but it is also hopeful. Because it reminds us that forgiveness is not weakness, it is participation in the very heart and suffering of Christ.

So here is the application. We need to examine our hearts carefully. Not in general terms, but with real names and real situations. Is there someone you have not forgiven? Are you holding onto resentment, replaying the offense, waiting for an apology, or even an acknowledgment, that may never come? Bring that before God. Ask Him to help you see your own forgiveness more clearly. Ask Him for the grace to extend the same forgiveness that you have received.

It’s fitting that we are observing communion today as we consider Jesus' words here about forgiveness as one of the purposes of communion is meant to restore and strengthen peace among us. It helps us remember Jesus and his atoning work for us on the cross where guilty sinners can draw near to meet on level ground. And it is at the foot of the cross, with the bread and cup in hand, where we are reminded that, in the death of Jesus, our hostility has died and we now have peace with God and we are now to seek peace with others.

Communion also promotes peace by what it requires, an active pursuit of reconciliation. When thought of and practiced correctly, communion leads us into consistent self-examination and reconciliation. Similar to what Jesus says about being reconciled with each other before offering sacrifices to God (Matt. 5:23–26), Paul argues, in 1 Cor. 11, that we should examine our hearts and the state of our relationships with each other before approaching the Lord’s Table. (1 Cor. 11:28–29)

In an article on The Gospel Coalitions website entitled “War and Peace in the Church: How Communion Helps,” the author, Tim Shorey, makes the statement that “...if we eat the meal without first examining our hearts to identify and address these issues (speaking of unforgiveness), we annul the Lord’s Supper and turn it into an experience with no soul-nourishing grace whatsoever.” If the Apostle Paul takes communion this seriously when addressing this concern in the early church, shouldn't we come to the table with the same posture and reverence?

All of this makes the Lord’s Supper, and the warnings attached to it, a great blessing for our relationships. It turns each time we observe communion into a sobering reminder to check our relationships and make sure we’re aligned with God and at peace with others.

And understand this is often a process. You may need to forgive more than once. The memory may return. The emotions may resurface. And each time, you are invited again to release it. To choose grace over bitterness, freedom over bondage and the kingdom of God over the patterns of the kingdom of this world.

As we close, consider this. The way you forgive others is not just about them, it is a reflection of how deeply you understand the gospel. Forgiveness is not a side issue in the Christian life, it is central to the Gospel message we proclaim. It sits at the very heart of our relationship with God and our relationship with others.

And so, the question is not simply, “Have you been forgiven?” but “Is that forgiveness visible in your life?” Because when the grace of God truly takes hold, it is not

supposed to stay contained within us but to flow out to others. And when it does, something remarkable happens. The chains begin to fall. The burden begins to lift. Not because the past is erased, but because it no longer has the final word. Grace does.

May we be known as a people who have so deeply received the mercy and forgiveness of God that it reshapes every relationship, every wound and how we respond to every wrong done to us, both real or otherwise. And in doing so, may our lives reflect the very heart of the Father who has forgiven us and who now calls us to forgive others and live in light of it. Let's pray and examine our hearts before we share the Lord's Supper together.