

40 DAYS OF *prayer*

DAY
22

WEEK 4

PRAYER AS CONFESSION

Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Confession is crucial to the Christian life—both as repentance before God and as forgiveness between one another. Scripture is clear: God desires mercy. His loving kindness and mercy toward us abound; therefore, we must extend mercy toward others. This week, the devotionals will guide us through the confessional aspect of prayer, discussing the love that leads us to forgive as we have been forgiven.

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HELP US FORGIVE

EPHESIANS 4:32; COLOSSIANS 3:13

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”—Ephesians 4:32–5:2

My four-year old doesn’t like help. But . . . he can’t button his shirt yet either. So, in the morning, I watch him struggle. He gets so mad trying to cover himself with that little shirt, and I often offer to be an example. One of two things is likely to happen: (1) On a good day, he watches me button it while I explain how much better it will cover him this way; and (2) On a not-so-good day, he tells me I’m not his friend anymore and walks around with a shirt that will open wide to leave him exposed any moment.

When it comes to forgiveness, I differ little from him. Have I been dressed in Christ’s forgiveness through His sacrifice? YES! And do I try it myself with great frustration sometimes? YES! It’s like telling Jesus He isn’t my friend and trying to “button myself up” when I’m a moment away from being exposed. He asks if I will allow Him to show me the immense forgiveness He has offered me so that I can begin to rely on how it changes me. This allows Him to help me forgive others in return.

It’s when I don’t allow His amazing grace in forgiveness to be shown to me that I end up holding onto grudges I have against those who have wronged me—at the risk of being uncovered completely! Can we agree together today that we desire the graceful covering of Jesus’ forgiveness offers? We must allow His example to change the way we offer it to others.



REFLECTION PRAYER

Jesus,

It is hard to admit that we need You for so much, and it is our pride that tempts us to feel that way. We repent of the pride we still carry. We acknowledge that forgiveness is not only something You have audaciously offered us but also something you have commanded of us. We repeatedly fail at this, Lord, but you have promised us that we can follow You as our example. Please come into our lives. Humble us to see Your forgiveness towards us so that we may graciously extend it to others. We need Your help. Amen.

HELP US EXTEND MERCY

MICAH 6:8; MATTHEW 5:7; JAMES 2:13

Our church put together thousands of grocery bags of food for a free drive-through giveaway in our underserved community. People drove up, popped their trunks, and we loaded their vehicles. A Bible was included, and many requested prayer on the spot.

After weeks of advertising on social media and on the radio, the response was lackluster. It wasn't until some of us went to the intersection leading to the venue—with signs, fingers pointing, and words of encouragement—that we began to see a steady response of people and cars. People said, “There is no such thing as ‘free’ anything” and drove in the opposite direction, never availing themselves to this blessing. Some ignored us. But those who turned in to see if what we proclaimed was true emerged enthusiastically, thanking us for letting them know.

I was gripped by the varied responses. I thought about grieving the Holy Spirit by rejecting God's merciful offer of His Son. God endures the varied responses of skepticism, misunderstanding, and rejection: “But as many as receive Him, to them He gives power to become the sons of God; even to them who believe on His name” (John 1:12). An undeserving humanity has been offered a lavish gift: deliverance from the penalty, power, and presence of sin by the Son in whom God is well pleased. If we make it about our Lord, and not ourselves, we can extend mercy to those who need deliverance and keep pointing the way to the *only* Way.



REFLECTION PRAYER

Lord Jesus,

“I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shown to me . . .” (Gen. 32:10, KJV). I bless Your name, “For great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell” (Ps. 86:13, KJV). Help us bless people with the mercy we've been shown so they can “taste and see that [You are] good” (Psalm 34:8)! And, Lord, thank You for allowing us give away all that food. May we always be conduits of blessing to reflect the merciful Provider that You are. In Jesus' name, amen.

HELP US RELEASE OUR BURDENS AND BITTERNESS PROVERBS 10:12; EPHESIANS 4:31-32; HEBREWS 12:15

Simon was famous. As the local sorcerer, many people knew him and were amazed at his work. But once Jesus' disciples came onto the scene, Simon's fame was in trouble. In his mind, the only way to win back the favor of the people was to buy the gift of the Holy Spirit. And in that moment, we see a glimpse of a heart that is burdened with the weight of bitterness.

How does your heart do when you see others succeed? How do you respond when people no longer come to you for answers? This was a hard reality for Simon—one that greatly impacted his heart towards God. And if we are not careful, it will affect our hearts as well.

The writer of Hebrews implores us to not allow any root of bitterness to grow up in us (Heb. 12:15). Likewise, the Apostle Paul instructs the church of Ephesus to “get rid of all bitterness” (Eph. 4:31). Like the stubborn root of the most pervasive weed, we must suffocate bitterness completely so that it doesn't have any place in our lives.

Even though Simon was “full of bitterness and captive to sin” (Acts 8:23), he was not too far gone from God's grace. The instructions for his restoration are still true for us today. If you find yourself captive to bitterness, heed the voice of the apostles—repent from that wickedness and commit yourself to loving your neighbor because “love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet. 4:8).



REFLECTION PRAYER

Lord,

I come to You today acknowledging the times I have harbored bitterness in my heart. Envy has soiled my joy and taken my eyes off of You and Your goodness. Forgive me for the ways that I have treated my neighbor with contempt rather than with love. Lord, as I confess and repent of my sin, I trade the weight and burden of my guilt and shame for the easy and light yoke of forgiveness and restoration that You offer. May my feet flee from bitterness and run towards love, compassion, and understanding, both now and forevermore. Amen.

HELP US BE FREE FROM GUILT AND SHAME PSALM 103:8-14; ROMANS 8:1-2

If there is a struggle with living free from guilt and shame, it's not uncommon for there also to be a struggle with believing in the goodness of God. Who you believe God to be will reflect what you believe about yourself. In His goodness, Jesus died, was buried, and rose from the dead—according to the Scripture—to set you free not only from sin and death but also from guilt and shame. However, the enemy will ride guilt and shame on the back of conviction in the form of false claims:

You are so _____. I can't believe you would _____. You'll never _____.

Then, with a subtle shift, “you” turns to “they”: *They think you're so _____. They can't believe you would _____. They think you'll never _____.*

And gradually “they” becomes “I”: *I am so _____. I can't believe I would _____. I'll never _____.* And when you tell yourself a lie long enough, you'll eventually believe it.

Conviction does not equal condemnation. Conviction is the feeling of having done something wrong; condemnation is the impending punishment for what you did wrong. In His goodness, Jesus received your punishment; therefore, you are no longer condemned.

Living free from guilt and shame doesn't come without practice. Being able to recognize the enemy's false claims only comes after having realized you've believed a lie. Once you've learned how to identify the voice of the enemy, you can extinguish false claims with the truth of God's goodness: You've been acquitted, and the Lord has honored you.



REFLECTION PRAYER

(Pray aloud) Jesus, help me. I am struggling with living free from guilt and shame.

I confess that sometimes it's hard for me to trust in Your goodness. When I'm convicted for repeatedly doing the wrong thing, I feel like such a failure.

I renounce the lies that “I'll never be able to quit,” and that “You're disappointed in me.” I choose to believe that You will help me and that You take joy in me because Your Word says I am no longer a slave to sin but to righteousness—and You smile on me. Amen.

WE CONFESS INDIVIDUALLY

PSALM 32:5; PROVERBS 28:13; ACTS 3:19

I don't know how many times I've seen "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" calligraphied on some farmhouse style home decor or on some lady's prayer journal. And justly so—it's a beautiful reminder that we are utterly and completely known. Could anyone claim to know me better than the One who created me?

If you haven't yet—pause and meditate on the whole of Psalm 139. This Psalm starts by declaring that the Lord God has searched and known our every thought, action, and circumstance—our very soul. When we're at our best or our worst, when we're feeling distant or close, there's nowhere to flee from His presence. Does that warm you up or make you shudder? I reckon, both?

This leads us to the second half of the passage—a plea. It's a heartfelt longing to know Him as He has known us; a profound yearning to be as righteous as He is just. But no matter how well we think we've managed our own thoughts and ways, we don't know what we don't know.

"Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting."

You believe God answers prayers, right? Are you willing to be obedient when He reveals His response? Do you understand the gravity and power of this confession? Are you willing to go there?



REFLECTION PRAYER

God,

You know me so well! As my Creator, You know how I was meant to be. As my Savior, You've experienced the extent of my fallen state. You demonstrate Your love for us in this: *While we were still sinners, Christ died for us* (Rom. 5:8).

Like the psalmist, I acknowledge what I do know—about You, about me, about others—but I confess that I don't know what I don't know. Examine me, O Sanctifier, and lead me as You will. And by my will—my heart, mind, soul, and strength—I will follow you daily into everlasting. Amen.

WE CONFESS CORPORATELY 2 CHRONICLES 7:14; JAMES 5:16

The Bible consistently positions repentance before revival—whether it’s spiritual awakening, national healing, or cultural renewal. Throughout the Scriptures, we see God’s kings and prophets alike who are led to confess and repent of their peoples’ sin. Each time the Lord answered with healing and renewal—just like He promised (2 Chron. 7:11–14). When Jesus teaches us to seek forgiveness for sin, His prayer assumes a corporate nature: “. . . forgive **us our** debts . . .” (Matt. 6:12). Of “the prayers” to which the Early Church was devoted, corporate confession would have been vital. A culture of repentance was at the heart of the New Testament Church.

My friend Jim planted a church where another church had closed several years before. In his first months, while reading through old church files, he discovered that the church had made the decision to forbid performing interracial marriages in the 1970s. While it was a decision Jim had nothing to do with, his response was to lead his church in corporate repentance for the sinful, systemic patterns practiced by the previous congregation. The Lord answered. Today, Jim pastors one of the most diverse congregations in The Alliance.

Our churches ought to be marked by the perpetual practice of confession and repentance. It’s how the people of God reorient themselves from the powers and patterns of the world to the presence and purposes of God. The Lord responds by breaking the chains of cultural and institutional patterns of sin. If we want revival, let us begin with repentance.



REFLECTIVE PRAYER

Seek the Spirit’s leading to bring attention and awareness to areas of sin that may have taken root in your church. Allow these questions to shape prayers of confession and repentance:

1. What practices or patterns in our church are lacking in love (thoughts, words, deeds)?
2. Where might we be allowing sin to compel us in what we’re doing or what we’re not doing (pay attention to inherited behaviors)?
3. If anyone has been wounded by our sin, how might we seek forgiveness?