

Good morning! One of the hardest things for Christians to understand and incorporate into their lives is forgiveness. Part of the problem, of course, is that we don't like to forgive those who have hurt us. We'd much rather give them back at least some of what they have given to us. Still, forgiveness is such an essential and inescapable part of Christianity that we cannot be faithful Christians without receiving --- and giving---forgiveness. I have heard some Christians suggest that we do not need to forgive those who have not repented. Usually people who hold this view have been very badly damaged by someone, many times physically. Forgiveness is especially difficult for victims of physical or emotional abuse. It is important to understand, however, that forgiveness does not require us to continue to place ourselves in danger; we can forgive without continuing in insufferable situations. At the same time, we must forgive those who have wronged us, whether or not they have repented. This week we will take a look at what the Bible says about forgiveness and how it should operate in our lives. Let's begin by reading today's passages together:

Luke 23:34

But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.

Mark 11:25- 26

"And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses' "

In today's first passage, Jesus demonstrates forgiveness, despite the ongoing and unrepentant cruelty of others toward Him. He was hanging on the cross, bloody and bruised. He had already had His flesh ripped open. He had been beaten and mocked with a crown of thorns. They had spit on Him and struck Him on the head. He had carried His own cross up to Golgotha as far as He could go. Then they nailed His hands and feet to a cross as this angry mob screamed, "Crucify Him!" It was in this still-unfolding situation that Jesus said, "Father, forgive them." If there was ever a moment in history where someone should have deserved a free pass on forgiveness, it was Jesus hanging on the cross. Yet it was in this situation that He demonstrated forgiveness most clearly. Nobody was repenting---in fact they were all still doing it to Him!

In today's second passage, Jesus connects God's forgiveness of our sins to our forgiveness of others' sins against us, saying, "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses." Jesus placed forgiveness at the center of the prayer that He taught His disciples to pray—the Lord's Prayer saying, "Forgive us for our sins, just as we have forgiven those who sinned against us." Let's face it: forgiveness is hard and we cannot do it on our own. If we are to forgive others we must have God's help. Today, if you are harboring un-forgiveness toward someone who has hurt you, today is the day for you to forgive that person. It's too hard for you to do on your own...so ask Jesus to help you!