

Small Group Guide: THE LORD'S PRAYER: WORDS YOU THOUGHT YOU KNEW - Everyday Release

Opening Question: Share about a funny or minor moment when you held a silly grudge as a kid (a sibling stealing your toy, a friend not sharing, etc.). How do you look back on it now?

Opening Prayer: *Father, thank you for bringing us together. As we talk about forgiveness and releasing hurts, we admit this can be hard and sometimes painful. Please give us soft hearts, clear minds, and a willingness to hear from you. Help us understand your forgiveness and how to extend it to others. Lead our conversation by your Spirit. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Key Takeaways:

The Lord's Prayer is meant to be lived, not just recited. "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt. 6:12) calls us to a lifestyle of forgiveness, not just words.

Two big barriers to peace:

- Guilt over what we've done (last week's focus).
- Resentment over what's been done to us (this week's focus).

Unforgiveness feels good...temporarily. Like the Eskimo's knife covered with frozen blood, resentment can feel satisfying for a moment, but in the end it destroys us from the inside.

What forgiveness is NOT:

- It is **not conditional** – not earned, bargained for, or based on the other person stopping their behavior first.
- It is **not minimizing** the offense – "It's no big deal" is not forgiveness.
- It is **not resuming the relationship without change** – forgiveness and reconciliation are related but different. Forgiveness is instant; rebuilding trust takes time and change.
- It is **not forgetting** what happened – deep hurts are not erased from memory; instead God wants to transform and use them.

Forgiveness vs. Reconciliation:

- **Forgiveness:** releasing the debt and the right to get even; this is commanded and can be immediate.
- **Reconciliation / restoration:** requires genuine repentance (change), restitution when possible, and rebuilding trust over time. Boundaries are wise and biblical.

What forgiveness IS:

- **Relinquishing my right to get even.** I let God handle justice (Romans 12:19).
- **Repeating the process as long as necessary.** We may need to remind ourselves of the fact of our forgiveness decision when feelings flare up (Matthew 18:21–22).

God uses our hurts. We don't forget them, but we allow God to redeem them (Romans 8:28), so they become tools to help others rather than chains that bind us.

Why forgive?

- **God has forgiven you** far more than you'll ever need to forgive anyone else.
- **Bitterness makes you miserable** and poisons others around you (Hebrews 12:15). Unforgiveness keeps you a prisoner of your past.

Discussion Questions:

1. **Read Matthew 6:9-13, focusing on verse 12.** What do you think Jesus is teaching us by linking God's forgiveness of us with our forgiveness of others? How does this verse challenge the way you've usually thought about forgiveness?
2. **Read Romans 12:19.** In your own words, what does it mean to "leave room for God's wrath" or "leave that to God"? What makes it hard to trust God with justice instead of trying to get even ourselves?
3. **Read Matthew 18:21-22.** Peter suggests seven times; Jesus says seventy times seven. What does Jesus' answer say about the nature of biblical forgiveness? How does this idea of ongoing forgiveness connect with Pastor Dan's point about facts vs. feelings?
4. **Read Hebrews 12:15.** How have you seen bitterness "poison the lives of many others," either in your own family or in other relationships?
5. Pastor Dan said "*forgiveness isn't for them, it's for you*"—to free you from being a prisoner of your past.
 - Does that idea help you, frustrate you, or both? Why?
 - How might seeing forgiveness this way change the way you think about someone who has hurt you?
6. Talk about the difference Pastor Dan drew between **forgiveness** and **reconciliation**.
 - Why is it important to distinguish the two, especially in situations of repeated hurt or abuse?
 - Where might God be calling you to set healthy boundaries, even while you choose to forgive?
7. Pastor Dan encouraged us not to try to "forget," but to let God **redeem** our hurt (Romans 8:28) and use it to help others.
 - Can you think of a pain in your past that God has already used to encourage someone else?
 - Is there a hurt you're still in the middle of, where you'd like to ask God to "turn it for good" and maybe someday use to bless others?
8. Pastor Dan's wife suggests **praying for God to bless the person who hurt you**.
 - How does that idea land with you—realistic, impossible, hopeful?
 - What might be a first small step toward praying for someone who has hurt you?

Practical Applications:

1. **Name the Hurt Before God.** Set aside 10–15 minutes this week to honestly tell God what happened and how it hurt you. Don't minimize it. Then verbally say, "Lord, I choose to forgive [name] for [offense], and I surrender my right to get even. I leave justice to you."
2. **Pray for a "Hard Person."** Once a day this week, pray a simple blessing over a person who has hurt you: "Lord, would you work in their life, draw them to yourself, and bless them with your grace." Start exactly where you are—even if your heart isn't fully there yet.
3. **Clarify Forgiveness vs. Reconciliation.** Journal or talk with a trusted believer about one relationship where you're confused. Answer these two questions:
 - Have I forgiven them before God?
 - What boundaries might be wise while trust is (or is not) being rebuilt?
4. **Release the "Revenge Plan."** If you catch yourself replaying revenge scenarios or "what I should've said," pause and pray: "Lord, I've already forgiven. I give this thought to you. Help me walk in forgiveness and peace." Repeat as often as necessary (70 x 7).
5. **Let God Use Your Story.** Ask God this week: "Lord, is there someone you want me to encourage with part of *my story*?" Be open to a conversation where you can briefly share how God has helped you start healing from a hurt—without naming or shaming others.

MEMORY VERSE for the Week:

"Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord." (Romans 12:19, NIV)

Closing Prayer: *Lord, thank you for forgiving us far more than we'll ever forgive anyone else. You know every hurt represented in this group. Would you help us to release our right to get even and to trust you with justice? Where we're bitter, soften our hearts. Where we're afraid, give us wisdom and healthy boundaries. Use our stories and our scars for your glory and to help others. As we go from here, fill us with your peace and your Spirit. In Jesus' name, amen.*