

🕒 35 min

Forgiveness & Reconciliation

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Theologian Cornelius Plantinga said that sin can be described simply as the way things are not supposed to be. And since we were created for relationship, our sin is not just between us and God. Our words and actions that are misaligned with God's purposes can cause real harm to others, and when hurt occurs, it must be made right.

This reality is embedded in the Lord's prayer: "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt 6:9-13). Hurting others and being hurt by others is a part of living in this world. So too, should be the making of amends.

It's easy to skip the verse that immediately follows the prayer, "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (vv. 14-15). The forgiveness we extend is intertwined with the forgiveness we receive.

Scripture encourages us beyond forgiveness towards reconciliation. **Reconciliation is the Spirit-filled work of repairing what has been broken so God's peace may reign between all relationships.** Jesus forgives those who hung him on the cross (Luke 23:34), and proclaims, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matt 5:9). Moreover, Hebrews encourages us to "make every effort to live at peace with everyone" (Heb 12:14).

Receiving the abundant, steadfast love of God who is slow to anger, forms us to be more patient, gracious, and loving towards others (Ps 103:8). We point to the risen Jesus when we extend to others what we have received from God. This is not an easy truth. In fact, at times it's incredibly costly and vulnerable.

Being reconciled to God (forgiveness) and seeking shalom with others (reconciliation) can feel overwhelming. Fortunately, it is by God's grace, power, and authority—not ours—that forgiveness, reconciliation and justice is possible and accomplished.

EMBODIMENT EXERCISE | 3 min

Begin with two minutes of silence, allowing everyone to settle in. Invite everyone to practice a breath prayer, saying the first line in the minds as they breathe in, and the second line as they breathe out.

[as you inhale] *I am made right with God.*

[as you exhale] *Make me right with others.*

OPENING PRAYER (RESPONSIVE) | 1 min

One Creator God has forgiven us.
Many **We are freed to forgive.**

One Holy God holds nothing
against us.
Many **We leave vengeance to him.**

One Because of Christ, all is right
between us and God.
Many **May all be right in between us
and those who have done harm.**

All **Yes, may all be right between
us and those who have done
harm so that your shalom may
fill the earth.**

SCRIPTURE READING | 3 min

Psalm 103:1-12

Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel: The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION | 5 min

Ask the Holy Spirit to direct your reflection and allow emotions to surface. You might want to record your thoughts in a journal.

Where might you be holding on to unforgiveness? Who do you harbor bitterness or resentment towards? Ask God to bring comfort where you experience pain and for strength to release blame towards people that come to mind. If there any places of unbelief in God's love and forgiveness, ask God to help your unbelief.

COMMUNITY PRAYER | 15 min

Go back to Psalm 103. Take time to praise God in one-sentence prayers, drawing on God's attributes from the passage. For example:

- "God, I thank you for your mercy which is _____."
- "God, I thank you for your justice because _____."
- "God, thank you for not treating us according to our sins because _____."

A PRAYER FOR THE PEACEMAKERS | 1 min

One person prays aloud.

God, we are sinners,
but you have made us holy.
God, we are broken,
but you have made us whole.
We have seen you on the mountaintop;
be with us in the valley below.

We desire to give as you give to us,
but that Lord is costly and hard,
and we are but water and dust.
You, oh God, can raise us up,
to life and love with you.
Do it now that we may live,
in life and love with you.

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray aloud together.

**God who is our shalom,
who embraced us while we were enemies,
give us courage and strength to pursue the
way of peace, through the abundant love and
power of your Spirit,
Amen.**