



March 29, 2017
The Lord's Prayer, The Fifth Petition
"Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us..."

[Read Matthew 18:23-35](#)

"...we ask that God would give us all things by grace, for we sin daily and indeed deserve only punishment." (*Martin Luther, Small Catechism*)

One of my favorite television characters from years past often said, "Never say you're sorry. It's a sign of weakness." No matter how much I enjoyed that character, I flinched whenever I heard this line. I know this statement is not true.

Only the most callous and dishonest among us would deny that we hurt and wrong other people with embarrassing and reliable regularity. We may rationalize our behavior by noting that we are not ax murderers. It may well be that our sins do not have the external consequences that other, "bigger" sins might have. But we Christians know and confess that sin is sin—and that sin separates us from God, from ourselves and from others.

So we pray for God's forgiveness daily. And we pray that the Holy Spirit will empower us to forgive others. That's the meaning of that little word "as" in the petition. We need to know that forgiving and being forgiven travel the same spiritual road into and out of our hearts. If we are unwilling to forgive those who sin against us, then we will have great difficulty receiving God's forgiveness for our own sins.

This isn't some sort of payment system. It's not that we must forgive in order to qualify for God's forgiveness. Instead, this petition describes a deep spiritual reality. The two-way spiritual street must be open in both directions or it's not open at all.

In fact, Luther points to our own practice of forgiving as a sign that God forgives us. In the *Large Catechism* he describes our own forgiving as almost like a sacrament in its importance and power. "Whatever can be effected by Baptism and the Lord's Supper," he writes, "which are appointed as outward signs, this sign can also effect to strengthen and gladden our conscience. And it has been especially instituted for us to use and practice ever hour, keeping it with us at all times" (paragraph 98).

If you want the comfort of knowing God's forgiveness, you can exercise this almost-sacrament of forgiving the one who sins against you. Prayer for that gift of the Spirit and make the most of it! Saying we're sorry is not a sign of weakness. It is a sign of the strength of the Holy Spirit working in and through and among us.

Let's pray. Dear Heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit into my heart today to create the gift of faith which strengthens me to forgive those who sin against me. Use this sign to strengthen my weak conscience and to lead me to ask Your forgiveness every day. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Do something: Pray about someone who needs your forgiveness. Look for opportunities to give that gift.