Dear Friends,

"FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES"

I was a little boy when I learned the Lord's Prayer, which I pray every single day. Jesus taught this prayer to his disciples and it has been passed on through nearly two thousand years of history. This petition, "Forgive us our trespasses", is an important one for us to reflect upon.

When Jesus taught his own disciples this prayer he was, in a sense, telling them, "You are sinners and you need God's mercy in your lives." Perhaps this statement sounds overly simplistic. However, the entire Bible tells the story of how God has tried, throughout human history, to bring salvation to all people through the forgiveness of sin. What does this say about sin and our relationship with God? Our sins have a profound effect on our relationship with God. They separate us from the loving union God wants with us.

Our sins must, in some way, anger God and yet, this petition reminds us that God is the source of the mercy we need. I think of all the many ways I used to disobey my own parents while I was growing up and how frustrated they would get. I can remember feeling so bad about what I had done and that I had hurt my parents. I went a little too far away and couldn't be found. I took the one thing I wasn't supposed to have. I pushed one of my siblings to the screaming point. Or, when I was a teenager, I would be right there at the dinner table eating supper with my family and was as distant from them as though I lived on another planet. I ignored them as if they weren't there. I was often ungrateful, arrogant and aloof. My attitudes and behaviors often hurt my parents and family in deep ways. And they always forgave me despite the pain I may have caused them.

In this way, their love was Godly. When we pray, "Forgive us our trespasses," we are asking, again and again and again, for mercy. Why? Is it so that God won't be mad at us anymore? Is it because we are afraid of how God will judge us? When we consider the fact that Jesus is the One God sent to bring us salvation, then it is certainly important for us make this petition to God because we want our life in eternity to be happy. That is what God wants for us too.

However, this petition is an important one for a much more personal and immediate reason. No matter what our age, we are still children, very much aware of the fact that

our sins cause real harm in our relationship with God. All we have to do is look at the ways our sins impact those we love to see how they impact our relationship with God. There is so much loneliness, fear, anger, hatred and distrust in our world today. All these attitudes, all the discord, all the separation and pain we inflict on one another, all that separates us from God and each other is the consequence of sin. In so many ways, our lives are broken and we are in deep pain.

Because of this, it is important to say words we learned as little children: "I'm sorry, please forgive me." These words reflect the pain of the sinner, they reveal the depth of the shame we feel knowing that our sins build walls of separation in the loving relationships of our lives. We ask God to forgive us our trespasses because the consequences of our sins are painful and we are in need of healing.

Jesus knew this. This is why God sent his Son into the world. God wants us to be at peace. God wants us to be healed. We, however, have to reach out from the depths of our pain like disobedient little children who need to know that their parents still love them. If only we could find the humility to cry out for mercy, to seek reconciliation, to desire healing for hearts broken by sin, we would truly know the justice of God. We would see it so beautifully revealed in miraculous reuniting of souls harmed by the separation caused by sin.

I know my parents and siblings still love me despite the ways I hurt them when I was growing up. I know God still loves me even though I am a sinner. I have been forgiven for so many things, by so many people. I am in awe of the capacity we have for mercy. I am in awe of the healing forgiveness brings.

"Forgive us our trespasses." This is such an important petition not only because we know that God is going to judge us, but because we are so much in need of healing and peace in our lives.

In joyful hope,

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