

18th May 2022

Debts

**"Sixteen tons, what do you get?
Another day older and deeper in debt.
Say brother, don't you call me 'cause I can't go,
I owe my soul to the company store."**

Merle Travis, *Sixteen Tons*

Debt is a big problem in the UK. For a start, The UK national debt currently stands at £1.7 trillion and is growing at a rate of £5,170 per second! And in case you can't relate to such staggering figures, statistics for the year 2020 tell us: £1,685 billion was owed by individuals in the UK; on average every citizen spent £865 on interest alone; 280 people were declared bankrupt every day; £31,798 is the average debt per adult. Economic hardship is a real problem, and the forecasts indicate that it'll get worse. When we come across the word "debts" in The Lord's Prayer, therefore, we should remain conscious of the crippling effects of this social ill.

But "debts" and "debtors" in The Lord's prayer is about more than economics. It's about how we are with each other. How often have we heard the phrase, "I'm so indebted to you"? Something good has been done, so much so that the recipient feels indebted to the person for their kindness, a gift of love they will perhaps never be able to repay. But such kindnesses aren't offered with the expectation of payment in return. We may feel "indebted", but it is a debt that will never be "called in".

But the debts we must be more conscious of, and which the Lord's prayer rightly calls us to remember, are the things that happen between us that undermine, or even destroy, our relationships. The alternative version of The Lord's Prayer uses "transgressions". The contemporary form uses "sin". Whichever way, we are called to be ever conscious of the errors of our ways, to seek forgiveness for these, so that we might be better able to forgive the mistakes – the debts – we might hold against others.

My Granny (that fount of all wisdom) was fond of saying, "Do as you would be done by." The Lord's Prayer tells us, "Forgive as you are forgiven." If we can find forgiveness for ourselves, in our religious life or in our self-awareness, might we not then be in a better position to forgive the transgressions others have done to us – "as we forgive our debtors"?

A prayer for today

Thank you for your forgiveness., Lord. Now, where's that debtor I have to forgive too? Amen