

# Lesson 15: Freedom through Forgiving (BITTERNESS)

Healing Streams Ministry, Savannah, GA. All scriptures are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

## Introduction

In the previous lesson we sought to expose the “hidden” work of the enemy to divide us from God, others and even from our self—by bringing convincing accusations (truth with a twist) that turn us from God’s ways of mercy giving love. Accusations by the enemy seek to create division and separation over issues of hurt and offense and then hold it all in place by means of un-forgiveness. So what is God’s answer? **Forgive!** How much, how often, how thoroughly? As much as needed, as often as needed, as thoroughly as needed—to fully release your heart. The truth is a childlike heart of joy is waiting for all of us on the other side of fully forgiving the very ones whom an enemy used to rob us of our joy! God really wants to turn the tables on the enemy, but He needs us to work with Him, not against Him. ***Un-forgiveness in all of its forms is an agreement with Satan, not God.*** Ouch. It not only hardens our hearts (separating us from peace and joy), but it also damages our bodies (through the stress response). These strongholds have to be torn down.

## Freedom through Forgiving

**Bitterness is the number one block to healing**—it leads to unanswered prayer (Mk 11:25) and it holds in place a host of deadly emotions.<sup>1</sup> It is like drinking poison and hoping the other person will die. Grudges do bad things to our bodies, minds and hearts. We simply have to choose between getting even and getting well. The writer of Hebrews warns that if we have a root of bitterness it will trouble us and defile many others through their contact with us.



**Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.** Hebrews 12:14-15

**Bitterness is a stressor to the body** and can lead directly to illness, but it also keeps trauma from being healed and that adversely affects our health as well. How does that play in? Unmended trauma of the past increases the levels of anxiety and fear we carry which are so damaging to health, since the pain of unforgiven offense is always telling us that God and others can’t be trusted. Bitterness is a block to healing, because God has written that He will not release mercy we need, or answer prayer, if we don’t show mercy (see also Lk 6:37-38).

**Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father, who is in heaven, may also forgive you your transgressions. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your transgressions.** Mark 11:25-26 WEB

**Bitterness is a stronghold**—learn to carry it captive before it carries you captive (2Co 10:3-6). The high thought of bitterness is saying to God, “My law of not forgiving is better than Your law of mercy.” Fall completely out of agreement with its thoughts and feelings—before what begins as a seed of hurt or offense grows into a stronghold of nightmarish proportions.

**7 underlings or degrees of the bitterness “strong man”** (Lk 11:21-22). Bitterness never stays where you put it—it seeks to keep on growing and spreading. It wants to take over your life.<sup>2</sup>

- **Un-forgiveness** (not letting go of hurt, offense, or wrongs).
- **Resentment** (to “re-feel” old offenses; keeping a record of wrongs).
- **Retaliation** (getting even by criticism, passive aggressive behavior, etc.).
- **Anger and wrath** (sudden upsurge, going out to the other person or down upon oneself).



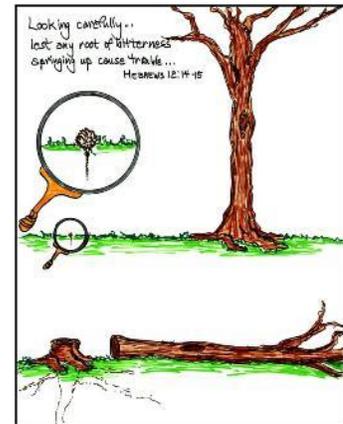
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- **Hatred** (detesting, despising, strong disliking, intense ill will, rejection, hardness, apathy).
- **Violence** (wanting to see harm come to another, desiring to lash out or hurt back).
- **Murder** (with the tongue, or in the heart, or by criminal act; wishing them dead).

### A barren tree and a stump—an image of the forgiveness process.

1. By an act of your will choose to cut the tree down. The enemy will oppose this. Do it anyway.
2. With each return of old feelings, cut through the trunk. The enemy will accuse you of having failed at forgiving—he works both sides of the street! Keep on doing it anyway.
3. Eventually you will work through the leafy branches and feel full forgiveness—remembered pain is gone!
4. The stump that trips you up later is the question that “stumps” us: why did God allow it? Release Him also. Trust His love and wisdom—even when you can’t understand it. Believe His promises of restoration.



**Combine forgiveness with the power of believing.** Forgiving others releases the pain and weight of wrong off of us, but we may still feel saddened by the loss we experienced. To help us God has given magnificent promises of restoration—for those who love Him (see Ro 8:28).

**As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save many people alive. Genesis 50:20 WEB**

**The temptation to judgment.** God separates us from our sins (Ro 7:17). But judgment *binds* our spirit with bitterness and *blinds* us to our own pride and unloving hearts. The Holy Spirit gives discernment about sin so that:

- We won’t walk in the dark, not knowing good from evil, right from wrong.
- We will be able to pray for that person and help them turn back to God.

The enemy seeks to turn discernment into judgment and bind the sinner to the sin.

- Bitter judgment goes against what Jesus suffered at the cross—He died to forgive.
- Bitter judgment is the nature of Satan in us, seeking to express itself through us.

**The necessity of forgiveness.** The truth is no one is ever trapped in their pain by the sins of others. We are entrapped by our own sin of bitter judgments. Forgiveness brings release: it is a major key to the Kingdom of God (Mt 16:18-20; Jn 20:21-23). We are to loose sinners from their sins and bind the enemy. But when believers bind sinners to their sins, we unwittingly loose the enemy and advance his kingdom—first in us, then into the world around us as we spread the poison. **Turn the key that sets captive hearts free!**

Turn the key that sets captive hearts free.  
Forgive all for all.

**Biblical incentives to forgive**—try these for leverage, they really work!

- 1) **Your own freedom.** Un-forgiveness brings torment (Matthew 18:34-35) by binding hurt, hardness and heaviness to our hearts. It also generates fear and insecurity and it is a block to receiving answers to prayers, even prayers for healing (Mark 11:25).
- 2) **They don’t know** what they are doing. Jesus said it—so it’s true. Let it work for you (Lk 23:34).
- 3) **Humble yourself**—see your own sinfulness and it is easier to release others (Mt.18:33).
- 4) **Get compassion** for them—God looks past the sin to see the wounds. Do likewise (2 Ti 2:24-26).
- 5) **Let Jesus gain the inheritance** He died to receive—forgiveness for *all* sinners.

God is seeking a people after His own heart—a people willing to keep their hearts open and loving, no matter what the cost. His call to forgive is an invitation to pass from death to life. Don’t let this opportunity slip away. Purpose in your heart to truly forgive those who have wronged you. Put the offense and the person under the Blood at the foot of the Cross as



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often as needed until even the memory of the event no longer gives pain. It begins as an act of the will. Feelings follow. Experience the peace and release of finally letting go.

**Say yes to life!**

End notes for Freedom through Forgiving

1. For bitterness as a block to healing: Teaching and insights from Be In Health® teaching and materials, Dr. Henry W. Wright, Thomaston, Georgia, seminar notes, October 2000.
2. For the 7 degrees of bitterness: Ibid.

## Notes/Journal



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## Exercise



*Make a people list:*

- 1) **Ask God** to reveal every area of un-forgiveness towards anyone who has wronged you (real or imagined), hurt you, or anyone you have tried to forgive but haven't fully. When you think of them does your heart tighten, get heavy, or feel numb? Add them to the list!
- 2) **Forgive all** from the heart, not as a feeling, but as an act of the will. Make a resolute decision to forgive them and let them go. Release them and let God deal with them. If you have truly forgiven them, the pain will no longer be there in your heart and you will no longer want justice or vengeance—even when you see them or think of them.
- 3) **Pray** for them all the good blessing that you would wish God would shed upon you. If you can't do this, you haven't fully forgiven them. Doing this will help you to fully forgive.

### Individuals to forgive

Mother/Father  
Brother/sister  
Husband/wife/children

Family members/in-laws  
Teachers/coaches/bosses  
Pastors/spiritual leaders

Others in authority  
Friends/enemies  
Anyone for anything

### People I need to forgive

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## Discussion Questions

Does anyone have personal knowledge of a disease that began because something “unforgivable” happened to them or someone they knew or of a disease that ended when forgiveness was released? Let psychological illness (soul dis-ease) count as a disease.

It helps to see the gravity of this error by the negative example that really bitter people give us as a warning. Seeing their wretchedness becomes part of our own motivation for doing the



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hard work of forgiving. Perhaps someone could share such a story of a person no one in the group could possibly know, but whose life was tragically wrecked by their un-forgiveness. Then pray extravagant grace down upon that person to help them get free.

Since we defeat the enemy by the word of our testimony (Rv 12:11), this is a very appropriate time for people to share stories of how they had to do some forgiving in a hard place and the way in which it set their own life free. But be watchful: if anyone dwells *too long* on what was done to them, they may need to do more forgiving.

## Main Points



- Un-forgiveness is both a root of illness *and* the number one block to healing.
- Jesus commands us to forgive absolutely everyone for any sin against us.
- Bitterness has 7 degrees—it can grow from a seed of unforgiveness into murder.
- Forgiveness has at least 5 motivations—from selfish to selfless. Use them all!
- The tormentors come when we don't forgive fully from the heart.
- The key of forgiveness releases us as well as them—make the 10 steps work for you.

## Digging Deeper



What forgiveness is NOT—7 common misconceptions.

- 1) **It is NOT a feeling:** Forgiveness is a choice, an act of the will, not a feeling. We cannot control our feelings, but we can control how we choose to respond despite our feelings being what they are. If you don't feel like forgiving, that should not deter you. In fact, few people **feel** like forgiving—that's why it is a command, not an invitation.
- 2) **It is NOT glossing over:** Forgiveness does not pretend the offense was not as bad as it really was. It does not turn a blind eye to real faults. It sees sin as sin and then forgives the person.
- 3) **It is NOT nursing the fond memory:** Real forgiveness does not keep score, hold grudges, or build walls. It is necessary to watch our boundaries, but it is not loving to build walls on them!
- 4) **It is NOT excusing:** True Christian forgiveness needs no reasons or excuses in order to forgive—it is obedience to the cross. There are always reasons why we do wrong. Reasons help us to understand and forgive, but reasons do not excuse us. God did not excuse us—He atoned for sin at the cross of Christ. Sin is evil—it can **only** be covered by forgiveness.
- 5) **It is NOT a reward:** Christian forgiveness is not something earned by being sorry or by efforts to change. The less deserved it is, the more it is Christ-like, mercy-based forgiveness. When mercy is deserved, then any forgiveness given is justice based—not mercy based.
- 6) **It is NOT a divine pardon:** Forgiveness is not letting the other person “off the hook”—it is taking them off our hook and putting them in God's hands for redemption. It is the most responsible thing to do with sin and injustice. God will not drop the ball—He will certainly do the right thing with what we give Him.
- 7) **It is NOT blindly trusting:** Forgiveness creates no obligation to trust the offender. Jesus trusted Himself to no one, but He lived in forgiveness and love with everyone. He still does. Aren't you glad He forgives you, even though He can't trust you never to betray his love? He evidently thinks forgiving us is a small price to pay for the joy of loving us. Let's do likewise.

**What forgiveness is:** forgiveness means being open to loving and even liking the other person, accepting them just as they are—just as we would desire to be accepted and loved if we were them. It means releasing them, setting them free, letting them go, letting them be themselves—and setting our own hearts free in the process. ***Forgiveness is giving your pain and the injustice to God and trusting Him with it.***



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**Who to forgive?** We need to spread it around evenly wherever it is needed.

1) **Others:** most frequently. A prayer that rarely gets answered: "God don't let anyone offend me today, I don't have time to deal with it." Even with this, *practice makes perfect*.

2) **Self:** not nearly as easy as you think. Unless you have low expectations of yourself, a very weak conscience, or a great hold on grace, *it can be very hard to really forgive yourself*.

3) **God:** don't underestimate the need for this. If God is all-powerful and all-loving (which He is), then the pain of what He allows can be a very real hurt or source of offense to us. *He is absolutely innocent of any evil or wrong-doing*, but our hearts may be holding hurt or un-forgiveness and need to release Him from any bitter judgments we unwittingly carry.

4) **Nature:** rare, but real. Events, animals and objects all may need to be released by forgiveness.

## Sword and Shield



So many scriptures command forgiveness—the Lord must really want us to get this!

"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Matthew 6:12-15

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven." Matthew 18:21-22

"Then his lord called him in, and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt, because you begged me. Shouldn't you also have had mercy on your fellow servant, even as I had mercy on you?' His lord was angry, and delivered him to the tormentors, until he should pay all that was due to him. So my heavenly Father will also do to you, if you don't each forgive your brother from your hearts for his misdeeds." Matthew 18:32-35 WEB

"Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you." Luke 6:37-38

The Lord actually sees not forgiving as a form of hating (1Jn 2:9-11; 3:14-15; 4:20-21).

## Prayer Focus



**Get your heart ready.** The first stage in gaining victory is recognizing the spiritual problem and then allowing yourself no excuses, but being willing to take full responsibility for having it. The second stage is praying for God to help you with it—casting the burden on Him to do it *in* you and *through* you and *for* you. The third stage is coming into obedience to the part that the Lord shows you that you need to do. Let your prayer focus be on stage two: asking God for help and strength to obey Him now that you realize you will *have* to forgive.

*Lord, make me willing to be made willing to obey you fully from the heart. Help me want to want what You want (forgiveness) and hate what You hate (un-forgiveness).*

**Review the 5 motivations (in the lesson) and these affirmations against holding bitterness.**

- *I would rather be free (on the inside), than bitter.*
- *I will set free anyone I have to in order to get free.*
- *What was done to me is nothing compared to what bitterness is doing to me now.*
- *I am not bound by the past—only by my bitterness about it.*
- *Whatever the reasons are for being bitter, they are not as good as freedom feels.*
- *I will turn the key of forgiveness and walk away.*



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- I will just give it to God and leave it all behind.
- I will walk away from the ruined place and let God be the one to restore it.
- If I have to start my whole life all over, just to walk away from bitterness, it will be worth it in order to live with an un-bitter heart.
- Why should I complain about or be bitter about all of the past years of carrying the pain, because the truth is that I bound the pain of my ruin to myself though bitterness.



## Renunciations and Affirmations

Confess and renounce in the generations of your family on both sides. Repent for each spirit you have entertained. Then confess and believe in the way God's Word is telling you to go. \*

Example: *Father, I renounce \_\_\_ (Bitterness, Related spirits) in the generations of my fathers and I repent of having walked in it myself. I repent of my own sin of \_\_\_ (Unforgiveness, resentment...). Forgive me and break its power over me and off my generations.*

### The seven degrees or underlings of bitterness

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|------------------|-------------|---|
| 1) Unforgiveness | 4) Anger    | 7) Murder (with the tongue, from the heart) |
| 2) Resentment    | 5) Hatred   |   |
| 3) Retaliation   | 6) Violence |   |

### Related spirits

Self-pity	Accusation	Shame, blame
Rebellion	Strife, hostility	Cursing
Fear	Death	Gossip, slander
Rejection	Suicide	Envy/jealousy

\* Renunciation list modified from Be In Health® teaching and materials, Dr. Henry W. Wright, Thomaston, Georgia, seminar notes, October 2000.

## Putting Feet to Your Prayers/Stretch Yourself



**How to forgive?** If you break a hard job down, it's easier to do. Really go to work with these 10 steps and they will work for you. Bring the 5 motivations in and power up! Set your will to agree with God and let His truth take your heart on a pilgrimage to new life (Ps 84:5).

- 1) **Seek grace:** ask God to help you by the power of His Spirit to make a real commitment of your will to do His will. If you really want to obey Him, then He will empower you.
- 2) **Acknowledge the pain.** Sin hurts. Sin is injustice. It is wrong. It grieves God and us.
- 3) **Ask God to forgive them:** really mean it. He already does, but you need to express it.
- 4) **Ask God to catch the thief** and make him pay: commit the real enemy to God for His justice.
- 5) **Ask God to forgive you** (for judging them): believe that He has and gratefully receive it.
- 6) **Choose to forgive them:** pray it and say it by an act of your will; put your heart in it.
- 7) **Choose to forgive yourself** (for prolonging the pain): accept it. Release the pain.
- 8) **Choose to believe God's promise** of redemption is for you (Romans 8:28). Rejoice in it.
- 9) **Pray for them**—all of the blessings you would like God to bestow on you (Job 42:10).
- 10) **Thank God by faith** for His wisdom and goodness in all He allows and re-surrender.



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