

Forgive? Not Optional!

The Unalterable Command That Gives Incredible Life

This teaching on why forgiveness is required is a practical application that companions the lessons set forth in "Matters of the Heart," our free [eCourse](#) for spiritual growth and emotional transformation. The 24 Main Healing Lessons from the course can be found in the downloads section in PDF and MP3 formats. They are also available in our [Store](#) as an eBook, a 176 page workbook and as CD and DVD sets of 24, 1/2 hour teachings.

A Matter of Life and Death

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love one another--according to these words of St. John. He is convinced that through Jesus we can love each other and for Jesus we must. Forgiveness is required—it is not an option! He says that to hate a brother or sister is to be a murderer. But we don't hate them—we just haven't quite forgiven them.

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. 1 John 3:14-15



An unforgiving Christian is a living contradiction. That is why John tells us whoever does not love abides in death. It goes against our very nature as Christians to not forgive, since we ourselves only live by His forgiveness of us. Passing from death to life means really learning to forgive others from the heart.

Watch a short video about forgiveness on our YouTube channel

[Forgiving Cats](#)

A cat's teenage pregnancy led to a very funny encounter with God.

Why Forgive?

We need powerful motivation to practice this! There are Biblical and practical reasons why forgiveness is required. Unforgiveness needs to be removed like a dead tree (Hebrews 12:14-15).

1) Jesus Example

Jesus chose to suffer death on the cross for the sake of our forgiveness.



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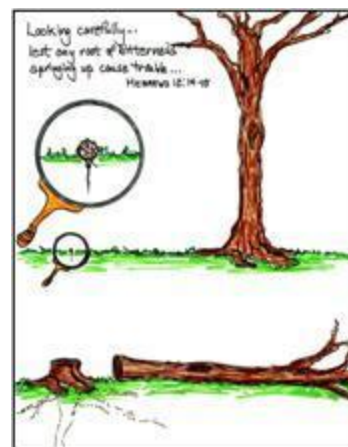
And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4:32

2) Jesus' Command

If we don't forgive, we will suffer the consequences of unanswered prayers, un-received mercy, and inner torment. He also says that if we love Him, we will obey Him.

"And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. 26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses." Mark 11:25-26

Matthew 18:34-35 ' 34 "And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. 35 So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses." Matthew 18:34-35



3) Jesus' Inheritance

We want to see the Lord gain His reward for paying sin's debt for everyone. His reward is the release of sinners to Him for Him to save and redeem.

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. Ephesians 1:18

4) Consider What Unforgiveness Does

Un-forgiveness deadens: It deadens our sense of connectedness to life and to God. We feel numb, spiritless, cut off from God, a stranger to joy.

Un-forgiveness darkens: It darkens our understanding of others, God, and life. We spin off on tangents of hurt that we rationalize are right.

Un-forgiveness destroys: It destroys our relationships, careers, even health. We build walls, cut ourselves off—both jailer and jailed are in the same jail.

What Forgiveness Is NOT

Some common misconceptions

1) It Is NOT a Feeling



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Forgiveness is 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. It is not hypocritical to forgive people when you don't feel like it. In fact, few people feel like forgiving—that's the whole reason why God commands us to do it (He doesn't have to command us to like ice cream!).

Hypocrisy is when we don't act according to what we really believe to be true. But as Christians we really do believe in forgiveness for sins, that's why we seek forgiveness from God so often. To not forgive sin in the other person is to be a hypocrite. Un-forgiveness is really trying to take the easy way out--the path of least resistance, a path of spiritual laziness because it lets feelings rule without being challenged by our real beliefs. It causes us to pay a terrible price in the end.

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 or minimize them. It looks at the evil of sin and 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 want to build walls on them!

4) It Is NOT Excusing

True Christian forgiveness needs no reasons or excuses in order to forgive, because it is mercy based, not justice based. There are always reasons why we do wrong, but reasons do not excuse us. Christian forgiveness begins where excusing ends. Reasons help us to understand and excuse, but God does not excuse our wrong-doing. He atoned for it at the cross of Jesus. Sin is sin—it can only be forgiven.

5) It Is NOT a Reward

Christian forgiveness is not something earned by being sorry or by efforts to change. It may be wholly undeserved, unmerited. In fact the less deserved it is, the more it is genuine, mercy-based forgiveness when it is given. If you deserve forgiveness, then there is justice in forgiving you—not mercy.

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.

7) It Is NOT Blindly Trusting

Forgiveness creates no obligation to trust the offender. Trust has to be earned; forgiveness is a gift commanded of us. 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. And there is no one else in the universe with a freer, more joyful heart.

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 offense to God and trusting Him with it.

Who to Forgive?

We need to spread it around evenly wherever it is needed.

1) Others

most frequently. An old prayer of mine: “God don't let anyone offend me today, I don't have time to deal with it.” It rarely got answered!

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 hard to really forgive yourself. Yet, even here forgiveness is NOT an option. We simply must get good at forgiving and accepting ourselves, or we will never have any lasting peace and pleasure. You are a sinner! So what can you do about it? Hate the sin and love the sinner!

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 unforgiveness nevertheless and the need to release Him can be real.

4) Nature

Rare, but real. Events, animals, objects all may need to be released by forgiveness.

How to Forgive?

If you break a hard job down, it's easier to do.

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 Forgive You (for judging them)

Believe that He has and gratefully receive it.

5) Choose to Forgive Them

Pray it and say it by an act of your will; put your heart in it.

6) Choose to Forgive Yourself (for prolonging the pain)

Accept it. Release the pain.

7) Choose to Believe

God's promise of redemption is for you (Romans 8:28). Believe it with your whole heart. Rejoice in it.

8) Pray for Them

Pray for your "enemies" all of the blessings you would like God to bestow on you.

9) Thank God

By faith thank God for His wisdom and goodness in all He allows and re-surrender.

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 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!

One More to Explore

Good Grief

There is a right way to grieve and it is well worth discovering.



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Interested in Going Deeper?

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