

person and his/her sin. Scripture tells us to first look at ourself. *"Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye"* (Matthew 7:4-5). It is so easy to minimize our own sin because, from our perspective their sin is so great. Do not compare yourself to the other person, rather look to Christ and His holiness. That will give you a much more accurate view of the seriousness of your own sin.

**3) Remember God's forgiveness.** God didn't forgive us because we got our act together, because we were already changed, or because we deserved it. Refer to Romans 5:8, shared earlier. The person who offended you doesn't deserve forgiveness either. We forgive because God commands us to, knowing we will greatly benefit by doing so.

## **FORGIVENESS IS:**

**Forgiveness is a choice** – a decision made with our will to forgive

**Forgiveness is commanded and empowered by God** — Mark 11:25, *"And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses."* 2 Corinthians 9:8, *"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work."*

**Forgiveness is a decision to surrender the punitive attitude and to trust God to do what's right and best in that person's life.** God's justice is far superior to ours. "Forgiveness involves... handing over to God the responsibility for justice... (God) can far better represent (us) and uphold (our) cause. Forgiveness means deferring the cause to Christ and deciding to be free of the ongoing burden of bitterness and blame."<sup>2</sup>

**Forgiveness is a decision to cancel the debt** — to no longer try to exact payment from the offender. Remember that their sin has also been paid for by Jesus Christ at the cross. He promises to exact judgment. Jeremiah 11:20, *"But, O Lord of hosts, You who judge righteously, testing the mind and the heart, let*

*me see Your vengeance on them, for to You I have revealed my cause."*

## **WHEN WE CHOOSE TO FORGIVE WE ARE MAKING FOUR PROMISES:**

- 1) I will not think about this incident. I will choose to not dwell on it.
- 2) I will not bring this incident up and use it against you.
- 3) I will not talk to others about this offense. I will not gossip or harm your reputation.<sup>3</sup>
- 4) I will not allow this incident to stand between us or hinder our personal relationship.<sup>3</sup>

There is a great freedom as we understand, commit to, and practice Biblical forgiveness.

## **FOOTNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> Mocolo, Lidia. Anger and Forgiveness Seminar, 1999

<sup>2</sup> Beth Moore, *Breaking Free: Making Liberty in Christ a Reality in Life*, LifeWay Press, 1999

<sup>3</sup> Sande, Ken, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, Baker Book House, 1991

*All scripture is from the New King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.*

## **DIGGING DEEPER**

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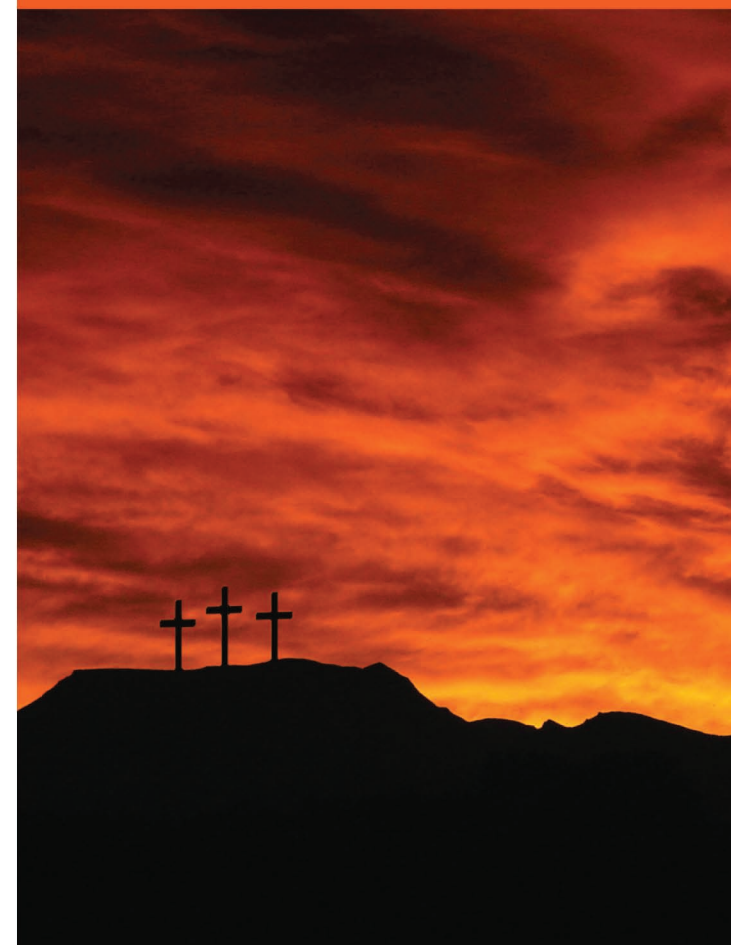


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# **FORGIVENESS**



# **Forgiveness**

**Breaking Free**

A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

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*Transformation Resource Series*





## Forgiveness

**F**orgiveness, according to Webster's Dictionary is (a) to cease to feel resentment against an offender; to pardon; (b) to give up resentment or claim for retaliation; (c) to grant relief from payment. It would seem, therefore, that the opposite of forgiveness... unforgiveness, entails, at the very least, feelings of resentment, an unwillingness to pardon, a desire for retaliation and a debt mentality toward the offender.

### IF YOU ARE THE OFFENDED – GRANTING FORGIVENESS

Unwillingness to forgive another's offense against us has a very different effect than we intend. Unforgiveness, instead of punishing or hurting the offender, primarily permeates our own life. It is destructive in numerous ways, including our relationship with that person and our relationship with God, not to mention our physical well-being. Unforgiveness, left unchecked, will eventually develop a root of bitterness which rehearses the offense and embellishes the details, over and over. This root of bitterness will wreak havoc not only in the specific relationship in which the offense occurred but will also spread its venom to other people and relationships in our lives. *"...lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;"* (Hebrews 12:15). In addition to harming our relationships, unforgiveness holds us in the grip of bondage. We think of the offense and the offender often. It plays over and over in our mind and fuels the seed of anger we already feel.

Several things can prevent us from forgiving the person who has offended us. It can be our personal pride and self-righteousness which are rooted in the belief that we are somehow better than the offender. It can be our belief that if we forgive him, he'll have gotten away with it or that she'll never change. It can be our perspective that their sin is much greater than ours. By

**Pretending it doesn't hurt is not the same as forgiveness.**

offering forgiveness to a person we are not saying that he deserves forgiveness. He doesn't deserve forgiveness any more than we deserve God's forgiveness. *"...while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* (Romans 5:8)

### FORGIVENESS IS NOT:

**Forgiveness is not a feeling.** It is a decision made at a point in time to release the person and their offense to God, and lived out daily by the choice to stand by our decision.

**Forgiveness is not denial.** Pretending it doesn't hurt is not the same as forgiveness. Acknowledging to God that you have been hurt is a first step to forgiving. In Psalm 55:12-14, King David laments how painful it is to be hurt by someone near to him. *"For it is not an enemy who reproaches me; then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me; Then I could hide from him. But it was you, a man my equal, my companion and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in the throng."*

**Forgiveness does not require forgetting.** Destructive things done to us can have lasting effects that often remind us of the offense for years to come. Frankly, as we commit to forgive, Satan won't let it go that easily and will bring it to remembrance, often, at first. As we remain faithful to not dwell on the offense, over time it will become less prevalent in our conscious thoughts. With God as our example, Scripture tells us that He removes our transgressions from us, *"As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us"* (Psalm 103:12). It does not say God forgets our sin. He chooses to not hold it before our face.

**God commands us to put off sinful behavior and to put on righteous behavior.**

**Forgiveness is not a once-and-done event nor is it easy.** Forgiveness is a choice that we need to make at a point in time but requires regular reminders of that choice. It is not just words; it requires action. God commands us to put off sinful behavior and to put on righteous behavior. For example, put off...bitterness (Hebrews 12:15) put on tenderheartedness (Colossians 3:12), kindness and compassion

(Ephesians 4:32); put off...an unforgiving spirit (Mark 11:26), put on ... forgiveness (Matthew 6:14).

**Forgiveness does not mean removing consequences of the person's sin.** A great deal of "enabling" takes place under the guise of forgiveness. Protecting a person from the consequences of their sin or removing the consequences encourages continuation in that sin. God has allowed consequences of sin to discourage us from repeating the sin, and to lovingly discipline us. Although God forgives our sin He does not remove the natural consequences of the sin. We still may suffer the consequences of our sin here on earth, but Christ's sacrifice removed the consequences of our sin in heaven. (He satisfied God's wrath.)

**Forgiveness does not require waiting for one to ask for forgiveness.** If this were the case, we would have no choice but to be in the bondage of unforgiveness until the other person acts. God never puts us in that position. Although forgiveness and restoration may not take place between you and the offender until the offender repents, forgiveness can be transacted between you and God, by making a choice to release the offense to God, along with the emotional pain that accompanies it. This will prepare your heart to forgive the offender when he/she comes asking for forgiveness, while in the meantime release you from the bondage of bitterness.

### HOW DO I FORGIVE?

**God is our model.** *"And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you"* (Ephesians 4:32). How did God forgive us?

**1) In Christ.** Forgiveness is ours only in, through and because of Christ. We are commanded to forgive our brother from the heart. *"And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. '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). Be encouraged! "God never asks us to do anything that 'Christ in us' doesn't empower us to do." The Holy Spirit empowers us to forgive even in the face of the harshest offense.

**2) Start with personal evaluation.** When we have been offended we are prone to focus on the other