

Overcoming Unforgiveness

How many of you have ever been hurt by someone else? Did you forgive that person for what they did? We've all been hurt by another person at some time or another — we were treated badly, trust was shattered, hearts were broken. And while this pain is normal, we sometimes let that pain linger for too long.

One of the most powerful weapons the church has ever been given is the power of forgiveness. Forgiveness is the key relational issue of the Bible, the very heart of Christianity!

“Forgiveness is the foundation for a Christ Centered Life – it’s at this point that our Christianity rises or falls!”

God was so concerned about forgiving sinful people that He paid the highest possible price to offer us that forgiveness. He sent His own Son into the world to live among us and ultimately die an agonizing death on Calvary so that we could be forgiven and saved.

2 Corinthians 5:21 – “For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.”

God not only forgives us, He challenges us to follow Him and be forgiving of those who sin against us the same way He forgives us when we sin against Him. Jesus set the pattern in the model prayer. **Matthew 6:12** - “**Forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us.**”

Friends, we must learn how to forgive and let go, or we will get trapped in a cycle of bitterness and anger and hurt, be miserable in this life, and in the end, miss out on heaven.

I. Why should I forgive

Because bitter resentment will destroy you. **Bitterness** is unresolved hurt and can be real or imagined. When you are “bitter” you perceive someone has done you wrong. If you don’t deal with it, you will eventually begin to “resent” the other person and hold a “grudge.”

Resentment is repressed anger, bottled-up anger, smoldering pressure-cooker anger that will attack you and hurt your health if not dealt with. Some heart disease is emotionally induced by unresolved conflict. That’s why cardiologists warn: *“Stop worrying and get rid of your resentments; let your anger out or it will destroy you.”*

Bitter resentment is the unhealthiest emotion people have. It’s like a cancer that eats you alive, its poison. It has physical and emotional consequences that lead to depression and fatigue - nothing drains you emotionally like bitterness.

Job 5:2 - “To worry yourself to death with resentment would be a foolish, senseless thing to do.” Resentment is foolish because it is unhealthy. When you get angry and become resentful towards somebody, you don’t hurt them, you hurt yourself!

Let’s say somebody hurt you ten, twenty, thirty years ago, and you’re still resentful about it. You’re worrying, stewing, spewing, you’re all upset about it, but it’s not bothering them. It’s still making you miserable, but they’ve forgotten it. Thinking of that person who hurt you with bitter resentment in your heart only drains your body of energy. It just prolongs the hurt. **Job 18:4** - “You’re only hurting yourself with your anger.”

“Hating someone is like setting your house on fire to get rid of a rat!” “Not forgiving someone is like drinking poison and expecting them to die. It only hurts you!”

“Resentment is when you let your hurt become hate. Resentment is when you allow what is eating you to eat you up!” **Resentment is emotional suicide!**

Resentment cannot change the past, it cannot correct the problem, it doesn't change the other person, it doesn't even hurt the other person, it only hurts you. Resentment makes you mad, unhappy, and miserable. I've never heard anybody say, **“I feel so much better being resentful.”**

No, the unhappiest people I know are those who are carrying a grudge. **“He that carries bitterness to bed with him will find the devil creeping between the sheets.”**

A grudge always ends up hurting the one who holds it far, far more than the one against whom it is held. **Ecclesiastes 7:9** - **“Keep your temper under control; it is foolish to harbor a grudge.” GNT**

The effects of unforgiveness are bitterness, anger, resentment, rage, hatred, broken relationships, broken homes, poor health, etc. These are the types of things found in the life of an unforgiving person. Friends, you are killing yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually if you are living with repressed bitterness and anger in your heart and soul.

“We cannot live healthy lives if we are not forgiving people.”

Because God has forgiven me. The first step to forgiving others is realizing that you are forgiven and deeply loved (**Colossians 3:13** - **“Never hold grudges. Remember the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others”**).

So when I forgive someone, I am only giving them what God has given me! **“We will never have to forgive anybody else more than God has already forgiven us!”**

Hebrews 8:12 – **“And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.”** Wow! Now, that is a remarkable promise. God doesn't just forgive. He forgets. He erases the board. He destroys the evidence. He clears the computer. He doesn't remember our mistakes. For all the things God does do, this is one thing He refuses to do. He refuses to keep a list of our wrongs – and neither should we!

People who feel forgiven find it easier to be forgiving. People who feel unforgiven find it difficult to forgive others (David). Remembering how much God has forgiven us makes it a whole lot easier to forgive other people.

“When God forgives our sins, He buries them in the deepest sea and puts up a ‘No fishing’ sign!”

Micah 7:19 – **“...You will trample our sins under your feet and throw them into the depths of the ocean!”**

Because I need forgiveness in the future. If you have something against someone, you need to let it go and forgive that person, because if you are holding something against someone else, it is being held against you by God.

The Bible says that our unforgiveness blocks God's forgiveness in our lives. The Bible says we cannot receive what we are unwilling to give. Jesus is crystal clear on this point - if God has forgiven us then we need to forgive other people. But if we refuse to forgive, then heaven will never be our home!

Matthew 6:14-15: **“If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.”**

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

“If you can’t forgive, don’t ask to be forgiven by God!” “The forgiven must forgive!” “We must forgive to be forgiven!”

The sin of **“unforgiveness”** will cost you your health, life, and soul in hell and do more to destroy relationships than any other thing we can do. It also leads to the desire for **revenge!**

Revenge is really saying to God – *“God, I don’t trust you to deal with this situation, I think I can do your job better than you can. This person wronged me, but I can’t turn it over to you because I don’t know what you are going to do here.”*

“If we get even with somebody, all we have done is come down to their level!”

Romans 12:17–19: “Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, “I will take revenge; I will pay them back,” says the Lord.”

“To take revenge is to be overcome by evil ourselves. Vengeance is the Lord’s - let Him do it!” Besides, if someone has wronged you and you get revenge, you will only be happy for a minute. But if you forgive him, you will be happy forever! *Forgiveness is the best revenge!*

How often do I have to forgive? **Matthew 18:21-22:** “Then Peter came to him and asked, “Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?” “No, not seven times,” Jesus replied, “but seventy times seven!”

Forgiveness is not an occasional act. It is a permanent attitude, a way of life for a true child of God. Forgiveness is not a one-shot deal. It is continual. Jesus said, **“Over and over.”**

“We ought not to keep score of the number of times others have hurt us. God keeps records, and vengeance belongs to Him.”

How will I know when I have fully forgiven and released my offender? Give yourself this test. Do I secretly rejoice when I hear they are having problems or misfortune? Do I avoid the person on purpose? Do I speak to the person only when something like a chance meeting happens? Do I constantly think about what happened? Do I ever sit and brood over the wrong done to me? Do I hesitate to pray for the person?

You know you have released them when you can think about them and it doesn’t hurt anymore. You know you have released them when you can pray for God to bless them. People who are hurt tend to hurt other people.

So you know you have released them when you begin to understand their hurt, rather than focusing on how they hurt you. *“Forgiveness is me giving up my right to hurt you for hurting me!”*

Forgiveness does not mean you erase the past. It doesn’t even mean the other person will change his behavior — you cannot control that. They are responsible for their actions; you are only responsible for yours. Forgiveness means that you are letting go of the anger and pain, and moving on to a better place.

It’s not easy. But you can learn to do it. *“Forgiveness is unlocking the door to set someone free and realizing you were the prisoner.”*

“The ultimate proof of total forgiveness takes place when we can sincerely ask God to let those who have hurt us off the hook -- even if they have hurt not only us, but also those close to us.” R. T. Kendall

The key to forgiving others is to quit focusing on what they did to you and start focusing on what God has done for you.

“But that’s not fair - somebody has to pay for what this person did - they can’t get away with this.”

You are absolutely right - someone must pay. ***“But you don’t understand. This person doesn’t deserve grace or mercy - they are not worthy of forgiveness.”*** I’m not saying they are. But are you?

“But I can’t forgive him/her!” The truth is that you **“won’t”** forgive him/her. All of us are **able** to forgive; some of us choose **not** to forgive. All of us **can** forgive but not all of us **will** forgive. Forgiveness must be given or else resentment will strangle and eventually destroy us.

“But the cost of dealing with resentment openly is too great. It might cost me the relationship.” The cost of not addressing the resentment is even greater. It might cost you your health, your life, your soul!

“But if I forgive them they get away scot free.” No, they won’t. The Bible says one day God is going to settle the score and balance the books. One day He’s going to have the last word. God is a fair God. He’ll take care of it. That’s why there’s a hell!

Romans 14:12 – **“...each of us shall give account of himself to God.”**