

Overcoming Unforgiveness

How many of you have ever been hurt by someone else? We all have at some time or another — we were treated badly, trust was shattered, hearts were broken. When you were hurt, did you forgive that person for what they did? **Matthew 6:12** - “Forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us.” NLT

The Bible is crystal clear on this point - “*If God wasn’t willing to forgive sin, heaven would be empty.*” **Psalm 86:5** – “O Lord, you are so good, so ready to forgive, so full of unfailing love for all who ask for your help.” NLT

As we will learn, if we are not willing to forgive others, heaven will never be our home!

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.” A grudge always ends up hurting the one who holds it 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

Resentment is repressed anger, bottled-up anger, smoldering pressure-cooker anger that will attack you and even 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.*”

Job 18:4 - “You’re only hurting yourself with your anger.” GNT “*Hating someone is like setting your house on fire to get rid of a rat!*”

Bitter resentment is the unhealthiest emotion people have. It’s like a cancer that eats you alive, it is a poison that will destroy your soul. “*Not forgiving someone is like drinking poison and expecting them to die. It only hurts you!*”

Job 5:2 - “To worry yourself to death with resentment would be a foolish, senseless thing to do.” GNT

“Resentment is when you let your hurt to 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.*”

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.

Because God has forgiven me. The first step to forgiving others is realizing that you are forgiven and deeply loved (**Colossians 3:13** – “**Make allowance for each other’s faults (never hold grudges), and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others**”). NLT

“We will never have to forgive anybody else more than God has already forgiven us!” So when I forgive someone, I am only giving them what God has given me! (**Hebrews 8:12** – “**And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.**” NLT

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!

“Every man should keep a fair-sized cemetery in which to bury the faults of his friends!” C.S. Lewis

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.**” NLT

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.**” NKJV

*“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!**

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.**” NLT

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 someone has wronged you and you get revenge, you will only be happy for a minute. *“If we get even with somebody, all we have done is come down to their level!”*

But if you forgive him, you will be happy forever! *“Forgiveness is the best revenge!”*

II. Formal forgiveness

The Bible describes a **“formal forgiveness”** and a **“release of hatred.”** **Formal forgiveness** takes place when two people agree and work together to resolve their differences, repentance takes place, and the lost relationship is restored. **Matthew 18:15** – **“If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back.”** NLT

Luke 17:3 - **“...If another believer sins, rebuke that person; then if there is repentance, forgive.”** NLT

This is the same kind of forgiveness God offers to those who repent (**Acts 2:38** – **“Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”**). NKJV

When God forgives or remits our sins, He is letting us off the hook, allowing us to walk away free from our debt.

“But what if the other person does not want to resolve the issue, refuses to repent and ask for forgiveness? Am I still obligated to forgive that person?”

Consider Jesus on the cross: **Luke 23:34** – **“...Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.”** NLT

The ones Jesus prayed for had not repented or asked for forgiveness. Did God forgive them? Yes, but only if they obeyed the gospel later like anybody else. But (and here’s the point), even if they did not repent and obey the gospel, Jesus did not hold bitterness and hatred in His heart towards them.

Remember, **formal forgiveness** is based on repentance and the relationship being restored, something the other person may not be willing to do. But before you think you're off the hook, please understand that all that bitterness and hatred you are holding against the other person is also a great sin in the sight of God!

III. Let it go

Whether or not “**formal forgiveness**” ever takes place, we are still responsible for releasing/getting rid of our bitterness and anger:

Ephesians 4:31–32: “Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.” NLT

The word for “**forgive**” that is used in **Ephesians 4** is **ἵμι – charizomai - khä-r ’-zo-m** which means: “*To be gracious to another person, to give someone a gift they do not deserve, to forgive freely.*”

Jesus taught us this in: **Matthew 5:44** – “**But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you...**” NKJV

It’s impossible to love and pray for someone if at the same time we hate them and are holding bitter feelings towards them!

Luke 6:37 – “**...Forgive others, and you will be forgiven.**” NLT The word for “**forgive**” that is used here is **ἀπόλυ – apolu - ä-po-lü’-** **Tug-of-war** which means “*to dismiss, to set free, to let go free, to release.*”

Sometimes that’s all we can do – **let it go!** Whether or not we can formally resolve the issue, bitter resentment, anger, grudges, revenge, hatred, and score-keeping are sins we cannot afford to commit if we are to be healthy followers of Jesus. “*The offense will never let you go, you must let go of the offense!*” “*Forgiving is not forgetting, it’s letting go of the hurt.*”

What about you? Do you have some hatred and bitterness towards someone who hurt you grievously in the past? Do you have a hidden anger at someone that is devouring you? Then you must forgive the person you are angry with (mentally and emotionally release the bitterness, resentment, pain, and anger), even if they are wrong and will not admit it or ask for forgiveness because you are doing it for your sake, not for theirs.

“**But what the person who hurt me did to me was really bad**” (examples: **raped, child abuse, cheated on**)!

“*If we say that monsters (people who do terrible evil) are beyond forgiving, we give them a power they should never have – we give them the power to keep their evil alive in our hearts. We give them the power to condemn us to live forever with the hurting memory of our painful past. We give the monsters the last word.*”

Sometimes what the other person did is simply inexcusable, but “*To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.*”

To forgive another person does not mean you will forget what happened or that the person is not responsible for what he did or that you need to bring him back into your life.

“To forgive doesn’t mean what the other person did was right - it means that you aren’t going to let what the other person did ruin your life, take your peace, and steal your joy!”

“Forgiveness doesn’t make the other person right, it makes you free.”

“Forgiveness doesn’t mean you excuse the crime – it just means you’re no longer willing to be the victim!”

“It isn’t the sin of another person that robs us of our peace, it is our own bitterness that does that! Do not lose your peace over someone else’s sin!”

Friends, God does not want us walking around carrying hate, bitterness and unforgiveness in our hearts, because the word of God, the love of God, and the Spirit of God cannot live in a heart filled with bitterness.

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!” NLT

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.”*

Remember, God has released us from a debt that we can never repay. The number of times God has forgiven us is infinite - when He forgives, He blots it out, removes it far away, forgets it, and throws it to the bottom of the sea. **He expects us to do the same!**

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.

“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.” NKJV

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 forgiven and 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.

“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

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.

“Forgiveness is me giving up my right to hurt you for hurting me!”

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.”***

IV. Tips to help you forgive

Forgiveness is a process that can take time. You aren’t going to do it in a second or maybe not even in a day. It can take time to get over something (may need help). So **commit to letting go**, because you recognize that the pain is hurting you, affecting your relationships, and causing you unhappiness.

Realize that the past is over. It isn’t happening anymore, except in your mind. And that causes problems — unhappiness and stress. Instead, bring your focus back to the **present moment**. In forgiveness, you are making the choice to be happy and move on. Find the joy in life now - stop reliving the hurtful past. It may take time, but with God’s help, you will get there.

V. Conclusion

It truly is a life-changing experience for a person who forgives someone who hurt them. Why? Because nothing in life is more devastating to our mental and emotional health, much less our spiritual health, than holding a grudge we refuse to turn loose of. Life eventually becomes bitter and painful for the one who will not forgive and release the hurt.

Failure to forgive leaves us torn apart spiritually, emotionally, physically. Our anger and resentment builds a wall between us and God. Our ability to talk to God about our own hurts and problems is destroyed because of our failure to forgive others.

The effects of unforgiveness are bitterness, anger, resentment, rage, hatred, broken relationships/homes, poor health, etc., which are all just as addictive as alcohol and drugs!

An unforgiving heart will cause you more pain and destruction than it will ever cause the person who hurt you! It will produce the **Three D's**: “**Depression, Despair, and Discouragement,**” and will kill you physically, emotionally, spiritually and shrivel your soul.

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

Where do you stand today? Are you holding anger, bitterness, and resentment against someone and it is killing you? Do you need to repent, or to rebuke someone (in love) for his sins against you so that they can repent and the relationship can be what it should be? *If so, what are you waiting for?*