



Session 6: Forgiveness

The Mark of the Father

Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy’, But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:43-45)

In Matthew 6, Jesus taught us to pray: “Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors (v. 12) He went on to say, “For if you forgive others when they sin against you, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive you.” (Matthew 6:14.

We don’t get any credit for loving our friends—even the pagans do that. But when we love our enemies, we are marked by the Father’s love. The single greatest indicator that we have been infected with divine love is our capacity to love our enemies. It is the mark of the Father on our lives.

Paul went on to say, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32). Forgiving others is vital to our spiritual well-being. Jesus spoke about it often because we often get hurt in relationships. We get offended at home by our partner, children, parents, and siblings; we get hurt in the workplace by co-workers, customers, and bosses. We get annoyed with inconsiderate friends and rude neighbors. Life in a fallen world is fraught with opportunities for conflict.

The healing power of forgiveness

In recent years, research has proven the healing power of forgiveness. Studies found that forgiveness can help lead people to emotional and physical healing. People who forgive experience a noticeable decrease in anxiety, depression, hopelessness, inner emptiness, and an increase in self-esteem. They are more satisfied with their lives than the people who do not forgive.

Offers release from destructive emotions

Social scientists discovered that forgiveness is a key to healing psychological wounds. One clinical psychologist wrote, “Forgiveness offers a pathway out of the kind of emotional and psychological pain that repeats and repeats itself throughout our life.”

Sociologist Hobart Mowrer found that guilt was more detrimental to our emotional and mental health than childhood deprivation or neglect. Guilt damages our capacity to love others and to love ourselves. It manipulates us, influencing our choices and the



motivations in our heart. It closes us off from intimate relationships with the people around us.

Forgiveness is the most significant factor in both spiritual and psychological healing, a crucial stage in the **healing of our soul** and spirit. It offers us release from the debilitating effects of guilt, shame, anger, resentment, and rage.

Restorative power of forgiveness

Today forgiveness is considered to offer a highly significant and promising mode of healing in the counseling room. It is being used for all manner of problems: anger and depression, catharsis and peace with cancer patients, family-of-origin issues, sexual abuse and compulsions.

Research provides clear evidence that forgiveness is a powerful tool to help us recover from abuse, bereavement, trauma, addiction, abortion, divorce, and other losses. It enables us to tap into powerful spiritual resources that foster our healing.

Forgiveness is also being used to identify and resolve conflicted family relationships. It helps adolescents who felt unloved by their parents. Importantly, forgiveness has been identified as one of the top ten characteristics in a long-term first marriage.

Christian psychologist, Dr. Charles Zeiders describes the restorative impact of forgiveness as a “psychological healing complemented by lightness of spirit.” He says, “Because forgiveness so powerfully lifts souls to the experience of new psychological life, I call this effect *The Resurrection Effect*.” He explains that “forgiveness has the power to bring about individual and interpersonal healing through removing emotional burdens, bringing peace, and in some cases restoring relationships.”

More than 2000 years ago, God provided us with the greatest tool of power ever given to humanity: forgiveness. Because of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, we can be forgiven for our sins and transgressions. Because His sacrificial blood was given in payment for all of humanity’s transgressions, we can forgive the people who sin against us –empowering us to keep our hearts open to God and the people around us

Why Should We Forgive?

Many Christians are ignorant of the high cost of unforgiveness. They do not understand how or why unforgiveness affects their lives. In the Gospels, Jesus Christ links forgiving others to answered prayers and well-being.

Some may object and say, “If you know what was done to me, you would never ask me to forgive. Why should I forgive this person after what they did to me? Here is a few reason why it is important to forgive that person.



God tells us to if we want our own sins to be forgiven

- For if you forgive others when they sin against you, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive you.” (Matthew 6:14).

Unforgiveness gives the devil a foothold in you

Ephesians 4:26, 27 says, “In your anger do not sin; Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.” The Greek word for foothold is *topos*: an inhabited place. Paul was warning us to deal with our anger quickly lest Satan get the upper hand in our souls. If we don’t take the high ground and forgive, Satan will take up ground in our souls.

Once unforgiveness gains a foothold, we develop more serious spiritual problems. Evils like resentment, revenge, rage, hatred, violence, and murder begin to consume our hearts and minds, forming destructive strongholds within the structures of our personality. Note, these are spiritual problems – not just psychological symptoms.

Harboring unforgiveness is like putting up a welcome sign in our souls for the enemy to come in and wreak havoc, and he never rejects such an invitation. Paul wasn’t saying it is a sin to be angry; He was reminding us that when we are angry, we are more likely to sin. Our anger can lead us out of the river of God’s presence and into some very dark places, so we need to be careful. We need to deal with our anger quickly so we don’t develop any bitter roots.

- Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity [a place] (Eph 4:26, 27).
- For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing (Jas 3:16).
- For indeed what I have forgiven ... I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, in order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes (2 Cor 2:10-11).

Allows Satan legal access to us

When we refuse to forgive someone, destructive spiritual powers and rulers of the darkness have the “legal right” to access us.

When we will not let go of the sins of others, we are keeping that person under the “bondage of our judgment.” Demonic bondages often stem from broken relationships of trust between people. When we hold another’s sins and do not forgive them, we are holding a curse upon ourselves.

- If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained (John 20:23).
- I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever shall say to his brother, “Raca” [empty headed, good for nothing], shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, “You fool,” shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell (Matt 5:22).



Unforgiveness hinders God's protecting grace

Unforgiveness, resentment, and anger open us to demonic bondage and the devil's power. Failure to forgive moves us out from God's protecting grace.

In the story of Cain and Abel, the Lord was pleased with Abel's offering of a sacrificial lamb, whereas, He rejected Cain's offering of fruit from his garden. Why? Cain had not followed the Lord's instruction about how to resolve sin – a sacrificial lamb.

When Cain became *very angry* by the favor shown to his brother, the Lord warned:

- If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it (see Genesis 4:1-16).

Cain failed to receive forgiveness from God for his sinful rebellion or forgive his brother for doing it right. His unresolved sin brought God's judgment down on him. He was condemned to roam the earth as a vagrant, unable to bring forth fruit from it. He lived in exile outside the presence of his Creator. We must recognize that *we cannot do whatever we want* – without consequence.

God will turn us over to the torturer

Using a parable Jesus gives us a reason why we should forgive. Jesus warns that if we do not forgive from the heart, we will be turned over to the torturers.

In response to Peter's question about how many times he must forgive, Jesus tells a story about the revengeful servant who, although he had been forgiven his debt, had his fellow man, who owed him money, thrown into prison.

When the servant falls on his knees before his master, the master feels compassion for the man, because he knows that the man does not have the means to repay him, and releases (forgives) him from the debt.

But then, the forgiven man finds his fellow servant who owes him a small sum of money and tries to force him to pay it back. He even places his hand around the guy's neck, trying to choke it out of him. Failing that, he has his friend thrown into prison.

When hearing of his behavior, the master calls him and says,

- "You wicked slave; I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?"
- And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him (Matt 18:32-33)
- Jesus turns to his followers and says, "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart" (Matt 18:35).

In this parable, Jesus establishes the reality that unforgiveness carries a high price tag: *torture!* Modern research scientists have discovered the same truth. Resentment, anger, and rage affect our health, our mind and emotions, our social relationships, and our walk with God.



Makes us physically sick

It is well-established that most physical sicknesses have an emotional component. Over two-thirds of hospital beds are occupied by patients who are put there because of their inability to organize and discipline their emotions. It has been estimated that fifty to seventy-five percent of patients are sick because of the influence of thought patterns and emotions upon their physical bodies.

Negative emotions like anger and resentment take a great toll on our bodies. Studies have demonstrated a strong relationship between hostility and heart disease as well as with other diseases like ulcers, gastritis, cancer, and colitis. They also show that chronically angry people die earlier than non-hostile people.

Studies have verified the positive power of forgiveness on our well-being. For instance, people who forgive are more likely to enjoy lower blood pressure, a stronger immune system, and a drop in the stress hormones circulating in their blood. Their back pain, stomach problems, and headaches may disappear. They report reduced anger, anxiety, depression, and PTSD symptoms; higher self-esteem; and more hopefulness about their future.

What I have come to see ... is how intimately the forgiveness of sins is connected with bodily and emotional healing. They are not separate. In fact, far from being a sign of God's blessing, much physical sickness is a direct sign that we are not right with God or our neighbor – Francis MacNutt.

Refusing to forgive may not directly cause disease, but the negative effects of holding on to hurtful memories and past injuries can weaken your immune system. You become more susceptible to illnesses and diseases, including cancer, so says webMD.com, the respected medical advice web site.

Dr. Steven Standiford, chief of surgery at Cancer Treatment Centers of America, claims: "It's important to treat emotional wounds or disorders because they really can hinder someone's reactions to the treatments – even someone's willingness to pursue treatment." In fact, forgiveness therapy is now an integral part of cancer treatment at the center.

Blocks our physical and emotional healing

When Jesus healed the man at the pool of Bethesda, He made a direct relationship between sin and sickness. He told the man to not sin anymore (John 5:1-9).

Dr. Zeiders describes how unforgiveness acts as a barrier to healing deep psychological wounds in his article, "*A Christian Depth Psychology of Forgiveness Leading to the Resurrection Effect.*"

In his book, *Healing*, former Catholic priest Francis MacNutt wrote, "I have found that many sins do not block God's healing power to the same extent as does a lack of forgiveness. I understand better than I used to why Jesus laid such a heavy stress on



forgiving enemies when he talked about prayer ... He often seems to connect forgiving enemies with the Father's answering prayers."

Imprisons our wounds

When someone sins against us unjustly, we sustain a wound in our heart. We respond to the painful wound by becoming angry and resentful. To balance the scales of justice, someone must pay for the pain we experienced: either the person who hurt us or even our self.

Consciously or unconsciously, we desire to hurt someone. Consequently, our resentment and revenge become deeply entrenched in the wound, causing it to feel even more painful.

- My heart is wounded (smitten like grass and withered away) within me (Ps 102:4).
- People weighed down with iniquity ... From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it, but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores; they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment (Isaiah 1:4-6).
- Thus says the Lord, 'Your wound is incurable, and your injury is serious, there is no one to plead your cause; no healing for your sore, no recovery for you' (Jeremiah 30:12).

Our wounds, now imprisoned, are cut off from the healing presence and love of Jesus Christ. The only way out is to turn to God for healing, repent of the desire to take revenge, and forgive those who wounded or hurt us. The act of repentance enables us to humble ourselves, placing ourselves before God in a receiving position.

Causes personality imbalance and disintegration

Many emotions can paralyze and debilitate us because they produce an unhealthy spiritual and mental condition. Fear and anxiety are disintegrating enemies of human personality. They clog up normal sources of emotional, spiritual, and intellectual power.

We become bogged down by resentment, fear, and guilt; our emotional ills turn in upon ourselves and sap our energy, reducing efficiency. Unable to expel our anxieties which have turned inward on our personality, we enter into a state of dis-ease and fall prey to many forms of ill health.

Forgive because bitterness is a poison to your soul.

The author of Hebrews warns us not to come short of God's *grace*, lest a root of bitterness grows in our hearts (Heb 12:15). In fact, we are encouraged to let our hearts be strengthened with *grace*, rather than with food (Heb 13:9).

Psychiatrist M. Scott Peck recognized the existence of "a powerful force originating outside of human consciousness which nurtures the spiritual growth" of his clients. He found grace to be a very common phenomenon that cannot be explained within the conceptual framework of conventional science and natural law.



The complete work of Jesus Christ has opened the doorway for us to enter into the throne room of God and receive his grace for everything we need (see 2 Cor 9:8; 12:9).

Keeps us from hurting those we love

Eating something bitter leaves a biting, disagreeable sensation in the mouth. Similarly, bitterness in the heart causes life to taste bitter. We find little joy in living life and we infect others with our bitterness.

When we do not go to God and receive his grace for the pain inflicted by others, unforgiveness turns inward, becomes deep-seated, and bitterness gets rooted in our hearts. We are warned of this consequence in the Bible:

- See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many have been defiled (Heb 12:15).

According to the Bible, bitterness rooted in the heart affects the very words we speak: “For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart” (Matt 12:34). People with a root of bitterness have a tonal quality to their words that sound sharp, edgy, sarcastic – perhaps reproachful or even cruel.

What is Forgiveness?

In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray: “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matt 6:12). In the Gospel of Mark, He says, “Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions” (Mark 11:26).

Sin creates a debt

What is it we are to forgive? We are to forgive *the debt*. Jesus is saying that when someone transgresses or sins against us, a debt has been created and needs to be resolved – and He *expects us to settle that debt* which was created by our transgressor. He is asking us to release the person from having to pay down their debt. He says we can do this through forgiveness!

Remember, the law of justice requires the one who committed the wrong to be held accountable and made to pay down the debt in order to balance the scales of justice.

When someone violates the law of justice – through transgressions, deliberately or ignorantly – an account has been opened, a debt has been created, and an imbalance has resulted. To restore balance (harmony), the debt *must* be paid down by someone, i.e., justified.

For indeed what I have forgiven ... I did it for your sakes ... that no advantage be taken of us by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes (2 Cor 2:10-11).



Defining Forgiveness

In Matthew 18:27, Jesus said, “The lord of that servant felt compassion and released him and forgave [*aphiemi*] him the debt.” The Greek word *aphiemi* translated “forgave,” means “to dismiss, to cut off, to release” something.

In this biblical story, the lord felt compassion and cut off the indebtedness of the servant; i.e., he dismissed the debt that the servant owed him. The servant was no longer responsible to pay it.

Forgiving the debt, not the person

Notice this vital distinction: the focus of forgiveness is on the *debt*, not the person who owed the debt. It is the debt that receives the action of the verb “forgive.”

When the lord dismissed the debt, cutting it off, the debt no longer existed; it was wiped out. When we ask the Lord to forgive us our transgressions, our sins, we are asking Him to dismiss the debt we owe, not dismiss us.

Heart-Based Forgiveness

Heart-based forgiveness means you allow your emotional core to be touched, release your right for revenge, and let go of the record of wrongs you’ve been collecting.

Some type of spiritual event takes place in our heart that empowers us to release our transgressor from their debt. The evidence of heart-based forgiveness is compassion.

- And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt (Matt 18:27).
- Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you? (Matt 18:33).
- So shall My Heavenly Father also do to you if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart (Matt 18:35).

The pathway to heart-based forgiveness demands that something take place deep inside us. We can’t just give mental agreement and then brush it away as unimportant. To be real, forgiveness must touch our heart in some significant way. We no longer demand that the person suffers the way they have made us suffer.

1. Aware of your need

Forgiveness is usually motivated by an awareness that you are hurting in some way or that you are continually recalling the failures of some individual and sharing them with others. This awareness enables us to acknowledge that our mind or heart is not at peace with someone.

Sometimes you may not be aware that you are holding an offense until the Holy Spirit makes you aware of it. This awareness may occur suddenly, but other times it may be gradual.



2. Acknowledge you have been sinned against

Forgiveness requires you to acknowledge that you have been hurt by another person's sin or transgression. This may be hard. You know you are hurting, but you are not sure why – you think perhaps it is your fault.

Some people don't trust their own perception of some event, because they were taught as children not to. They were told over and over that what they were seeing wasn't true – when it was.

Acknowledging sin brings freedom

Many years ago a friend was telling us how much he was hurting, and no matter how much he prayed about it, the pain wouldn't go away. He even went to a Christian therapist for help, but to no avail. As we listened to his story of how he was hurt, I suddenly said to him, "You were sinned against, weren't you?"

He looked astonished. His countenance brightened up. He had not considered that his painful feelings were a consequence of being sinned against. Later, he told us how much this one thought helped him and he was free of the pain.

Other people try to pretend that something did not hurt them, perhaps because of pride. But the truth is that they are deceiving themselves. Denying their painful response only creates more problems for them in the future. They swallow their emotion, taking it deep inside, where it can do much greater damage to them later in life.

3. Take an account of what happened

The next step is to take an accurate account of what happened. Before you can cut off or dismiss a debt, it is necessary to know exactly what was done or not done, and the extent of the damage. In the parable of Jesus, the king needed to know what the servant owed him.

Know what you need to forgive the offender for

Identify exactly what they did or failed to do for you. What was their sin against you? What do you need to forgive them for?

Identify what their sin cost you

Identify exactly what their sin cost you, the price you pay because of their unjust action. What do they owe you? What did you want from them?

True forgiveness requires psychological and emotional honesty with our self and with God. We must not only acknowledge the truth about what happened but also our feelings of hurt, resentment, vengeance, and anger. These destructive emotions must become available to us. Otherwise, our forgiveness may take place only in our mind, not in our heart.

- When the king came to realize the seriousness of the situation, he reacted with anger. He commanded the servant to be sold into slavery with his wife & children until he could repay his debt (Matt 18:34).



4. Identify how their sin made you feel

Identify exactly how their sin made you feel. What feelings did you experience as a result of their transgression against you? Many feel the pain of interpersonal offenses, but they don't have the courage or know how to acknowledge it. If you are unable to access your pain, ask the Lord to bring you in touch with it.

Did you feel abandoned, rejected, unwanted, unloved, or left out? Were you afraid, anxious, worried, or terrified? What about embarrassed, ashamed, bad, blamed, or stupid? Belittled, betrayed, unloved, or deceived? Angry, resentful, enraged?

5. Anger must be acknowledged and released

Although our typical response to injustice is to get angry, we must acknowledge and release the anger before freedom will come.

Anger is an emotion for which the Christian community has little tolerance—it is seen as a sin and unbecoming. Many families also taught this belief. If you get angry, you are often scolded and shamed. But the Bible tells us to *be angry and don't sin*: "Don't let the sun go down on your anger or you will give the devil an opportunity" (Eph 4:26).

The length of time you hold on to anger, and what you do with it, has much to do with whether it becomes sin or not. I hold that we must not be too quick to tell someone to forgive, especially if they are not yet in touch with their pain and anger.

Satan wants us to dwell on anger and do nothing about it. He wants us to turn the anger inward and bury it deeply. So demonic forces will take the opportunity to stir up this old anger and we will express old anger in a new situation.

Make a Decision

As we discussed earlier, we must make a decision to release our desire to even the score and instead forgive the offender.

We can't wait until we *feel* like it—we might never get there. Accepting the blood of Jesus as enough for the sins of our debtor frees us to decide we will forgive them.

Our decision to forgive involves giving up our right to negatively judge someone who has wounded us and instead extend compassion toward them. This reflects our commitment to release our self and the other person from any burden of debt and injury.

6. Recognize your debtor is unable to repay the debt

When the servant begged for forgiveness, the king realized that he'd never have the means to repay the debt. We also come to the same point where we realize that our offender does not have the means to repay their debt.

When we are hurt, we look to the person who hurt us for repayment. We want to make them pay for our loss, thinking it will take away our pain. But in most cases, they do not have the power (resources) to do this. They might even be dead.



Only Jesus has the power to take away our pain and heal our wounds. He is the only one who can pay back and restore the debt of the losses we have incurred in our lives.

7. Stop demanding your debtor change

At this point, we stop all demands that the one who hurt us must change. Forgiveness is never a means of changing someone else, but rather the avenue of release for us. We do not say, "I'll forgive you, *if* you do this or that." If so, then we are still trying to make our transgressor pay down the debt they owe us. Once we forgive them, they owe us nothing.

8. Disconnect transgressor from their sin

Forgiveness becomes easier for you if you can separate your offender from their sins. They are not your enemy; it is their sins that are your enemy.

When God saved us, He separated us from our sin. He saw our sin, but He saw *us* without it. He loved us even in our sin, because He was able to separate us from our sin. This means that we too can forgive others of their failures, yet love them.

9. Agree to live with consequences of your transgressor's sin

In forgiving others, you are agreeing to live with the consequences of their sins, but in the freedom of forgiveness, rather than in the bitterness of unforgiveness.

Suppose a drunk driver hits your car; you are injured and your child is killed. You will live with the consequences of that driver's sin for the rest of your life – you will pay the price for their sin, whether you want to or not.

This is why, when we come to forgive, we need to understand exactly what the unjust action was and what it cost us. What did we lose because of that person's sin against us?

Note: If someone is too quick to forgive, and their pain or anger is not available to them, they are probably in denial. Before doing the hard work of forgiveness, it may be better to wait until they are in touch with their anger.

Through an act of our will before God in prayer, we assert our *Will to Forgive* over our *Will to Punish* our debtor, and we surrender our right to get even.

Some type of spiritual event takes place in our heart that empowers us to release our transgressor from their debt. The evidence of heart-based forgiveness is compassion.

- And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt (Matt 18:27).
- Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you? (Matt 18:33).

10. Release your debtor from their debt

In forgiving your transgressor, you are dismissing the debt they owe you. You are saying, "I no longer require you to suffer the way you made me suffer."



In releasing our debtors, we are free of the anger and the stresses of maintaining the note of debt. This requires us to apply some faith, some confidence and assurance in our heart, that as we let go of what was owed us and surrender it into God's hands, He has taken responsibility for it.

11. Allow your emotional core to be touched

In the parable of Jesus, the king is *feeling* something that allows him to freely release the servant of the debt. The feeling of "compassion" exposes the true heart of the king.

Compassion is the benevolent emotion we express toward another with whom we have made some inner identification. It says *I know the pain you carry, for I also have carried a similar burden*. Feeling compassion can ease the hard work of forgiveness in a way that nothing else can.

When you are willing to revisit the hurt caused by your transgressor and go to the Lord with your pain, you typically experience empathy and compassion for the one who hurt you.

Undergo change in your heart

Biblical forgiveness requires that something takes place in our heart. This is the crucial moment in forgiving others. Once we see that every human being has inherited a corrupted seed from Adam, blame dies.

It was the nature of Jesus to forgive, and when we receive Him into our hearts, we receive his nature—loving and forgiving. The same spirit that was in Jesus is in us too, so we also are able to forgive. Real forgiveness is the giving of the love of Christ through the Holy Spirit to one who needs it.

- Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful (Luke 6:36-37).
- Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:3).

How Do You Forgive?

Remember God's grace to you

Start with remembering God's grace to you. When you are hurt and struggling with unforgiveness, when you find yourself having imaginary conversations with the person who hurt you and rehearsing the offense in your mind, then it's time to remember God's grace.

The unmerciful servant failed to take this step. He rehearsed his fellow servant's offence, and his own losses, but he failed to remember the master's grace to him. You can't rehearse your hurt and remember God's grace at the same time.

Here are some very practical steps you can take

1. To help you remember God's mercy and grace, you can listen to worship music that centers on the grace of God. Sing the songs and let them soak over you.



2. You can meditate on Scriptures that boldly proclaim the merciful heart of the Father.
3. You can read over the accounts of Jesus' death on the cross for you and contemplate that price that Jesus paid for your ransom.
4. You can return to the parable in Matthew 18 of the unmerciful servant or perhaps read the passage in Luke 17:1-10.
5. Get your journal out and write down all the sins you have committed that God has forgiven and recall God's mercy with a grateful heart.

Preparing to forgive

Now we're ready to utilize the great tool of power God has given to humanity: forgiveness. Because of the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ on the cross, you can make peace in your heart with everyone who has ever hurt you.

Get that cleared up before God. Forgive your father and mother, and all other family or friends, for what they did or did not do for you. Your heart needs to be cleansed from all bitter judgments, resentments, anger, hate, and murder, so you can experience God's peace, joy, and healing in your life.

And don't forget: you might need to forgive yourself. You cannot come to a place of peace as long as you are holding judgments against yourself. No one is benefiting from your refusal to accept the blood of Jesus as enough for your failures; to the contrary, you are hurting your family and friends.

1. Ask the Lord to search your heart

Ask the Lord to show you any resentment, anger, vengeful feelings, or bitterness in your mind and heart. Because resentments and bitterness are often concealed in painful memories, we can ask the Lord if there is any pain in us, like the Psalmist did:

- Search me O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any way of pain in me (Ps 139:23-24).

As you pray, God may bring to mind people and experiences you have totally forgotten. Let Him do it, even if it is painful. Remember, you are doing this for your sake, not the ones who hurt you.

2. Start a list of the people you are holding a debt against

Consider people in your family of origin

Think of the people in your family – even those who are no longer alive – and ask yourself if anyone owes you something: your father, mother, sister, brother, grandmother, grandfather, aunts, uncles, etc. What did they do to you or not do for you?

Dear Heavenly Father, I thank you that I belong to you. I want to honor my mother and my father, but I also know that my family is not perfect. I ask you to reveal to me who I need to forgive.



Watch to see whose face makes you uncomfortable, who you do not like, who you disapprove of. Pay attention to what you feel in the pit of your stomach. Does your stomach tighten? Or is there a reaction inside when you think of that person?

Then write their name down, like this:

I need to forgive my _____ (write down their name).

Consider other people

Look around you and ask who makes you feel uncomfortable, who you do not like, who you disapprove of: husband, wife, son, daughter, daughter-in-law, son-in-law, mother-in-law, father-in-law, teacher, pastor, neighbor, employer, co-worker, boy/girlfriend, former partner, etc.

As you think of them—even if they are no longer alive— pay attention to what you feel in the pit of your stomach. Does your stomach tighten? Or is there a “high octane ping in your spirit” when you think of that person? Add their name to your list:

I need to forgive _____ (write down their name).

At the end of your list write “myself”

Forgiving yourself is accepting God’s cleansing and forgiveness for your failures. It is amazingly difficult for people to forgive themselves. It seems we are more ready to forgive others rather than our self. One woman said to me, “God has to forgive me; that’s his job, but I don’t have to forgive me.”

I need to forgive myself _____ (write down your name).

Do you need to forgive God?

Thoughts raised up against the knowledge of God will usually result in angry feelings toward Him. Technically, we can’t forgive God because He cannot commit any sin. But we need to specifically renounce any way that we hold God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit responsible for events in our life. We must agree to release any anger we have toward them.

I need to forgive _____ (write down who in the deity you need to forgive).

3. Next, write out exactly why you need to forgive each person:

What was the wrong thing they did to you or failed to do for you? How did they sin against you?

Write out the specific way they hurt you.

I need to forgive (name) for _____ (describe what their sin was).

State what their sin cost you or what it is you want from them

Identify exactly what you think their debt is. What do they owe you? What do you expect from them? Describe how their sin has impacted your life. What has it cost you?

He or she owes me _____ (write it out).



4. Identify how their sin made you feel

Acknowledge what you felt. Admit to yourself, what he/she did made you feel True heart-based forgiveness must go deep, touching our emotional core.

Because it made me feel _____ (put a name on the feeling).

5. Release your feelings to God

You may find it helpful to write a letter to God about what happened. Start with "Dear Heavenly Father," then write down everything that comes to mind, without judging or censoring it.

This will help you get in touch with your emotions and release your feelings to God. Remember to sign your name when you are finished.

Choose to Forgive

1. Welcome the Holy Spirit's presence to guide and empower you

Position your heart in humility before the Lord. Give your heart to God now. Confess aloud your faith in Jesus Christ and his sacrifice on your behalf. Acknowledge that it is solely on the basis of what Jesus has done on your behalf that you can be forgiven, forgive others, and forgive yourself. Declare your total dependence on God to free you.

Heavenly Father, I need you to make me clean and whole. I am coming to you to confess my unforgiveness as sin and allow you to cleanse me of all unrighteousness. I ask you for your complete forgiveness. I believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the only way to God, and that He died on the cross for my sins and rose again from the dead. I give up all my rebellion and all my sins, and I submit myself to you as my Lord.

2. Forgive each person on your list, praying aloud

Make a decision to forgive all the people who have ever hurt you, recognizing that holding bitterness produces death in you and in those around you.

Speak out loud the words of forgiveness. You will verbalize your decision by saying out loud, "Lord, I forgive" Name the person or persons involved and state specifically what their sin is and how it made you feel.

Lord, I choose to forgive (name) for (state specifically what their sin was), because it made me feel (state your feelings).

Don't say, "Lord, please help me to forgive," because He is already helping you. Do not say, "Lord, I want to forgive," because you are bypassing the hard-core choice to forgive, which is your responsibility.



Here is an example of how you can do this:

Lord Jesus, I choose not to hold on to my bitterness and anger. I choose to forgive (name) for (what they did), because it made me feel (verbally share with the Lord every hurt and how it made you feel).

I renounce all my sins involved in holding unforgiveness against (name) and I choose not to hold on to my resentment. I give up my right to be angry with (name). I relinquish my right to seek revenge. I release (name) into your hands.

Make me clean and whole and release me from this sin. I thank you that your blood is enough for every sin committed against me. I thank you for the power of your blood to cleanse my heart from all resentment, bitterness, anger, rage, etc. I now receive your forgiveness.

Thank you for setting me free from the bondage of my bitterness. I now ask you to bless those who have hurt me. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

3. Ask the Lord to heal your wounds

You may need to be healed of the consequences of sins. After you have forgiven every person for every painful memory, then finish this step by praying:

Lord, I release all these people to you, into your hands, and I ask you to reveal the negative beliefs that were the result of their sins and to heal my damaged emotions and painful wounds. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Once you forgive your debtor, your desire for retaliation dissipates and your wounds can be comforted by the healing grace of God. We will know we have truly released someone from their trespass against us when we think of it and feel only a rush of joy and love; then we have forgiveness (Unknown).

4 Stop speaking evil against offender & wish them well

When you speak evil against someone by citing the wrong committed against you, it activates the law of judgment. You must decide instead that you will bear the burden of someone's transgression by not using it against them in the future. Forgive them and bless them.

- Every one of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself (Rom 2:1).

Although there may be times when someone is required to testify for the sake of justice, it should not be for the purpose of seeking revenge from a bitter heart.

6. Pray blessings on them

Pray blessings on those who have sinned against you. In Luke 6:27, 28, Jesus said

- "But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you"



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If you do what God asks us to do, He will do what you cannot – He will change your heart.

When we pray blessings on those who sinned against you, we simply pray that God will do for them all the good things we want in our own lives. Pray that they will know God's love and peace and joy. Pray that they will experience God's favor.

Keep on blessing them until your heart can love them.