

## IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS - FORGIVENESS AND LETTING GO

Nothing gives Satan greater opportunity to stop a person or church growing than unforgiveness; When someone offends us – if left unchecked that offense can lead to bitterness, resentment, and division. I have to admit one of the most difficult things in life is to forgive someone who has hurt or offended us. Just as a physical wound becomes infected if left unattended, so an emotional wound can become contaminated with feelings of resentment, bitterness, and revenge without the healing of forgiveness. However, forgiveness seems like a good thing in theory but the reality of forgiving someone is a lot easier to say.... than do.

**Unforgiveness is defined as a state of emotional and mental distress that results from a delayed response in forgiving an offender. It is characterized by indignation, bitterness, resentment and a demand for punishment or restitution.**

**Forgiveness is a conscious, deliberate decision to let go of feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person who has harmed you, regardless of whether they actually deserve your forgiveness.**

The bible has a lot to say about forgiveness.

**Matthew 18:21-35 (NLT)** *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!* Now Jesus wasn't suggesting that you keep tabs until you reach 491 – then take revenge. He is saying that you just keep forgiving them. To further explain this Jesus went on to tell the story of the Unforgiving Servant....

**Matthew 18:23-35 (Look up)** I understand the word torture used in verse 34 refers to spiritual torment. Then Jesus finished the parable by saying a very challenging thing – vs 35 ***"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from the heart."***

In essence Jesus warns us if we don't forgive others from our heart, we too will suffer spiritual torment. Our choice not to forgive gives Satan a foothold... tormenting us with anger, bitterness, criticism & resentment. This in turn can harden our hearts both to our fellowship with God and our relationship with others.

**So Why Forgive?** - Because God asks us to. He wants us to show mercy & forgive others just as he has shown mercy & forgiven us and he commands us to do that for our own good. Like an infected wound an unforgiven offense begins to choke effective communication, it stifles goodwill and tints every statement the other person makes until you can't stand being in the same room with them, let alone the

same marriage or family or church. That is the harm unforgiveness has on our relationships. Another reason people don't forgive is because they don't understand what forgiveness is & what forgiveness is not.

**Forgiveness is not forgetting** or ignoring what they've done and brushing it under the carpet. You can't let go of a hurt by simply trying to forget it! When God said in Jeremiah 31:34 I will remember their sins no more; as an all-knowing God he doesn't forget our sins but what He is that he won't take your past sins and use them against you. And in fact there are very good reasons why we should not forget – if someone has abused your trust let's say by asking for a substantial loan and then not paying it back. You would be very unwise to loan them more money.

**Forgiveness does not mean that we tolerate sin!**

There are consequences to sin & you have every right to put a stop to the sin by laying down expectations or removing yourself from a particular situation. However for your own good you need to forgive the person who has hurt or abused you. Holding on to that hurt leads to a root of bitterness and resentment that can take over your life.

**Forgiveness is choosing not to seek revenge:**

Understandably we want revenge, we want justice. However, the bible says in **Romans 12:19** Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. As hard as it is, and as much as you want to exact revenge we need to trust God for the outcome.

**Forgiving is agreeing to live with the consequences of someone else's sin** – Let me clarify this - If a spouse leaves you for another person, amidst the enormous hurt and betrayal that sin involves, you will have to live with the consequences of their choice. Your ex-spouse may continue in that relationship enjoying life and having no concern for the impact of their choice on you. The only real choice you have is whether to live with their choice in the bondage of bitterness or the freedom of forgiveness. Forgiveness is how you stop the pain.

**Forgiveness is primarily an issue between you & God.**

God commands you to forgive because he loves you and knows unforgiveness will consume you. For your own good you need to forgive, however, your personal healing from unforgiveness **cannot** depend on others. Where there is hurt and offense on both sides you have a responsibility to go to that person to seek reconciliation and ask for forgiveness as mentioned in Matthew 5:23 but if they choose not to forgive you – then you have done all you can. Yes, you need to forgive them, but you can't make them forgive you. By



going to that person you have been obedient and done what God asked. You also can't expect that forgiving someone will result in changes in them – you must forgive them anyway.

### How do you forgive from the heart?

**FORGIVENESS IS A PROCESS** There are varying degrees of offense and hurt so this is a complex issue. Forgiving from the heart is much more than just saying "I forgive" and pretending that you have dealt with it. Many can be deceived into thinking they have forgiven someone when all they have really done is pushed the problem down and tried to ignore it.

**1. Decide to forgive:** If you wait until you feel like doing it, you probably never will. **You do not heal in order to forgive – you forgive in order to heal.** The choice is yours – do you want to remain in bitterness, hooked to the past & giving the enemy entrance to your mind or are you willing to begin that process of forgiving.

**2. DEPEND** In some circumstances the hurt or offense is so great it is hard to forgive in your own strength, we need to ask God for help. Some circumstances may require counselling.

**3. DELIBERATE** – this process is one that we use in Freedom in Christ. In the interest of thoroughness, we suggest writing your reflections on a piece of paper that can be shredded at the end of the process. On the paper are three columns. In the first put the name of the person or persons you need to forgive; Column 2 gives space for you to write down everything the person did or failed to do. You do this in the interest of dealing with the issue completely before God **so you can finally let it go!** And finally in the third column you need to take time to consider how the person's actions made you feel. Acknowledge the hurt and the hate. Anger can be a reaction to the hurt & so sometimes you need to dig deeper to actually identify the emotion. Was it rejection; not feeling worthy; indignation?

Once you have done all that then you need to pray:

- Lord I choose to forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ because it made me feel \_\_\_\_\_
- i.e. I choose to forgive **my father** for **leaving us** because it made me feel **rejected and abandoned.**

Once you've acknowledged all that they did and all the feelings that hurt or offense caused in you then pray

***Lord, I choose not to hold on to my resentment. I thank you for setting me free from the bondage of my bitterness. I let go of my right to seek revenge and ask You to heal my damaged emotions. I now ask you to bless - my father – In Jesus Name – Amen***

It is important to pray for the person who has hurt you.

**Luke 6:27-28 (Look up)**

### How do you know you have truly forgiven that person and Let Go?

Forgiveness is a process. It is normal for hurts to continue to come back into your mind. Every time they do you need to take that thought captive in prayer to God acknowledging that you have now forgiven that person and pray a blessing on them. Again, this is a process and with time those thoughts will slow. If they persist then I would encourage you to get ongoing help from one of the Ministry Leaders at church or a Christian counsellor.

If you are still nursing; cursing or rehearsing a hurt or offense, then you have not forgiven them.

**Nursing a hurt** is when you hold on to that hurt and replay the unfair situation over and over again.

**Cursing a hurt** – is when you verbally speak evil of that person who has hurt you.

**Rehearsing a hurt** is when you recall the details of the offence with others. Joyce Meyer says "You can't walk in forgiveness and be a gossip. You need to stop repeating the offense because you won't get over it if you keep talking about it."

Finally I would encourage you not to hold on to an offense. Deal with it quickly and don't let bitterness or resentment take root.

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

1. How would you define forgiveness?
2. How would you define unforgiveness?
3. Can you recall a recent situation where you have had to forgive someone?
4. Why do you think people find it hard to forgive?
5. Look up Matthew 18:21-35. Discuss the parable and statement Jesus made in verse 35?
6. Why do you think it is important to deal with a hurt or offense quickly?
7. Look up Luke 6:27-28. Do you find this easy to do or difficult? Discuss.



**CENTRAL BAPTIST**

LOVE GOD : LOVE OTHERS