

# FREEDOM THROUGH FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is God's way to release your soul from a prison of pain, isolation, bitterness, and anger. It takes the sins of others and puts them where they truly belong, in God's hands. This frees you to rest in God's provision for you... His comforts, His kindness, His healing, His grace.

**Heart Questions:** What ways have you tried to deal with the pain of your past on your own, and how have they failed to truly free you? Does the idea of forgiving those who have hurt you seem unwise or fearful? When we choose not to forgive others, what are we trying to hold onto? What are we having to give up when we forgive others, and why is that so hard to do?

## How Does Forgiveness Lead to Freedom?

Discuss the following statements...

*Bitterness is like drinking poison, hoping it will hurt the other person.*

*Unforgiveness is like letting someone live rent-free in your head.*

Why is unforgiveness so enslaving? But why do we choose it? What do we think it is going to gain for us?

## The Difference Between Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Compare the following verses...

Mark 11:25	Matthew 5:23-24
Whenever you stand praying, <b>forgive, if you have anything against anyone</b> , so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.	Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that <u>your brother has something against you</u> , leave your offering there before the altar and <b>go; first be reconciled to your brother</b> , and then come and present your offering.
When others sin against us, we are called to actively forgive them	When we have sinned against others, we are called to go and reconcile with them

The command to forgive those who sin against us does not require communication or relationship with the offender (i.e. reconciliation). Why is this important?

## How Can We Forgive Such Grievous Sins?

The only way we can forgive others is if we understand the depth of God's grace and forgiveness for us. Forgiven people are forgiving people. Read Matthew 18:21-35 and discuss the main idea of this passage. What stands out to you? How does this passage both challenge and encourage you? How is Jesus trying to shape your heart through this parable?

## What Forgiveness IS NOT

Forgiveness **IS NOT** optional

- Eph 4:32 "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." - Forgiveness is an imperative, a command.
- The offender does not "deserve" your forgiveness. What motivates your forgiveness is that God calls you to do it, and trusting that He knows best. So while the journey might be difficult, we cannot say *"I'm not sure if I am going to forgive"*.

Therefore Forgiveness **IS NOT** based on your emotions

- If God commands us to forgive, then we cannot wait for our emotions to lead us.
- This doesn't mean that God doesn't care about our emotions. On the contrary, as we obey God we can trust that He truly wants to bring greater emotional wholeness through the process.

Forgiveness **IS NOT** forgetting

- Sometimes we say – *"I can't forgive, the pain is too great..."*
- God says in Hebrews 8:12 "... will remember their sins no more."
- "Remember" means to remind one's self, to recall into one's mind, to be mindful of.
- God does not forget our sin, He CHOOSES NOT to recall it to His mind for action
- Yes, the memories (to some degree) may still remain. You are not commanded to forget, you are called to forgive. But you can also trust that in forgiving, your will begin to free your mind from the prison wherein the memories tend to flourish. As you cast off bitterness and release the offender, you will be freed to anchor your mind on the good things that God says about you and that God has for you!

Forgiveness **IS NOT** dependant on another's repentance

- We may want to demand terms of forgiveness - *"I'll forgive only if they repent"*
- Mark 11:25 "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions."
- This means we can experience FREEDOM regardless of whether our offender ever acknowledges their sin toward us.

## **What Forgiveness IS**

Forgiveness **IS** a PROMISE / COMMITMENT to not hold the offense against that person

- It is a choice, a commitment before God toward that person expressed in prayer.
- 1 Corinthians 13:5 “...love does not take into an account a wrong suffered...”
- Psalm 103:10 “He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.”
- Forgiveness is a ONE-TIME commitment with ONGOING ramifications

The ONE-TIME commitment

- You are entrusting true justice into God’s hands for each painful sin against you
- You are committing to not dwell on the sin, not allowing it to drive anger and bitterness toward the person or God

The ONGOING action

- Renewing your mind when the memories and pain of your offender’s actions rise up.
- Ongoing pain is not a sign of unforgiveness, but rather an opportunity to act on the forgiveness you have granted by choosing a different path in your mind.

## **The Forgiveness List**

In order to make forgiveness tangible and practical, it is very important to make a detailed list of the ways your abuser sinned against you. This step will likely be very difficult, because it will require bringing into full acknowledgement the specific events of your abuse. Yet, the purpose of articulating your abuser’s sin is to actually FREE YOURSELF in a definitive way. You can trust God’s wisdom and His loving grace as you begin to work on your list.

- Between now and your next meeting, start working on this list.
- Be specific. For example, it doesn’t accomplish much to say “*God, I choose to forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for their anger.*” Anger manifests itself in words and actions expressed in real scenarios. It is best to list every specific way that a person’s anger was directed at you. After all, our mind doesn’t remember generic pain, but rather the pain of specific events, dates, times, and actions.
- Think of this axiom as you work on your list: *The degree to which you are detailed and specific is the degree to which you will experience freedom.*
- Try to use biblical language, and don’t use language that minimizes in any way your abuser’s sin. In making this list, you actually have the opportunity to face the real injustice of this person’s actions.
- When you meet next time, your friend will help you refine your list in preparation for praying through it together.

Note: You may need to make more than one list, because there may be other people who are culpable for your abuse (such as a family member who didn't protect you). Start with the forgiveness list for your abuser, and then move on to any other people that you need to forgive.