

The Power Of Forgiveness

Part 4 – My Choice To Forgive



Matthew 6:14-15 (NLT) 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.

- Have you ever wished you could rewind the last 7 years, 7 months, 7 days, or 7 minutes of your life and start over? If only you could take back that word spoken in anger, say no to that unwise suggestion, say yes to that forfeited opportunity, or salvage that broken relationship. Unfortunately, there's no "rewind button" in real life. However, God does offer us a powerful antidote to heal the REGRETS of past mistakes. It's called FORGIVENESS.
- In this series, we've learned that it's impossible to give away something that you don't possess. That's why before we can ever hope to grant forgiveness to others, we must first receive forgiveness in our own lives. ONLY THE FORGIVEN CAN TRULY FORGIVE!
- GUILT is one of the most debilitating of all human emotions. It wreaks destruction in our relationships with others and in our relationship with God. Sometimes, because of the unrealistic expectations of ourselves or others, we suffer with false guilt. However, to be honest, most of the time PEOPLE FEEL GUILTY BECAUSE THEY ARE GUILTY. All of us have certain things in our life of which we're ashamed.
- **Illustration:** Many years ago, a prominent playwright in London, England sent the following anonymous note as a joke to twenty of London's leading citizens ... "All has been found out. Leave the city at once." All twenty citizens immediately left London!
- Unresolved guilt affects us both emotionally and spiritually. **One psychiatrist estimated that 70% of people in mental wards could be released today if they knew how to find forgiveness!** Guilt breaks our relationships, because it's a natural tendency to avoid people we've wronged. **GUILT PRODUCES SEPARATION.** And the same phenomenon occurs in our relationship with God!

- ***Isaiah 59:2 (KJV)*** *But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.*
- ***Isaiah 59:2 (NLT)*** *But there is a problem—your sins have cut you off from God. Because of your sin, he has turned away and will not listen anymore.*
- ***Isaiah 59:2 (CEV)*** *Your sins are the roadblock between you and your God. That's why he doesn't answer your prayers or let you see his face.*
- Paul tells us that a good conscience is essential in maintaining our faith!
- ***1 Timothy 1:18-19 (NLT)*** *Cling tightly to your faith in Christ, and always keep your conscience clear. For some people have deliberately violated their consciences; as a result, their faith has been shipwrecked.*
- Are you suffering from a guilty conscience? Are there scenes from your past that you wish you could erase? Has unresolved guilt caused you to keep your distance from others? Or, more importantly, from GOD?
- Remember King David? **(2 Samuel 11-12)** He was guilty of shirking his responsibilities as King when his soldiers went out to battle. His idleness led to his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah. The baby born from their adulterous affair also died due to David's sin. David's son Amnon would subsequently rape his half-sister, and his son Absalom would later kill Amnon and repeat his father's adultery, this time with several of his father's wives and in the sight of the entire nation! The sword would never depart from David's house, and he would watch his sons scheme against each other, even to the point of killing one another and leading the nation into civil war. And to top it all off, David never even confessed the sin that started it all until he was directly confronted by the prophet Nathan! Talk about a load of guilt! **But David repented and received forgiveness!**
- ***Psalm 51:1-3, 7-12 (NLT)*** *A psalm of David, regarding the time Nathan the prophet came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.¹ Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins.² Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin.³ For I recognize my shameful deeds—they haunt me day and night ...⁷ Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.⁸ Oh, give me back my joy again; you have broken me—now let me rejoice.⁹ Don't keep looking at my sins. Remove the stain of my guilt.¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a right spirit within me.¹¹ Do not banish me from your presence, and don't take your Holy Spirit from me.¹² Restore to me again the joy of your salvation, and make me willing to obey you.*

- Are you tired of dealing with, living in, or running from the past? The good news is that **FORGIVENESS FROM THE PAST IS POSSIBLE!**
 - God hates sin, but He loves the sinner!
 - Satan loves sin, but he hates the sinner!
- God forgives us completely whenever we ask. But even after God forgives, the enemy will continually attempt to harass you with guilt.
 - The guilt we feel BEFORE we repent is called CONVICTION. It is sent from God to draw us close to God.
 - The guilt we may feel AFTER we repent is called CONDEMNATION. It is sent from Satan to push us away from God.
- The bad news is that PEOPLE AREN'T LIKE GOD! Receiving God's forgiveness is easy; receiving people's forgiveness can be difficult.

HOW TO RECEIVE FORGIVENESS FROM OTHERS

1. **Determine if you actually need to ask forgiveness.** We should seek forgiveness only from those we have truly wronged. If you never acted on your thoughts or impulses, that's between you and God. More harm can be done to a relationship by confessing such hidden offenses. If restitution is necessary, the sin obviously needs to be confessed. But if the confession would do more harm than good to the other party, don't just unload your garbage! Sometimes sacrificial love involves our willingness to bear our own burdens instead of asking someone else to share the load.
 - **Ephesians 4:29b (CEV)** *Say the right thing at the right time and help others by what you say.*
2. **Your circle of confession should be no larger than your circle of offense.** If you've offended only one individual, then you need to confess your fault only to God and that person. If your sin has injured the witness of your church, then it is correct to seek forgiveness from the entire congregation. Restrict your confession to those who have been DIRECTLY AFFECTED – that is a biblical principle.
 - **James 5:16 (NLT)** *Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results.*
3. **Sincerely ask for the other person's forgiveness.** Many people confuse seeking forgiveness with making an apology. An apology is one-sided. It admits guilt and expresses remorse due to an offense you have committed, but it doesn't ask for anything.

Forgiveness involves much more than that. It actually asks the person you have wronged to do something – to release you from your debt to them! **It is impossible to ask forgiveness and blame others at the same time.** You must concentrate on YOUR offense. You need to specifically identify the wrong you've committed, and specifically acknowledge the hurt they've felt because of your sin. Then, sincerely ask them to forgive you.

- **Matthew 18:26-27 (NLT)** *²⁶But the man fell down before the king and begged him, 'Oh, sir, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.'²⁷ Then the king was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt.*
- 4. **Be prepared for a negative response.** Not every attempt at reconciliation results in a happy ending! The other party may respond HESITANTLY or even NEGATIVELY, and that hurts after you've poured your heart out! There are many reasons someone may be reluctant to grant forgiveness when asked:
 - They may not sense that you're truly remorseful.
 - They may feel guilty themselves.
 - They may expect restitution first.
 - They may fear that you will repeat the offense.
 - They may not want to reestablish the relationship.

If the other person refuses to forgive you immediately, don't be discouraged. Sometimes the wounds we inflict on others – even unintentional ones – are quite deep. They may need time before they can grant forgiveness, or perhaps they will never be willing to forgive, but that is between them and God. **REMEMBER THAT YOU CANNOT DEMAND FORGIVENESS!** But whether or not the other party forgives, you will have the freedom of a clear conscience in your relationship with them ... and in your relationship with God!

- **Acts 24:16 (NLT)** *Because of this, I always try to maintain a clear conscience before God and everyone else.*
- **1 John 3:19 (CEV)** *When we love others, we know that we belong to the truth, and we feel at ease in the presence of God.*

HOW TO GIVE FORGIVENESS TO OTHERS

- **Illustration:** Years ago, a man was rushed to the hospital after contracting rabies from a dog bite. A cure had not yet been discovered, and he was going to die. He asked the doctor for pen and paper, and the doctor said, "I'm glad to see your working on your will." The man replied, "This isn't a will. This is a list of all the people I'm going to bite before I die!"

- Most of us carry such a list around, not written on paper, but written in our hearts! On the list are the names of people who have wronged us, cheated us, embarrassed us, disappointed us, betrayed us, deserted us, or hurt us. Deep down, most of us want to see these people suffer for the pain they've caused us.
- The Bible calls that desire VENGEANCE, and vengeance that is harbored long enough eventually becomes BITTERNESS. Sometimes bitterness will erupt into violent behavior, but more often it works like a cancer, slowly destroying everything it touches.
- ***Hebrews 12:15 (NLT)*** *Look after each other so that none of you will miss out on the special favor of God. Watch out that no bitter root of unbelief rises up among you, for whenever it springs up, many are corrupted by its poison.*
- **HOLDING ON** to vengeance is the source of bitterness, but **RELEASING** vengeance (through forgiveness) is the antidote to bitterness. As we learned earlier in this series, **FORGIVENESS IS AN ANTIDOTE TO NEEDLESS SUFFERING!** Forgiving others is in your best interest!
- In **Part Two** of this series, we talked about the three steps we must take in granting forgiveness to others:
 - We acknowledge that a wrong has occurred.
 - We recognize that there is an obligation for repayment.
 - We CHOOSE to release our offender from that obligation and to cover the loss ourselves.

HOW CAN WE KNOW THAT WE HAVE TRULY FORGIVEN OUR OFFENDER FROM OUR HEART? Here is a three-point checklist for your heart from the story of Joseph:

1. **True forgiveness resists unnecessary embarrassment.** In dealing with his brothers' offenses toward him, Joseph sought to protect them from needless humiliation. He knew they would be living in Egypt for a long time, so he dealt with their sin privately instead of allowing it to spread through the Egyptian grapevine. There are rare cases where offenses must be reported to others. However, if we've truly forgiven another person, we'll try and keep their sin against us as confidential as possible. Mature Christians don't need to run to others or to the Pastor with every little hurt – they deal with it privately!
 - ***Genesis 45:1 (CEV)*** *Since Joseph could no longer control his feelings in front of his servants, he sent them out of the room. When he was alone with his brothers, he told them, "I am Joseph."*

2. **True forgiveness relieves people of unhealthy sorrow.** The Bible teaches that there are two types of sorrow that accompany sin. One is a godly kind of sorrow that leads to change. The other is an unhealthy sorrow that leads to paralyzing self-pity and despair.
 - ***2 Corinthians 7:10 (AMP)*** *For godly grief and the pain God is permitted to direct, produce a repentance that leads and contributes to salvation and deliverance from evil, and it never brings regret; but worldly grief (the hopeless sorrow that is characteristic of the pagan world) is deadly [breeding and ending in death].*

If we've truly forgiven someone, we don't desire to see them squirm in misery forever, because that is not in **THEIR** best interest (as much as it might be enjoyed by US!). It is obvious that Joseph had risen above his past, because he allowed his brothers to rise above their past! **If you can't let others forget it, then you haven't forgiven it!**

 - ***Genesis 45:5 (CEV)*** *Don't worry or blame yourselves for what you did. God is the one who sent me ahead of you to save lives.*
3. **True forgiveness CONTINUALLY releases our offender from their obligation to us.** Years after Joseph's initial confrontation with his brothers in Egypt, he had to face the forgiveness issue again, when their father Jacob died at the age of 147. Joseph's brothers immediately began to worry that he might unleash years of stored up vengeance against them, now that Jacob was no longer around to intervene. But Joseph had truly forgiven them; he had no desire for revenge.
 - ***Genesis 50:19-21 (NLT)*** ¹⁹ *But Joseph told them, "Don't be afraid of me. Am I God, to judge and punish you? ²⁰ As far as I am concerned, God turned into good what you meant for evil. He brought me to the high position I have today so I could save the lives of many people. ²¹ No, don't be afraid. Indeed, I myself will take care of you and your families." And he spoke very kindly to them, reassuring them.*

Forgiveness isn't a one-time action of the heart, but a continual choice of the will. FORGIVENESS IS SURRENDERING THE RIGHT TO HURT YOU FOR HURTING ME.

Joseph knew what it was to spend time in a physical prison, so he was determined not to spend time in an emotional one! He chose to release his brothers permanently, knowing that in the process he was also releasing himself! He never wanted to go back to either jail again!

Settle it in your heart forever that forgiveness is a LIFESTYLE!