

## Forgiveness

*“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).*

Forgiveness is powerful. It removes revenge, bitterness, and hatred from your heart. It does not pardon iniquities and make them real. Forgiveness is like a cancelled check. When you cancel a check, you cannot use it again. When you have forgiven someone, maybe your husband or wife, you no longer use that offense against him or her. Forgiveness judges not. It does not ignore someone who was mean to you yesterday. Unfortunately, in Christian circles we still see people nursing grudges from past years while they testify and rejoice about God’s daily forgiveness in their lives. Spurgeon, the great preacher, says, “No one has a right to claim the Christian spirit who refuses to forgive a foe, and even cement his forgiveness by some act of self-denying love.”

Forgiveness is a choice. If you choose to hold on to the ill-treatment, you build a personal prison, letting the offender hold you captive. Don’t allow someone else’s behavior to control your life.

Jesus emphasized forgiveness in His teachings because of its importance. The first lesson Jesus gave about prayer in Matthew 5 was on forgiveness:

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, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matthew 5:44-45)

Jesus tells us here that for any believer to be called a true child of God, he or she must constantly operate in forgiveness. Forgive those who have been malicious to you. We must show love to those who hate us and pray for those who knowingly use us to their own advantage.

### **How many times do I have to forgive? (Matthew 18; Luke 17)**

Peter, one of the disciples of Jesus, came to ask Him how many times a brother should offend one before taking action or revenge (Matthew 18:21). Jesus was very emphatic in His answer: seventy times seven—that is, 490 times. Jesus went further to illustrate forgiveness with a parable about a king who forgave a servant who could not pay his debt of ten thousand talents (about \$10,000,000 AMP). The same servant who had been pardoned for this huge amount of money would not forgive someone who owed him one hundred pence (about \$20). When the king heard what his wicked servant did, the king was wroth and delivered him to the tormentors, till he paid all he owed him. The Lord Jesus then said, “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses” (Matthew 18:35). God forgives and forgets our sins, and expects us to do the same (Isaiah 43:25).

### **Unforgiveness short-circuits prayer (Mark 11:24-26)**

After Jesus taught us how to receive from God through prayers of faith, He warned us what can hinder this—unforgiveness (Mark 11:25-26). I heard a minister gave a testimony on why his healing did not manifest until he forgave one of his friends who had wronged him some years past. This minister had a deadly disease in his throat, and he prayed and fasted asking God to heal him, but was not healed. He cried to God, “Why can’t you heal me, God?” The Spirit of God then told him, “You have refused to forgive your friend.” Immediately, this minister reconciled with the friend he had

ignored for many years, and he was then healed of this deadly disease. Maybe the desires of your heart have been held back from you because of unforgiveness. Unforgiveness will short-circuit your prayers. It gives room for the devil to operate in your life and limit your blessings.

### **How do we constantly operate in forgiveness?**

**1. Imitate Christ:** Jesus said, “If anyone serves Me, he must conform wholly to my example of living” (John 12:26). Paul says, “Be imitators of me” (1 Corinthians 4:16 Amp). Jesus demonstrated forgiveness even at the point of His death on the cross in the hands of His executioner. He prayed, “Father forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Stephen imitated Christ: while they were stoning him to death, he prayed, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:59-60). That prayer saved Paul, who was then Saul. We must constantly imitate our Lord Jesus Christ. When people offend you, remember to pray for them, and the Holy Spirit will give you the strength to overlook their faults.

**2. Remind yourself how much God forgave you:** God forgave all our iniquities (Psalm 103:3). You too must be willing to forgive others who trespass against you. This reminds me of a five-year-old boy who voted not to expel a bad boy in his school who was abusive to the younger ones, because he remembered that his father and mother forgave him when he sinned. The story went like this: The teacher asked for a vote on whether to expel this abusive boy, and all the small boys voted to expel him, except for this five-year-old. The five-year-old was asked why he voted for him to stay, though he knew that the bad boy would continue to abuse him. This little boy said, “If you expel him, he probably will not learn any more about God, and so he will become still more wicked.” “Do you forgive him, then?” said the teacher. “Yes,” said he, “father and mother forgive me when I do wrong; God forgives me too; and I must do the same.”

### **3. Remind yourself of who you are—God’s special people (1 Peter 2:9)**

Christ followers are called God’s special people, who are to proclaim the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light; therefore, we should not create room for bitterness or resentment in our hearts. Ephesians 4:26 says, “In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.”

**4. Practice love:** “For love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8). When you begin to store in your heart or on paper offenses someone has done to you—it could be your husband, wife, children, or church members—immediately tell yourself, “I’m keeping record of wrongs and I’m not practicing love.” In 1 Corinthians 13, we are told that love keeps no record of wrongs. Also, make it a habit to read 1 Corinthians 13 frequently, especially verses 4-8:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. **Love never fails.**