

FORGIVE TO BE FORGIVEN

“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” Matthew 6:12

Few things are more precious to receive than forgiveness. After carrying the burden of our sin, it is wonderfully freeing to know that the one we have wronged has completely forgiven us. Jesus told His disciples to ask God for forgiveness every time they prayed. Jesus knew that we would daily incur debts against God, as we inevitably fall short of God’s standard. A day does not go by that we do not need to ask God to remove our debt against Him.

Jesus warned that we should expect forgiveness from God as we forgive those who sin against us, for God will forgive us in the same way we forgive others (Matthew 6:15). God’s nature is forgiveness (Exodus 34:6-7). If we are to be His disciples, we must follow His example. If God will forgive our most relentless enemy, we can do nothing less. Jesus did not say that certain offenses are unworthy of our forgiveness. We have no biblical excuse for allowing unforgiveness in our hearts.

If you choose to withhold forgiveness from someone, your worship and prayers are futile (Matthew 5:23-24). Ask God to make you aware of those dark corners in your life where you are harboring resentment. A keen awareness of your own need for forgiveness will put the offenses of others in their proper light. Ask God to make you like Christ so that, even when you are being persecuted, you can pray, “Father, forgive them.”

ANGER, BITTERNESS, AND UNFORGIVENESS

The root of bitterness sprouts from the seed of preoccupation with self, and is disobedient to Jesus. He commands in Luke 9:23-24, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.”

Bitterness (which reflects a smoldering resentment) and unforgiveness do NOT produce Christlike character. Instead they produce jealousy, slander, anger, criticalness, fear, ungratefulness, impatience, tension, depression, mistrust, insensitivity, pride, unkindness, anxiety, gossip, obsession for revenge and strife. **Please circle or underline any of these that you are currently struggling with as a pattern in your life.**

Bitterness results from resisting the grace of God. Please look up each of the scripture references listed below:

Hebrews 12:14-15 – “Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord; looking diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by this many become defiled.”

I Samuel 16:14-15; 18:6-10 – “Then Saul was very angry...Saul eyed David from that day forward...the distressing spirit from God came upon Saul...”

II Corinthians 2:10, 11 – “...I have forgiven that one...in the presence of Christ lest Satan should take advantage of us for we are not ignorant of his devices.”

Romans 12:18-21 – “...do not avenge yourselves...vengeance is mine, I will repay says the Lord.”

Ephesians 4:31-32 – “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”

Genesis 4:5-7 – “But He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. So the LORD said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.’”

Matthew 18:21-35 – “And his master was angry, and delivered him to the tormentors until he should pay all that was due to him. So my heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”

Tormentors (which often show up as the feelings/emotions listed at the top of this worksheet) are God’s chastening and discipline in our lives. They are meant to “wake us up” to the fact that there is sin in our lives (the root of bitterness, which is hidden underground in our heart) that we are not confessing to the Lord (based on Hebrews 12:5-11).

Matthew 6:12 – “...forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.”

Matthew 6:14, 15 – “if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Jesus says this again in Mark 11:25, 26)

What Jesus is saying in Matthew 6:14-15 is that if we don’t forgive, our heavenly Father is not going to remove the consequences of our unforgiveness.

Colossians 3:13 – “...bearing with one another, if anyone has a complaint against another even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

Forgiveness is not an option with God. It is a command, and whatever He commands, He enables us to do through the power of His Holy Spirit.

Incorrect Statement: “I just CAN’T forgive.” (Philippians 4:13)

Sinful Statement: “I will NOT forgive.” (James 4:17; Matthew 22:37-39; John 14:15)

Forgiveness, like love, is a choice. It involves an act of our will to be obedient to our Lord.

When we forgive someone, we do not remind the person of their sin in an accusing manner (based on Hebrews 10:17). There are times when you will need to remind the person of their sin even after you have forgiven them. For example, if that individual develops a pattern of sinning in the same way, you are to exhort that person to repent. But the difference now is that you are to make your appeal in a spirit of gentleness, not in an accusing manner (based on Galatians 6:1).

- When we forgive someone, we do not dwell on the offenses suffered (based on Isaiah 38:17 – the Lord delivers us from this). We are not to keep account of any wrongs suffered (1 Cor. 13:5). We should not dwell on the evil done to us, but consider how to give a blessing instead (based on 1 Peter 3:9).
- We are not to gossip to others about the offense suffered (Proverbs 20:19). You may need to bring up someone’s sins to others but only with the focus on helping the person who is sinning, not to tear them down. For example, parents often have to discuss the sins of their children in order to determine how to train them.
- If I don’t forgive that person from my heart, then God does not forgive me my sins. (Matthew 6:14-15)
- Whatever I am overcome by, such as bitterness and unforgiveness, I will also be enslaved by. It will hold me back from God-given dreams and desires. It will actually cost me the blessings of God, and, worst of all, fellowship with the Father.
- If I have pride, God will not give me His grace to forgive when I have been offended. (based on 1 Peter 5:5).

Forgiving Your Parents:

Matthew 15:4 – “For God commanded, saying, ‘Honor your father and your mother’, and ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death’.”

When we curse (speak evil of) our father or mother we actually bring judgment on ourselves. Jesus said that however we judge we will be judged. (See Matthew 7:1-2)

Regardless of what our parents did to us (based on Ezekiel 18:20 – we are not to blame others) we must forgive them or we are not forgiven. If we do not, we also violate one of the Ten Commandments; “honor your father and mother”. (See Exodus 20:12)

Forgiveness is an issue of stewardship. “Will you share with me the gift of forgiveness that God has given you? Will you forgive me as you have been forgiven?”

Luke 6:37 – “Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.” (Matthew 7:1 says this also).

Matthew 7:5 – “Hypocrite, first remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”

I John 2:9-11 – “He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause of stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.”

I John 3:15 – “Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”

I John 4:20 – “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?”

HOW DO I FORGIVE?

BY GOD'S GRACE “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:15-16)

The life of Jesus was to be a model for us in all ways, and His forgiveness toward those who crucified Him was a model for how we must forgive. (See Luke 23:34)

I. Submit the memory to God.

Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to your remembrance the person or persons you have anger, bitterness, resentment or unforgiveness toward. Who are they? He will be faithful to do that because it is part of His job. (See John 16:8)

Clues that help you know if you have unforgiveness toward someone:

If you think about the person in an unkind manner, hoping that they will “get what they are due” or desiring revenge of any sort, this is strong evidence of unforgiveness.

If the mere mention of the person’s names causes you to feel anger, criticism, or tension, or makes your stomach churn, you probably are holding bitterness or resentment toward that person.

If the thought of a person continues to come to you and crowds out pleasant thoughts or distracts you from your work, study or enjoyment, YOU are in bondage to that person. That person is NOT in bondage to you.

Remember, if you have not forgiven them, you are the one in spiritual prison and torment, not them. (See Matthew 18:21-35)

II. Honestly confess to God that you have been unforgiving. It may be someone you love.

- A. Be specific. Allow the Holy Spirit to bring to your remembrance the place, events, emotions and the attitudes that the person expressed toward you – such as, unkindness, insensitivity, pride, anger, rejection, harm, ungratefulness or a general self-centered attitude that over-shadowed your relationship (i.e. a father or mother to a son or daughter). Examples: physical, sexual, verbal, or lack of acceptance or love.
- B. As you think on these people, events, places and attitudes, you will probably notice feelings rise up within you. Recognize what those feelings are; anger, fear, hurt, pain, hate, jealousy, etc. Be honest about what you are feeling. If you deny your thoughts or feelings you are lying to yourself. (See Proverbs 26:24-26.)

III. Choose to forgive by an act of your free will.

It has nothing to do with whether you feel like it or not. It is not optional. It is a command. Colossians 3:13 – “...as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.” Remember, you have been forgiven a debt you could not repay.

A. Make a list of the wrongs. Write them down. Examples:

- “They didn’t love me.”
- Broken promises
- False accusations
- Favoritism
- Abandonment
- Disciplined in anger
- Did not treat me as I wanted
- Spoke rudely to me in front of others

NOW! Fully forgive that person. Say out loud:

“Heavenly Father, I forgive (name) for (specific wrongs). I don’t feel like forgiving them and I have a hard time even saying these words, but I do it out of obedience to your word. Heavenly Father, I tear up the debt.”

Now tear up the list of wrongs.

*** NOTE: When you forgive someone, it is important to distinguish between forgiveness and the release of consequences.** Forgiveness is an act of obedience to the Lord (Luke 17:3-10) that gives the offender what he needs rather than what he deserves (based on Romans 5:8; Psalm 103:10). It is our duty to the Lord to forgive. Consequences, on the other hand, are meant to encourage the offender to change his way (based on Psalm 119:67). For example, a parent may need to allow his child to suffer the consequences of his sin even though the parent has already forgiven the child.

IV. Ask your Heavenly Father to forgive you for your wrong responses. Our feelings are not sin, but how we respond to those feelings is what the Lord holds us accountable for (based on Genesis 4:7).

Write out your wrong responses – rebellion, bitterness, insensitivity, pride, ungratefulness, resentment, disloyalty, irresponsibility, deception, laziness, etc. Even if they wronged you, your wrong attitude to that wrong must be confessed to God.

B. Take personal responsibility for your actions and attitudes. Do not say to God:

“They made me do it.”

“It’s not really my fault.”

“If they hadn’t...it would not have happened.”

Example Prayer:

“Heavenly Father, I have held bitterness, resentment and unforgiveness toward him/her. I confess my sin of bitterness (*or whatever the attitude*). Please forgive me Father, and I ask you to forgive them also. Father, please begin to cleanse my mind, and heal my heart and emotions. Heal the wounds that the enemies inflicted on me. Heavenly Father, according to Your word, Matthew 6:14, if I forgive men their trespasses, You will forgive me. Thank you for forgiving me. Father, will You please take back the ground the enemy has stolen from me because of my sins?”

V. Ask forgiveness from that person for your wrong attitudes.

Name them. Do not bring up what they did nor their attitude. It is your wrong attitude that is being dealt with.

Example: ‘John, there is something I need to talk to you about. God has shown me I have sinned against Him and you because I have had an attitude(s) of _____ toward you. It is my intention never to repeat this offense against you or anyone else. By God’s grace, I will make the appropriate changes in my life. I have asked the Lord to forgive me, and I would like to ask you to please forgive me. Will you forgive me?’

Their response should not affect you forgiving them. Remember, it is by your choice you forgive. They may respond in several ways.

Example:

“Oh that’s all right, think nothing about it.”

“I will forgive you, but I won’t forget.”

“No way! _____!”

“I didn’t know you felt that way!”

“Oh, everybody does that”

Without being contentious, be mildly persistent and ask again, “Would you please forgive me?” Do NOT engage in a discussion about what they did wrong!

You may make the person very uncomfortable. Sometimes it will convict them of their own unforgiveness and pride when they see your humility.

You may think that you cannot do this – you are right. You can only do this by God’s grace. James 4:6 promises that God’s grace will be given to us as we humble ourselves. It takes humility to admit our sin and ask for forgiveness. As we confess and forsake our sin, we deal with the issues of the heart (Jeremiah 17:9-10; Proverbs 28:13; 1 John 1:9) and God cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

* NOTE: DO NOT SAY...

“I am sorry”

“I apologize”

“I didn’t mean to...”

“If I have hurt you...”

“You made me do it.”

“If I have done anything...”

“If you hadn’t...it would not have happened.”

YOU are to take FULL responsibility. If possible, ask the person face to face. A phone call is the next best way and sometimes the best in certain situations.

* NOTE: DO NOT WRITE A LETTER if at all possible. Many times we want to do this so that our pride is not hurt!

VI. Replace wrong responses (put off’s) and thoughts with Godly responses (put on’s):

- A. Commit yourself to return good for evil. Read Luke 15:22-24.
- B. Replace negative feelings with biblically loving actions, (Luke 6:27-36). Prayer for the one who has hurt you will heal many wounds. (See Matthew 5:44 and James 5:16.) You need to ask God to bless and prosper them. Speak blessings on their family and their home. Pray for this person every day. Ask the Father to bless them spiritually, physically, mentally, financially, and emotionally. Don’t be concerned about your hypocritical feelings. You are doing this out of obedience to God’s Word.
- C. Look for ways to express love to the person. Send a card, a cake or flowers. Acknowledge how they have helped you or blessed you. Think of any Christ-like characteristics they have and praise the person for that characteristic.

Examples: Diligence, thoroughness, dependable, hospitality, generous, responsible, loyalty, sincerity, gentleness, sensitivity, punctual, wisdom, discretion, creativity, etc.

Ask your Heavenly Father to show you creative ways to express love to that person.

LOVE IS NOT A FEELING, IT IS A CHOICE!

* NOTE: Go through this entire worksheet at one sitting. Do not skip steps because you don’t like what it says to do. Do each part in the order in which it is given.

FORGIVENESS

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Forgiveness is agreeing to live with the consequences of another person's sin. Forgiveness is costly. You pay the price of the evil you forgive. You're going to live with those consequences whether you want to or not; your only choice is whether you will do so in the bitterness of unforgiveness or the freedom of forgiveness. Jesus took the consequences of your sin upon Himself. All true forgiveness is substitutionary, because no one really forgives without bearing the consequences of the other person's sin. God the Father "made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Where is the justice? It's the cross that makes forgiveness legally and morally right: "for the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all" (Romans 6:10).

REVENGE

"Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord." Romans 12:19

One of the hardest areas in which to trust God is in the matter of justice. When we perceive an injustice, we want to see the guilty party punished. We want justice to prevail, especially if we are the victim. We become impatient if we are not avenged quickly. Yet God warns us that vengeance is not our prerogative. We are to desire justice, but we are not to seek vengeance (Micah 6:8). When someone offends us, our responsibility is to respond to the offense with forgiveness (Matthew 5:44). God takes the responsibility to see that justice is done. God loves people too much to allow sin to go unchecked.

Peter claimed that God is not slow about His promises to us, but He is patient and long-suffering before He brings about judgment (2 Peter 3:9). Yet ultimately God has prepared for absolute justice. There will be no sin committed that He will leave unpunished. Either the punishment will fall on His Son or it will be charged against the sinner, but everyone will ultimately give an account for everything they have done (2 Corinthians 5:10).

God is absolutely just, and only He can ensure that justice is fully carried out. If we are impatient and seek revenge, we presume that we are wiser than God, and we reveal a blatant lack of trust that God will do the right thing. Only by trusting God's sovereign wisdom will we be free from our anger and preoccupation toward those who have committed evil. If we refuse to trust God's justice, we become enslaved to bitterness and anger. We must guard our hearts and trust God to exercise His judgment against those who oppose Him.

Taken from: *Experiencing God Day-by-Day* by Henry T. Blackaby and Richard Blackaby