

Forgiveness

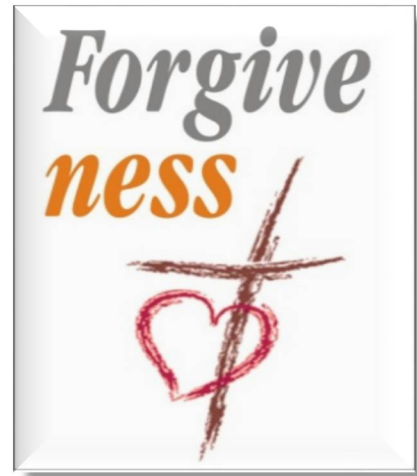
Forgiving everyone, everything, all of the time, right now.

Suggested Reading: Matthew 6:14–15, Luke 17:4, 1 John 1:9, Romans 12:19, Proverbs 19:5

Matthew 6:14–15: “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Forgiving is so important; it is foundational to the Christian life. But when we have a spirit of unforgiveness in our hearts it says, “I am not willing to forgive the offense against me. I will remember what has been done to me. I will never forgive that person.”



Forgiveness

**It is not a suggestion;
it is a commandment.**

It is clear from Matthew 6 that forgiveness is not optional. It is not just something you do if you feel like it—it is absolutely essential to the process of dealing with the sin in your own life. Forgiveness is your key to freedom. If you do not forgive, then God will not forgive you and free you from sin and guilt. To get that freedom, you must participate in all four aspects of forgiveness.

The Four Aspects of Forgiveness

1. Forgive those who have wronged you.
2. Ask forgiveness from those you have wronged.
3. Forgive yourself.
4. Forgive God??

Forgive Those Who Have Wronged You

Forgiving others is releasing someone from the wrong they have done to you. It is agreeing with God that they no longer owe you something for the wrong done. It is important to forgive as soon as God brings someone to your attention. However it is important to realize that forgiving someone is a process; it is not accomplished in just a single moment.

That process goes like this: Through God’s prompting you remember someone you need to forgive. You say the words of forgiveness, not just with your head, but engaging your heart as much as you are able. It is important to be specific. For example, you might say, “Father God, I

forgive Ms. Hurtme for her hurtful behavior toward me at the company Christmas party last year.” And then follow up with, “And Father God, I give you permission to bring this forgiveness to completion in my heart.” Then include that person in your prayers. You initiate the prayer and indicate your willingness to forgive, but only Father God can bring your forgiveness to completion—all the way to blessing them.

Ask Forgiveness From Those You Have Wronged

In the same way that you must forgive, you must also ask forgiveness from those you have wronged—and in some instances make restitution. Go before the Spirit of God and allow Him to show you any person you have wronged and the nature of your offense.

Now, seek His wisdom for the time and the method of asking forgiveness of them and how to make right the wrong, if necessary. Then be obedient, ask their forgiveness, and if required, make restitution. If they will not forgive you when you ask, know that you have done what is required, and you are released. If they do not forgive you, then it remains as sin in their life -- it is no longer your sin.

Sometimes it is not possible to ask the person for forgiveness (for example, if you don't know where they are or if they are deceased), or God might indicate that it is not appropriate to ask their forgiveness. If that is the case, then just ask for God's forgiveness for having wronged them, and then let it go.

Forgive Yourself

The enemy of God, Satan and all his minions, is called the accuser of the saints. He would attempt to ruin your life with the burden of guilt. Be sure that, as you are forgiving others, you also remember to forgive yourself and release to God the burden of guilt that you carry.

Forgive God??

This is a very hard thing for Christians to understand. Why would you need to forgive God? He is perfect and isn't guilty of anything. So why would a Christian have bitterness (an unforgiving, resentful, angry attitude) against God?

A few years ago a pastor came to me for ministry. He told me he had a very successful ministry; in his church God had often used him for many supernatural things, like healings and prophecy. He said that he had always had a strong sense of God in his life. But then he told me that all of that had gone away, and nothing worked anymore. After our second session, it was clear why his ministry and his life were in trouble: he had a deep resentment against God for some things that had happened to him—he blamed God. He felt that God had wronged him and had caused the loss of “success” in his ministry and all of the pain in his personal life.

Proverbs 19:3 illustrates the point: “When the foolishness of man ruins his life, his heart is angry against God.”

Do you have bitterness against God? Are you blaming Him for your own foolishness? Do you resent or feel angry with God, or do you feel He has let you down and not kept his promises to you, that He is responsible for your problems? You may know in your head that God is not guilty, but your heart says otherwise. Your heart says, “Where were you when I needed you?” and “Why did you allow this to happen to me?” Sometimes you even blame God for the times you felt certain that God had promised you something and He has not yet delivered. Sometimes, our hearts blame God that He feels absent from our lives, or that He is responsible for the hurts of the past. The enemy of God -- Satan, is called the accuser of God; he wants you to blame God. When you cooperate with him, the resulting bitterness is a door point for him to gain additional access to your life.

Now, returning to the story: I shared with this pastor that God had not caused these things; they were the work of the enemy of God, Satan. The enemy had then led him astray by telling him that God had caused the problems. The pastor cooperated with the enemy and believed the lie, forming bitterness in his heart toward God. So it wasn't that the pastor needed to forgive God for the bad things God had done to him—he needed to deal with the sin of cooperating with the enemy and the sin of bitterness, and then he needed to ask God's forgiveness. Nothing was going to change in his life until he repented and dealt with his sin. By our fourth session, the pastor agreed that he had indeed sinned against God. He repented of his sin and asked God's forgiveness. The pastor's life began to be restored.

If you have bitterness against God, first deal with the sin and then seek God's forgiveness.

The Standard for Forgiveness

Luke 17:4: “And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”

Everyone, Everything, All of the Time, Right Now

What is the standard of forgiveness? God's standard for forgiveness is that we must forgive everyone, everything, all of the time, right now -- completely, all the way to blessing.

There are three steps to forgiveness:

- Say “Father, I forgive (person) for (what) at (where) on (time or date).” Be specific.
- Then pray, “Father, I give you permission to bring this forgiveness to completion in my heart.”
- Then continue to pray for the person and allow God to change your heart to the point where, over time, you can genuinely extend blessing to them.



For instance, “Father God, I forgive my pastor for the statements he made about me at the board meeting last week,” and, “Father, I give you permission to bring this forgiveness to completion in my heart.” Then continue to pray for that person.

The next time you think of that person or see that person, if there is still a sharp bite in your spirit, continue with the three steps. How often do you do this? The Scripture says we should do this seventy times seven times, which basically means we need to do it as often and as long as it takes.

Forgiveness Is a Process

How do you know when you have forgiven? Forgiveness is not a carwash; it is a process and a heart matter. Only God can bring it to completion. Often when you forgive someone, it feels like not much has happened. You think, “I have forgiven the person, but I surely don’t want to ever see or talk to them again!” You are not done yet. But as you continue the process, you find yourself changing; God is changing your heart. You continue to forgive them. After a while, the sharp bite goes away and you think, “Okay, now I have forgiven them. I actually would be willing to see them again.” You still are not quite finished. God’s standard is that your forgiveness would go all the way to blessing-- forgive again and again until you can look the person in the eye and truly ask God’s blessing on them.

When you can say in your heart, “I truly would like to bless that person” and mean it, then you



have come all the way to forgiveness. God is not asking you to forget, just to forgive. You’ll probably always remember the wrong done to you, but once you have forgiven, you no longer need to carry it as a sin in your own life. And in terms of wrongs you’ve done to others, your freedom does not depend on them forgiving you; it only depends on you sincerely asking for forgiveness.

Justice Is God’s Alone

Many Christians think, “But if I forgive that person, they get away with the wrong they did to me. I want justice!” Romans 12:19 makes it clear to us that we are not to become angry and extract satisfaction by punishing the person who wronged us. God is protecting us by telling us that He will take care of it. “‘Vengeance (justice) is Mine,’ says the Lord, ‘I will repay them.’” When you forgive someone, you get off the hook; they don’t. God no longer holds you accountable for the sin of unforgiveness, but God still holds them accountable for their sin.



“Not forgiving is like drinking rat poison and then waiting for the rat to die.”¹ Only you are poisoned; they are not affected by your unforgiveness. Unforgiveness slowly, like poison, takes your Life—your spiritual Life.

¹ Anne Lamott, *Traveling Mercies*

Begin the Process

Let me suggest an orderly approach to forgiveness. Take a full sheet of paper and at the top make five columns. Label them Who, What, When, Where, and 70x7.

| Who | What | When | Where | 70 X 7 |
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Prayer: Now spend time in prayer. Engage your heart and ask God to show you any unforgiveness in your life. Write down the names of the people involved, the wrong they did (or the wrong you did to them), when this happened as best as you can remember (make the event specific—you may have a number of items for just one name), and where it happened.

Then say “Father, I forgive (person) for (what) at (where) on (time or date).” And, “Father, I give you permission to bring this forgiveness to completion in my heart.” Then continue to pray for that person.

As God brings others to mind, just add them to the list and continue as needed. You will be amazed by His faithfulness in forgiveness.