

The Power of Forgiveness

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Introduction

I invite you to learn more about your New Life in Christ. The first step is to understand forgiveness. It is the foundation of everything else you will learn.

Webster's dictionary defines forgiveness as: the act of forgiving. Forgiving is defined as "to cease to feel resentment against (an offender)"; "to give up resentment of or claim to requital"; or "To grant relief from payment of a debt."

Forgiveness involves letting go of resentment towards someone who has caused hurt, pain, or injury. This is one of the hardest things for humans to do. Jesus our Savior was perfectly able to forgive others in His greatest suffering. This is one reason why He is our perfect example.

Let's consider for a moment the depth of what Jesus has done for you and me. Let's explore the gift of His forgiveness and all that is available through it.

Chapter 1

The Life and Death of Jesus

Jesus' earthly ministry lasted for a few years, and He did many great things. He prayed for sick people to be healed. He gave to the poor and taught people the Way back to the Tree of Life. He helped those who were hurting, depressed, and stressed. He never sinned or disobeyed God. He never violated the Ten Commandments. He was perfect!

"...Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:38).

Though He did only good things and was perfectly obedient to God, He willingly chose to suffer for our sins. At the end of His earthly ministry, He knew that He was about to die. He knew that He was about to endure the worst treatment that any human has ever or will ever endure. He prayed to God for strength.

"For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21).

"All we like sheep have gone astray. Everyone has turned to his own way; and The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6).

"40 When he was at the place, he said to them, 'Pray that you don't enter into temptation.' 41 He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and he knelt down and prayed, 42 saying, 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.' 43 An angel from heaven appeared to him, strengthening him. 44 Being in agony he prayed more earnestly. His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground" (Luke 22:40-44).

In this moment of anguish, Jesus still did not want to do things HIS way. He only wanted His Father's will to be done. He was in such pain from the anguish that He sweat blood. That same night

Jesus was arrested and falsely accused by His own people.

“57 Those who had taken Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together. 58 But Peter followed him from a distance, to the court of the high priest, and entered in and sat with the officers, to see the end. 59 Now the chief priests, the elders, and the whole council sought false testimony against Jesus, that they might put him to death; 60 and they found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward...” (Matthew 26:57-60).

Jesus lived such a perfect life that the chief priests and elders had a hard time finding people to even falsely accuse Him. Finally, two came forward to accuse Him, though He was innocent. He was beaten and then put on trial. The accounts of Jesus’ trial and death are recorded at the end of the books **Matthew**, **Mark**, **Luke** and **John**. We will combine these accounts to recall what Jesus went through for you and me.

“67 Then they spat in his face and beat him with their fists, and some slapped him, 68 saying, ‘Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who hit you?’ 1 Now when morning had come, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death: 2 and they bound him, and led him away, and delivered him up to Pontius Pilate, the governor...11 Now Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked him, saying, ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’ Jesus said to him, ‘So you say.’ 12 When he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. 13 Then Pilate said to him, ‘Don’t you hear how many things they testify against you?’ 14 He gave him no answer, not even one word, so that the governor marveled great” (Matthew 26:67-68, Matthew 27:1-2, Matthew 27:11-14).

“13 Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people, 14 and said to them, ‘You brought this man to me as one that perverts the people, and behold, having examined him before you, I found no basis for a charge against this man concerning those things of which you accuse him. 15 Neither has Herod, for I sent you to him, and see, nothing worthy of death has been done by him. 16 I will therefore chastise him and release him’” (Luke 23:13-16).

“1 So Pilate then took Jesus, and flogged him. 27 Then the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium, and gathered the whole garrison together against him. 28 They stripped him, and put a scarlet robe on him. 29 They braided a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and a reed in his right hand; and they kneeled down before him, and mocked him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ 30 They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. (John 19:1, Matthew 27:27-29).

“20 Then Pilate spoke to them again, wanting to release Jesus, 21 but they shouted, saying, ‘Crucify! Crucify him!’ 22 He said to them the third time, ‘Why? What evil has this man done? I have found no capital crime in him. I will therefore chastise him and release him.’ 23 But they were urgent with loud voices, asking that he might be crucified. Their voices and the voices of the chief priests prevailed. 24 Pilate decreed that what they asked for should be done. 25 He released him who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus up to their will” (Luke 23:20-25).

“31 When they had mocked him, they took the robe off him, and put his clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him. 33 When they came to the place that is called ‘The Skull’, they crucified him there with the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. 34 Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.’ Dividing his garments among them, they cast lots. 35 The people stood watching. The rulers with them also scoffed at him, saying, ‘He saved others. Let him save himself, if this is the Christ of God, his chosen one!’ 36 The soldiers also mocked him, coming to him and offering him vinegar, 37 and saying, ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’” (Matthew 27:31, Luke 23:33-37).

“44 It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. 45 The sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two. 46 Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!’ Having said this, he breathed his last. 47 When the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, ‘Certainly this was a righteous man’” (Luke 23:44-47).

Consider for a moment this recorded account of Jesus' death. When Jesus was accused before the governor, Pontus Pilate, He said nothing. He was silent. Anyone else would have vehemently proclaimed their own innocence. Jesus' perfect life testified of itself. He did not need to speak. He knew He was innocent.

They placed a crown of thorns on His head and then beat it into His skull with a staff. They then scourged Him with a Roman flagellum. This was a leather whip with pieces of metal, glass, and nails on the tips. It ripped Jesus' flesh and muscles; He bled mightily. It would have exposed deep tissue and even bone. Jesus was then led away to be crucified. This was a terrible way to die.

In this form of execution, the Romans would take large iron nails and hammer them through your hands and feet into a wooden stake. You would then be lifted up while nailed to this stake. Eventually, you would suffocate. This is the way Jesus died – rejected, mocked, despised, and beaten severely.

Why did all this happen? Why did Jesus suffer this way? Jesus died about 30 AD. Roughly 700 years before this event, one of God's prophets named Isaiah foretold these events. He also answers why this happened.

“3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of suffering and acquainted with disease. He was despised as one from whom men hide their face; and we didn't respect him. 4 Surely he has borne our sickness and carried our suffering; yet we considered him plagued, struck by God, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities (sin). The punishment that brought our peace was on him; and by his wounds we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray. Everyone has turned to his own way; and The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed, yet when he was afflicted he didn't open his mouth. As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he didn't open his mouth” (Isaiah 53:3-7).

These verses foretold what Jesus would do for you and I. Jesus willingly laid down His life like a sheep. This is why He did not respond to his accusers. He was hated, mocked, and despised. He went through these things because of our iniquities and sin. When

we sin, we hurt ourselves and others. We also sin against God and Jesus. Jesus suffered for our disobedience to God's Words and our transgressions of His commandments.

In His suffering, Christ did not get angry. Remember—Jesus did not suffer for His own sins. He suffered for your sin, my sin, and the sins of the entire world! He was still able to say “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

This is the essence of forgiveness. He did not hold resentment toward others for what was happening to Him. He asked God to wipe away their guilt for falsely accusing and mistreating Him. He was so righteous that even the Roman centurion who watched Jesus' suffering proclaimed that He was a righteous man.

All of us have sinned. Our sin separates us from God. Sin brings with it the penalty of death.

“1 Behold, The LORD's hand is not shortened, that it can't save; nor his ear dull, that it can't hear. 2 But your iniquities have separated you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear” (Isaiah 59:1-2).

“...for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

“14 Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:14-15).

The amazing thing is that Jesus did not just die for one group of people. He died for the sins of the entire world. “The next day, he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

We have all sinned and deserve death. We deserve the wrath of God, which is eternal death in the Lake of Fire. We deserve the suffering that He took in our place.

“For indeed Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed **in our place**” (I Cor 5:7b).

“6 For while we were yet weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will hardly die for a righteous man. Yet perhaps for a righteous person someone would even dare to die. 8 But God commends his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we will be saved from God’s wrath through him” (Romans 5:6-9).

Jesus died for you, me, and the whole world knowing all the sins that had been committed and all the sins that we would commit in the future. He still suffered and died—despite the awful way humans treat each other and even despise Him. In the midst of His pain, He said “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” The penalty of sin that we each deserve was put on Him. All humans naturally die because we have sinned. Jesus never sinned—this means He could not stay dead! Jesus lived such a righteous life that He actually resurrected from the dead.

“38 After these things, Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked of Pilate that he might take away Jesus’ body. Pilate gave him permission. He came therefore and took away his body. 39 Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred Roman pounds. 40 So they took Jesus’ body, and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. 41 Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden. In the garden was a new tomb in which no man had ever yet been laid” (John 19:38-41).

“1 Now on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went early, while it was still dark, to the tomb, and saw the stone taken away from the tomb. 2 Therefore she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, ‘They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know

where they have laid him!’ (John 20:1-2)

“5 The angel answered the women, ‘Don’t be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus, who has been crucified. 6 He is not here, for he has risen, just like he said. Come, see the place where the Lord was lying’” (Mat 28:5-6).

Think about the goodness of God towards you. He sent His son, Jesus, to die for your sins (and all our sins) so we would be spared from the wrath of God. The penalty of death that each of us deserve was transferred to Christ.

He took it in your place even though He was perfect and we have fallen far short of perfection. He died so many years ago before you were born. Even then He knew that YOU were WORTH IT! This brought Him joy while He suffered.

“...looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

Chapter 2

Dying to Self and Living for Christ

Fifty days after Jesus resurrected, the followers of Christ were gathered together to celebrate a special day called the Feast of Pentecost. While they were gathered, a mighty miracle happened.

Acts 2:1-5

“1 Now when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all with one accord in one place. 2 Suddenly there came from the sky a sound like the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. 3 Tongues like fire appeared and were distributed to them, and one sat on each of them. 4 They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other languages, as the Spirit gave them the ability to speak. 5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under the sky.”

The Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples with fire! Peter then addressed those gathered. At the conclusion of his message, he called them to repent.

Act 2:36-41

“36 ‘Let all the house of Israel therefore know certainly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.’ 37 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ 38 Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all who are far off, even as many as the Lord our God will call to himself.’ 40 With many other words he testified, and exhorted them, saying, ‘Save yourselves from this crooked generation!’ 41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized. There were added that day about three thousand souls.”

The first step in accepting Christ as the only one who can save you from sin, the life of pain, and the Wrath of God is to repent.

Repent means to change your mind towards God. It is where you change your mind from the attitude of seeking your own way. Instead, you submit your life totally to God. Remember the Garden of Eden. This change of mind will always result in a changed life.

In the Garden, mankind chose what looked good to the eyes. We still do the same today. When you genuinely repent, you make the decision to stop chasing your what your eyes desire. You come to the realization that are tired of the hurt and pain you cause yourself and others. You are tired of the lack of fulfillment and purpose.

When you repent, you decide to no longer rebel against God's Word or His commandments. You no longer want to do things your way. You see the commandments as the guide for your life. The moment you truly repent, you begin seeking and choosing God's purpose for your life.

Repentance involves forgiveness. We must ask God to forgive us for our sins. This involves admitting that we have sinned and deserve the ultimate penalty for sin. We must admit that Christ's perfect sacrifice is the only solution.

If you will ask forgiveness for your sins and turn away from your old life, your sins will be forgiven. Your penalty will be cancelled. He will wipe away your sins as if they never happened!

“8 But if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him; 9 knowing that Christ, being raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over him! 10 For the death that he died, he died to sin one time; but the life that he lives, he lives to God” (Romans 6:8-10).

As part of this process, we must also forgive others. Jesus said, “25 Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father, who is in heaven, may also forgive you your transgressions. 26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your transgressions” (Mark 11:25-26).

Remember that Jesus forgave us despite what He went through. Think about what He said on the cross: “Father, forgive them for

they know not what they do.” He said this while being crucified and mocked. He had just been beaten. He went through this even though He was innocent. While we were sinners, He still died for us.

We must learn to forgive others in the same manner. In the next chapter, we will learn more about forgiving others.

Chapter 3

Learning to Let Go

As mentioned in the last chapter, forgiveness is the first step in repentance. We ask God for forgiveness, but we must also forgive others. This is truly a process, and we will review that in this chapter.

We have each been hurt by other people—whether verbally or physically. They may say things that are untrue. Sometimes we are physically harmed or our property is disrespected. When people wrong us, our first reaction is typically anger.

Sometimes we were hurt years ago, perhaps as far back as our childhood. Sometimes we were hurt more recently. Whatever the case may be, these hurts and inner wounds are within us. For us to go forward in our walk with God, we need to address these wounds.

Consider the following Bible verse: “You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people; but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am The LORD” (Lev. 19:18).

When people wrong us, it can be difficult to let go. Our human nature may think of ways to “get even” with people. In Leviticus 19:18, God asks us to do something that is very much against human nature: not to hold grudges against others.

In our sinful human nature, we want to get even because we think that will make us feel better and pay them back at the same time. As God’s children, He wants us to react differently than the rest of the world. He wants us to live a holy, set apart life. How should we respond when we are mistreated?

To address this, we will look at a person in the Bible named David. He was one of the greatest kings in Israel’s history. Before he became king, he served under King Saul.

Saul treated David with kindness at first. As time passed, his

heart towards David changed. He threw spears at him, slandered his character, and tried to kill him. He turned people against David.

At one point, David actually had the opportunity to kill Saul, but he refrained. Instead, he said, “The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord’s anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the Lord” (I Samuel 24:6). He honored the calling on Saul’s life. After all that David went through, he chose not to hold a grudge. While Christ’s example is the best one to follow, David’s actions are a powerful reminder for us today.

It is important that we look back into our past and think about the people who have hurt us. Unforgiveness is like a poison we drink hoping it hurts someone else. In reality, it can only hurt us.

How do we forgive those who have wronged us? Set aside some time to sit down and think about those who have wronged you. From your heart, speak out loud that you forgive that person. Even speak out his or her name and what he/she has done to you. Next, ask God to forgive this person. Ask God to bless this person and increase your love for him or her.

And you may have to do this multiple times. You see, forgiveness is something you walk in. There is an initial moment when you decide to forgive someone and let go of the pain. However, those feelings of what they have done to you may come back. When those feelings re-surface, just repeat the steps of forgiving them. As you do this over time, you will be set totally free. When you think about the person and no longer have the feelings of hurt, pain, anger, or bitterness rise up within you then you know you are completely free.

Some hurts can be released easily, but others will take time. Learn to release that forgiveness towards people as those feelings arise.

Here is another practical way to address forgiveness towards others. I have practiced this and found that it works. You can also make a forgiveness list. This is where you list every person who you have unforgiveness towards. Ask God to help you in this process. He will show you the people that you need to forgive, even

if you have forgotten.

Write down each person's name and beside the name you write the thing (or things) they have done to you. Next, you say that person's name and their wrong out loud, but also ask God to forgive and bless each person. Ask God to help remove the memory of that wrong from your heart and mind. Really focus on releasing it when you ask. When you have gone through the list, you burn it (When you burn this list, do it in such a way where it will not burn your house down or cause damage to property or the environment). This practical suggestion can really benefit those who have years of hurt built up inside. Again this may take time.

Unforgiveness can actually cause physical and mental conditions in people. Over the years, I have witnessed people who forgive others actually receive healing. Letting go can be the hardest thing, but God will guide you towards releasing the hurt and pain.

In Romans 12:17-21, Paul wrote: "17 Repay no one evil for evil. Respect what is honorable in the sight of all men. 18 If it is possible, as much as it is up to you, be at peace with all men. 19 Do not seek revenge yourselves, beloved, but give place to God's wrath. For it is written, "Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord." 20 Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in doing so, you will heap coals of fire on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Sometimes you have to forgive people that you may never see again. They may have already passed away. At other times, we need to forgive those we see on a regular basis. While we may not be able to see the person we are forgiving, we can only do so much. Sometimes those who have wronged you will never confess their wrong. This is why Paul said "as much as it is up to you, be at peace with all men..." We can only do our part. We have to put the rest in God's hands.

In these verses, Paul conveys to us that we should not seek revenge. Instead, he encourages us to overcome evil with good. He even mentions hot coals. At first, we might think that these verses refer to bringing down hot coals of harm upon them. That is not the context of Paul's statement.

In ancient Israel, coals were used on a special altar called the Altar of Incense. The Altar of Incense can represent our prayers (Rev. 8:3). This altar was also an important aspect of God covering the sins of the nation of Israel. This happened on a special day called the Day of Atonement. We will discuss this day more in another booklet.

In these verses, Paul is exhorting us to do good things for others as a way to atone for their sins against us. This is showing love despite the harm they have done to us. It is covering them despite what they have done.

“And above all things be earnest In your love among yourselves, for love covers a multitude of sins” (I Peter 4:8).

This is the essence of the example of Christ, who forgave us on the cross in the midst of His suffering. We always want to pray for those who harm us.

In the verses from Romans, it is interesting that both hunger and thirst are mentioned. This can refer to spiritual hunger and thirst.

Often people who hurt others are in need of spiritual food and drink from God. They have a need and a longing for the things of God, but their spiritual needs are unfulfilled. They are spiritually lost, blind, and hurt themselves. Often people who hurt others have been hurt by someone else in their past. They hurt others out of their spiritual frustration.

We want to pray that God heals those who have hurt us. We want to pray that God fulfills their spiritual longings through a genuine relationship with Him. You can always ask God to reveal to you why a person hurt you. With this special knowledge, you will have an empathy that can help you let go.

As we do good to others and pray for them, we are letting go of the grudge. That person being spiritually whole is of more value than our grudge. Our grudge may bring us momentary satisfaction; their spiritual health will be a tree of life to them and countless others.

As just mentioned, many people who have hurt you are hurting themselves. They are acting out of their hurt. The road to forgiveness begins when we say “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

Forgiveness is something you begin with one decision, but it is continued through your lifetime as you learn to let go. Despite our suffering, we learn to have the perspective of Christ on the cross. It will help you to be gentle on others who are hurting and learning how to overcome.

God is faithful and He will help you do it.

Conclusion

- As part of this process, forgive yourself. You may or may not have done anything wrong in these situations. Release feelings of condemnation and doubt you have towards yourself. Jesus took the beating for you; you don't have to beat yourself up. If you have done something wrong, ask God to forgive you.
- Realize that God is not angry at you because someone else hurt or mistreated you.
- Your conscience is your moral compass of right and wrong. Ask God to help cleanse your conscience with the blood of Jesus (Hebrews 9:14).
- How many times should you forgive someone? Jesus told the disciples 70 times 7 times (Matthew 18:21-35). In other words, as many times as is necessary.
- Sometimes satan will project offense or hurt in your heart and mind towards someone even if they haven't done anything. He may try to make you think that someone has wronged you or that this person hates you. If this happens forgive him or her anyways and ask God to increase your love for that person.

The power of forgiveness is that it releases you into a new life with a new purpose in life. In the next booklet in this series, "Your New Life", you will learn more about your new life and all that God has for you. It is an exciting, fulfilling life!

Forgiveness is the foundation of the Christian faith. In this booklet, you will learn about the forgiveness of God that is available. Furthermore, you will learn how to forgive those who have hurt you.



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