

FREEDOM THROUGH FORGIVENESS

This study is designed to help us deal honestly and fully with any unforgiveness that may be in our hearts. Have you ever found yourself making (or thinking!) any of the following statements?

1 *“There’s no unforgiveness in my heart.”*

If you have truly forgiven every person who has ever sinned against you, then you are able to experience the great freedom, joy, peace, and blessing that result from being a forgiven, forgiving child of God.

However, it is possible to live with seeds of unforgiveness for so long that we become blinded to its presence in our lives. The following exercises will help open your eyes to any unforgiveness that may have become lodged in your heart.

Have you ever been hurt? Put a check (✓) next to any of the following hurts you have experienced:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lied to | <input type="checkbox"/> Rejected by parents |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Promise(s) broken | <input type="checkbox"/> Stolen from |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Neglected by grown children | <input type="checkbox"/> Cheated in a business/financial deal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Treated unfairly by an employer | <input type="checkbox"/> Rebellious/wayward son or daughter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parents divorced | <input type="checkbox"/> Belittled |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Slandered/falsely accused | <input type="checkbox"/> Alcoholic parent or mate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced by mate | <input type="checkbox"/> Publicly humiliated |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Violent crime against self or a loved one | <input type="checkbox"/> Abused (physically, emotionally, sexually) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mate committed adultery or other sexual sin | |

As you reflect on the ways you have been offended, do you find any of these statements to be true?

- Every time I think of (person or offense), I still feel angry.
- I have a subtle, secret desire to see (person) pay for what he (she/they) did to me.
- Deep in my heart, I wouldn’t mind if something bad happened to the person(s) who hurt me.
- I sometimes find myself telling others how (person) hurt me.
- If (person’s) name comes up, I am more likely to say something negative about him/her than something positive.
- I cannot thank God for (person).

These statements are an indication that we have not fully forgiven all those who have sinned against us.

REMEMBER:

Forgiveness means that I fully release the offender from his debt. It means fully cleaning his record. It is a promise never to bring up the offense against him again (to God, to others, or to the offender himself).

God’s Word says that if we say we have not sinned, even though His Spirit shows us otherwise, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us (cf. 1 John 1:8). Have you deceived yourself into believing that you have forgiven everyone who has sinned against you? As God examines your heart, does He find any unforgiveness there?

If you would agree with God that there is unforgiveness in your heart, check this box:

2 “There’s no way I could ever forgive (person) for (offense). He (she/they) hurt me too deeply.”

What are some of the hurts Jesus suffered from us?

Isaiah 53:3-7 _____

Psalms 22:6-7, 16 _____

How has God dealt with us who have sinned against Him so greatly?

Ephesians 2:4-5 _____

Isaiah 43:25; Hebrews 10:17 _____

Micah 7:18-19 _____

How did Jesus command us to respond to those who wrong us?

Luke 6:27 _____

Romans 12:17-21 _____

Colossians 3:13 _____

Luke 17:3-4 _____

What should be the measure (the standard) of our forgiveness?

Colossians 3:13 _____

On that basis, what offense is “too great” to forgive? _____

Would God command us to do something that He would not enable us to do? _____

How are we enabled to forgive (Philippians 2:13)? _____

3 “They don’t deserve to be forgiven.”

What did we do to earn or deserve God’s forgiveness? _____

Romans 5:8 _____

Ephesians 2:4-9 _____

What are the reasons we should extend forgiveness to those who sin against us?

- The offender is genuinely sorry for what he has done.
- I have been forgiven an infinite debt by God, so I forgive as I have been forgiven.
- God commands me to forgive.
- The offender promises never to do it again.
- The offense was an “understandable mistake.”

4 “If I forgive them, they’re off the hook!”

We may feel that if we forgive another, justice will not be served—they will get off scot-free. The problem is, we have put ourselves in the position of a “bill collector.” What does Romans 12:19 have to say about “bill collecting”?

REMEMBER:

Letting the offender off of your hook does not mean they are off of God’s hook. Forgiveness involves transferring the prisoner over to the One who is able and responsible to mete out justice. It relieves us of the burden and responsibility to hold them in prison ourselves.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT:

Would I be willing for God to deal with me in the same way that I want to see my offender dealt with?

5 *“I’ve forgiven them, but I’ll never be able to forget what they did to me.”*

According to the Scriptures, when God forgives us, what does He promise to do?

Jeremiah 31:34; Hebrews 10:17 _____

Psalms 103:12 _____

REMEMBER:

Forgiveness is not forgetting. It is a transaction in which I release my debtor from the obligation to repay his debt.

An omniscient God cannot *forget*. But He does promise not to “remember our sins” or to hold them against us. God does not ask us to forget the wrong that has been done to us, but simply to forgive.

However, the attitude of our heart when we do think of the offense can be an indication of whether or not we have truly forgiven. When you think of the person who has hurt you most deeply, which of the following attitudes do you experience?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Emotional churning | <input type="checkbox"/> Desire for God to bless him |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Desire for revenge | <input type="checkbox"/> Desire to see him spiritually restored |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hard to ask God to bless him | <input type="checkbox"/> Sense of rest and relinquishment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hard to see his good qualities | <input type="checkbox"/> Gratefulness to God for this person |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Want others to know what I know about him | <input type="checkbox"/> Humbled by how greatly I have sinned against God and how much He has forgiven me |

6 *“I really have forgiven, but I still struggle with feelings of hurt.”*

According to the following passages, what must we be willing to do, in addition to forgiving those who sin against us?

Luke 6:27-31 _____

Romans 12:17-21 _____

REMEMBER:

The act of forgiveness is only the starting place for dealing with those who wrong us. The initial act of releasing the offender must be followed by a commitment to invest positively in his/her life. This investment is the key to experiencing emotional healing and wholeness.

Whenever possible, we should seek to rebuild the relationship between ourselves and the offender. In situations where this is not possible or appropriate, we can still invest in their lives through prayer.

What are several practical ways that you could “return good for evil” or invest in the life of someone who has wronged you?

7 *"I won't forgive!"*

Ultimately, forgiveness comes down to a choice. It is a choice that God both commands and enables. But some simply refuse to make that choice. According to the following Scriptures, what can we expect if we refuse to forgive those who sin against us?

Matthew 6:14-15 _____

2 Corinthians 2:10-11 _____

Matthew 18:32-35 _____

What are some of the physical, emotional, and spiritual "tormentors" (Matthew 18:34 KJV) we might experience in our lives if we are unwilling to forgive?

Circle those specific consequences of unforgiveness that you have personally experienced at one time or another.

Choosing to Forgive

Has God revealed any lack of forgiveness in your heart?
 Do you desire to be set free from the prison of unforgiveness?
 Are you ready to choose the pathway of forgiveness?

If so, here are some steps that will help you to deal with the hurts and offenses you have experienced.

1. Make a list of the people who have wronged you.

Next to each name, write the offenses(s) which that person committed against you. Then record how you responded to their wrongdoing.

Person	Their Offense	My Response
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

2. Thank God for each person who has wounded you.

They are instruments to humble you and to mold you and conform you to the image of Jesus.

3. Confess to God, and then to the offender, any wrong responses you may have had (unforgiveness, hatred, bitterness, gossip).

4. As Christ has forgiven you, fully forgive each offender.

Remember that forgiveness is not a feeling; rather, it is a choice and an act of the will. It is a commitment to clear the other person's record, never to hold that offense against them.

5. Confirm your love. (2 Corinthians 2:8)

Look for ways to “return good for evil”—that is, to invest positively in the lives of those who have wronged you.

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