



FORGIVENESS

REASONS WE STRUGGLE TO FORGIVE

1. A WRONG IDEA OF FORGIVENESS

- **Forgiveness is NOT downplaying the offense** or forgetting what happened. It's not saying, "Oh, that's not a big deal."
- **Forgiveness is NOT always easy.** Many times it's easier "said" than "done" because it's hard to let go of things that seemingly won't let go of you. It's difficult to forgive repeat offenders, unapologetic people, or those who intentionally and maliciously inflict pain upon our hearts.
- **Forgiveness is NOT forgetting.** Truthfully, there are some hurts you will NEVER forget. We've been taught to forgive and forget, but there are some things that are impossible to forget. So does remembering mean that I haven't forgiven? If not, what does real forgiveness look like?
- **Forgiveness is NOT a feeling**—it's a conscious choice to respond to offense in a God-honoring way. It means remembering the event without being bound by the pain it once caused. God desires for you to experience His power to renew, restore, and make all things new.
- **Forgiveness does not always require reconciliation.** We often say, "I'll forgive them when they apologize," but this mindset places our freedom in their hands, making us a hostage to the one who hurt us. True forgiveness releases the offense without waiting for the other person to make it right.

Romans 12:18 reminds us, *"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."* However, peace doesn't always mean restoration. Some offenders have no desire to reconcile, and continuing the relationship may only bring more pain. Others may want reconciliation but lack the ability to stop causing harm. In these situations, trust the Holy Spirit to guide you in setting healthy boundaries.

Reconciliation may be a possibility if there is...

- **Sincere Repentance:** A consistent turning away from wrong actions and unhealthy behaviors
- **A Desire for Restitution:** To make things right if possible
- **Rebuilding of Trust for Both Parties:** Proven through consistent accountability, words, and actions

FORGIVENESS IS A WORK OF THE HEART THAT SETS US FREE

2. IT FEELS UNFAIR TO LET THEM OFF THE HOOK

Forgiveness can feel like collaborating with our offender, as if we're contributing to our own downfall. We convince ourselves that they don't "deserve" forgiveness. But God does not operate on fairness or merit—and thank God for that, because if forgiveness were based on what we deserve, none of us would receive it.

Our natural instinct is to make them feel the pain they caused us. **But you cannot truly forgive someone while still trying to hurt them.** Hurt people often hurt others, yet revenge won't heal your wounds or ease your pain. Don't seek to get even—pray for them. Not just *about them*, because you can pray about someone while still holding on to resentment. Pray *for them*—that's how you train your heart to forgive.

Ask yourself, "Am I willing trade my forgiveness from God in order to hold someone else accountable for their offense toward me?"

3. WE DON'T THINK WE CAN

We often feel too weak to forgive, believing we don't have the strength to let go of the wrongs done to us. And on our own, we don't. But we were never meant to navigate life in our own strength. We are empowered by the supernatural strength of God. He reminds us in His Word, "'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."

Forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling—and it's a choice we must make daily. If we wait until we *feel* like forgiving, we'll remain stuck, allowing our emotions to dictate our lives according to the ways of the world. But God invites us into a new reality, one where freedom begins with a decision.

When you choose to forgive first, the feelings will follow. This is a part of living from the Tree of Life. Remember: *Choices lead—feelings follow.*

HOW TO LIVE AN UNOFFENDED LIFE

1. RECOGNIZE OUR OWN IMPERFECTION

We will never forgive others for more than God has forgiven us. "*Freely you have received; freely give.*" Matthew 10:8

2. FOCUS ON THE REAL ENEMY

People are not the enemy—the devil is. LOVE people, HATE the devil.

3. RECEIVE THE LOVE OF GOD

Receiving His love gives us the capacity to love others. If you have a hard time loving others, you may not have fully received God's love for you.

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." 1 JOHN 4:10

STEPS OF FORGIVING THOSE WHO HAVE HURT YOU (Luke 6:27-28)

1. **Pray for them** – It's natural to retaliate, but Jesus said to love those who have hurt you.
2. **Bless them** – Speak well of them.
3. **Do good to them** – Treat them well.



SIX WAYS TO STAY UNOFFENDED

1. TAKE THE LOWEST SEAT

Consider everyone more important than yourself. Put the needs of others before your own. Strive to please God, not yourself or others. Be a servant and look to honor others rather than yourself.

2. ALWAYS REMAIN GRATEFUL

Gratitude changes our attitude by keeping us aware of God's provision and blessings.

3. GIVE OTHERS THEIR FREEDOM

Don't try to control others. People need the freedom to make their own decisions. Sometimes they make good ones; sometimes they make bad ones. Either way, it is *their* decision.

4. MAKE DECISIONS THAT PROMOTE LIFE IN OTHERS

When someone offends you, the natural response may be to ignore them or seek revenge. But Jesus offers a better way. Maintain a positive attitude toward them. Choose to speak words of life over them and do things that build them up. How they respond is up to them.

5. TRUST GOD TO BRING JUSTICE WHEN AN OFFENSE COMES

Vengeance belongs to the Lord. Think about what it would be like to pay for your own sin, rather than Jesus taking care of it. None of us want what we really deserve. We'd rather have grace!

6. DEDICATE TIME TO THE LORD

Refresh your spirit in prayer, Bible study, and fellowship with Jesus. God's presence brings change.

GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. Did you previously have the wrong idea of forgiveness?
2. Are you harboring unforgiveness in any way?
3. Have you received God's forgiveness for your past sins? If not, what do you think is holding you back?
4. Would you trade your right to forgiveness from God for the right to hold someone accountable for their offense?

PRAYER FOCUS

- Pray for God's grace to truly be able to receive His forgiveness so you can freely forgive those who have offended you.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to show you who you need to forgive and give you the strength to do so.
- Pray that the Lord will heal every wound in your life and allow you to live a truly unoffended life.
- If you find yourself dwelling on past failures and feeling burdened by sins you've already sought forgiveness for, take time to pray specifically over these areas, releasing them to God.

APPLICATION

Make a list of any individuals you need to forgive, and take time to pray for each one.

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