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## Forgiveness

I shared my intent to write this lesson on forgiveness to a friend who is a nonbeliever. He said he did not think forgiveness was necessary—which caused me to deeply consider the meaning and consequences of his statement. The next day I realized the following enlightening and profound spiritual truth:

When one believes **forgiveness** is not necessary,  
it impedes their ability to know and experience God's heart!

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,  
that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” John 3:16.

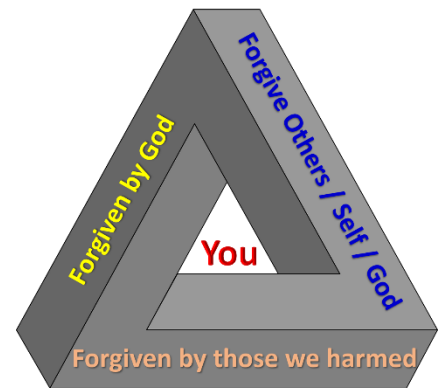
God's **forgiveness** in Jesus Christ is absolute, eternal, and an expression of His love.

God's **forgiveness** penetrates our heart and transforms our soul.

**Forgiveness** is more powerful than we realize, because it operates within the spiritual realm.

What's more, forgiveness operates in three different spiritual dimensions—where each type of forgiveness enables us to more fully know and experience God's heart. These three different forms of forgiveness comprise the content of this lesson, and is depicted by the triangle to the right:

1. We must be forgiven by God.
2. We must forgive:
  - a. Others
  - b. Self
  - c. God
3. We need to be forgiven by those whom we have harmed.



## We Must be Forgiven

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23

The mystery of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is we are freely forgiven—not by what we do—but by the grace of God. This is difficult for those who are not born again to grasp because it conflicts with our human rational thought process—which is based upon everything we earn and achieve in life is based upon what we do. No one gives us anything of value for free...especially eternal life...which cannot be purchased (it has already been paid for by Jesus).

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. **For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:1-10

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”  
Ephesians 1:7

“For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” Psalm 103:11-12

## **We Must Forgive**

Those who are forgiven—must forgive—which seems relevant and logical. However, for many, this can be very difficult because our flesh does not want to forgive. In fact, our flesh usually responds with very strong emotions that demand vengeance and retribution for what was done to us.

However, God is very straightforward about forgiveness for those who are born again: because we are forgiven, we must forgive. The following words spoken by Jesus Christ reveals His truth regarding the importance of forgiveness. Although we are forgiven and will live with Him for eternity...to not forgive someone has many undesirable consequences that stifle our internal peace, joy, happiness, and spiritual growth.

“Then Peter came to Him and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.’” Matt 18:21-22

Peter (a disciple of Jesus) thought he understood forgiveness. Throughout time, the rational thinking of man says fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. Do it again and %\*\$#^#&!!! Peter’s human logic and attempt at spiritual wisdom caused him to think to forgive seven times should be more than sufficient. But Jesus—Who reflected the character and heart of God—instructed we must forgive up seventy times seven (490 times).

It’s important to note the response of Jesus is not about a specific number. But rather, it provides insight into the loving, forgiving and patient heart of God. Consider how many times each of us have repeated the same sin over, and over, and over. Jesus then continued to instruct Peter by reinforcing our need to forgive (and consequences of unforgiveness) in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant.

“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’ So, his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So, when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’ And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers 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.” Matthew 18:23-35

Some may perceive the response of the master as revenge, and based upon conditional forgiveness. I see the response by the master as punishment that is designed to change the attitude of the heart and behavior. Consider the parable if the master did not respond; or worse, rewarded the servant. God is holy; His word is absolute; and there are consequences when we do not obey. In addition, consider the interaction between the master and the servant from the perspective of a father and son relationship. When a son disobeys, will the father punish his son for the son’s benefit? Plus, will the father disown his son for what he did, or still love him unconditionally?

For those who received God's grace and forgiveness, harboring unforgiveness will create conflict within our heart and soul. Think about the contradiction when a Christian, who has received eternal and unmerited forgiveness by the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ, asks God for forgiveness of their sin when they have not forgiven someone else. The internal conflict can range from unpleasant to debilitating; and is a consequence of not obeying God's word. In the same way the master delivered the servant to the torturers until he should pay all that was due him...the torture associated with the deprivation of spiritual peace is a form of spiritual chastisement...for our betterment.

"My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." Hebrews 12:5-11

"And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' Therefore, you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." Galatians 4:6-7

Here are additional scriptures regarding forgiveness.

Jesus said "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses." Mark 11: 25-26

"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 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." Ephesians 4:30-32

"Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven." Luke 6:37

"And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you." Ephesians 4:25-32

Here is something else to consider.

Why would God mandate we forgive others?

Take time and think about your answer.

My answer to this question is in the form of another reflective question.

Can you identify one commandment from God that was not for our physical and spiritual benefit?

## Consequences of Unforgiveness

When we hold onto unforgiveness, we will also experience anger, bitterness, hatred and a desire for retribution—which results in:

- Distress to our body and mind.
- Continued aggravation of our internal “scars” cause by the one who harmed us.
- A “restricting filter” between us and God.

What’s more, the day-to-day internal suffering and pain associated with unforgiveness soon becomes “normal” to us because we forgot what it was like to live without the internal turmoil. Meanwhile, the never-ending boil of caustic rage continues to fester to the surface in what we say and do.

In addition, when we hold onto unforgiveness:

- We are held in bondage by the person(s) who committed the offense against us.
- Their crime continues to influence our ability to live life to the fullest by limiting all that there is to experience in our walk with our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

However, when we are able to stand back from a distance...and look at everything that has occurred to us from an eternal, spiritual and “big picture” perspective—and reflect upon the grace and forgiveness God has given us in His Son, Jesus Christ—is when we are able to begin the process of breaking the stronghold and chains of unforgiveness.

It is safe to say those who harmed us do not deserve to be forgiven. However, it’s also safe to say we did not deserve God’s forgiveness in Jesus Christ. God’s desire for us is to:

- Let go of that which continues to destroy us from within.
- To forgive as He has forgiven us—as a reciprocal act of His love, His mercy and His grace.

Forgiveness—the deliberate act of relinquishing (surrendering, abandoning) our feelings of resentment and/or vengeance towards someone who has harmed us—is biblically mandated. But there is a very good reason—because forgiveness is much more powerful than we realize in that it can heal the internal “damage.”

Forgiveness:

- Is a powerful spiritual weapon.
- Will restore our body, heart and soul from the devastating harm caused by trauma, such as:
  - Verbal abuse.
  - Mental abuse.
  - Physical abuse.
  - Sexual abuse.
  - Domestic violence.
  - Parental separation.
  - Loss of a loved one.
- Takes power away from Satan and his demonic minions.
- Changes our perception of:
  - Those who have harmed us.
  - The world around us.

Even if the person who committed the crime does not care, refuses to change, or is no longer living—forgiveness is still vitally important for the one who was harmed—for it is a source of healing—which has been proven by medical research on forgiveness.

## Medical Research on Forgiveness

There have been multiple studies on the psychological and physical effects of forgiveness during the past 20 years. Medical research has determined there are many psychological and physical benefits that occur when we forgive. (This should not be surprising because God's word instructs us to forgive!)

Note: The following content is from an article posted by the **American Psychological Association (APA)**.

Research has shown that forgiveness is linked to mental health outcomes such as reduced anxiety, depression and major psychiatric disorders, as well as with fewer physical health symptoms and lower mortality rates.

APA content source: <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2017/01/ce-corner>

The **Mayo Clinic** is one of America's top-ranked medical institutions; is regarded as one of the best residency education programs in the United States; and performs significant research in multiple medical fields.

Note: The following content is from an article posted by the Mayo Clinic.

Unforgiveness can cause:

Anger	Sadness	Depression
Anxiety	Confusion	Resentment
Desire for vengeance	Hostility	Bitterness
A sense of injustice	Inability to connect with others	High blood pressure

Forgiveness can make way for improved health and peace of mind. Forgiveness can lead to:

- Healthier relationships.
- Improved mental health.
- Less anxiety, stress and hostility.
- Lower blood pressure.
- Fewer symptoms of depression.
- A stronger immune system.
- Improved heart health.
- Improved self-esteem.

Forgiveness is a commitment to change by moving from suffering to forgiveness by:

- Recognizing the value of forgiveness and how it can improve your life.
- Identify what needs healing and who needs to be forgiven and for what.
- Acknowledge your emotions and behavior caused by harm done to you, and work to release them.
- Choose to forgive the person who's offended you.
- Transition from your role as victim and release the control and power the offending person.
- Consider joining a support group or seeing a counselor.

Mayo Clinic content source: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/forgiveness/art-20047692>

For more information on psychological and medical research findings Google "research on forgiveness."

## Where Do I Find Strength to Forgive?

It is important to realize and remember—the intent of Satan and his minions is to cause unforgiveness, anger, hatred, bitterness, and a desire for vengeance—to occur in all of us. This is what he orchestrates between nations; and this is what he instigates between persons—all with the intent of causing spiritual and physical death. When we choose to forgive, his divisive power is taken away, and its grip ceases its hold on us.

If you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord...remember:

- Where you were, where you are, and where you are headed (eternally) because of Jesus.
- This transformation is because in Christ you are forgiven.

“And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.” 2 Colossians 2:13-15

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.” Ephesians 1:7

Look through your spiritual eyes and consider:

- The darkness that is in the world.
- The influence of Satan in people’s lives.
- The number of people living in darkness who:
  - Have no clue what they’re doing.
  - Are blindly led by unknown forces.
- It is by the grace of God you can see these spiritual truths.

Now consider:

- The person(s) who harmed you.
- Their existence in overwhelming darkness.
- The effect of Satan’s influence.
- The eternal consequences of:
  - What they did.
  - What you can do.

Remember...even though the one who harmed you may:

- Discount/disown what they did.
- Respond with disdain
- No longer live.
- Forgiveness is for **YOUR** healing.

## **I Cannot Forgive Myself**

We once lived in darkness and were influenced by principalities, powers, rulers of darkness of this age, and spiritual hosts of wickedness. (Ephesians 6:12). But we are now in the light of Jesus and can see with greater clarity. (Ephesians 5:8)

All of us have memories—which are part of our soul and are eternal. This includes the good memories and those we wish never occurred. There are times when a memory flashes across my mind; I cringe at the thought of what I did; and I ask how is it possible for God to forgive me. Unfortunately, God’s grace and forgiveness does not erase our memories of past sins. Our memories remain for a purpose. For example, our memories:

- Provide us with a benchmark that allows us to compare how much we have grown in Christ (sanctification).
- Provide us with an ability to understand and have compassion towards those who are bound by similar sin.
- Reinforce humility.
- Will be illuminated and judicated during the Judgment Seat of Christ. (See 2 Corinthians 5:9-11)
- Magnify our thankfulness, praise and worship of God while we are still in our physical bodies...and especially when we are on the “other side” in our spiritual bodies as we join the great multitude praising God. Imagine what it will be like when we see our Savior and Lord in Heaven...and we truly realize for the first time...how much God loves us...and we were truly forgiven for that which we thought was unforgivable.

“Then I heard something like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.’”  
Rev 19:6-7

Remember...the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ did not provide a means to forgive a few of our “less important” sins. He also died for those sins that seem unconscionable (shocking, immoral, inexcusable, and horrifying). To perceive otherwise discounts the unfathomable gift of grace God has bestowed upon us via His Son, Jesus.

## **How Can I Forgive God?**

My father died of lung cancer when I was 14 years old. It was a devastating and traumatic experience. Looking back, I had no idea of what was going on internally as I experienced anger, frustrations, confusion, and a mournful heartache that reached into the marrow of my bones. I missed my father. I miss him to this day.

Approximately three years later, while standing in the water’s edge in Huntington Beach, California, I accepted Jesus Christ as my savior. When I was 21 years old, I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord. I had made a complete mess of my life and my only choice was to give it to Him.

I am now 66 years old, and I can say with confidence that every one of God’s promises is true.

My wife and I discuss the loss of my father on occasion. (In March, 2020, we celebrated our 40<sup>th</sup> year of marriage.) We both wonder if we would have met if my father did not die. I also wonder if my life in Christ, my teaching ministry and the website would also exist as it does today. I will not know until I am on the “other side” and I can ask Jesus directly. Until then, the following assisted me in overcoming my pain, and forgiving God:

1. Express your pain and thoughts in prayer. Be honest with God (He can handle it).
2. Recognize His thoughts and ways are different from ours. (Isiah 55:8-9)
3. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. (Proverbs 3:5)

Each of us needs to come to the point where—by faith—we conclude the events we go through in life are allowed by Him to accomplish His purpose in our lives, and in the lives of others.



## What If I'm the One Who Needs Forgiveness?

We have all harmed someone in one form or another. Those who have entered into the light of Christ will look back with remorse and guilt, and may experience negative consequences for our wrongdoing.

If you need to obtain forgiveness from someone you have harmed:

1. Honestly assess and acknowledge the wrongs you've done and how they have affected others.
2. Pray and confess your sins to God.
3. Then, if possible, talk to those whom you have harmed. Express your sincere sorrow and regret for what you have done, affirm it was wrong, and ask for forgiveness.
4. If your wrongdoing resulted in a financial impact, if possible, reimburse their loss.
5. Do not explain why or provide excuses why you did what you did. This is not about you. This is about those you have harmed and their recovery.

This action—if done with a sincere heart—will begin to dissolve your guilt, shame and pain. No one is perfect. We all make mistakes. Plus, God is more interested in the attitude of our heart than he is with our failures. His love for us is beyond measure—which motivates us to repentance and obedience in all areas of our lives.

Your actions will begin the internal process of freeing you from the consequential turmoil of what you did. However, it is important to realize the person(s) you harmed may not forgive you. They will likely need to overcome their pain and anger, and find forgiveness in their own time. Regardless, remember to treat them with humility, compassion and empathy—and most important—agape love.

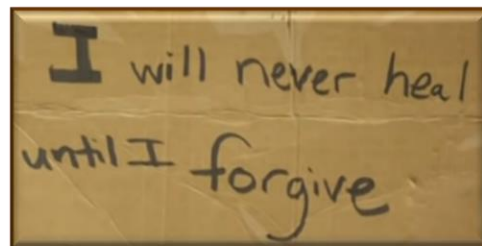
## Summary

Jesus Christ was a perfect reflection of God. As such, consider some of the last words spoken by Jesus...after he had been rejected, accused, and abused...as He hung on the cross dying, He said “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” Luke 23:34

It is these words that provide spiritual insight into the nature of God’s heart, and words that provide us with guidance in how to respond to a dark world.



Here is a link to a wonderful video on forgiveness:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FxoMbPWuk0I>



Forgiveness is more powerful than we realize. However, forgiveness can be difficult because the scars can be deep and calloused—especially if there was sexual, physical, mental and/or emotional abuse. But remember, forgiveness is a choice—and most important—it is for your benefit, healing and spiritual wellbeing. Think about it...all of the consequences of unforgiveness are detrimental to life and living. But when forgiveness is based upon a sincere heart and bolstered by the Holy Spirit, it will break the chains that bind you; as it melts away the inappropriate thoughts, undesirable emotions and harmful physical responses.

If you are harboring unforgiveness in your heart...the following prayer may assist you.

*Heavenly Father, in the name of Jesus Christ I come before Your throne of grace and mercy to find help in my time of need. Thank you, Jesus, for dying for me and paying the price for my sins. Your word says that we are to forgive others as we have been forgiven. However, Lord, I have been deeply hurt and I am having difficulty in forgiving because of what was done. Holy Spirit, I give you my heart, I give you my soul, I give you my emotions, and I give you my pain—because only You can change me from within. Help me to forgive as you have forgiven me. Amen.*

“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” Colossians 3:12-17

I pray that you find the desire and power to forgive those who have harmed you...for those who live in darkness do not know what they have done.

All for His Glory  
Harold D. Thomas