# Biblical Forgiveness

Scripture has a lot to say about forgiveness. Knowing what forgiveness is and how to forgive is critical to our personal maturity and the Body of Christ’s healing.

## Scripture References

Ephesians 4:32

*“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”*

Mark 11:25

*“Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.”*

Colossians 2:13-14

*“When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”*

Matthew 18:21-35

*v.34-35 “And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.”*

Luke 7:36-48

*v.47 “For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.”*

Colossians 3:13

*“bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”*

## Biblical Forgiveness, Therefore:

* Is a commandment by God to all Christians
* Involves a conscious decision on my part (I choose to forgive…)
* It is an event (It is not passive nor ongoing)
* Involves canceling the “certificate of debt“
  + There is a specific debtor with specific debt(s)
* Does not require the debtor to initiate or participate.
* Is about Me and my relationship with God
* Biblical forgiveness frees me (the forgiver) of the burden I’ve been carrying
* Forgiveness is different than reconciliation. Reconciliation involves my relationship with another person. Forgiveness is between me and the Lord.

## How to Forgive

1. Acknowledge the debtor (the person you need to forgive)
2. Acknowledge the hurt (charging the debt to someone and something)
3. Acknowledge how it made me feel (emotional debt)
4. Releasing the person from the debt they owe me by giving

the debt over to Jesus (canceling the debt)

Example Prayer:

*“I choose to forgive [NAME] for stepping on my toes and bruising them. It was painful! I also choose to forgive him for laughing when I was in pain, which made me feel humiliated. I surrender these debts to you, Lord, as only you can be the judge and jury of this case. I choose to take myself off of the judge’s seat and let you be Lord in this situation. I choose not to hold these things against [NAME] any longer but allow you to mediate this case however you choose. I repent for walking in unforgiveness and bitterness toward him. Help me love [NAME] well despite how he’s treated me, and help me keep healthy boundaries where needed. Amen”*

By relinquishing the debt to God, we enable Him to step in and do what only He can do: judge righteously! Whether He gives grace and mercy or holds the person accountable, that is God’s prerogative. We no longer hold the debt! We give God the certificate of debt (or mortgage, if you will) and let God be our protector, provider, and judge. Ultimately, forgiveness is an act of faith and trust in God. And we’re reminded from scripture that God freely forgave us when we didn’t deserve it. Jesus set the example for us to follow!

* As we accept the person unconditionally, God gets to be our source of life
* I choose to release my rights & expectations (especially to get even).
* When the enemy tries to bring past offenses to my mind, I replace those thoughts with the truth. I set my mind on how I forgave the offense. I no longer hold any rights to bring this debt against the offender. I don’t own the mortgage anymore. God does!

## Who might I need to Forgive?

* Myself

We need to forgive ourselves when we’ve been holding ourselves accountable. We need to accept Christ’s forgiveness. To not forgive ourselves is like saying that Christ’s death on the cross is insufficient!

* Others

I forgive others to free myself of the weight of unforgiveness and bitterness. Forgiveness allows God to work in people’s lives and expose sin. Unforgiveness reveals areas where we are playing God and demanding things of Him.

* God

To forgive God is not to suggest that He needs forgiveness but that we need to acknowledge our anger with God when our expectations are not realized. If we avoid “forgiving God” (surrendering our rights), we cannot receive from Him or experience Him as our life.

## Forgiveness vs Reconciliation

* Reconciliation is different from forgiveness.
* Reconciliation requires two agreeable parties, while forgiveness is between me and God.
* Reconciliation involves rebuilding trust between those who have experienced broken fellowship.
* Not every relationship can be or should be reconciled. (AKA Abusive Relationships.) However, Christians are commanded to forgive immediately and as often as an offense occurs.
* Forgiveness comes before you can reconcile.
* Reconciliation presumes that the guilty party has apologized and is asking for forgiveness.
* Forgiveness is a gift for the forgiver, while reconciliation can bless both parties.

## Anger & Resentment

* Anger is a strong emotional reaction to a perceived loss or hurt.
* Anger often results from a loss, blocked goal, or unmet expectation.
* Terms are all linked to anger
  + Hurt, Offended, Irritated, Annoyed, Frustrated and Disappointed.
* When anger is not dealt with, it can become bitterness or resentment.
* If we don’t forgive, we allow bitterness and resentment to control us

Hebrews 12:15

*“See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;”*

Ephesians 4:26-27

*“BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.”*

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*“BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.”*

* Anger can be legitimate (unsinful), but often, when dealing with personal unmet expectations and offenses, it’s a fleshly response.
* Unresolved anger can lead to fleshly/carnal living:
  + Hostility, aggression, passivity, self-deprecation, sarcasm, depression, eating disorders, withdrawal, etc.

## Common Misconceptions

Christians often use the following statements but are ***NOT*** representativeof forgiveness.

* I don’t feel angry anymore, so I must have forgiven.
* I can understand why they did what they did.
* I can put myself in their shoes.
* I separate the behavior from the person (sin from the sinner).
* I am giving them the benefit of the doubt. (They didn’t mean it.)
* “Time heals all wounds.” I’m willing to be patient with them.
* Forgiveness is a process and takes a lot of time. (No! Forgiveness is a choice.)
* I’m willing to forget about it.
* I am praying for the person who hurt me.
* I asked them to forgive me. (Or they asked you to forgive them. Have you?)
* I’ve confronted the person about their behavior.
* It didn’t hurt that badly or wasn’t a big deal.
* I can act like it never happened.
* I have attempted to reconcile.
* I’m willing to tell the person I forgave them. (Have you forgiven them before God?)
* I will be friendly, give them a gift, and “turn the other cheek.”
* I’m pretending everything is okay and not bringing the offense up again.

***NONE* of the above statements represent forgiveness**. Some of these may help in getting ready to forgive or be byproducts of forgiving someone, but they are not the same as choosing to forgive.

## Reasons why people don’t forgive

There are many reasons people do not forgive. Sometimes, they don’t realize God has commanded us to follow Jesus’ example and that forgiveness is an expectation for believers. Other times, they have misunderstandings that make it difficult to forgive.

Here are some common misconceptions:

If I were to forgive, I would feel out of control.

I want to feel in control and manipulate others by holding the debt against them.

**Truth**: I am out of control when I cling to my hurt. I am the one in bondage.

It seems too easy and unfair. It appears like I’m overlooking or condoning sin.

**Truth**: No, I am charging and documenting the debt and recognizing that Jesus died on the cross for that sin.

Waiting for the person to come to me first

**Truth**: This rarely happens, and this isn’t what God has instructed you to do.

Failure to forgive myself.

**Truth**: Before I can truly forgive others, I must forgive myself. I can only love my neighbor to the degree I love myself.

Failure to understand God’s love and forgiveness for me.

**Truth**: I cannot offer someone a gift (forgiveness) unless I have something to give.

Fear of feelings that might be stirred up

**Truth**: God knows how to gently let the feelings surface that need to be healed. Hiding feelings doesn’t heal them.

If I were to forgive, I may get hurt again.

**Truth**: I will get hurt again by others regardless of what I do. The issue is how I decide to respond to these upcoming hurts so that I am not living in fear and being controlled by unforgiveness.

Revenge-the person has to pay for it.

They need to be punished and learn a lesson. I want to hang on to the right to be a judge.

**Truth**: I’m not god, and trying to play God will get me in trouble. Vengeance belongs to the Lord (Romans 12:19)

If I ignore it, the problem will go away.

**Truth**: The problem will just resurface later. Unresolved baggage will carry into the present.

I don’t want to give up my excuse-making system.

Freedom can be scary. I’m used to being burdened by unforgiveness. Forgiving will put me out of my comfort zone.

**Truth**: I will learn a whole new way of living if I learn to forgive.

Pride: forgiving someone makes me look weak.

I want to feel like I am better than others. I want to be strong and superior. If I’m right, then I don’t have to forgive.

**Truth**: Pride is what keeps me in bondage and hinders my growth.

I’m waiting for a “convenient” time and “feeling.”

**Truth**: It will never be convenient, and you will likely never feel like forgiving.

The person isn’t sorry for what they’ve done.

Chances are they will not be sorry. God often convicts people AFTER you forgive.

**Truth**: Forgiveness is primarily for my benefit. I should not wait.

If I choose to forgive, I’m acting like a hypocrite because I don’t “feel” loving and forgiving.

**Truth**: I’m a hypocrite if I don’t forgive because my real nature in Christ is now forgiving.