

# FORGIVENESS

A Care + Counsel Resource

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When we are wronged, we can take one of three paths - the path of resentment, the path of revenge, or the path of forgiveness.

- **The Path of Resentment** is choosing to dwell in the past and live in bitterness. Resentment is recycling hurt in your minds & hearts.
- **The Path of Revenge** is choosing to hurt others with your words and actions. Hurt people hurt people.

Resentment is in our minds and hearts. Revenge is in our words and actions. But we don't need to take the path of resentment or revenge. We can choose a third path ...

- **The Path of Forgiveness** is making a choice to experience "freedom through forgiveness."

## Forgiveness is the choice to trust God by letting go of resentment and revenge toward someone who hurt you.

**Forgiveness is a choice.** It's a deliberate decision; an act of the will.

- Forgiveness happens at a *point in time*. I make the choice to forgive. Some here today need to make that choice today.
- Forgiveness is also a *process over time*. If, over time, you're struggling with resentment & revenge toward someone you thought you forgave, return to the choice to forgive.

Peter asked Jesus how many times do I need to forgive, seven times? Jesus said 70 x 7. The point is not to forgive 490 times. Rather the principle is to continue to forgive every time I remember how I was wronged.

### To Trust God.

Forgiveness involves trusting God at two levels:

- *Trust God to right the wrong.* That's God's job, not yours. Vengeance is mine, says the Lord. It's God's job to bring justice, either now or in the future. Don't take God's job or stand in His way.
- *Trust God for your healing* as you release your resentment and desire for revenge.

### Releasing resentment and revenge.

- *Resentment is in your mind and heart* - letting go of bitterness, grief, shame.
- *Revenge is in your words and actions* - letting go of hurting someone for hurting you.
- *Releasing is letting go* of the need to make the other person pay for the wrong done to you.

### Toward someone who hurt you.

Relational and emotional hurt is a reality in life - in marriage, in families, in friendships, at work, in the church.

**There are two aspects of forgiveness - internal forgiveness and verbal forgiveness.**

- **Internal forgiveness** is forgiveness in your heart. It's talking to God about your hurt & releasing your resentment & revenge to God - for God to work & to heal. This is where forgiveness starts.
- **Verbal forgiveness** is expressing forgiveness to the person who wronged you. But this should only happen if: 1) the person comes to you, 2) expresses genuine repentance, and 3) asks for forgiveness.

To verbalize forgiveness without each of these necessary steps can actually cause more issues. It can be passive aggressive or enable sinful behavior. Let me give you two quick examples -

- To say, "I forgive you for interrupting me" without someone first acknowledging interrupting is passive aggressive and leads to more conflict.
- To say, "I forgive you for your anger" without someone saying "I apologize for my anger" only enables further sinful language.

## 1. Forgiving People Are Free

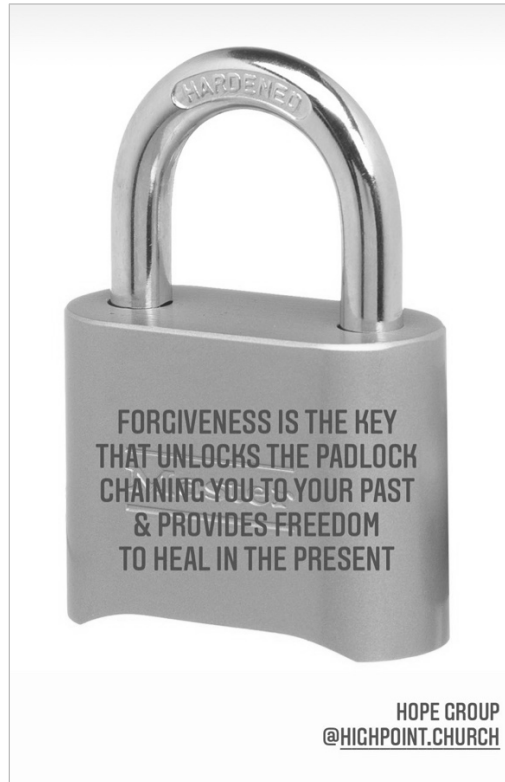
Free from what? Free from resentment and revenge.

*<sup>31</sup> Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. - Ephesians 4:31*

- Bitterness - recycling old hurts and holding on to grievances ... this is resentment
- Wrath - acting out because of unresolved issues ... revenge seeking
- Anger - red-hot anger and ice-cold anger - explodes, implodes; revealed, concealed, volatile, vindictive; reactive, resentful
- Clamor - the noise of relational strife
- Slander - evil speech used to destroy reputations and relationships
- Malice - bad-heartedness, evil intent

*Do these words describe someone who is experiencing freedom? Or do they describe someone who is controlled by past hurt.*

Notice the progression - it starts with bitterness. Bitterness is first in the list. It leads to wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice. In other words, it starts with resentment. Resentment leads to revenge.



**Forgiveness is the key that unlocks the padlock chaining you to past hurt and provides freedom to heal in the present.**

**Do you want to experience freedom through forgiveness?**

Many people do not want freedom through forgiveness.

- Some would rather feed their hurts than be freed from their hurts.
- Some prefer to be a victim to their past, rather than a victor in the present.
- Some choose resentment and revenge instead of forgiveness.
- Some think to not forgive punishes the other person when in reality they punish themselves.

It's been said to not forgive is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. Unforgiveness hurts you more than it hurts the person who hurt you.

If you fail to deal with your past hurt, you will be enslaved to resentment and revenge - bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, malice.

Forgiveness is the key that unlocks the padlock chaining you to past hurt and provides freedom to heal in the present.

## 2. Forgiven People Forgive

*<sup>32</sup> Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another,  
as God in Christ forgave you. | Ephesians 4:32*

When we are free from resentment and revenge, we are free to be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving.

The sequence is from God to you to others. Forgiveness starts with God, comes down to us, and then goes out to other people.

### How does the Lord forgive?

- Graciously – Don't deserve it; can't earn it.
- Generously – Not partially, but completely.
- Gladly – Not reluctantly, but willingly.

Forgiveness is amazing to receive, but forgiveness is hard to give.  
Forgiven people are forgiving.

### Forgiveness is not ...

- **A feeling** – Forgiveness is not an emotion; it is an act of the will. Don't say, "I'll forgive when I feel like forgiving" because that will never happen.
- **Forgetting** – You cannot always forgive & forget. Sometimes the pain is so hurtful that it will never be forgotten, but it can be forgiven. To say, "I'll forgive when I can forget" is backwards thinking. Perhaps the reason you are having a hard time forgetting is because you have not forgiven.
- **Excusing** – The wrong done was wrong. To forgive someone is not to excuse their wrong. Instead, to forgive someone is to acknowledge that wrong was done. Forgiveness does not justify, rationalize, minimize, or excuse wrong actions.
- **Always Verbalized** – Forgiveness is first a matter of the heart (internal forgiveness) and it's only communicated when the offender says – "I was wrong for \_\_\_\_\_, Will you forgive me?" (verbal forgiveness).
- **Reconciliation** – Forgiveness & reconciliation are separate topics. You can forgive but restoration requires trust & appropriate boundaries. Forgiveness is a necessary first step for restoring a relationship, but the journey toward reconciliation & restoration will take time based on the severity of the offense.

- **Fair** – Thank goodness forgiveness isn't fair! If it was based on fairness, who of us would be forgiven by God? It was not fair for the sinless Son of God to bear our sin. You do not deserve His forgiveness. It is His great love and mercy poured out for us.

Forgiven people are forgiving. Who is it that you need to forgive? A parent? A spouse? An ex-spouse? A friend? A co-worker? A family member? In the same way we have been forgiven, we need to forgive. As God forgives us, we forgive us. Forgiven people are forgiving.

### 3. Forgiven People Don't Forgive Themselves

You might be struggling to forgive yourself because you have feelings of regret, guilt, and shame from our past. So, we feel like we need to forgive ourselves. But to forgive yourself is not a biblical concept.

Nowhere in the Bible does it say, "forgive yourself." The Bible does say, "love others as you love yourself." But never "forgive others as you forgive yourself." Instead, what does it say?

<sup>32</sup> *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.* -  
Ephesians 4:32

Many people falsely believe they need to earn their forgiveness, to pay penance. But you cannot earn forgiveness or pay for your forgiveness. God gives you forgiveness.

If I purchased a gift for you and gave it to you, you cannot say ...

- *"I gave myself the gift."* You cannot give to yourself what was given to you. Why? Because it was already purchased for you and given to you as a gift!
- *"I need to pay you for the gift."* To try to pay for me for the gift misses the point of a gift. If you pay for the gift, it no longer is a gift.

Only God can absolve sins - a priest can't absolve your sins & neither can you. God forgives you because His Son, Jesus Christ, purchased your sin on the cross. The cross is not a down payment. The cross isn't rent with an option to buy. The cross is not splitting the check with you - like when you go out to eat with a co-worker. No, the cross is your forgiveness paid in FULL!

To think that you need to forgive yourself means that the cross is not sufficient. But the cross is sufficient. Because God's forgiveness is sufficient - you don't need to forgive yourself.

- If God has forgiven you, He has wiped your slate clean. You are white as snow.
- If God has forgiven you, what more is there to forgive that you need to forgive yourself of? Instead, receive His forgiveness and believe you are forgiven.

# Forgiven People Forgive

Use this worksheet to journal areas of forgiveness.

<p><b>WHO?</b></p> <p>List people with whom you have unresolved hurt</p>	<p><b>WHAT?</b></p> <p>List specific offenses. What ways were you wronged?</p>	<p><b>HOW?</b></p> <p>List how you responded or will respond to who/what</p>
<p>List names (or initials) of people who have sinned against you and with whom you currently have unresolved issues in your heart.</p> <p>The goal of this exercise is to identify areas of forgiveness.</p>	<p>List specific ways you have been sinned against by those in the first column.</p> <p>You don't need to try to dredge up things you don't recall. God may have erased some painful memories from your mind. Harm can be done to seek to conjure up memories that God may have mercifully removed.</p>	<p>Have you...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>retaliated?</li> <li>withheld love?</li> <li>been bitter?</li> <li>gossiped?</li> <li>prayed for?</li> <li>forgiven?</li> <li>talked it out?</li> </ul> <p>You're not responsible for what happened to you, but you are responsible for your response.</p>

As the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive. – Colossians 3:13