

## What Forgiveness Is Not<sup>1</sup>

- **Forgiveness is not** circumventing God's justice. . . .  
— God will execute justice in His time and in His way.
- **Forgiveness is not** waiting for "time to heal all wounds." . . .  
— Time does not heal wounds—some people will not allow healing.
- **Forgiveness is not** letting the guilty "off the hook." . . .  
— It is moving the guilty from your hook onto God's hook.
- **Forgiveness is not** the same as reconciliation. . . .  
— It takes two for reconciliation, only one for forgiveness.
- **Forgiveness is not** being a weak martyr. . . .  
— It is being strong enough to be Christlike.
- **Forgiveness is not** stuffing your anger. . . .  
— It is resolving your anger by releasing the offense to God.
- **Forgiveness is not** a natural response. . . .  
— It is a supernatural one, empowered by God.
- **Forgiveness is not** denying the hurt. . . .  
— It is feeling the hurt and releasing it.
- **Forgiveness is not** being a doormat. . . .  
— That would make Jesus the greatest doormat of all!
- **Forgiveness is not** conditional. . . .  
— It is unconditional, a mandate from God for everyone.
- **Forgiveness is not** forgetting. . . .  
— To forgive, you must remember.
- **Forgiveness is not** a feeling. . . .  
— It is a choice—an act of the will.

*"You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised."*  
(Hebrews 10:36)

## What Forgiveness Is

- **Forgiveness is** dismissing a debt.
- **Forgiveness is** dismissing your demand that others owe you something, especially when . . .  
— They fail to meet your expectations.  
— They fail to keep a promise.  
— They fail to treat you justly.
- **Forgiveness is** dismissing, cancelling, or setting someone free from the consequence of falling short of God's standard.
- **Forgiveness is** extended even if it is never, ever earned.
- **Forgiveness is** extended regardless of a lack of repentance.
- **Forgiveness is** releasing your resentment toward your offender.  
— Releasing your right to hear "I'm sorry"  
— Releasing your right to be bitter  
— Releasing your right to get even

*"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody."*  
(Romans 12:17)

- **Forgiveness is** releasing your rights regarding the offense.  
— Releasing your right to dwell on the offense  
— Releasing your right to hold on to the offense  
— Releasing your right to keep bringing up the offense

*"He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends."*  
(Proverbs 17:9)

- **Forgiveness is** reflecting on the character of God. Just as God is willing to forgive us, we are called to forgive others.  
— To forgive is to extend mercy.  
— To forgive is to give a gift of grace.  
— To forgive is to set the offender free.

*"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."*  
(Colossians 3:13)

## The High Cost of Unforgiveness<sup>2</sup>

- **Unforgiveness** robs us of God's forgiveness. (Mark 11:25)
- **Unforgiveness** allows a root of bitterness to grow. (Hebrews 12:15)
- **Unforgiveness** causes us to walk in darkness. (1 John 2:9–11)
- **Unforgiveness** reflects a godless heart. (Job 36:13)
- **Unforgiveness** makes us captive to sin. (Acts 8:23)
- **Unforgiveness** grieves the Spirit of God. (Ephesians 4:30–32)

## God's Heart on Forgiveness

- **God commands** that we forgive each other. (Ephesians 4:32)
- **God wants** us to forgive others because He forgives us. (Colossians 3:13)
- **God wants** us to see unforgiveness as sin. (James 4:17)
- **God wants** us to get rid of unforgiveness before it makes us bitter. (Hebrews 12:15)
- **God wants** us to overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21)
- **God wants** us to be free to worship Him in honesty and in truth. (Matthew 5:23–24)

## The Four Stages of Forgiveness

### #1 Face the Offense.

- **Don't minimize the** offense.
- **Don't excuse offensive** behavior.

*"In our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead."*  
(2 Corinthians 1:9)

### #2 Feel the Offense.

- **Don't deny your** pain.
- **Don't carry false** guilt for hating what happened. (God hates sin, you too can hate sin.)

*"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven . . . a time to love and a time to hate."*  
(Ecclesiastes 3:1, 8)

### #3 Forgive the Offender.

*"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."*  
(Colossians 3:13)

### #4 Find Oneness—if appropriate.

- **Note if the** offender accepts responsibility.
- **Discern if there** is absolute truthfulness—if not, reconciliation is not possible.
- **Set appropriate boundaries.**
- **Don't rush reconciliation—change** takes time.

*"If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose."*  
(Philippians 2:1–2)

## How Do You Truly Forgive? (How to Handle "The Hook")

- **Imagine right now** that there is a hook attached to your collarbone. And imagine all the pain attached to the hook as a result of the wrong that was done to you.
- **Ask yourself**, *Do I really want to carry all that pain with me for the rest of my life?* The Lord wants you to take the pain from the past and release it into His hands.
- **Then take the** one who offended you off your emotional hook and place him onto God's hook. The Lord knows how to deal with your offender. God says,

*"It is mine to avenge; I will repay."*  
(Deuteronomy 32:35)

## Prayer of Forgiveness

"Lord Jesus, thank You for caring about how much my heart has been hurt. You know the pain I have felt because of ( list every offense ). Right now I release all that pain into Your hands. Thank You, Lord, for dying on the cross for me and extending Your forgiveness to me. As an act of my will, I choose to forgive ( name ). Right now, I move ( name ) off of my emotional hook to Your hook. I refuse all thoughts of revenge. I trust that in Your time and in Your way You will deal with ( name ) as You see fit. And Lord, thank You for giving me Your power to forgive so that I can be set free. In Your holy name I pray. Amen."

*"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."*  
(Ephesians 4:32)

## How to Forgive . . . Again

**F**orbid recurring thoughts of the wrongs to enter your mind.  
“*[Love] keeps no record of wrongs.*” (1 Corinthians 13:5)

**O**vercome the temptation to bring up the matter again.  
“*Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips.*” (Psalm 141:3)

**R**epeat Scripture in your mind.  
“*Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers all wrongs.*” (Proverbs 10:12)

**G**ive the situation to God.  
“*When they hurled their insults at him [Jesus], he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.*” (1 Peter 2:23)

**I**ntercede on behalf of your offender.  
“*Far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you.*” (1 Samuel 12:23)

**V**alue what you can give rather than what you can receive.  
“*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*” (Acts 20:35)

**E**xtend God’s grace, mercy, and forgiveness.  
“*The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.*” (James 5:11)

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### Related to Forgiveness . . .

- Anger: *Facing the Fire Within*
- Confrontation: *Challenging Others to Change*
- Evil & Suffering . . . Why? *Why God, Why?*
- Guilt: *Living Guilt Free*
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