

## The Power Of Forgiveness – Part Four

Matthew 6:14-15

14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Have you ever wished you could go back in time and start life over from a certain point in time? If only you could take back that word spoken in anger, say no to that unwise suggestion, say yes to that forfeited opportunity, or salvage that broken relationship. Unfortunately, there's no "rewind button" in real life. However, God does offer us a powerful antidote to heal the regrets of past mistakes. **It's called forgiveness.**

In this series, we've learned that it's impossible to give away something that you don't possess. That's why before we can ever hope to grant forgiveness to others, we must first receive forgiveness in our own lives. **Only the forgiven can truly forgive!**

Guilt is one of the most debilitating of all human emotions. It wreaks destruction in our relationships with others and in our relationship with God. Sometimes, because of the unrealistic expectations of ourselves or others, we suffer with false guilt. However, to be honest, most of the time people feel guilty because they are guilty. All of us have certain things in our life of which we're ashamed.

Unresolved guilt affects us both emotionally and spiritually. One psychiatrist estimated that 70% of people in mental wards could be released today if they knew how to find forgiveness! Guilt breaks our relationships, because it's a natural tendency to avoid people we've wronged. **Guilt produces separation.** And the same phenomenon occurs in our relationship with God!

Isaiah 59:2 But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.

Paul tells us that a good conscience is essential in maintaining our faith!

1 Timothy 1:18-19

18 This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare;

19 Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck:

Are you suffering from a guilty conscience? Are there scenes from your past that you wish you could erase? Has unresolved guilt caused you to keep your distance from others? Or, more importantly, from God?

Remember King David? (2 Samuel 11-12) He was guilty of shirking his responsibilities as King when his soldiers went out to battle. His idleness led to his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah. The baby born from their adulterous affair also died due to David's sin. David's son, Amnon, would subsequently rape his half-sister, and his son Absalom would later kill Amnon and repeat his father's adultery, this time with several of his father's wives and in the sight of the entire nation! The sword would never depart from David's house, and he would watch his sons scheme against each other, even to the point of killing one another and leading the nation into civil war. To top it all off, David never even confessed the sin that started it all until he was directly confronted by the prophet Nathan! Talk about a load of guilt! But David repented and received forgiveness!

Psalm 51:1-3, 7-12

1 Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me...

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

8 Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.

9 Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

11 Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.

12 Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Are you tired of dealing with, living in, or running from the past? The good news is that forgiveness from the past is possible!

God hates sin, but He loves the sinner! Satan loves sin, but he hates the sinner! God forgives us completely whenever we ask, but even after God forgives, the enemy will continually attempt to harass you with guilt.

The guilt we feel before we repent is called conviction. It is sent from God to draw us close to God.

The guilt we may feel after we repent is called condemnation. It is sent from Satan to push us away from God.

The bad news is that people aren't like God! Receiving God's forgiveness is easy; receiving people's forgiveness can be difficult.

## How To Receive Forgiveness From Others

Determine if you actually need to ask forgiveness. We should seek forgiveness only from those we have truly wronged. If you never acted on your thoughts or impulses, that's between you and God. More harm can be done to a relationship by confessing such hidden offenses. If restitution is necessary, the sin obviously needs to be confessed. But if the confession would do more harm than good to the other party, don't just unload your garbage! Sometimes sacrificial love involves our willingness to bear our own burdens instead of asking someone else to share the load.

**Ephesians 4:29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.**

If you've offended only one individual, then you need to confess your fault only to God and that person. If your sin has injured the witness of your church, then it is correct to seek forgiveness from the entire congregation. Restrict your confession to those who have been directly affected; that is a biblical principle.

**James 5:16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.**

Sincerely ask for the other person's forgiveness. Many people confuse seeking forgiveness with making an apology. An apology is one-sided. It admits guilt and expresses remorse due to an offense you have committed, but it doesn't ask for anything.

Forgiveness involves much more than that. It actually asks the person you have wronged to do something; to release you from your debt to them! It is impossible to ask forgiveness and blame others at the same time. You must concentrate on your offense. You need to specifically identify the wrong you've committed, and specifically acknowledge the hurt they've felt because of your sin. Then, sincerely ask them to forgive you.

Matthew 18:26-27

26 The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

27 Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

Not every attempt at reconciliation results in a happy ending! The other party may respond hesitantly or even negatively, and that hurts after you've poured your heart out! There are many reasons someone may be reluctant to grant forgiveness when asked:

- They may not sense that you're truly remorseful.

- They may feel guilty themselves.

- They may expect restitution first.

- They may fear that you will repeat the offense.

- They may not want to reestablish the relationship.

If the other person refuses to forgive you immediately, don't be discouraged. Sometimes the wounds we inflict on others, even unintentional ones, are quite deep. They may need time before they can grant forgiveness, or perhaps they will never be willing to forgive, but that is between them and God. **Remember that you cannot demand forgiveness!** But whether or not the other party forgives, you will have the freedom of a clear conscience in your relationship with them and in your relationship with God!

Acts 24:16 And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void to offence toward God, and toward men.

1 John 3:19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

## How To Give Forgiveness To Others

**Illustration:** Years ago, a man was rushed to the hospital after contracting rabies from a dog bite. A cure had not yet been discovered, and he was going to die. He asked the doctor for pen and paper, and the doctor said, “I’m glad to see your working on your will.” The man replied, “This isn’t a will. This is a list of all the people I’m going to bite before I die!”

Most of us carry such a list around, not written on paper, but written in our hearts! On the list are the names of people who have wronged us, cheated us, embarrassed us, disappointed us, betrayed us, deserted us, or hurt us. Deep down, most of us want to see these people suffer for the pain they’ve caused us. The Bible calls that desire vengeance, and vengeance that is harbored long enough eventually becomes bitterness. Sometimes bitterness will erupt into violent behavior, but more often it works like a cancer, slowly destroying everything it touches.

Hebrews 12:15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;

Holding on to vengeance is the source of bitterness, but releasing vengeance, through forgiveness, is the antidote to bitterness. As we learned earlier in this series, forgiveness is an antidote to needless suffering! Forgiving others is in your best interest!

In part two of this series, we talked about the three steps we must take in granting forgiveness to others:

- We acknowledge that a wrong has occurred.

- We recognize that there is an obligation for repayment.

- We choose to release our offender from that obligation and to cover the loss ourselves.

## How can we know that we have truly forgiven our offender from our heart?

Here is a three-point checklist for your heart from the story of Joseph:

True forgiveness resists unnecessary embarrassment. In dealing with his brothers' offenses toward him, Joseph sought to protect them from needless humiliation. He knew they would be living in Egypt for a long time, so he dealt with their sin privately instead of allowing it to spread through the Egyptian grapevine. There are rare cases where offenses must be reported to others. However, if we've truly forgiven another person, we'll try and keep their sin against us as confidential as possible. Mature Christians don't need to run to others or to the Pastor with every little hurt; they deal with it privately!

Genesis 45:1 Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren.

True forgiveness relieves people of unhealthy sorrow. The Bible teaches that there are two types of sorrow that accompany sin. One is a godly kind of sorrow that leads to change. The other is an unhealthy sorrow that leads to paralyzing self-pity and despair.

2 Corinthians 7:10 For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

If we've truly forgiven someone, we don't desire to see them squirm in misery forever, because that is not in their best interest. It is obvious that Joseph had risen above his past, because he allowed his brothers to rise above their past! If you can't let others forget it, then you haven't forgiven it!

Genesis 45:5 Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.

True forgiveness continually releases our offender from their obligation to us. Years after Joseph's initial confrontation with his brothers in Egypt, he had to face the forgiveness issue again, when their father Jacob died at the age of 147. Joseph's brothers immediately began to worry that he might unleash years of stored up vengeance against them, now that Jacob was no longer around to intervene. But Joseph had truly forgiven them; he had no desire for revenge.

Genesis 50:19-21

19 And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God?

20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.

21 Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.

Forgiveness isn't a one-time action of the heart, but a continual choice of the will. Forgiveness is surrendering the right to hurt you for hurting me. Joseph knew what it was to spend time in a physical prison, so he was determined not to spend time in an emotional one! He chose to release his brothers permanently, knowing that in the process he was also releasing himself! He never wanted to go back to either jail again!

**Settle it in your heart forever that forgiveness is a LIFESTYLE!**