

# Freedom Through Forgiveness

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Relationships have hurt each of us. Those hurts cause wounds that lead to an angry and bitter spirit and leave us with scars of emotional pain that we can carry for years. Unless we understand and resolve the bitterness through genuine forgiveness, we will not be able to face similar relationships in the future. We block the pain, causing us to emotionally lock up when confronted with a new hurt in a relationship. Let's take a look at what resolving bitterness is all about.

## Matthew 18:21-35

*Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.*

*"Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.*

*But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.*

*When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."*

***"There's no unforgiveness in my heart."***

If you have truly forgiven every person who has ever sinned against you, then you are able to experience the great freedom, joy, peace, and blessing that result from being a forgiven, forgiving child of God.

However, it is possible to live with seeds of unforgiveness for so long that we become blind to its presence in our lives. The following exercises will help open your eyes to any unforgiveness that may have become lodged in your heart.

*Have you ever been hurt?* Put a check next to any of the following hurts you have experienced:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> lied to                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> rejected by parents                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> promise(s) broken                           | <input type="checkbox"/> stolen from                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> neglected by grown children                 | <input type="checkbox"/> cheated in a business/financial deal       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> violent crime against self or a loved one   | <input type="checkbox"/> rebellious/wayward son or daughter         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> treated unfairly by an employer             | <input type="checkbox"/> belittled                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> parents divorced                            | <input type="checkbox"/> alcoholic parent or mate                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> slandered/falsely accused                   | <input type="checkbox"/> abandoned by parent or mate                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> divorced by mate                            | <input type="checkbox"/> publicly humiliated                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> mate committed adultery or other sexual sin | <input type="checkbox"/> abused (physically, emotionally, sexually) |

**As you reflect on the ways you have been offended, do you find any of these statements to be true?**

- Every time I think of \_\_\_\_\_ (person or offense), I still feel angry.
- I have a subtle, secret desire to see \_\_\_\_\_ (person) pay for what he/she did to me.
- Deep in my heart, I wouldn't mind if something bad happened to the person(s) who hurt me.
- I sometimes find myself telling others how \_\_\_\_\_ (person) hurt me.
- If \_\_\_\_\_'s (person's) name comes up, I am more likely to say something negative about him/her than something positive.
- I cannot thank God for \_\_\_\_\_ (person).

These statements are an indication that we have not fully forgiven all those who have sinned against us.

***Remember: Forgiveness means that I fully release the offender from his debt. It means fully cleaning his record. It is a promise never to bring up the offense against him again (to God, to others, or to the offender himself).***

God's Word says that if we say we have not sinned, even though His Spirit shows us otherwise, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us (cf. 1 John 1:8). Have you deceived yourself into believing that you have forgiven everyone who has sinned against you? As God examines your heart, does He find any unforgiveness there?

# Importance of Forgiveness

**Bitterness is one of the most common ways that Satan uses to destroy Christians.** Bitterness creates resentment, anger, and emotional damage. Paul traces the development of unresolved bitterness in Ephesians 4:31. Bitterness leads to wrath (outbursts of anger), wrath leads to anger (rage, constant state of anger), anger leads to clamor (making a public scene), clamor is followed by slander (derogatory, injurious speech), and slander leads to malice (inner hatred of heart). The natural consequence of harboring an attitude of bitterness is that it eventually controls you.

**Scripture warns against bitterness and its destructiveness.** Paul warns that bitterness is like a “root.” The longer it is allowed to grow, the more difficult it is to get rid of. Hebrews 12:15 states that a root of bitterness left to grow will bring defilement to “the many.” This root will produce the devastated fruit of anger, ungratefulness, a critical attitude, insensitivity to others, revenge, mistrust and depression. Unresolved bitterness is also like a highly contagious disease that has a contaminating and destructive effect on others.

**The only remedy for bitterness is genuine forgiveness.** In order to resolve bitterness, we must first understand and experience God’s forgiveness of our sin. God chose to focus on His desire to forgive us through the atonement of Christ’s blood, rather than to hold us accountable for our failures (Isaiah 43:25; 55:7; Psalm 103:12). He could have demanded justice and required us to pay for our sins through death, but instead, placed them on Jesus Christ at His death. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ and his atoning blood was the payment on our behalf. The moment Christ reveals to us his forgiveness of our sin we can begin to understand the forgiveness of sins that came by way of the cross.

**Forgiveness demands a payment to be made when none can be given.** When someone has sinned against us and hurt us, our sense of justice demands that a payment be made for their failure. When that person cannot pay or chooses not to pay, we resent the injustice and become bitter and angry, which can also lead to depression and other tormenting problems, or we can exercise forgiveness leading to peace. If we choose to forgive, as God forgave us, and assume the emotional debt or payment for the pain that person caused us, we will be free from resentment, bitterness, and anger. You can tell when someone forgives by the sympathy and compassion they demonstrate toward the person that hurt them.

**But, it is hard for me to forgive!** We never feel like forgiving someone who has hurt us because deep inside we believe they deserve to pay for the damage they caused us. Forgiveness involves our willingness to go to the cross for the person who has hurt us and to embrace and accept the emotional pain they have caused us. Jesus didn’t feel like going to the cross, but chose the Father’s will (Matthew 26:39). Forgiveness is taking the focus off of ourselves and graciously choosing to go to the cross on behalf of the wrongdoer. Remember if you have truly forgiven you will see the offender as Christ sees them. You will desire to grant them sympathy and compassion. It does not mean that you will trust them right away, but when you truly forgive from your heart trust will be built.

### What Forgiveness is Not

1. It is *not* the same as forgetting. You can forgive even if you can never forget.
2. It is *not* saying that what happened to you was OK. You don't want to soften or deny the reality of the act or the damage.
3. It is *not* asking for retribution, restitution, or atonement. Forgiving means to let go of vengeance and accept my painful reality.
4. It is *not* allowing repetition of the hurt. Forgiveness does not mean that you are then obligated to put yourself in the same hurtful situation.
5. It is *not* the same as reconciliation (that takes two people).
6. It is *not* between you and the other person. It is between you and God.
7. It is *not* using the past against the other person. You must stop punishing or judging the other.
8. It is *not* dependent on the other person's response. Don't make forgiveness dependent on an apology or recognition from the other person that what they did was wrong.

### What Forgiveness Is

1. It *is* a choice and a decision. You decide to forgive because it is the right thing to do.
2. It *is* an act of obedience. We are clearly called to forgive, no matter how we may feel.
3. It *is* a spiritual event. It can, as a consequence, have positive psychological and physical effects.
4. It *is* agreeing to live with the effects of what someone else has done to you. You need to forgive even if the offense has caused you long-term or ongoing damage.
5. It *is* allowing justice to be handled by God. Let go of controlling the consequences to the offender.
6. It *is* a process that often needs to be repeated. With new memories of old offenses and renewed anger, you may have to repeat as necessary.
7. It *is* without limits. We are called to forgive *all* things, no matter how awful.
8. It *is* allowing the mercy of God to work through you. See yourself as incapable alone of having the love and grace to forgive without letting the love of God to flow through you.
9. It needs to be done with thoroughness. Forgive *all* people for *all* things.
10. Forgive transgressions whether they were intentional or not. The criterion is: *Did their actions result in you being hurt in some way?*

## Forgiveness involves:

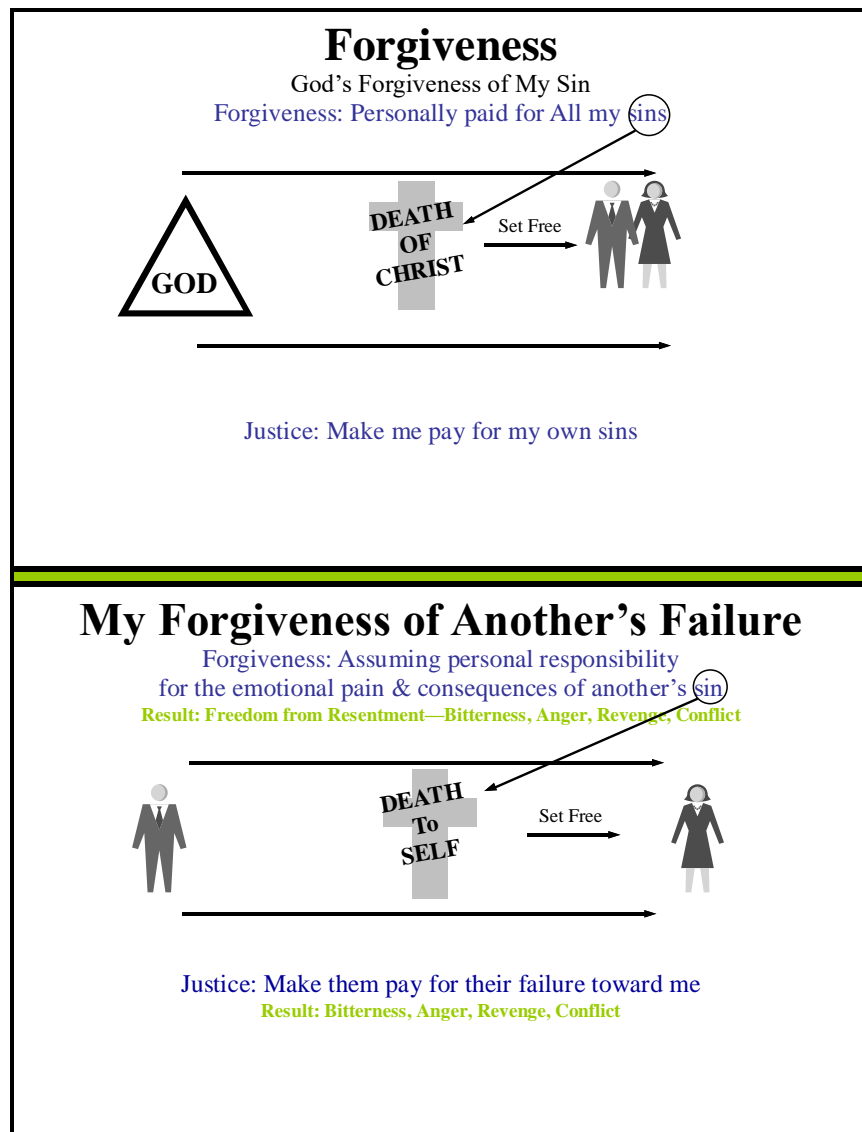
**A choice:** The person who has been wronged, hurt or sinned against must choose to forgive.

**Acceptance:** It begins by being willing to accept the pain and the consequences of the persons sin against me.

**Substitution:** You must be willing to pay for the emotional pain and the consequences that the person has caused you and no longer desiring the person who sinned to pay. In doing so, the debt of emotional damage is paid (assumed) by you.

**Releasing:** It is the act of releasing someone from the emotional damage or consequences caused by the sin and accepting the loss. It also means feeling and releasing the pain within your heart, and no longer holding them responsible for the consequences or future consequences of that failure.

**Allowing:** The Lord to heal the pain we are experiencing within our hearts.



# Emotional Pain Words

- |                                       |   |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Abandoned    | <input type="checkbox"/> Empty                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Suicidal           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accused      | <input type="checkbox"/> Hurt                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Taken advantage of |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Afraid       | <input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Torn apart         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alone        | <input type="checkbox"/> Indecent                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Unloved            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Angry        | <input type="checkbox"/> Inferior                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Unclean            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anxious      | <input type="checkbox"/> Insecure                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Unfairly treated   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Apathetic    | <input type="checkbox"/> Insensitive to my<br>needs | <input type="checkbox"/> Unfit              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ashamed      | <input type="checkbox"/> Insignificant              | <input type="checkbox"/> Unimportant        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attacked     | <input type="checkbox"/> Invalidated                | <input type="checkbox"/> Unlovable          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bad          | <input type="checkbox"/> Lied to                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Unnecessary        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Belittled    | <input type="checkbox"/> Lonely                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Unprotected        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Betrayed     | <input type="checkbox"/> Manipulated                | <input type="checkbox"/> Unsafe             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bitter       | <input type="checkbox"/> Mindless                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Unsympathetic      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blamed       | <input type="checkbox"/> Mistreated                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Unwanted           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cheap        | <input type="checkbox"/> Misunderstood              | <input type="checkbox"/> Used               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cheated      | <input type="checkbox"/> Molested                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Violated           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Condemned    | <input type="checkbox"/> Neglected                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Vulnerable         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Confused     | <input type="checkbox"/> Not cherished              | <input type="checkbox"/> Wasted             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Controlled   | <input type="checkbox"/> Overwhelmed                | <input type="checkbox"/> Wicked             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deceived     | <input type="checkbox"/> Pressure to<br>perform     | <input type="checkbox"/> Worthless          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Defeated     | <input type="checkbox"/> Pressured                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Wounded            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Defenseless  | <input type="checkbox"/> Rejected                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Wrongly judged     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Degraded     | <input type="checkbox"/> Repulsed                   |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Defrauded    | <input type="checkbox"/> Revenge                    |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Despair      | <input type="checkbox"/> Ruined                     |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Destroyed    | <input type="checkbox"/> Sad                        |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Devalued     | <input type="checkbox"/> Scared                     |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Don't belong | <input type="checkbox"/> Secluded                   |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dirty        | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-disgust               |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disappointed | <input type="checkbox"/> Stressed                   |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disgusted    | <input type="checkbox"/> Stupid                     |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disrespected | <input type="checkbox"/> Suffocated                 |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dominated    |   |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Embarrassed  |   |   |

## Consequences of sin against me

Loss of reputation  
Loss of money  
Loss of job  
Loss of security  
Loss of childhood  
Loss of trust  
Loss of good years  
Loss of love  
Loss of relationships  
Loss of family  
Loss of \_\_\_\_\_.

## Prayer

*“Lord, I acknowledge that over the years, I have developed resentment and anger toward others who have hurt me. This has caused me to experience inner pain and to build walls between others and myself. It has kept me from being open with them. “Lord, I choose to forgive each individual who has hurt me. I am willing to pay the price for the emotional pain they caused me. I desire to be free to love and be emotionally open with each person who has hurt me. I want to show them kindness, a tender heart, and a forgiving spirit  
“Lord, reveal to me those areas of bitterness, resentment, and anger within me that have been buried for so long. I want to identify and resolve each one of them. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”*

## Steps to Resolve Bitterness

### Step 1

**Worksheet: People Who Have Hurt Me.** List each of the ways you have been hurt by parents, family members, or others in your life. In the first column, write the individual’s name. In the second column, list the ways you were hurt (the issues). In the third column, list the emotional pain you felt. Choose at least four to six words to describe your pain by referring to the worksheet, *Emotional Pain Words*.

### Step 2

**Pray through each issue.** Using the prayer at the bottom of the worksheet, pray through each issue out loud, making sure that you open the pain within your heart in order to release it. When coming to the phrase, “I am willing to pay,” remember the payment Jesus made for your sins on the cross and accept the opportunity of paying for the emotional pain that others have caused you.

# People Who Have Hurt Me

	<b>Release</b>	<b>Pay</b>
List each person who has hurt you in the past.	How did they hurt you? (List issues)	Describe the emotional pain caused by the hurt.



	<b>Release</b>	<b>Pay</b>
List each person who has hurt you in the past.	How did they hurt you? (List issues)	Describe the emotional pain caused by the hurt.

**Prayer**

*“Lord, I choose to forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ causing me to feel \_\_\_\_\_, and I am willing to pay for the emotional pain and consequences that \_\_\_\_\_ has caused me. I ask You, Lord Jesus, to take back the ground I gave to the enemy through my bitterness, and I yield that ground to Your control.”*

# Healing from the Pain

Cause of Emotional Pain	Lies I Believe	Vows I Made	Truth as in Christ and His Word