

# Forgiveness:

*Learning to let go of the wall-building wounds  
that sabotage our relationship with God,  
and everyone else.*

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## ***You've Got To Love Both***

**M**ost of you who are reading this, given the obvious title, have picked it up because you're looking for answers. Others may be reading to see if this booklet will help someone else, but a few of you are using that "excuse" as an indirect way to get solutions for your own life! The majority of you probably already consider yourself to be Christians and that's good because I wrote with you primarily in mind. But some readers are still working through the decision whether or not to follow Christ and I hope some will decide to follow Jesus by time you get to the end. A subset of you know without reading that you need to forgive someone but don't know how, or are looking for someone to make it easier or "cheaper" for you. Then there is the group that isn't looking to forgive necessarily but you're willing to investigate the possibility because the subtitle got you thinking. I'm guessing that most of you, regardless of which category you fall in, don't realize how influential and disastrous the unresolved past is to your present relationships.

Whatever your motivation, understand that my dream is not that you will forgive those you need to forgive! It's that doing so will remove the massive restrictions that the walls of unforgiveness have erected between you and God. Forgiveness isn't the goal, restored friendship with God is. Forgiveness is the path, God is the destination. Take down the barriers between you and God and you'll be

stunned by what He'll show you about and how He'll rescue your vertical relationships.

So, if you're working on getting closer to God, pressing into the astonishing relationship that being His child makes possible, or even considering that decision, than you need to consider this subject very carefully. Why? Because unforgiveness degrades ALL relationships! It obviously breaks your connection with the one you have yet to release. That you expected, and maybe desired! But did you realize that it hinders your closeness with people who have never done you wrong? These are folks you love, who don't deserve to be pushed away. People that you would never want to feel rejection from you? See, unforgiveness and the bitterness, resentment, hatred and whatever else that's behind unforgiveness, can't be contained. It leaks. You can't be angry at just one person. That sort of putrid spirit gives off a stench that love simply can't contain. Everyone is touched, everything is infected, no one is safe... And that includes God!

**1 John 4:20-21** <sup>20</sup> *If anyone boasts, "I love God," and goes right on hating... thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see?* <sup>21</sup> *The command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both.* The Message

**Matthew 6:14-15** <sup>14</sup> *"In prayer there is a connection between what God does and what you*

*do. You can't get forgiveness from God, for instance, without also forgiving others.* <sup>15</sup> *If you refuse to do your part, you cut yourself off from God's part.* The Message

More bluntly...

**Matthew 6:14-15** <sup>14</sup> *"If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you.* <sup>15</sup> *But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.* NLT

There isn't much wiggle-room there! It sure doesn't seem to take into account those offenses that you did not deserve. We'll get to that in just a moment but for now, realize that the circumstances around the offense do little to change how God wants us to deal with it.

Deserved or undeserved, full forgiveness is always required. Not only is unforgiveness a sin but the other unhealthy and sinful responses that are coping mechanisms we employ to process wounds and hurt (to ignore, medicate, numb them) remain with us until we fully process our need to forgive.

The only way to remove this divine relationship killer – the whole sordid unforgiveness thing – is to step up and get it over with. That's not a lack of sympathy you hear, it's genuine love from me to you. I want you well, whole and completely able to know God deeply and follow Him fully. But you must let it go in order to be able to move closer to Him. The price tag for an expanding relationship with God often is forgiveness, and depending on the offense, that may seem like a very steep price to have to pay. But the cost of holding onto it's much greater, even if you aren't consciously aware of the bleed off of resources that persists undercover.

**B**elow I will help you learn what forgiveness is and is not because there are some very warped ideas out there. For now, have you ever wondered why you struggle getting closer to God? Why it seems so hard to know what He wants you to do?

Why does everything you do, all the advice and counsel you follow, all the spiritual practices you have tried, and retired, and tried harder, why does it all leave you just about where you were when you started?

For that matter, maybe you've also woke up to the fact that your relationships in general aren't that great. You constantly sabotage your friendship and loves in ways you don't even understand. You're forever inattentive or neurotically overprotective, emotionally flat-lined or uncontrollably explosive, repeatedly unfaithful or relationally smothering, always to blame martyr or never to blame perfectionist. Whatever it is, relationships don't seem to go too well for you, and some of you like it that way.

I suggest that maybe the answer to your vertical distance from God and horizontal distance from others is connected to some nasty unforgiveness you need to be done with. Something that ties you to the past, manhandles your present, and is ruining your future. It drives you forward but never let you escape your history, and the memories, which drives you even harder. Unfortunately, it's difficult to escape, and grow up, when the thing you need to leave behind is anchored to you like a ball and chain that clanks behind you with every step you take, and impedes even the simplest of adventures. You need to be free.

The following explanation won't answer all your questions or necessarily make it easier to forgive. Forgiveness is relatively simple, but not easy. No explanation can make forgiving someone who hurt you inexpensive. The rest of your life, and the lives of those closest to you, will be either cursed or blessed by what you decide to do. Read slowly and carefully, think through what is said, talk to God about the parts you don't like or don't understand, and tell Him He has permission to open your heart and mind to know the truth - because the truth, which is Jesus, will set you free (John 8:32 with John 14:6).



### *What Forgiveness Is NOT...*

**F**orgiveness is **NOT a FEELING**. (1) You won't feel like forgiving until after you have. I'm very sorry. It's unreasonable to expect that you will want to forgive unless maybe you realize the consequence of unforgiveness. Part of the cost is extending forgiveness when you don't want to, when they haven't asked for it, when they may not even know or care that they've hurt you, and when you feel they don't deserve it. If you wait until you feel like it, you may never do it. I know I wouldn't have! But that is entirely not the issue here.

**F**orgiveness is **NOT DENIAL**. (2) It's not pretending it didn't happen. It's not refusing to think about it or telling yourself you somehow asked for it or deserved it. It's surely not the self-deception of pretending it didn't hurt accompanied by the stuffing/covering of emotions. Unexpressed emotions *never* go away. They lay in wait, often un-known to you, and will fly up when you least expect or want them to. They *will* eventually find a way to surface. Lying to yourself about their existence only makes matters worse.

Refusing to find the source of those emotions that have you by the throat, seemingly non-existent one minute and impossible to ignore the next, gives them unrestricted permission to your heart. You may manage them for a while, but manage is all you can hope for because they aren't going anywhere until you honestly face them.

**F**orgiveness is **NOT APPROVAL**. (3) If it was OK, what's to forgive? I can't tell you how many times I've heard, "Oh, it's alright, I understand it so it didn't bother me, I just let it roll off and went on as if nothing happened."

There's that denial again. Something did happen. Think about it. If there's something "roll off," then something happened! You may understand why they did or didn't say or do what they did or didn't do, but that doesn't mean the hurt you felt should be dismissed or permitted or sanctioned for any reason. You think you're being kind and merciful by telling them it was OK but you're doing neither of you an act of kindness. You don't have to be unkind to face the truth. You aren't ceasing to blame but placing blame where it belongs. Maybe it was even an unintentional offense but if you're hurt you're hurt, no sense in acting like you weren't. You weren't OK with it and didn't approve of it. Deal with it and move on but don't pretend you were OK with it if you weren't. Admit the hurt, reject false guilt, let go of resentment, and then deal with your own response to the offense.

**F**orgiveness is **NOT FORGETTING**. (4) This is an impossible, unreasonable and ridiculous request. But remembering doesn't have to destroy us. You'll never forget, however cloudy the memory may become with time. But forgiveness is freedom from the control that remembering exerts and healing of the open wound. A scar may remain, a limp may persist, but that's a far cry from a gaping, infected, oozing, putrid wound! Forgiveness is intentionally choosing to remember that you have forgiven them. Thinking one should forget has often lead people to put themselves back in unavoidable dangerous situations that God never asked them to re-enter. Here again the cost is multiplied. Forgiveness is releasing someone even though you do remember – and choosing to do it again and again every time that tender scar is bumped by them or anyone else!

**F**orgiveness is **NOT TRUST**. (5) Once it's lost, trust must be earned, but forgiveness is a free gift given to the offender. They are two different things. You must not harbor ill will in your heart, but that doesn't mean you check your brain out at the door and blindly

trust them again. They'll have to show, over an *extended* period of time, that they can be trusted. Especially when abuse has occurred. But knowing they're not trustworthy isn't license to hate, reject or be unloving to them. You may need someone else help you know when and if you should trust because hurt often leaves us, if even just for a time, unable to judge correctly regarding that person. We may be too lenient depending on numerous variables, or too protective, due to the nature of the relationship and offense.

**Forgiveness is NOT INJUSTICE.** (6) We're not excusing them from legal or moral guilt when we forgive. You can require legal justice. To do so may protect others. God may lead you to drop the charges if there's a legality involved but that's not a given. If it's a personal offense, you're "dropping your charges" because you're the only one who can. No one else is involved except God to whom they will still have to account. What we *are* doing is healing our inner person that's polluted by unforgiveness and what comes with it. Consequences still come to the forgiven; at the very least they are still accountable to God. We're just refusing to punish them ourselves any longer by choosing to leave them to God's mercy and grace, and possibly the secular legal system, instead of handing out our own brand of justice through hatred and refusing to forgive.

**Forgiveness is NOT TOLERANCE.** (7) You can forgive anything, patience *is* a virtue, but sometimes God allows us to remove ourselves from continued wrongdoing. It would depend on the type of attack and God's leading. For example, physical or sexual abuse need not be endured and shouldn't be allowed. Loving and forgiving your enemies isn't necessarily the same things as being a doormat. Again, depending on the circumstance, God may call you to serve them by remaining close enough for them to offend again. In a marriage for example, assuming there is no abuse, you

may have to forgive again and again, even unfaithfulness. Even then, it can and should be done without enabling them to continue in a destructive and abusive pattern. You can forgive and remain together without tolerating continued and intentional attack. You do need to forgive them AND you may need to avoid them, for a time or in the end permanently, for your safety and the safety of others that you should be protecting.

**Forgiveness is NOT RESTRAINT.** (8) Just because you're able to control yourself around the one who hurt you, doesn't mean you've forgiven them. Forgiveness isn't containing or restraining your emotions but letting it go (not venting it) - being free from it. If it takes most or all your energy to keep yourself in check when you are around them or think of the person, you are *not* free from the wound and your forgiveness needs to be revisited. We're not talking anger/emotional management here. True forgiveness is not having some awful emotion well up and by sheer determination keeping it in check until it settles down, until you get away from them, or until you can vent privately. Struggling to be civil around them isn't the freedom Christ suffered to provide! There is more. Sometimes, restraint is the exact opposite of what you should do. However, get reliable counsel (not biased affirmation from someone else who hates them) before you confront. Maybe this is obvious, but you should forgive them and defuse your emotions before you speak to them. If you don't, all they may "hear" is the anger and hurt behind the words. You take a very real risk of saying what makes you feel better and venting and, in effect, telling them what you'd really like to say. That probably won't help either of you!

**Forgiveness is NOT RECONCILIATION.** (9) This could be in some way viewed as a summary of what has been said so far about what we're not saying when we talk about forgiveness. Forgiveness is between you and God more than it's something between you and the offender. It has little to

do relationally speaking with another human being, other than yourself. It is what we do for our own health and sanity. It's something we do for ourselves – and this time it's a good thing! If it's done for another it's more for those around us that are hurt by our unforgiveness toward another. The offender needs to do nothing to be forgiven by us except offend us! Does anyone see the similarity here to God's forgiveness of us?!

Now, reconciliation is something we do with the offender. Forgiveness is intra-personal where reconciliation is inter-personal. Forgiveness can happen in the secret of our own heart and mind but reconciliation requires a restored relationship. That restoration which may or may not come and may or may not even be advisable or healthy. Forgiveness is always healthy for us. In fact, that another accept your forgiveness cannot be a condition for offering it. It's not about how they respond it's about your response to God. Reconciliation is something for later on down the road, it must be worked for and earned and proven to include sustainable change. If you've been holding off forgiving because you're not ready to reconcile or because you have a sneaky suspicion that it's not safe or smart to do so, make note of this point. I'm not asking you to check your brain out at the door to forgive. I'm asking you to check your hatred and anger and unforgiveness out before you enter God's presence, or anyone else's for that matter!

**F**orgiveness is **NOT PAINLESS**. (10) It may require you to reopen old wounds that you thought were healed or that you have been working hard to ignore, stuff and cover for years. You may discover emotions and feelings you didn't know were buried deep in your inner person; grief and loss that you never processed. You may have to let go a several rights you have been clinging to – the right to get even, to tell them how much they hurt you, to make them see their wrong, or simply to hurt them in return. And the

actual act of telling them you forgive them (if that is necessary and won't create a whole other and unnecessary situation) can be very painful to face. It means giving up your carefully constructed defenses that exclude God to instead begin to trust Him to be your protection. Be very sure, He can be trusted. And the cost is worth it. Most of all, unforgiveness hurts you more than anyone and that pain is released when you forgive. It's a great trade off. The pain of unforgiveness for the pain of having to forgive.

**F**orgiveness is **NOT THE ONLY OPTION**. (11) This one is a freebee for you! You can chose to remain a hateful, bitter and miserable person who is abusive (physically, emotionally, verbally, relationally, spiritually) to one degree or another, even if unconsciously, to those around you. You can stay as you are but you won't stay as you are! Remain unforgiving and you grow more sick and toxic to yourself and others. Choosing not to change is a choice to change, for the worse.



### *What Forgiveness Is ...*

**K**nowing what forgiveness is not may just remove everything you thought it was! What's left? Well, if you're thinking all the pain was taken out of it, think again. I'm going to tell you that forgiveness is just four things and even though that seems like very little, all four are likely to be very hard. Please, read it all before you decide, and then make your decision. Reading it doesn't do any harm, unless you already know God's asking you to forgive someone and you already know don't want to!

**F**orgiveness is a **CHOICE!** You can't feel or act differently until you chose to move in the direction of forgiveness. That choice may be in direct disagreement with your feelings. It may seem to violate every human impulse in your body. It may go against everything you've been taught and seen modeled. It doesn't however contradict Jesus' teaching or example as you will see later.

Some feel it's inauthentic to forgive when they don't feel like it. Let me ask you question, how often do you feel like going to work on Monday morning, or Wednesday morning? How often have you gotten up and gone to work the first day after vacation? Do you still go? Yes? Hypocrite! Your heart wasn't into it and you certainly didn't want to go, but you went anyway. Isn't that inconsistent, inauthentic? No. You went to work anyway because it's your responsibility and all manner of bad things will happen to you and yours if you don't. You went because it was your job, because others you love depended on it.

Why do you forgive? Same reason! It's your duty and others are depending on your doing so. And think of it this way. You have little control over most things in life, certainly not the offense you are in need of forgiving. You have no direct control over your feeling either. However, you can regulate your thinking and you can make your own choices and forgiveness is one of the few things in life you have some control over. All you control "enthusiasts" out there sit up and take notice! The choice to forgive may be the most authentic thing you do because it's not an impulse, many of which you deeply regret afterward. It's a hard, courageous, deliberate choice with nothing behind it except love – love for God, love for yourself, love for others, and even a little kindness for the offender!

**F**orgiveness is a **CHOICE** to **Acknowledge** (1) So, before it is anything else, it is a choice. If you wait till you

feel like it you will usually never do it. You can't feel different until you chose to move in that direction and the first step is choosing to cut off that ball and chain.

As I said above, you have to finally accept that you were wronged. Believe it or not, this is very hard for some, especially if those that hurt them were very close, or the wound was very severe. If we convince ourselves they didn't mean it, which they may not have, or tell ourselves that we did something to deserve it, which makes no difference, or otherwise let them off the hook, these things keep us from having to face the painful truth of what was done to us. If they did nothing wrong what's to forgive? Pretending nothing bad happened seems easier than the admitting the truth and dealing with it in a psychologically and spiritually health way. And it is, for the short term.

So it's time to stop defending them. If you believe they didn't mean to hurt you, great. But aren't you still hurt? Maybe you overreacted and it's mostly your fault you were offended, but weren't you still insulted? Maybe you have a few issues of your own and you perceived it wrong, misunderstood, twisted their words, or didn't let them finish. OK, but you still walked away stinging.

Did you tell yourself that it should not have hurt because there were extenuating circumstances in their lives so we should be more tolerant and not be bothered by it? Does that really make sense? You shouldn't have been hurt, so you couldn't possibly have been hurt, so that bruise on your heart just can't be real! They were awful to you but they were going through a rough time so that should somehow magically suspend the laws of relationships and void your right to be treated like a human being? If you were any kind of a person you'd understand and not feel hurt? Really?!

Trying to understand may be helpful but you were still hurt. Own up to it. It's not wrong to

be hurt by someone who was being nasty even if they were going through a traumatic time. Hurt and offense is amoral, neither good nor bad, so why shy away from admitting it's there? For Heaven's sake – and earth's – get on with getting rid of it.

We may instinctively defend loved ones (parents, grand-parents, aunts, uncles...) and think that all the good we remember should balance out the times that their words or actions stung us. But until we acknowledge the injury, until we honestly and accurately accept things as they were, or at least as we perceived them at the time, we can't forgive. Whether or not they meant to hurt you, or that you overreacted, misunderstood or were asking for it, is entirely not the point. A hurt is a hurt no matter how it comes to us.

Say that it hurt, that you thought it was wrong or unjust, reject what forgiveness is not as I describe it above. Stop hiding, running away, ignoring or excusing it. It shows greater kindness to them to forgive them than it does to remain hurt and pretend you were not. Pretending, and therefore leaving the wound to fester, means you run the very great risk of inadvertently hurting them back in some way, even unconsciously. It always bleeds through somehow. Listen, if we never face the truth we may never have healing, freedom, or know God better.

**F**orgiveness is a **CHOICE To Absolve.**  
(2) Here is a simple definition of forgiveness. ***Forgiveness is a deliberate decision to consider that someone is no longer in debt to you.*** It's the choice to pay the price and move on. It means that, as far as we're concerned, they don't need to do anything any more to correct their wrong – we cancel the debt, freeing them from obligation to us. They may still have a moral obligation before God or a legal one before man, but we are letting go of our demand for a personal confession and/or "payment." We end all efforts to make sure they know what they did was wrong, to explain in living color how

much they hurt us and what we think of them, to finally be heard. It's giving up our right to explain ourselves, to have our day in court, to see them hang their head in shame as they realize the truth we've forced them to accept. We lay down our right to hear them say, "I'm sorry, you were right, I was wrong, what was I thinking, I'm such a dolt, I'll never do it again." It's walking away from the desire to punish the one who has offended us, giving up our craving to see them suffer for what they did to us.

Get the full picture please, the entire cost. In order to genuinely forgive we forfeit our right to garner sympathy from others by rehearsing what was done to us and how noble we are for forgiving. If we can't get that horrible person (and often horrible is an honest understatement) to stroke our wounded heart by "fessin' up" to their wrong, well, we'll find someone who will listen and administer the balm of pity to our martyred selves. I'm sorry but no matter how cruel they were, that'll either reopen the wound or plunge it deeper. It's like shoving a stick in the wound and digging around in there a bit! You must chose to live with the loss *without* complaint, self-pity, revenge or spiritual pride.

Here's the rub, as long as you cling to it, it will cling to you. Continue to keep it fresh and it will continue to keep you sour! Hanging on to your right to get even allows them to continue to wound, abuse, and misuse you. You reoffend yourself or exacerbate the injury every time you review it. Maybe a person isn't connected to the hurt but regardless, hang tightly to it and you'll never be free from it because it will never pry itself out of your grasp! It will mold itself to your fingers till that hurt feels quite normal in your fist, like it's a part of you that can't be removed. The more at home you are with that brokenness the harder it will be to see yourself free, never mind actually getting free. Cease your confounded efforts to collect payment from them, and *bring the hurt to Jesus instead*, so

He can make things right, not necessarily for us, but in us!

**F**orgiveness is a **CHOICE** to **Admit.** (3)  
Here's where the cost increases exponentially. Hang with me for just a few minutes and I'll eventually tell you what you need to admit. Before I do, I want to warn you that what I'm going to suggest may not sound fair at all. So, let me immediately give you some help with that. It's not fair. The very idea of forgiveness – letting the guilty go free without punishment or reparation – demands that it's not fair. What I'm going to teach has nothing to do with fairness. Having to forgive someone who hurt you without provocation? How could that be fair? Well...

The only thing you can do is put it into perspective. (If you don't want to forgive, you're not going to want to do this.) The only way you could remotely attach that idea to this – that it is fair to forgive – is if you remember what Christ has done for you. Yes, I did play that card! You may say, "Don't bring that up! That's not fair! Isn't that spiritual manipulation or something? You don't know what they did to me!" Well, I told you that "fair" wouldn't be the first thing you'd want to call it!

Before we go any further, you need to read this. If you consider yourself a Christian, if you have received and known His forgiveness, you need to humbly read this now, slowly, carefully, and gratefully.

**Matthew 18:21-35** <sup>21</sup> *At that point Peter got up the nerve to ask, "Master, how many times do I forgive a brother or sister who hurts me? Seven?"* <sup>22</sup> *Jesus replied, "Seven! Hardly. Try seventy times seven."* <sup>23</sup> *"The kingdom of God is like a king who decided to square accounts with his servants."* <sup>24</sup> *As he got under way, one servant was brought before him who had run up a debt of a hundred thousand dollars.* <sup>25</sup> *He couldn't pay up, so the king ordered the man, along with his wife, children, and goods, to be auctioned off at the slave market.* <sup>26</sup> *"The poor wretch threw himself at the king's feet and*

*begged, 'Give me a chance and I'll pay it all back.'* <sup>27</sup> *Touched by his plea, the king let him off, erasing the debt.* <sup>28</sup> *"The servant was no sooner out of the room when he came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him ten dollars. He seized him by the throat and demanded, 'Pay up. Now!'"* <sup>29</sup> *"The poor wretch threw himself down and begged, 'Give me a chance and I'll pay it all back.'* <sup>30</sup> *But he wouldn't do it. He had him arrested and put in jail until the debt was paid.* <sup>31</sup> *When the other servants saw this going on, they were outraged and brought a detailed report to the king.* <sup>32</sup> *"The king summoned the man and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave your entire debt when you begged me for mercy.'* <sup>33</sup> *Shouldn't you be compelled to be merciful to your fellow servant who asked for mercy?"* <sup>34</sup> *The king was furious and put the screws to the man until he paid back his entire debt.* <sup>35</sup> *And that's exactly what my Father in heaven is going to do to each one of you who doesn't forgive unconditionally anyone who asks for mercy."* The Message

Your hurt my feel like a truck load more than a \$10 offense, but compare it to what you've been forgiven and rescued from. Put it into eternal perspective. Attach a dollar value to what Jesus Christ has given you because of all He paid to leave Heaven, come to earth and secure your redemption with His life, and return to glory again. Go ahead, give it a try. Got it? Is it worth a trillion? A zillion? A bazillion times infinity!?

No one, I repeat, no one, is saying that your experience should be minimized, treated as insignificant, or addressed with indifference or permissiveness. If you had to endure that sort of treatment from anyone, please accept my sincere apology on their behalf. (That was another wrong you will need to forgive!) Your pain is real and the wrong was definitely wrong and needs to be addressed. OK? For some of you, the abuse was immoral, torturous, evil, and for most people, anyone but a Christian, unforgivable. Still – don't turn me off now – no human has done as much to you as your sin has done, is doing, or ultimately would do, without Jesus.



His forgiveness of you and me was the epitome of colossal unfairness! What God has given you – removal of the sin that prevents friendship now and forever with God and all the fringe benefits that come along with it – is a great gift. The thing about gifts like this is that it comes with responsibility. To whom much is given, much is required.

**Luke 12:48** ... *Great gifts mean great responsibilities; greater gifts, greater responsibilities!* The Message

Remember the incalculable price tag you put on what Jesus did for you? Placed in this context, and how I'm coaxing you into forgiveness, you may begin to think that the responsibility is almost enough to make you want to give God's gift back! Then again, not if you really understand what has been given to you.

After all the posturing and politicking I just did to make this as palatable for you as I can, let me just say it directly; who are you to refuse to forgive someone when God has heard your plea for mercy and set you free? Their wrong, as painful and wrong as it was, is sort of like the \$10 debt when compared to your \$100,000 debt that you owed God. The only difference is that today \$100,000 doesn't sound like much and if it's too steep, you could always put it on credit! But back then this was an astronomical amount of money basically chosen not for the amount, but for how unreachable an obligation it would have posed in that day. When Jesus answered Peter's question, He chose seventy times seven not because he had to forgive only 490 times, but because it was a huge amount more than seven and would have seemed to him like he was being told he should never be able to stop forgiving.

The same is the case with \$100,000. It should seem to you like God is saying that you must always forgive without end no matter what the offense. *Remember what forgiveness is NOT*

*before you walk away.* You *don't* have to trust, tolerate, deny, forget or approve. But for everyone's sake, you *do* have to forgive.

**N**ow, if you are at a place where you can put the grievousness of the wrong done to you in that eternal perspective, you are ready to move on to this third step. (That is not to say your hurt should be minimized and therefore ignored because it can't come close to what Christ did for us on the Cross.) If you're not there yet, remembering of course what forgiveness is not, than I'm not sure there's much benefit to reading on. Ask God to make you ready, or to want to be made ready, depending on how far you have yet to travel to get here. When you arrive at that place where you're ready, read on.

As if it hasn't been so far, the third step will be hard. You have heard it said that two wrongs never make one right? I'm sorry, I really am, but to be able to move on you'll need to consider how you responded at the moment and over the following hours and days (and years!) after the offense was given. No matter what was done to you, it's never OK to respond in like kind. Two wrongs never have and never will make one right – just a bigger wrong! Nothing that was done to you, however evil, warrants or permits hatred in return. Or any other sinful response for that matter like slander, vengeance, verbal attacks, or unforgiveness. Hatred and unforgiveness are sin, forms of punishment or revenge that God forbids. We're forcing others to "pay" by holding back love, grace, mercy, forgiveness.

Now, here's where "admit" comes in. We must confess to any sinful response on our part, and any hurt we caused others as a result. To forgive you must repent of your sinful responses such as; any ungodly, unbiblical, unchristian, unhealthy coping mechanisms which includes unloving reactions, no matter how unloving their provocation was. This really isn't about them, it's about you. We must stop justifying our

sinful reaction – he hurt me first! –admit to a lack of mercy and an eternal perspective, and repent. Yes, you heard me right, you need to apologize, at least to God. Fair? Nope. Necessary? Yes!

You may not be aware of this but your wrong response keeps the issue alive. You can't move on if you keep living in it, churning all the pain and emotion up, and continue to make them pay for their actions, or lack thereof with wrong choices of your own. Every time you retaliate, or even rehearse it, you reawaken the whole thing. Remember the picture of the stick poking around in the open wound, and reoffend yourself with it. You may even have honestly forgiven them but by going back there and renewing your wrong reactions you need to forgive them again because they've offended you again through your rehearsal of it. You are actually letting them abuse you every time you go back there in your dysfunctional and sinful recollection.

Here you thought all this time that you were keeping them away from you with your protective measures and in reality, just the opposite was occurring. And it's your choice and your fault. Told you this would be hard to swallow. You may have just choked on that last insensitive comment but let me tell you why I said it like that. When I needed to forgive someone I REALLY didn't want to forgive, and realizing that I was choosing to let them continue to harm me motivated me to forgive them "right quick!" I was pretty upset over what had been done or not done, and I knew it was tearing me apart still. And I was allowing it. It was something I didn't appreciate being told, at first, until it sunk in. Then I couldn't have been more thankful that someone had the courage to take that risk, tell me the truth, and help me see. It may not have felt good but my hope is that somehow it helped you too.

**H**ere's an even deeper reality. Part of our hostility and pain is because of what developed in our lives as a product of the

wrong. Something awful was done or said but the result was that our life was changed so that we became something we don't like or want to be. As a result we sometimes blame the offender for doing this to us, for making us who we are. "It's his fault I'm like this." "She's to blame for my current situation." "If they hadn't treated me like this I wouldn't have all these problems." So true, some of the situational or logistical particulars might be different but don't confuse that with who you have become. No matter how hurtful or unjust it was, neither the offense(s) or the offender is what made you who you are today. No one has that kind of power over you. I would think you wouldn't want to give anyone, especially them, that kind of sway. We are today who we've chosen to be – innocently or deliberately, consciously or unconsciously – and only we can make the decision to change or be free – in Jesus Christ.

So again I say, we must admit to any part we played in the past, or are still acting out, in the drama we call our life. We have to take responsibility for our actions and place some focus on our own sinful retaliation, instead of only on the wrong done to us. The past, resplendent with its attacks and wounds, can only be left behind if we face fully those key events that we have let shape us and acknowledge the wrong done to us, and admit the wrong we perpetrated in response.

I often hear another response from people trying to defend their case to me – really to God – as they desperately try to escape the need to forgive. I'm particularly fond of this deflection myself and have used in the past. Here it is; "I don't hate them, I love them. I can't possible hate someone I love so much." Actually, just the opposite is true. You can love someone and hate them at the same time. Truth is, those we love the most are the ones capable of hurting us the deepest. If a stranger were to tell a women she was having a bad hair day, or that her dress made her look fat (which would need to be forgiven!), it wouldn't feel good, but it probably wouldn't

cut as deep as if that was the first thing her husband said to her as she entered the kitchen in the morning. Coming from someone who you expect nothing from, it doesn't affect us so deeply because we could care less about what they think. In this way we unwittingly give those we love the most the greatest power to wound us.

This is why some never let anyone get too close and instead close down when they feel the relationships is getting serious. They've been deeply hurt before when they got close to someone and they don't want to let that happen again. So they only keep surface relationships and find a way to discard or sabotage any that they fear are going deeper before they are hurt again. It's really a sad way to live. They know this truth all too well, that those you are closest to will be the ones who disappoint you the most and offend you the deepest. Your expectations are lower the more casual your relationship, and expand as the closeness of the relationship grows. Yes, you do love them, maybe very much. And that's the very reason why you are so ticked off and so critically wounded.

The brightest among you, or maybe the most skeptical and cynical, have already figured out what this might mean, and you are not happy! You realize that if you're responsible for your reaction to offense, then you're answerable for hurt you have given to others. You also remember how you treated some of those who attacked you and are coming to the awakening that you may have wounded them in return. Do you see where I'm going? You should NEVER do this without seeking solid Biblical counsel first, but the reality is that you may owe an apology to someone who deeply wounded you, and your only misdeed was giving them what you thought they rightly deserved!

Again, I have seen tons of unnecessary and unfortunate damage done by well meaning people who make restitution where it's not

needed. So please seek guidance first. I'm reluctant to even bring it up because of all the silliness and needless additional pain people have caused by telling someone who never knew it that they used to hate them but now they are sorry! There are cases when it's necessary but you the wounded are in no place to discern that given all your destabilizing emotions about the whole thing. I'll address this in detail later but for those of you who saw it coming, I wanted to be perfectly honest about it. If God wants to you eventually go that route. He'll tell you, and get you through it. Count the cost, but please don't give up here.

**F**orgiveness is a **CHOICE To Adjust** (4)  
Let's summarize what we have so far. First, I wanted to make sure you didn't have a warped and ridiculous idea of what forgiveness is. There are some bad teachings out there that when presented, push people away from true forgiveness and the help they need, not toward it and not toward God. Then we walked through the need to acknowledge our hurt, to stop ignoring, dismissing or excusing the actions and come out and say that we felt slighted, offended, wounded, or worse. Only when we acknowledge that we're been wronged can we let go and genuinely forgive. If nothing bad happened there's nothing to forgive. It's costly but better than the alternative. It got harder when we reached that nasty fork in the road that we just pasted. It made us choose whether we'd stall out on the process, or forge ahead. Moving forward meant choosing the path that took us in the direction of admitting that we didn't always handle the situation properly. Our response was less than helpful or far from what God would want, and we may need to do our own apologizing.

Sometimes those handy coping mechanism become so much a part of who we are, such a relied on protection (which really provide no safety at all, just more harm) that they become entrenched in our lives in such a way

that only spiritual warfare can permanently dislodge them. Space and time doesn't permit us to delve into this dynamic here so I offer only this passing comment. (That's not to be understood as a commentary on how small an issue this is to ultimate and total freedom. Take it as just the opposite!) The role that our sinful choices play and the opening that gives the devil is often a huge reason why some cannot seem to get beyond the past. Sometimes even when they've done all that's suggested in the teaching, and maybe a whole lot more! I again want to use the strongest language possible to encourage you to get qualified and experienced pastoral (Biblical/spiritual) counsel from someone who believes in and understands the issue of spiritual warfare and the Christian. Secular counsel will help, but only God can deal with Satan and the heart in a way that secures final and lasting freedom. You don't want sin management because that's learning how to keep the roaring lion in check so it can't break out unexpected. That tragically and needlessly consumes a lot of energy and it doesn't expel that lion! You want release from the prison you've long lived in by killing that cursed lion and redirecting all that freed-up energy toward God and the life He died to give you! (I think I mixed my metaphors there – the prison and lion – but I just get so excited!)

Anyway, one of the things you may need to adjust is you own understanding of spiritual warfare for the Christ-follower. If you've never considered this possibility, maybe now is the time to do so. Be advised, any self-respecting Christian won't use "the devil made me do it" any more than they'll say it's in their genes and they can't help themselves. It's not an excuse; Satan has nothing that he wasn't given, even if released unconsciously. But it will take intentional effort to get "it" back in the name of Jesus.

Spiritual warfare is real and it's vitally important so don't settle for defeat. Keep pushing until you have the victory described

in Romans 6. If the battle between good and evil is real then so is your freedom from sin and the expectation that you no longer need to accept being controlled by it.

**Romans 6:6-8** <sup>6</sup> *Our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin.* <sup>7</sup> *For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin.* <sup>8</sup> *And since we died with Christ, we know we will also share his new life...* <sup>11</sup> *So you should consider yourselves dead to sin and able to live for the glory of God through Christ Jesus.* <sup>NLT</sup>

**M**oving on, I'm taking about adjusting both your posture toward the offender and toward the coping mechanism you picked up to deal with the wound along the way. The later is another subject too large in scope to cover in detail here. We're focusing on the act of forgiving and this is a connected issue that's just as important as spiritual warfare. Wounds have to be dealt with. Everyone does something with them even if it's ignore them. If we have been taught, and had healthy responses modeled to us, we grow up learning how to get true healing for our wounds. A good majority of people however are either taught dysfunctional and sinful responses, or nothing at all and are left to figure out for themselves how to deal with their hurt. Most fall back on various human instincts, influenced by their wiring and other factors. Only problem with that is that when humans are left to themselves they choose distinctly human coping mechanisms – which do even more damage in the long run – not God's. I love it when people say to me that it was only human to respond they way they did. They tend to think that this excuses their unauthorized responses. It doesn't. My answer to them is, "Exactly, it was only human, and that's the problem because forgiveness is a divine characteristic not a human one. You should never have been left to your instincts! Your parents were

responsible for knowing God and teaching you His ways. You probably should forgive your parents for failing you before you forgive the offender for the offense!”

Let me paint a simple scenario to show you what this might look like before we move on. A child receives a traumatic wound from their parent at a young age. Instinctively kids know parents are supposed to love and protect them, not harm and abuse them. The attack obviously confuses them. To make sense of it they tell themselves that it must have been their fault. The must have deserved the treatment they received. This conclusion is often suggested to them by Satan. To accept it is to accept Satan’s word as truth and creates all sorts of problems by itself. If the parent – or siblings, teachers, peers, relatives – berated them at all, it makes this conclusion seem even more feasible. You can guess what this does to their self image. It begins to destroy it. The pain of the hurt(s) and the power of the lie(s) work together to produce a significant wound usually deepen over time with repeated wounding and the same dysfunctional and untrue conclusion employed to make sense of it all. The wound hurts. Over time the hurt increases until the injury becomes a dominate factor in one’s mind and psyche. Everyone finds ways of lessening the pain. That’s in our genes! The worse the pain is, the greater the compensation. Good choices lead to healthy processing habits that include forgiveness in the full-bodied way that I’m explaining it. Bad habits rely on one or more of the 11 things forgiveness is not, combined with various tricks to make them work. Ways to medicate the pain, anesthetize it, avoid it, cover it, explain it, resist it, prove themselves, compensate, pay for it, or whatever is chosen as a coping mechanism. Deceit and self-mutilation (physical and psychological/mental) abound. Everything from believing themselves to be worthless, to eating until they are dangerously over weight, to various other medicinal addictions, and even to

suicide. Pride rises up as a way to counter low self esteem and it helps ruin most relationships. Competitiveness or laziness, or flip flopping between the two, steps in to try to convince others (the offender and/or themselves) that they are valuable, or to protect themselves from proving to the whole world once again that they are nothing more than screw-ups!

Wow... Guess that’s not so simple after all! And that little picture is not the half of it! It gets more complicated depending on the depth of the psychological drivers, and on the severity of the trauma(s), and on how many follow up wounds aggravated the issue, or the length of time the broken coping mechanism is employed. See the mess it makes? See how it comes between us and God? Imagine believing you’re no good, believing that everything and everyone in your life has proven you’re worthless, and then trying to take God at His word when He claims you are unconditionally loved, valued, pursued, wanted, and beautiful just as you are?!

What I’m saying is that wounds need full forgiveness and without it they lead to all sorts of destructive coping mechanisms (sins) that take over our lives, often without our knowledge, or permission. No, that’s not overstated in the least. If you want to relate well, deeply, faithfully, fully, passionately with God and man, you must walk intentionally into a complete forgiveness that cuts you free from the control of the past and the sin that lives there, both their’s and yours.

That’s admittedly a high level pass at trying to explain this complex dynamic. I’m not a licensed counselor in any way other than by years of experience with my own life and those of the folks I’ve talk to as a pastor. But even if I were God would still be the one you need. God is necessary be required and other people will be invaluable. Don’t do this alone.

Since that summary above (about 10 paragraphs!) was all about doing some very hard stuff, I'm happy to inform you that step 4 should be easier than the above three. Just remember I said easier, not easy. You can begin doing this at any point that you realize you have an issue with someone, you don't have to wait till this point in the process, but it'll have the most impact on you after you have actually gone through the forgiveness above.

This last crucial aspect of forgiveness ties in with some of what has already been said but I want to make a bigger deal of it here. What's needed now is to adjust our "posture" toward the offender. If we want to hold onto the ground we've gain through steps one through three we have to put distance between us and the old hurt. We must hold firmly, not to the offense, but to our decision to let go of it. We must give up on administering justice ourselves. We must move into a new attitude toward the offender – reposition our mind and heart regarding those we've forgiven.

Jesus Himself taught His disciples to do this but many feel His instructions are unreasonable, if not ridiculous and unfair? Have you ever heard or said something like this?

*"I can forgive them, but I don't have to be nice to them."*

*"After what they did to my kid?! I can forgive them this time but they better not even think of messing with them again or else I'll...!"*

*"I'm a forgiving person, but I can only take so much. At some point the forgiveness runs out and when that happens, God help them!"*

*"Who do they think they are treating me like that? I won't stand for it. I'm no push over. I know my rights. I don't deserve that kind of disrespect. If God*

*wants me to forgive them I will but I won't stand there and be spoken to like that. God can't really expect me to believe that I should ever let anyone be so rude!"*

That's not quite what Jesus taught! I don't think God would want us to walk right back into abuse and violent mistreatment, but you had better ready this if you think you have permission to be unkind to your "enemies."

**Luke 6:27-36** *"But if you are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. <sup>28</sup> Pray for the happiness of those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you. <sup>29</sup> If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn the other cheek. If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also. <sup>30</sup> Give what you have to anyone who asks you for it; and when things are taken away from you, don't try to get them back. <sup>31</sup> Do for others as you would like them to do for you. <sup>32</sup> "Do you think you deserve credit merely for loving those who love you? Even the sinners do that! <sup>33</sup> And if you do good only to those who do good to you, is that so wonderful? Even sinners do that much! <sup>34</sup> And if you lend money only to those who can repay you, what good is that? Even sinners will lend to their own kind for a full return. <sup>35</sup> "Love your enemies! Do good to them! Lend to them! And don't be concerned that they might not repay. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to the unthankful and to those who are wicked. <sup>36</sup> You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate."*

**Romans 12:17-21** *Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. <sup>18</sup> Do your part to live in peace with everyone, as much as possible. <sup>19</sup> Dear friends, never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God. For it is written, "I will take vengeance; I will repay those who deserve it," says the Lord. <sup>20</sup> Instead, do what the Scriptures say: "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink, and they will be ashamed of what they have done to you." <sup>21</sup> Don't*

*let evil get the best of you, but conquer evil by doing good.*

(Read also: Matthew 5:44; Exodus 23:4-5; Proverbs 25:21-22; Luke 23:34 with 1Peter 2:21-23; Acts 7:59-60; 1Corinthians 4:10a and 12b-13, 13:4-7; 1Peter 3:8-12)

Jesus starts the lesson in a most interesting and deliberate way. “If you’re willing to listen...” Or, “To you who are ready for the truth...” <sup>MSG</sup> Before you even consider what He going to say, ask yourself this; are you willing to be taught, to be challenged by the truth and made into the likeness of Jesus? Don’t just say “yes” because you know that’s what a good Christian should say. You may actually want to read on and come back to this decision! Jesus tells you to love your enemies. For a detailed and specific picture of what that’ll look like, consider my summation of those verses.

- Do good to those who did nothing but harm you and rip you off.
- Wish the best for those that hurt you and made life harder for you.
- Specifically ask God to rescue, help, teach, provide for, forgive, and protect them.
- When an enemy makes a demand of you try to comply with greater generosity than they expect or exact.
- Stop trying to get back what was taken from you; give it up, let it go, and stop keeping score!
- Instead, do for them what you wish they had done for you.
- Love even when there’s a good chance they won’t love in return.
- When they attack or use you, consider what you can do to meet whatever need or wound is driving them to the abuse.
- Give the gift of forgiveness even when they have no intention of admitting to any wrong.
- Remember God loved you when you were still unthankful and wicked.
- If self-protection becomes necessary, proceed with the same kindness and compassion that the Father showed you.

- Never pay back others with evil but mercy, grace, and kindness instead, leaving punishment to God.
- Stop focusing on your needs, hurts and rights and try to find a way to help soothe the internal hunger and thirst that drove them to hurt you.
- Let God adjust your posture toward the offender and replace hatred with love and grace.

Your attention has been on rehearsing and remembering the offense and keeping that hurt current and fresh, replaying the video in your mind. Or you’ve expended much energy trying NOT to play that video but the memory persists no matter what you do and annoyingly pops up – usually with much of the emotion and suspicion and protection that go with it – when your defense are down.

The choice you must make here, the adjustment that’s required is that you now chose to remember and rehearse your forgiveness instead of their offense(s). You proactively pray for them and determine to do good for them if you get the chance. You act toward them like a friend not an enemy. I didn’t say that you have to trust them. You can show them love without exposing yourself and those you’re sworn to protect to any undo abuse. Just look for chances to bless them not to avenge yourself. Refuse to speak ill of them to anyone, even yourself. Remind yourself as you speak to God that you have given up and released forever any rights you thought you had and that were violated. Chose to leave them to God where they are sure to find greater mercy and grace and kindness than they ever found with you.

**I**f you want to be completely free you need to go in the opposite direction that your human instincts tell you is right and fair. This will have to be a God thing. It’s the same with any attempt to follow Him. This isn’t you acting like Jesus. This requires death to self and total surrender to Him to live and move and love through you. You’ll never love like

Jesus. It's humanly impossible. But with God, all things are possible. He can love through any willing vessel if He finds submissive and trusting abandonment to Him. The Christian's mission is not to live and act and try to guess what God would do in your shoes, or even to follow His lead in our own energy and effort. Death means you get out of His way and free Him to live and touch others through you. If you don't know what this means you need to do some research, talk to your pastor or Christian counselor who understands verses like John 3:30, Galatians 2:20 and 2Corinthians 12:8-10. It'll need to be someone who won't tell you to tap into or pray for God's power but who'll teach you how to connect to His heart through relationship and release His life (and power) through you.

**John 3:30** *He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.* <sup>NLT</sup>

**Galatians 2:20** *I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me...* <sup>NLT</sup>

Reposition your heart to align with these verse in your conversations with God. This adjustment reflects true Christianity because it can come only from the heart of Christ. You may not understand yet but it should be reassuring to know that you don't have to do it. You have to forgive and pursue the relationship and than let God produce this kind of life in you.



## ***Do I Need To Forgive?***

**F**rom my experience with folks that need to forgive I've discovered that most benefit from as vivid a picture as I can give them of what forgiveness will look like. They need something to compare themselves to in order

to know if there's any evidence that there might be unforgiveness in their lives. I think that nearly universal need might suggest that there's a blockage between them and another and that it's a pretty common condition. It certainly is common to have trouble building a relationship with God. Most people enter the Christian life with wounds and unforgiveness weighing them down and holding them back from God. Every life at some point encounters hurt and rejection; it's the way of it. It's just part of being human and living with other humans. That may sound cynical to some but I think it's just reality.

I've found that even after all I've said so far, there are still plenty of people with glaring unforgiveness issues who nevertheless are not aware. Sometimes it's because they just don't want to be aware. I've been there. Who hasn't found themselves stubbornly unwilling to forgive someone who has hurt them deeply? That said, the verses below and their explanation are probably for you, for us all.

Sometimes we are ignoring the reality, but other times folks are completely unaware and innocent. They've read teachings like you found here, heard it preached repeatedly over the years, maybe even helped others grasp the concept of forgiveness with all its finer points, and genuinely feel that they're fine. They may have even received counsel in the past regarding the very events and people they still need to forgive. However, the impact of the trauma is so huge that their built-up defenses still haven't been penetrated by the truth. I've been there as well. Trust me when I say that these folks are not OK. There are probably red flags that others see but they don't, or don't know how to interpret them. Because we're so oblivious we may not even take seriously the comments other make about those flags, if they dare say anything at all.

If you're in this camp, well, you don't know it. I guess everyone who thinks they are OK had better read on! I'm going to use the most



reliable, knowledgeable, and trustworthy source we have to offer a little test you can give yourself. That's the Bible of course. I trust God will use it to help you along and open your eyes, if indeed they need it. Now, if you're really serious about knowing the truth, and have had others suggest you need to forgive but haven't seen that need your self, I encourage you to get with someone you know loves you unconditionally and give them permission to look at the test and give you their opinion of your heart condition.

**Answering the question,  
“Is there unforgiveness  
in MY heart?”**

**B**efore we proceed there's I more thing that I forgot to explain. Evidence suggesting you need to forgive won't surface only with, or be directed exclusively at, the person who offended you. Be sure to apply this to all relationships in your life. We can have no idea who or what from their past still impedes us. We have a problem but they have not connected it to the past. We have no idea who we need to forgive. Even if we do know who, we can become quite cold toward them over time. Maybe we know we shouldn't be angry and hateful so we've learned to manage our outward and maybe even the inward respond to some degree. Maybe it's managed well enough to convince ourselves that we have nothing left to do with that relationship except move on. We've run so quickly and impulsively away from thoughts about them and/or what they did or didn't do or say that we're able to escape before there's time to feel anything or react. The result is that we take this test and conclude that we pass because we've become good at stealing ourselves away from any unwanted and ungodly responses. We may feel we did so good on numbers 1-4 that we just skip 5, 6, and 7.

However, unforgiveness and the cancerous emotions that sustain it like anger, bitterness, hatred and defensiveness eat away not just at our own heart, but they infect those around us. It transforms from cancer into the bubonic plague! It affects and infects most every relationship we have. No matter how diligently we work to protect those we love, to suppress and control our emotions, eventually those diabolical feelings surface.

Picture a huge inflated beach ball that you're doing your best to keep under the surface of the water. It takes all your concentration to keep the weight of your hands distributed just right so that it doesn't pop out the side. The more you work the deeper you can push that ball. But, it only takes a split second of distraction, a moment given to enjoying the scenery, and you take your concentration off that ball. Once you do you can't stop it from escaping your grasp. The slightest shift in containment and it gets away. And like anything you submerge, the deeper you push it the higher it flies when you let it go! Just trying to take a little rest and enjoy life provides sufficient interruption in our efforts to restrain those emotions. Swoosh! Up they fly. And make no mistake, they can't be stopped and they're devilishly hard to get back under control! Frequently you won't want to control them. Other times you'll feel that baffling crazy pull of wanting to and not wanting to at the same time!

You had thought everything was under control. But any “innocent bystander” (those you love are nearby the most so they get dumped on the most) can be unfortunately enough to “trip” the right trigger. They just need to say or do something that stimulates the rotten response you have toward one you've never forgiven. They may just look or smell like the one you hate. Your reaction catches you by surprise. The surprise breaks the hold you have on the infection you hide underneath. The words they use, their tone of voice, their body language or facial expressions or just the subject they broach.

Something touches that old wound. Something provokes you to defiantly put your hands on your hips – which means they're not on the emotional beach ball anymore! The result is that you accidentally treat them as if they're that person you need to forgive.

So you may need to consider every relationship, even the ones you think are OK. Also, be ready to find that the person you're the worst toward isn't the real person you were originally hurt by. They just have a way of poking that infection and triggering your darker and hidden emotions. They really aren't the problem. Who or what they remind you of is. You may need to apologize to them but their only offense is their unfortunate and uncanny ability to bring that hidden hurt into the open.

The notes below won't only serve as an informal test but are designed to help you put actual names on your responses and identify your coping mechanisms. This will help you face the truth as the nasty sounding terms motivate you to change. The particulars will give you specifics to look for the next time you're offended. Again, "coping mechanisms" are the way you've come to instinctively deal with hurt, disappointment, betrayal, and rejection. It's the way you believe that you protect yourself from further exposure even if what you're really doing is relationally deadly to you and others.

The idea isn't that you need to get more right than you do wrong. You may be tempted to ignore the prodding of the Spirit if you can conclude that there's only a couple points you struggle with. But if God convicts you with a single word or description you would do best to heed that nudge and at least consider failing yourself even if you "pass" all others. A tendency, especially for those who see themselves as failures, or the genuine disciples who love God and truly want to please Him, is to throw up your hands half way through and assume you've failed completely. Failed worse than that ninth grade math exam or eleventh grade French

final! Let me reassure you that this is never the case. YOU may have several unhealthy responses programmed but you don't have them all. Again, help from a counselor here can be a real encouragement and necessity.

## A 7-Point Self-Test

The "test" comes from the following verses that I've pasted together from two different Bible versions:

**Ephesians 4:30-32** ...*Do not bring sorrow to God... by the way you live... <sup>31</sup> Get rid of (banish) all bitterness, rage, anger, (passion, rage, bad temper) harsh words (anger, animosity, brawling, clamor, contention), and slander (evil-speaking, abusive language), as well as all types of malicious behavior (spite, ill will, or baseness of any kind). <sup>32</sup> Instead, be kind (useful and helpful) to each other, tenderhearted (compassionate, understanding, loving-hearted), forgiving one another (readily and freely), just as God through Christ has forgiven you. (NLT and AMP)*

## Improper Responses To Offense:

**Grieving God** (1) *The Message*® says, "Don't break His heart." This is like a general statement that covers anything not specifically listed. What it implies is if your knee-jerk response would disappoint Him, it's improper.

Some so completely believe they're a worthless failure, having never known approval that they'll put things in this category that shouldn't be there. It's not wrong to feel hurt, even if you simply misunderstood a comment that was meant to build you up not tear you down. It's not even wrong to be angry, especially let's say, at injustice.

But what you do with it, now that's another subject all together. How you respond to or process that hurt and anger, and other reactions, is the issue. It's clear that responding like anyone else would, in ways

sanctioned by most people, may not be the same as God's ways. And it's Him you need to try not to grieve. David even claims, after adultery and murder, that when he sinned against another he really was sinning against God (Psalm 51:4a). Don't excuse yourself with "it was only human" or compare yourself with someone else. Hold yourself up to God's standard instead and ask yourself if He would approve?

Remember, you break His heart if you take forgiveness from Him but refuse to pass it on to others. Don't take the gift He's given you for granted by not spreading the love around. You're forgiven and guaranteed a place in His family and kingdom, so show some grace. To be forgiven of so much and yet refuse to forgive another, makes you evil, merciless, and a recipient of God's punishment. It infuriates Him, it breaks His heart. (Matthew 28:23-35).

**A**nger and Bitterness (2) Verse 31 say "get rid of" or "banish" anything remotely like unforgiveness. Usually when you throw something away it's because you deem it to have no more value to you. Keeping that garbage around may decrease your quality of life so you throw it out. So too with these evils. They're worthless garbage. There's no value here unless you treasure becoming an angry, miserable old man or woman. They don't protect you from more hurt, they hurt you all the more. Are you imprisoned here? Examine more closely with me what these poisons look like so you don't pass this by without having a clear understanding.

**Bitterness** – The original term literally means "sharp or pointed." Bitterness hurts others and has a sharp edge that cuts or wounds or scars. Does that describe your words, actions, humor? I have been and still can be if I'm not careful, a very prickly person. Touchy, sensitive and quick to put up defenses that were designed to protect and defend me. But that meant I "cut" others. Even my attempts at

humor betrayed me as they would often come out as personal attacks directed at others mistakes or foibles, making them feel stupid, ugly or otherwise devalued. A bitter person may not just use hurtful or hateful words but their whole persona may be jagged, rough and difficult to be around without feeling that sharp edge of their personality.

**Wrath/Anger** – When we're hurt and angry and that pain is allowed to stay around and seethe, to percolate, it brews a nasty cup of rage in due time. Someone with an unforgiveness issue will often have a bad temper. Full of resentment and animosity that boils over now and again into outburst of anger, hostility and aggression. For some it happens rarely, or only in certain circumstances, and for others it's chronic. They're dangerous to be around because they have become toxic. A combative person, with words or fists, usually is an angry person. Danger has triggered the fight or flight response and the angry person is often one who choose to fight.

Of course, that angry, violent tendency can be pent up inside in ones imagination and thought life. Scenarios that are never acted on are played out in the relative safety of one's mind and heart. But it's still wrong. I think that even though these people are safer for others to be around, it's worse for those that bottle it up than for those that vent. The "venters" that dump on the rest of the world usually feel better, at least for a while, after they explode! They go ballistic, settle down, and are possibly even apologetic. But the "bottlers" keep it all inside and stockpile that crud till it has damaged just about everything. And if they do ever go off, watch out, the more they stuff the more there is to surface when they snap!

**Malice** – As you probably can see, many of these negative characteristics blend together. Bitterness and anger are just not nice traits. The original language for "malice" suggests

an evil, vicious character, a desire to see others suffer, a disposition to harm. That's how we become when unforgiveness lingers because this is an evil and cruel trait. You may find here someone who's highly competitive, maybe even a pirate, a "cut-throat," who will try to win at all cost. It often costs his or her friends as much as it cost them, if they have any.

**Cruelty** – Here's a closely connected trait. This is just basically an unpleasant, unkind soul. They will be physically, verbally and/or emotionally mean or abuse. The word "combative" again comes to mind. They're prone to pick a fight. A cruel person just has an offensive way about them that strikes out and hurts those that get near. Words are often the favorite weapon and they may use humor. We can allow ourselves to say all sorts of unkind things in a way we think it's funny but we would never say to someone else with a straight face. Social media is one place you'll see this surface. The stuff people post sometimes is quite harsh and it's hard to imagine them saying those things to another's face. Some folks are not that careful, they'll say whatever they want and aren't safe because they are physically wild, uncontrolled, unpredictable and known to strike out without a moment's notice. That's cruel because it makes all those who are nearby to live in fear and self-defense not knowing when the next attack will come.

**Vengeance** – This consumes many poor souls. It's a vice that can take over a life, driving folks to all sorts of extremes. A vengeful person desires to get even or make offenses right. They want to be heard, understood, affirmed. They want to take control and force the offender to see and apologize and pay for their crime, maybe even more than would be just. The malice and cruelty wants them to suffer as much or more than they have. You'll find people who have a crusade to fight, a wrong to right, an evil to reverse, a war to fight, a battle to win. Unfortunately, they end up sometimes on a "witch hunt" looking for something that isn't

there. They may end up trying to make innocent people pay for what they believe they've done wrong, driven by fear and misunderstanding, and they are so consumed that they won't stop to prove or just refuse to see. They take up offenses easily, for themselves or others, sometime for those who don't want or need anyone to defend them, or for the wrong side of the issue defending the party that should be doing the apologizing!

**Frustration** – Frustration is suppressed anger that's turned inward. Confusion, despair, discouragement, depression and hopelessness can be the product. False guilt and self-hatred can be by-products. It's just not good to turn unforgiveness and its band of evil brothers inward on yourself.

**Hatred** – I know, you love them. You're just a little resentful, hurt and frustrated. So tell me what the difference is! Do you remember that I said you can love and hate someone at the same time? It makes sense because the ones you love the most are the ones that can hurt you the deepest. And if you have any of these symptoms in other relationship you should also remember that hatred always spreads; it eats away at your heart and soul like cancer. You can't be bitter at just one person. At that moment, when I realized I had hated in my life, the shock of the reality that this evil was lurking around in my life jolted me into an decision to forgive no matter what it cost. I thank God for that. I hope it does the same for you.

**Self Pity and Victimization** (3) A third test is no surprise because most people who feel slighted want a chance to tell their story in the hopes that others will side with them. We may even look for the opportunity or manipulate and concoct conversations just so we get a chance to tell our tale of betrayal and pain – real or imagined. Some of you have that feeling of victimization welling up in you even now because I suggested that your betrayal may have been imagined, unintended, accidental, or possibly non-

existent. But everyone misjudges events and words and intentions and fails to gather all the facts, and occasionally comes to the wrong conclusion. Some more than others, and people with this coping mechanism more than most.

**Clamor** – The word “clamor” in its original usage means an outcry, uproar or shout. The original term is an onomatopoeic word, a word that imitates the sound it describes, like “pow” or “bam.” The sound it makes imitates a raven’s grating, annoying cry. Imagine a crow constantly bleating in your ear. It could be likened to the annoying sound of a continually dripping faucet or a child at your knee saying “mom, mom, mom” or “dad, dad, dad” over and over until you finally listen.

(Come now, you wouldn’t have me believe that you’ve never been annoyed or irritated by your child’s incessant needs would you?!) Got the picture? Think of the thing in your life that is the most annoying because of its repetitive, never-ending, demanding, attention-seeking nature and you have clamor!

This is going to be a hard one to see in yourself because of the justification you have for feeling sorry for yourself and because few people want to think of themselves as bothersome. The person with this trait views themselves as the victim, making themselves the martyr by their reoccurring whining and complaint about their unfair treatment and the injustice of the world in general. The term you are looking for is self-pity – the self-indulgent belief that your life is harder and sadder than everyone else’s. You’re always the wronged and never the wrong-doer.

This person dwells on their suffering and wants everyone to know what was done to them so they cry out over and over in one pitiful way or another. They’re wrapped up in the inward rehearsal that keeps it fresh – wallowing, pouting, seeking sympathy. This of course makes them overly sensitive, prone to take up offenses unnecessarily, and to live

with a begrudging, martyr syndrome. To most around them, even though they’re unaware, they’re the irritating, exasperating, bellyaching whiners among us.

Not a very flattering picture is it? While the offense and pain maybe very real (we wouldn’t want to suggest that it isn’t), can you see why I said it would be hard to recognize even the slightest bit of this inclination in yourself? Dare you ask another if they see self-pity in you?

**Slander and Gossip** (4) Here’s another reaction, one that all of us have been on both sides of. I think we all could admit, at least privately right there where you sit, that we’ve spoken ill of another person, at least once. Of course, we’ve been falsely accused and misrepresented plenty as well.

**Slander** – To slander is to offend by saying something false or malicious that damages another’s reputation. This time, the original term is the word that we get “blasphemy” from and is a compound word meaning “to say” and “to injure.” Kind of speaks for its self doesn’t it? I guess the more common term would be gossip – making something widely known by indiscreetly and thoughtlessly repeating that which is either groundless or unsubstantiated. We call them rumors. Gossip isn’t always false. It could be information that can be proven true but is personally damaging and wasn’t widely known until you passed them it on. Information that when known, it causes others to think less highly of another than they did. It may of course be only partly true, or so presented by us that it’s made to appear unflattering. It’s all slander and gossip.

How about some legalese for you? We’ll call it “defamation of character?!” Two words say it all. This is a mocking, critical, sarcastic, faultfinding, judgmental, harsh, demeaning, ungracious spirit.

Whew! You made it through that but probably not unscathed. If some of those negative caricatures fit you, ask yourself and others if they actually characterize your life or are just occasional blips that you skillfully and humbly recognize, apologize for, and correct. If they're more like permanent fixtures with you, than you probably have some work to do.

## Proper Responses To Offense:

We're now into verse 32 of Ephesians 4 – the positive side, the good and right responses. Those reactions that should be found, should be learned and should be practiced. If these aren't traits you're known for, you again may have some unforgiveness skulking about in your heart.

**Kind and Tender-hearted** (5) The dictionary says that kindness is a generous, warm and compassionate nature. The Greek word employed means serviceable, helpful, useful. You must be generous and selfless to serve another. Love serves and builds up, hatred is self serving and destructive. Benevolence reaches out, cruelty puts itself first. Kindness is polite, giving, thankful, and people-centric while the opposite is rude, greedy, ungrateful and self-centered. The kind are merciful and gracious and strong enough to exercise qualities that some believe are a sign of weakness.

Forgiveness is itself an act of service because it may help heal another's life as well as your own. When you ask for or grant forgiveness you minister by helping the healing process along. Requesting forgiveness gives them the opportunity to make the decision to release you, freeing themselves from all the bad that grows out of failing to. That's being kind.

**Tender-hearted** – The tender-hearted are good spirited, warm hearted, and full of pity and understanding. They ask, "What horrible thing must they have endured to make them hurt others so?" A tender soul sees past their

own pain and rights to extend grace. This is not to excuse the hurt but to engender forgiveness. They give no quarter to a vengeful, hateful, critical spirit but pursues peace, healing, restoration.

**Forgiveness** (6) Here we are, full circle back to where we started. Are you forgiving? Is it habit, a matter of principle with you to consciously chose to freely and graciously give your favor unconditionally, regardless of the circumstances, every time, endlessly?! (Matthew 18:21-22) What conclusion do you feel pressed to after having looked this closely into the matter? Is there a face seared into your mind, an event that keeps playing over and over? Or is God coming at it the other way, using the self-test to alert you to a possible problem that you haven't gotten to the bottom of yet.

**Christlikeness** (7) In case you didn't know, these chapter and verse breaks in the Bible weren't there to begin with. They were added just to help people find their way around. One of the unfortunate ones comes right here between chapters four and five in our Ephesians passage. Please read them as a unit and let God speak to you through them.

**Ephesians 4:32-5:1-2**<sup>32</sup> *Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you.*<sup>1</sup> *Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents.*<sup>2</sup> *Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.*<sup>MSG</sup>

Have you learned proper behavior from your "Daddy-God?" Is your love selfishly cautious or wildly extravagant? I can tell you that I'm not very gentle or sensitive sometimes when my feelings are hurt. Do you (for the most part) love God and everyone else? You need

to forgive to deepen your relationship with God, and you need to “keep company with him” to learn how to love and forgive. The more you forgive the closer you’ll grow to God and the closer you get to Him the more you’ll forgive. It’s a reciprocal, self-supporting virtue. There’s a symbiotic sort of relationship between them. If you want one you need the other. Would you forfeit them both just because you don’t want to forgive?



## Grudges and God

The Newsboys sing a song called *Million Pieces* and the second verse with the chorus make a wonderful closing for us. It asks why you’re holding grudges in old jars, why do you want to show off all your scars, and what’s it going to take to get you to lay a few burdens down, it’s a beautiful sound... When you finally release those burdens and they all fall away like a million rain drops, falling from a sky that’s now blue, kissing your cares goodbye as they all fall like a million pieces, from high in the sky like a ticker tape parade... and now you’re free to fly! (Newsboys, Thrive © 2002) Wow! Doesn’t that sound refreshing and inviting and... easier!?”

The decision is yours. Forgive or not to forgive, that is the question? However, to know God better or not to know God is the same question. You can’t have your cake (unforgiveness) and eat it too (good friendship with God). I hope you found the answers you were looking for but it may mean that you didn’t hear what you wanted to!

Maybe you have another truth to face. Maybe you aren’t even one of His followers but know you need Him – not only to deal with your past and put it behind you, but in order to live in the present the way you’d like.

If you believe that you need Him to forgive your sin because it comes between Him and you, and accept that it was God Himself who died on that cross for you, you can simply ask. “God forgive me, I want that indescribable and never ending relationship with you that my sin prevents, so forgive me and make me yours. My life is yours in return.” Something like that will get the job done!

Now, if you just had that conversation with God, at the risk of sounding like a broken record, please get yourself to a church. It doesn’t matter so much which one as it does that your choice is both relevant and solidly Christian. If you walk in and it feels and looks like you’ve step through a time warp and returned to the eighties, you may want to try another church. Or if they seldom mention the Bible, Jesus Christ, sin and salvation as well as freedom, healing and the new adventure, I again suggest that you keep trying!

You’re going to be asking yourself where this new life and decision takes you now? Just because you prayed that prayer it doesn’t mean all your baggage flew out the window just now and is gone forever. Freedom and healing are coming but God doesn’t want to rob us of those things that will teach us how to live and love Him and trust Him. Therefore, He seldom wipes it all away at once. You need help to understand what you just prayed, to work through that unforgiveness baggage, and to find friends that are on the same road, headed the same direction, to travel with.

Before you go, I have a few quotes that may help you make your decision, in case you haven’t yet. I pray they’ll serve you well.

*"I cannot forget, but I can choose to disregard my memories. I don't have to let them linger in my thoughts. I don't have to act on my memories. I can choose to set them aside quickly, knowing that they are seeds of revenge Satan wishes to grow in my heart." (Quote from a man who saw most of his family killed by the Germans in WW I.)*

*"I will let no man narrow and degrade my soul by making me hate him." (Booker T. Washington)*

*"Forgiveness - giving up the desire to punish the one who has offended us – an informed decision to bear the pain of another's offense without demanding that he or she be punished for it."  
(Source unknown)*

*Forgiveness is the fragrance a flower leaves behind on the heel that crushed it. (Source unknown)*



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