

Developing the Ability to Forgive

INTRODUCTION.

A. Verses from Proverbs.

1. “The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, And his glory *is* to overlook a transgression.” (Proverbs 19:11, NKJV)
2. “Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; . . . Do not say, “I will do to him just as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work.” (Proverbs 24:17,29, NKJV)
3. “If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; For so you will heap coals of fire on his head, And the Lord will reward you.” (Proverbs 25:21-22, NKJV)

B. Defining forgiveness.

1. Forgive - *aphiemi* - to send away (Matthew 6:12)
2. Vine’s defines forgive (*aphiemi*) as “primarily, ‘to send forth, send away’ . . . denotes, besides its other meanings, ‘to remit or forgive’ (a) debts, . . . these being completely cancelled; (b) sins . . .” (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, pg. 250)
3. Example of debt forgiveness: Your bank calls you one day and tells you that you have been forgiven of your \$70,000 bank loan. There will be no more notifications, no more reminders of it, and no more payments. The forgiveness will not be thrown at you later, not used to manipulate you later on, and would not be misreported on your credit report.
4. As we will show, forgiving others of sin against us will be no different.

C. Let us begin by examining the standard of forgiveness as set by God.

I. STANDARD OF FORGIVENESS SET BY GOD.

A. God promised to remember our sins no more.

1. Hebrews 8:12; 10:17
2. Psalms 103:11-12 - “For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.” (NKJV)

B. When Jesus was persecuted, He was willing to forgive the transgressors. (I Peter

2:21-23; cf. Luke 23:32-34)

- C. Here is the standard:
 - 1. When we forgive someone, we are to no longer hold that sin against them. We should strive to not allow the thought of that sin affect the way we treat or feel towards the brother who sinned against us.
 - 2. Even if the brother is unwilling to ask for our forgiveness, we should not harbor feelings of ill-will towards that brother.

II. FORGIVENESS BEGINS WITH THE PROPER ATTITUDES.

- A. We must possess mercy. (Matthew 5:7)
- B. We must not seek revenge. (Romans 12:14,17,19,21; Matthew 5:39-42; I Peter 3:9)
- C. We must love our enemies. (Matthew 5:43-36)
- D. We must love our brethren. (I Corinthians 13:4-5) Note: With a love that is shown. (I John 3:18)

III. REASONS TO FORGIVE.

- A. We must forgive because God has forgiven us.
 - 1. Ephesians 4:31-32
 - 2. Colossians 3:12-13
- B. We must forgive if we want to be forgiven.
 - 1. Matthew 6:12, 14-15
 - 2. Mark 11:25
- C. If you every expect God to forgive you of a sin, then you must be willing to forgive you brother who has sinned against you.

IV. WHAT ARE THE LIMITS TO OUR FORGIVING OTHERS?

- A. First the conditions: (Luke 17:3-4)
 - 1. If your brother sins against you, you are to rebuke him. *Note: Matthew 5:23-24 also places the responsibility upon the offender to approach the one against whom he had sinned.*
 - 2. After you rebuke your brother, he is to repent, asking you to forgive him.
 - 3. After your brother repents, you are to forgive him. *Note: Even if your brother does not ask for forgiveness, by Christ's example you should have the willingness to forgive, so that at any point he is willing to repent, then*

you can forgive him.

4. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and repents each time, then you are to forgive for each transgression.
- B. Now, the limits: There are no limits to the number of times you are forgive your brother. (Matthew 18:21-35)

V. CAN WE FORGIVE AND HOLD A GRUDGE?

- A. Grudge - “a feeling of deep-seated resentment or ill will” (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary)
- B. Holding a grudge goes against Ephesians 4:31-32.
1. bitterness - bitter hatred
 2. wrath - “passion, angry, heat, anger forthwith boiling up and soon subsiding again” (Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon)
 3. anger - “anger, wrath, indignation” (Ibid.)
 4. clamour - “a crying, outcry, clamour” (Ibid.)
 5. evil speaking - “slander, detraction, speech injurious, to another’s good name” (Ibid.)
- C. Can a Christian forgive a brother or sister and still hold a grudge? Most certainly not! Does God forgive us and still hold a grudge against us? Again, most certainly not!¹

VI. BIBLE EXAMPLES.

- A. Consider the following examples of people just like your selves who were willing to forgive others.
1. Esau forgave Jacob. (Genesis 33:4,11)
 2. Joseph forgave his brethren. (Genesis 45:4-15; 50:19-21)
 3. Moses forgave Miriam and Aaron for speaking against his wife. (Numbers 12:1-13)
 4. Stephen asked the Lord to forgive his murderers. (Acts 7:60)
 5. David forgave King Saul. (I Samuel 24:10-12; 26:9,23; II Samuel 1:14-17)
- B. Quite often people will say, “I just can’t forgive him. You don’t realize how bad he has hurt me. I’m not Jesus. I can’t forgive that easily.”
1. Did your offender throw you into a pit where you were sold into slavery,

separating you from your family for eighteen years? That is what Joseph's brothers did to him, yet he forgave them.

2. Did your offender criticize the ethnic background of your spouse? That is Aaron and Miriam did to Moses and Moses forgave them.
3. Did he insistently, unreasonably demand your death, though you were innocent? Did he demand that a murderer and insurrectionist be released rather than you? Did he beat you so brutally that it almost killed you? Did he push a crown of thorns down on your head, strip you, put ridiculous clothes on you, hit you and spit in your face, make you carry your own instrument of death until you collapsed under its weight, give you vinegar and gall to drink, nail you to a cross, gamble to see who would get your clothing, and ridicule you as you were dying? . . . Yes, that's what they did to Jesus. And how did He respond? Did he curse them? Did he cry out, "I'll get even with you if it's the last thing I ever do!"? No, "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly." He simply prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." (Luke 23:34) (Keith Sharp, *Jesus Our Example of Forgiveness*)

VII. HOW CAN I CHANGE?

- A. Remember: Hatred and bitterness does you more harm than the offender.
- B. Ask for God's assistance through prayer!
- C. Practice praying for the offender. (Luke 23:34)
- D. Cultivate the grace of mercifulness and compassion. (Matthew 5:7)
- E. Put your self in the shoes of the offender.
 1. Would you desire to go through life unforgiven?
 2. Every time you sin against God, you are in the shoes of the offender. Do you want God to forgive you? If so, then you must be willing to forgive.²

CONCLUSION.

- A. The unwillingness to forgive can be one of the most expensive sour qualities you ever acquire. The unwillingness to forgive will cost you your happiness, your sanity, and your soul. If you are unwilling to forgive, to truly forgive, then God will not forgive you.
- B. Consider the following story of a little girl who was unwilling to forgive.

THE STORY OF DAISY by Phillip Yancey

Daisy was born into a working class Chicago family, the eighth child of ten. The father barely earned enough to feed them all, and after he took up drinking, money got much scarcer. Daisy shudders when she talks about those days. Her father was a "mean drunk," she says. Daisy used to cower in the corner, sobbing, as he kicked her baby brother and sister across the floor. She hated him with all her heart.

One day the father declared that he wanted his wife out of the house by noon. All ten kids crowded around their mother, clinging to her skirt and crying, "No, don't go!" But their father did not back down. Holding on to her siblings, Daisy watched through the bay window as her mother walked down the sidewalk, shoulders adroop, a suitcase in each hand, growing smaller and smaller until she finally disappeared from view.

Some of the children eventually rejoined their mother, & some went to live with other relatives. It fell to Daisy to stay with her father. She grew up with a hard knot of bitterness insides her, a tumor of hatred over what he had done to the family. All the kids dropped out of school early in order to take jobs or join the army. One by one they moved away to other towns. They got married, started families, and tried to put the past behind them. The father vanished - no one knew where and no one cared.

Many years later, to everyone's surprise, the father resurfaced. He had gutter out, he said. He had become religious. He had sobered up. He began studying the Bible and praying. For the first time in his life he felt loved and accepted. He felt clean.

And now, he told his children, he was looking them up one by one to ask for forgiveness. He couldn't defend anything that had happened. He couldn't make it right. But he was sorry, more sorry than they could possibly imagine.

The children, now middle-aged and with families of their own, were initially skeptical. Some doubted his sincerity, expecting him to fall off the wagon at any moment. Others figured he would soon ask for money. Neither happened. And in time the father won them over, all except for Daisy.

Long ago Daisy had vowed never to speak to her father - "that man" she called him - again. Her father's reappearance rattled her badly, and old memories of his drunken rages came flooding back as she lay in bed at night. "He can't undo all that just by saying 'I'm sorry,'" Daisy insisted. She wanted no part of him.

The father may have given up drinking, but alcohol had damaged his liver beyond repair. He got very sick, and for the last five years of his life he lived with one of his

daughters, Daisy's sister. They lived, in fact, eight houses down the street from Daisy. Keeping her vow, Daisy never once stopped in to visit her dying father, even though she passed by his house whenever she went grocery shopping or caught a bus.

Daisy did consent to let her own children visit their grandfather. Nearing the end, the father saw a little girl come to his door and step inside. "Oh, Daisy, Daisy, you've come to me at last," he cried, gathering her in his arms. The adults in the room didn't have the heart to tell him the girl was not Daisy, but her daughter Margaret.

- C. If someone has done you wrong, you must truly forgive them. You cannot forgive in word and not in thought and action. Once you forgive a person, you must release from the debt, never to hold it against them.
- D. Then and only then can you find true happiness and forgiveness from God.

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¹ The idea for this section came from an article by Keith Sharp, *Jesus Our Example of Forgiveness*

² This section came from a lesson by Bryan Loughmiller, *Forgiving or Unforgiving Which Are You?*, with the last point added by me.