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Forgiveness

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. (Romans 12:18)



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Understanding Forgiveness

People experience forgiveness when they let go of hurt feelings and grudges and genuinely want what is good for the one who wronged them. In our sin-stricken nature, we want to hurt people who hurt us. We believe not forgiving another will hurt them. But not forgiving doesn't hurt the one we can't forgive. It hurts God and us.

Forgiveness is hard. Many people feel the weight of forgiveness is their burden. It's not. Jesus got there first. He already carried the cross that forgave all our sins. God must mean more to us than what others think about us or feel toward us before we can experience forgiveness.

Many things will follow our obedience to forgive others, like freedom from God's wrath, freedom from going to hell, and freedom from guilt, shame, bitterness, and anger—even knowing we have God's forgiveness because we could forgive another. But the real prize is we get Jesus. The motive for us to forgive is that if we do, we get Jesus. Understanding that Jesus bore our punishment makes us feel forgiven and allows us to receive God's mercy to forgive others. When others receive our forgiveness, they experience God's grace, and we get Jesus.

Managing Forgiveness

We need forgiveness because our opposing beliefs and prideful hearts create conflict within our relationships. People in conflict are out to get, not give. But forgiveness aims to "give." How can we undeservingly take God's forgiveness of our sins but not forgive someone who offends us? What does that say about our hearts? We freely live by God's mercy and forgiveness, yet we are unwilling to forgive others.

We can't authentically forgive if we don't forgive from the heart. God promises if we hold on to an unforgiving spirit, He won't forgive us, but if we forgive others, He will forgive us. When we don't repay someone's wrongdoing with our wrongdoing, God sees how we reflect Jesus.

We play a much smaller role in forgiveness than most people think. We need only return good for evil and bless the one who wronged us. That's it. That's our responsibility toward our enemies, and we can do it whether the one who hurt us admits they hurt us or not. We leave the weight of judgment to God because He will judge justly. Anything we could do to others to "repay" their hurt is child's play compared to God's justice. The Lord shall judge His people for their sins.

Practice Jesus' Teachings

Jesus asks if we love only people who love us, how are we different from people who don't believe in God? Even people who don't believe in God love those who love them. Jesus teaches us to love all people, even those who don't love us in return. If we hurt someone and seek forgiveness, but they don't accept it, we should still want what is best for them. Jesus wants us to make peace with everyone to the extent possible.

If people can't accept our forgiveness, we move forward with healthy boundaries and pray for them without wanting to hurt them. Only God can change a heart. What matters is that when we forgive, we have integrity, just as Jesus did. Our intentions and actions are like Jesus' when we want what is good for people who wrong us.

Forgiving someone doesn't mean we must trust them or forget what they did to us. Some wounds cut so deep they hide in scars that never heal in this lifetime. Jesus knows all about wounds and suffering. He experienced all the painful moments we will ever go through and much more, so we would do well to learn from Him. Even if there is tension or separation between us and a loved one, and our relationship differs from how it once was, we can still pray for them and want what is best for them.

Connect

Connect with your child by sharing when you had to forgive someone and ask them if they ever experienced anything like that. If they don't have a "forgiveness" story, ask them if anyone has ever hurt them and how that made them feel. You want to see what's in their hearts, so continue asking questions until they see why they felt "hurt." Share the story about Jesus meeting a woman who people accused of wrongdoing, but when Jesus confronted those people about their wrongdoing, they all left when Jesus made them see they had made mistakes too. (John 8:1-11) Jesus wants us to be honest about our mistakes, but He doesn't want to punish us. He's already taken our punishment.

Teach

Don't respond to evil with evil. That reaction is more fitting for dangerous animals who attack when threatened. If you're upset that someone hurt you, stepping back is better than acting out in anger. If showing kindness doesn't change your offender's heart, seeking revenge won't help. Those who seek vengeance face consequences beyond our control. Justice belongs to God. Resist repaying someone's wrongdoing with equal harm because those who take revenge lose, while those who forgive, win. Someone who can control their emotions is stronger than a warrior. We deal with bad intentions against us by keeping our peace. God's Holy Spirit helps us react with integrity.

Model

Model how to forgive by acting out a scenario where you say words you regret after getting angry with your child because they didn't do what they said they would. Your

apology could be, "I notice that my anger hurt you. I'm sorry that my words and actions hurt you. I was wrong. I was only being selfish and thinking about myself. Do you forgive me?" Tell your child that no matter how small, every wrongdoing is part of God's plan for our lives. God allows trials and offenses to test and prove our faith. Jesus sacrificed His life for us by being nailed to a cross and dying for us. His suffering was for sin—not His, but ours. Jesus came to bring peace, not just between us and God, but also to help us get along with each other. He left an example so we might follow in His steps.

Prayer

Our Father, who is as far as near. We honor Your name above all else. You rule above and walk with us on earth. We ask for only what we need today. Your Word is the truth and life that we bring to others. Thank you for creating, nourishing, and sustaining us. Forgive us for our sins and help us forgive those who sin against us. Protect us from the temptation to hurt others or do anything that would separate us from You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Scripture

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. (Romans 12:18)

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, (Matthew 6:14)