What Is Forgiveness and How Can I Get It?

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What Is Forgiveness?

Read: Matthew 6:9–15
Forgiveness is one of the most important values of the Christian life. As believers, we know about it; we talk about it; we even expect it. But do we really understand it?

What are the four responses that are not truly forgiveness?
1. ___________________________________
2. ___________________________________
3. ___________________________________
4. ___________________________________

Read: Matthew 18:21–35
Pause the teaching for a moment and look up the dictionary definition for forgiveness. How is it defined?

Thought: “Forgiveness is surrendering my right to hurt you for hurting me” (Archibald Hart).

Why is forgiveness important?
1. ___________________________________

Thought: My ________________ with ________________ _____________ is a rain gauge of my relationship with __________.
2. ___________________________________
3. ___________________________________
4. ___________________________________

Your Turn
How have you typically forgiven others in the past?
____________________________________
____________________________________
In light of this study, how will you approach forgiveness in the future?

__________________________________
__________________________________

Review the section on the importance of forgiveness. Which of these reasons most motivates you? Why?

__________________________________
__________________________________

Really think about your relationships in light of the passages from Matthew. What do they reveal about your relationship with God?

__________________________________
__________________________________

Thinking Space

Use this space to write down what the Holy Spirit is teaching you today. What is He reminding you of through this session? Write one thing you will do as a result of God’s promptings.
Granting Forgiveness to Others

Read: Ephesians 4:31–32
Granting forgiveness to others sometimes seems unreasonable. Or maybe we just don’t know how to go about doing it. The whole idea of forgiving goes against our nature, but the Bible not only tells us we have to, it also shows us how.

True or False: God’s Word says to hold off our forgiveness until we feel like forgiving.

Why is it so difficult to forgive others?
1. ___________________________________
2. ___________________________________
3. ___________________________________

Thought: The issue is not ____________ you forgive, but ____________ you.

1. Scenario One: Your brother sins against you and you go. He repents.

   1. What are the three steps in this process (Matt. 18:15–18)?

   __________________________________
   __________________________________

   2. What does it mean to treat him as a “heathen” (Gentile) and a tax collector”?

   __________________________________
   __________________________________

   3. What is always the goal of repentance? Read Galatians 6:1–2.

   __________________________________
   __________________________________
Scenario Two: You’ve been sinned against and you go, but he doesn’t repent.

1. How do you respond if they don’t repent?
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________

2. How is it possible to forgive in situations like this?
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________

In this difficult situation, it is essential to ask God to give you the grace to forgive. Is someone on your mind right now? Pause for a moment; go to God in prayer and ask Him for the ability to forgive.

Scenario Three: You’ve been sinned against but you can’t go and they can’t repent.

1. What would be some examples of this scenario?
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________

2. What should you do?
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________

Thought: Forgiveness always ______________ with ______________.

Your Turn

Think of someone who has hurt you. What might be stopping you from forgiving?
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________

Which of the three scenarios fits this situation?
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________
Who is to "go" first?
_______________________________________

What steps might you take to bring closure to this hurt?
_______________________________________

Thinking Space
Use this space to write down what the Holy Spirit is teaching you today. What is He reminding you of through this session? Write one thing you will do as a result of God's promptings.
_______________________________________

_______________________________________

_______________________________________

_______________________________________

_______________________________________
Read: Matthew 5:23–24

You may think it’s hard to forgive, but wait until you need to ask for forgiveness. That’s one of the toughest things we have to do as a Christian. Perhaps that’s why the two least heard words in the English language are “I’m sorry.” But is it really necessary? Do I really need to go to someone and ask for forgiveness when I’ve wronged someone? The answer is “Yes.”

How would you explain the seeming contradiction between Matthew 5:23–24 and Matthew 18:15–18?

What are the excuses people use to avoid seeking forgiveness?
1. _________________________________
2. _________________________________
3. _________________________________
4. _________________________________

What are the seven principles of asking for forgiveness?
1. John 1:9 ____________________________
Matthew 5:25 _________________________
Psalm 51:2–3 _________________________
Ephesians 4:26 _______________________
Matthew 18:15 _______________________
Matthew 5:23–24 _____________________
Luke 19:8 ___________________________
Thought: Forgiveness is not an ______________ response, it’s an ______________ response. Forgiveness is always a choice.

Your Turn
Think of someone you have offended. If no one comes to mind immediately, go to God in prayer and ask Him to show you if there is someone. What excuse have you made for not seeking forgiveness from this person? What must you do now to be obedient to God in this situation?

_______________________________________

_______________________________________

_______________________________________

_______________________________________

Which of the seven principles do you need to put into practice today? Make a plan to live out that principle.

_______________________________________

_______________________________________

_______________________________________

_______________________________________

Write a prayer releasing your situation to God.

_______________________________________

_______________________________________

Thinking Space
Use this space to write down what the Holy Spirit is teaching you today. What is He reminding you of through this session? Write one thing you will do as a result of God’s promptings.

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_______________________________________
Forgiveness doesn’t just patch things up; it actually makes you a better person. The benefits of forgiveness go even further than most people imagine. Let’s consider the seven fruits of forgiveness.

**Fruit #1:** You become __________________ to the person from whom you were separated (Matt.18:15).

a. Who is the person at fault here?
   ____________________________________________

b. Why is it important to be reconciled with him or her?
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________

**Fruit #2:** You regain a ____________ relationship with God (1 John 4:20).

a. When you have a problem with your wife, children, etc., what does this indicate?
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________

b. What logic does John use in this verse to point out this problem?
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________

**Fruit #3:** Your ______________ life is restored (Mark 11:25).

a. What is the person doing when he/she realizes a grudge is being held?
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________

b. What is the consequence of failing to forgive?
   ____________________________________________
Fruit #4: It takes away the _______________ in your life (Eph. 4:30–32).

a. How does unforgiveness affect the Spirit who dwells in you?
   ___________________________________
   ___________________________________

b. What is the basis for forgiving one another?
   ___________________________________
   ___________________________________

Fruit #5: Forgiving might bring about _______________—personal and/or corporate (Phil. 4:2–3).

a. What was hindering revival in the church at Philippi?
   ___________________________________
   ___________________________________

b. What are those around these two women supposed to do?
   ___________________________________
   ___________________________________

Fruit #6: It _____________God has forgiven us (Matt. 6:12–14).

a. What does “forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” mean?
   ___________________________________
   ___________________________________
   ___________________________________
   ___________________________________

b. What does Jesus indicate we will be missing if we fail to forgive?
   ___________________________________
   ___________________________________
   ___________________________________
   ___________________________________

Fruit #7: It brings us a ___________ conscience (Titus 1:15; 1 Pet. 3:16; 1 Tim. 1:5).

a. What does a lack of forgiveness do to our conscience?
   ___________________________________
   ___________________________________
   ___________________________________
   ___________________________________

b. What is the result of having a good conscience?
   ___________________________________
   ___________________________________
   ___________________________________
   ___________________________________
Thought: We need to forgive, not because people are ________ for what they’ve done to us; we need to forgive because it’s the ________ thing to do.

Your Turn

Prayer is a time for God to speak to us as well as for us to speak to God. Spend a few moments right now listening to Him. Who is God speaking to you about? Does forgiveness need to be given to or received from this person?

_______________________________________
_______________________________________
_______________________________________
_______________________________________

Which fruit(s) do you find scarce or completely missing in your life?

_______________________________________
_______________________________________
_______________________________________
_______________________________________

What should be your motivation for forgiving?

_______________________________________
_______________________________________
_______________________________________
_______________________________________

What steps do you plan to take in the next week to see more of the fruits of forgiveness in your life? List at least three below.

_______________________________________
_______________________________________
_______________________________________

Thinking Space

Use this space to write down what the Holy Spirit is teaching you today. What is He reminding you of through this session? Write one thing you will do as a result of God’s promptings.

_______________________________________
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_______________________________________
It’s one thing to agree with the idea of forgiveness, but actually living out the discipline of forgiveness goes a lot deeper. We may not be able to forgive and forget, but we can choose to forgive and forsake our bitterness. Let’s see how.

Luke 15 actually contains three parables: the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin, the parable of the lost boy. All of them reflect God’s attitude toward the “lost,” but the parable of the “lost boy” gives us some special insights into the area of forgiveness.

This third parable is often called “The Parable of the Prodigal Son.” Using the following questions, summarize the story.

1. At what point did the younger son “wise up”?
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

2. What did the younger son choose to do? Why is this important?
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

3. How did the father respond?
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

4. What lessons do we learn about forgiveness?
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

5. How did his older brother respond?
   __________________________________________
6. How did the father respond to the older brother?
____________________________________
____________________________________

7. Who ended up in the house, enjoying the fellowship of the father? What made the difference?
____________________________________
____________________________________

Thought: You don’t forgive people because they’re ________ of forgiveness; you forgive people because you make a ________ to ________ them from what they’ve done to you.

Your Turn

Which son most closely resembles you?
____________________________________

Is there anything keeping you from enjoying the fellowship of the Father? What is it?
____________________________________
____________________________________

Who is sin ultimately against?
____________________________________
____________________________________

What are you going to do today to make a difference in your relationship with the Father?
____________________________________
____________________________________

Thinking Space

Use this space to write down what the Holy Spirit is teaching you today. What is He reminding you of through this session? Write one thing you will do as a result of God’s promptings.

____________________________________
____________________________________
____________________________________
____________________________________
____________________________________
____________________________________
Day 1: What Is Forgiveness?

What are the four responses that are not truly forgiveness?

1. Asking God to forgive someone for hurting you.
2. Simply shrugging off the offense.
3. Forgetting that the offense occurred.
4. Trying to figure out why the person hurt you.

Look up the dictionary definition for forgiveness. How is it defined?

n. The act of forgiving; pardon.
(From dictionary.com.)

Why is forgiveness important?

1. Because our relationship with others is important to God.

Thought: My relationship with other people is a rain gauge of my relationship with God.

2. It’s necessary for a right relationship with God.
3. God wants us to receive the maximum amount of rewards.
4. If we fail to forgive, it will create bitterness.

Day 2: Granting Forgiveness to Others

God’s Word says to hold off our forgiveness until we feel like forgiving. False

Why is it so difficult to forgive others?

1. Sometimes it’s because we don’t know how or what to say.
2. Sometimes it’s because of our pride.
3. Sometimes it’s because we don’t want to forgive.

Thought: The issue is not should you forgive, but will you.

Scenario One: Your brother sins against you and you go. He repents.

1. What are the three steps in this process (Matt. 18:15–18)?
   Go to your brother alone;
   if he won’t listen, take two or three others;
   if he still won’t listen, tell it to the church.
2. What does it mean to treat him as a “heathen” (Gentile) and a tax collector? To treat him as one who needs to be brought into fellowship.


Scenario Two: You’ve been sinned against and you go, but he doesn’t repent.

1. How do you respond if they don’t repent? You still forgive.

2. How is it possible to forgive in situations like this? You pay the debt yourself—by grace.

Scenario Three: You’ve been sinned against but you can’t go and they can’t repent.

1. What would be some examples of this scenario? Person has died or can’t be found.

2. What should you do? You forgive them anyway.

Thought: Forgiveness always starts with you.

Day 3: Seeking Forgiveness from Others

How would you explain the seeming contradiction between Matthew 5:23–24 and Matthew 18:15–18? No matter if you’re the offender or the offended, you are to “go.”

What are the excuses people use to avoid seeking forgiveness?

1. It happened before I was saved.

2. What happened is insignificant.

3. I don’t know where the person is.

4. I can’t afford to make it right.

What are the seven principles of asking for forgiveness?

1 John 1:9: Always start with God. Make sure your relationship with God is right.

Matthew 5:25: Get a right perspective. Forgiveness is the choice of the person who has been hurt.

Psalm 51:2–3: Take responsibility. Don’t expect forgiveness and don’t base your response on whether the person offended will forgive you or not.
Ephesians 4:26: Keep short accounts. Don’t let the sun go down on your wrath.

Matthew 18:15: Always maintain small circles. The scope of your confession is determined by the scope of your transgression.

Matthew 5:23–24: Make your confession personal. Go in person or in as personal a way as you can.

Luke 19:8: Make amends. Show that you have repented of your sin.

Thought: Forgiveness is not an emotional response, it’s an intellectual response. Forgiveness is always a choice.

Day 4: Fruits of Forgiveness

Fruit #1: You become reconciled to the person from whom you were separated (Matt. 18:15).
   a. Who is the person at fault here? A brethren, i.e. a fellow believer.
   b. Why is it important to be reconciled with him or her? Because you’re going to spend eternity with this person.

Fruit #2: You regain a right relationship with God (1 John 4:20).
   a. When you have a problem with your wife, children, etc., what does this indicate? You have a problem with God.
   b. What logic does John use in this verse to point out this problem? If you can’t love someone you can see, how can you love someone you can’t see?

Fruit #3: Your prayer life is restored (Mark 11:25).
   a. What is the person doing when he/she realizes a grudge is being held? The person is praying.
b. What is the consequence of failing to forgive? Your own trespasses (sins) are not forgiven; your prayers are not heard.

Fruit #4: It takes away the bitterness in your life (Eph. 4:30–32).

a. How does unforgiveness affect the Spirit who dwells in you? It grieves the Spirit.

b. What is the basis for forgiving one another? God in Christ forgave you.

Fruit #5: Forgiving might bring about revival—personal and/or corporate (Phil. 4:2–3).

a. What was hindering revival in the church at Philippi? The conflict between Euodia and Syntyche.

b. What are those around these two women supposed to do? Help them to be reconciled.

Fruit #6: It ensures God has forgiven us (Matt. 6:12–14).

a. What does “forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” mean? It can mean to the same extent that we’re willing to forgive others or it could mean to forgive us in the same way we forgive other people.

b. What does Jesus indicate we will be missing if we fail to forgive? We will miss the ongoing fellowship with God in our lives.

Fruit #7: It brings us a clear conscience (Titus 1:15; 1 Pet. 3:16; 1 Tim. 1:5).

a. What does a lack of forgiveness do to our conscience? It defiles it.

b. What is the result of having a good conscience? You will put to shame those who revile you.

Thought: We need to forgive, not because people are sorry for what they’ve done to us; we need to forgive because it’s the right thing to do.
Day 5: The Discipline of Forgiveness

1. At what point did the younger son “wise up”?
   When he hit rock bottom.

2. What did the younger son choose to do? Go back to his father. Why is this important? Because it was the father he sinned against.

3. How did the father respond? He saw him, ran to him, hugged and kissed him, forgave him.

4. What lessons do we learn about forgiveness? The father was eager to forgive; no apology was necessary.

5. How did his older brother respond? He became angry, refused to come in.

6. How did the father respond to the older brother? He went to him and tried to reason with him.

7. Who ended up in the house, enjoying the fellowship of the father? The younger son. What made the difference? The “prodigal” was willing to receive the father’s forgiveness, while the older brother chose to cling to his bitterness.

Thought: You don’t forgive people because they’re worthy of forgiveness; you forgive people because you make a choice to release them from what they’ve done to you.
Forgiveness is something we want but struggle to understand. In this study, Woodrow Kroll offers biblical instruction on what forgiveness is.

You’ll see that forgiveness isn’t a feeling but a choice—choosing to release others from a debt to you. This study also considers when it's necessary to forgive, how to seek it from those you’ve wronged and the results of seeking or granting forgiveness. Dr. Kroll then illustrates the beauty of forgiveness with a story Jesus told about a father and his two sons.

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Woodrow Kroll served as Senior Bible Teacher for the international media ministry Back to the Bible for close to 23 years. As the voice of Back to the Bible radio, his teaching continues to impact lives with the truths of Scripture and help people engage God’s Word on a daily basis.