

CRAIG CASTER

FORGIVENESS

AND RECONCILIATION

WORKBOOK

Jesus said, "...And forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us"
MATTHEW 6:12

Forgiveness and Reconciliation v2.0

By Pastor Craig Caster

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About the Author

Pastor Craig Caster is the Founder and Director of Family Discipleship Ministries. In early 1992 Craig began to experience a burden for families from the Lord. At this point in his life Craig was the Vice President of a large developing company in San Diego, California and had spent 8 years as a lay minister leading a marriage ministry as well as a youth ministry. During that year the Lord began to reveal the vision for this ministry and in January 1993, Craig left his career for full-time ministry. In 1994 Family Discipleship Ministries became a non-profit ministry in San Diego, California.

Craig has gained a reputation among many evangelical churches as a trusted resource for family counseling, seminars, and family ministry resources. He has developed biblically based marriage and parenting tools and taught thousands through seminars hosted in churches around the country and abroad. These biblical seminars have been embraced by the county of San Diego, and meet the requirement for parents under court order to attend parenting classes. Craig has served on several school and community based organizations. In 1997 Craig was asked by the San Diego City Attorney's Office to help design their *Parenting Project*, an early intervention program for troubled teens, also providing support, and resources for parents, in collaboration with the police department, juvenile probation, and the county courts.

In addition, under Craig's leadership, Family Discipleship Ministries developed and implemented a youth mentoring ministry for children from single-parent families, foster care, and group homes with over 400 graduates between 1994 and 2000. Over the past 20 years Craig has worked with both children and parents as a youth pastor, marriage counselor, teacher, and speaker.

Craig has been married since 1980. He and his wife are the parents of three grown children, and one grandchild.

About Family Discipleship Ministries

Family Discipleship Ministries is a non-profit ministry that was established in 1994, under the Founder and Director Pastor Craig Caster. The main purpose of this ministry is to support, educate, and train the body of Christ to more effectively minister to families. To accomplish this goal we offer family counseling, teaching seminars on marriage and parenting, spiritual discipleship, church leadership training, and counseling training. Family Discipleship Ministries also offers numerous materials in video and audio format, workbooks, paperback, and online resources in English as well as several other languages.

The vision of Family Discipleship Ministries is to reach out to Christian churches, enabling them to disciple their congregations in marriage and parenting. To date thousands of parents throughout the US and abroad have completed our biblical marriage and parenting classes hosted in churches as well as through our free online classes.

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The Sovereignty of God

The word **Sovereign** means - *Possessing supreme power, unlimited wisdom, and absolute authority.*

“All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him ‘What have You done?’”

-Daniel 4:35

“...You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O Lord, You know it all.”

-Psalm 139:1-4

Psalm 139:1-18 teaches that God knows each of us intimately, that all of our acts and thoughts are known to Him even before they are known to us. Before you opened your heart to God, by accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior, He knew whether you would come to Him or not and gave you that option through the gift of free will. God is not willing that any should perish and chooses that all would follow Him. But through the exercise of free will, He gives every individual the freedom to reject Him.

When God created Adam and Eve, He gave one restriction, which was not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When they disobeyed by listening to Satan, mankind came under the curse of sin. In Adam, God gave mankind the freedom to choose good, but through disobedience he chose evil; therefore, it is now reality that all who choose to become God’s children in Christ still live in a fallen world and are touched by the evil around them. If this were not true and God shielded His children from all trouble and evil, people would only be motivated to turn to Him for the guarantee of an easy life. In fact, this is the very argument that began the historic showdown in heaven between God and Satan concerning the life of Job.

Satan said to God:

“Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face.”

-Job 1:9-11

God *allowed* Satan to bring evil upon Job through the loss of his possessions, his children, and finally his health. God is a loving Father and does not *bring* evil into our lives; however, for His purpose and for our ultimate good, He *allows* us to be touched by evil. The outcome of Job’s suffering was greater trust and intimacy with God.

Job did not understand the reason that God was *allowing* him to suffer (God declared he was a righteous man in Job 2:3), so he asked, “Why?” For several chapters Job agonizes over this question, seeking a satisfactory answer. God never answers directly but turns Job’s attention to His power and glory, which is displayed in creation. Job was satisfied through deeper understanding of the greatness of God. When we suffer, like Job, we look for an explanation. “Why, why, why?” One of the many lessons we learn from Job is that “Why?” is the wrong question. We should instead ask God, “What?”

◆ **What are You trying to teach me?**

◆ **What is Your will for me in this season of suffering?**

*"...God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust."
-James 1:13,14*

*"Then Job answered the Lord and said, 'I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted...I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but not my eye sees You...'"
-Job 42:1-6*

◆ **This being true, what part of your life is beyond God's power, wisdom, or authority?** _____

◆ **What day or circumstance has touched you that God did not know beforehand?** _____

*"In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works everything in conformity with the purpose of His will."
-Ephesians 1:11*

◆ **How should you respond to life's disappointments, difficulties, suffering, and trials?**

If God knew all that would happen to us before we were born, then it follows that through His foreknowledge we were predestined through His grace to live the life given to us. God does not prevent evil from touching us, or save us from our bad choices, but He does promise to work all for good in the life of those who are committed to Him (Romans 8:28-29).

*"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son..."
-Romans 8:28, 29*

For example, we can choose to harbor bitterness toward parents who disappointed us, a spouse who deserted us, friends who failed us, a drunk driver who killed a loved one, or we can place our faith in a sovereign God.

When we come to Christ, we trust God with our eternal destiny. We must also trust Him with our past and present circumstances; Christ alone can comfort and strengthen us both in and through our trials, and can bring good out of bad. It is only through our faith and obedience that God can and will give us peace, and bring praise, honor, and glory to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Read the following passage and write in your own words what it is saying and how it can be applied to your personal circumstances.

"...In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than

gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

-1 Peter 1:3-7

Trials and Tribulation

◆ GOD’S WORD TEACHES THAT TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS ARE PART OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation’ but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

-John 16:33

Jesus tells us that we can have peace and that He has overcome the world, but still in the midst of trials we ask, “Why? What is *God’s* purpose?” Just as the refiner places crude gold into a crucible and administers heat to bring dross (impurity) to the surface, God allows His beloved children to go into the crucible of suffering to be *refined* and *transformed* into the image of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

“He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness.”

-Malachi 3:3

If we trust ourselves to God’s goodness and purpose, our hearts will become permeated with the love, hope, and confidence of Jesus Christ. Others will see the righteousness of Jesus Christ being worked out in us.

Remember Romans 8:28-29:

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son...”

-Romans 8:28, 29

God does not say *some* things work together for good, but *all* things. The key is faith; if we choose to believe God’s promises and trust Him in all of our trials and tribulations, we will be victorious and God will be glorified. In this passage, “...to those who love God”, are those who have received Jesus as Lord and Savior, which includes an understanding that God’s purpose in this life is to deliver us from the power of sin, which translates to becoming one who is able to choose righteousness over evil, glory to God.

“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.”

-2 Corinthians 2:14

- ◆ Are you willing to trust God with the pain that others have caused in your life? Yes No
- ◆ Are you willing to allow God to transform your life through trials?
- ◆ Are you willing to trust God as you deal with hurts and trials in your life?

“There are times, says Jesus, when God cannot lift the darkness from you, but trust Him. God will appear like an unkind friend, but He is not; He will appear like an unnatural Father, but He is not; He will appear like an unjust judge, but He is not. Keep the notion of the mind of God behind all things strong and growing. Nothing happens in any particular unless God’s will is behind it, therefore you can rest in perfect confidence in Him.”

My Utmost for His Highest Oswald Chambers

The Cost of UnForgiveness

The word *forgive* means literally *to give away*. When a debt is forgiven, the rights to payment are *given away*. If someone injures me and I forgive them, I *give away* the freedom to continue being angry and resentful towards the one who wronged me. To do this breaks many strongholds that lead to emotional and psychological problems. To trust God and forgive others means giving our hurts to God, letting Him take them away from us. In this way, we give away any right we may have to resent or seek retribution. Through God, we give a pardon for the offense. The word *pardon* is derived from Latin, *perdonare*, meaning to *grant freely*. True forgiveness is undeserved, unmerited, and free. It is not *just* or *fair*. In the Scriptures, to *forget* means, *to let go from one’s power*.

When we refuse to grant forgiveness, choosing to maintain our *right* to demand payment for wrongs done to us, there is a price to pay. Unforgiveness, or being unwilling to let go of offense when we believe another person has wronged us, results in a negative emotional condition. The most common is *resentment*, which means *to feel again*. **Resentment clings to past hurts, reliving them over and over.** Resentment, like *picking a scab*, prohibits our wounds from healing.

“See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.”
-Hebrews 12:15

- ◆ In Hebrews 12:15, we learn that bitterness is like a deep root taking hold in the human heart, which then grows and produces *fruit*; however, rather than nourishing others, this bitter fruit defiles both us and others.
- ◆ Most people do not realize or readily admit to harboring unforgiveness, resentment or bitterness because they only recognize it as a logical emotion after being hurt. They see their condition as justified and seek others to listen to their complaints, or sympathize with them. Ephesians 4:31 teaches that there will be undeniable evidence in an individual’s life that the bitter tree of resentment is growing within their heart.

“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.”

-Ephesians 4:31

Wrath – *An outburst of a strong, vengeful anger or indignation, seeking retribution.*

Anger – *A state of mind marked by fretfulness and reacting to life’s challenges with frustration.*

Evil speaking – *Unkind words, verbal abuse against someone, clamor/slander, wounding someone’s reputation by evil reports, backbiting, insult and defamation.*

Malice – *Hateful feelings that we nurture in our hearts. A desire to see another suffer and/or to separate ourselves from that person, not wanting to work toward reconciliation.*

Ask yourself, “Are any of these common in my life?”

- Pride
- Self-righteousness
- Self-pity
- Emotional disturbances
- Anxiety, tension & stress
- Health problems
- Eating Disorders
- An unhealthy sense of self-confidence
- Lack of trust in relationships
- Lack of intimacy in marriage
- Sexual Dysfunction
- Judgmental & critical of others
- Ultra-sensitive & easily offended
- Absence of peace & joy
- Broken fellowship with Jesus
- Afraid to lead as a husband
- Afraid to follow as a wife

Why Forgive?

Along with the emotional and social devastation that results from unforgiveness, we are indebted to forgive because:

◆ GOD COMMANDS IT

Obedience to God is not optional. Deciding when we will and will not obey His commands leads to an unfruitful, ineffective and spiritually barren life.

“But love your enemies, and do good...and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

- Luke 6:35,36

“And whenever you stand praying. If you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.”

-Mark 11:25

◆ IN FORGIVING, WE BEAR THE IMAGE OF JESUS

As Christians, we are called to carry the name of Christ to a lost world. In fact, the term *Christian* means *little Christ*. Christ demonstrated forgiveness, came to this earth and died to establish forgiveness for the guilty; to bear His image we must be willing to forgive others, as He forgives us. Christ commissioned the church to proclaim forgiveness. You must forgive others to bear the image of Christ within yourself !

“Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.’”

-Luke 23:34

“...the one who says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same manner as He walked.”
-1 John 2:6

◆ **FORGIVENESS BREAKS THE CYCLE OF PAIN, BLAME AND STRONGHOLDS**

Forgiveness brings healing to a hurting person, functions as an antidote to the poison of bitterness; however, it does not address all issues of blame and fairness, but often disregards those altogether. Remember, the hurt and resentment is left behind with God, while obedience to forgiveness brings freedom and enables one to start over in a relationship, when that applies.

This truth is demonstrated in the life of Joseph, Genesis chapters 37-45. Betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery, he refused to allow the root of bitterness to take hold in his life. After years of separation, when the family was reunited, Joseph testified of the healing work that God had done in his life through forgiveness, demonstrated by the names of his sons.

In Genesis 41:51,52, we read:

“Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, “For,” he said, “God has made me forget all my trouble in all my father’s household.”

“He named the second Ephraim, “For,” he said, “God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction...”

In this passage, *forget* does not mean cease to remember, but means to *let go*, or cease to let hurts control your present life. Joseph’s *fruitfulness* was directly related to putting his trust in God’s sovereignty and forgiving others. Remember that resentment means *to feel again*. Instead of multiplying his hurt by feeling it again and again, Joseph chose to trust God as the overseer of all events in his life.

Unforgiveness imprisons us in the past and locks out all potential for a fruitful life.

During Joseph’s years in Egypt, he allowed God to heal a heart that had been broken by his own brothers. Later, when given the opportunity, he demonstrated his healing through acts of love, forgiveness, and grace to his brothers. Joseph speaks to them in Genesis 45:

“Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life...and to keep you alive by a great deliverance...He kissed all his brothers and wept on them, and afterward his brothers talked with him.”

There was no blaming and no explanation demanded, only the voice of mercy and forgiveness. The way was cleared for Joseph and his brothers to be reunited and begin a new relationship.

◆ **FORGIVENESS LOOSENS THE STRANGLEHOLD OF GUILT IN THE OFFENDER**

“...in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

-Ephesians 2:7

Forgiveness brings freedom to all involved. God set Joseph free, but his brothers would have carried their grief to the grave if Joseph had not forgiven them. Remember, we forgive because God forgives us in Christ. That same forgiveness undeserved and unearned, is what we owe to others and functions to relieve the oppressive burden of what we know as guilt.

If Jesus had not extended kindness and forgiveness to sinners, we would all forever exist in the stranglehold of guilt. He made the first move toward us, which made it possible for us to be reconciled to Him.

Reconciliation

To *reconcile* is to restore to friendship or harmony, to settle or resolve differences. It is the doing away of an enmity, the bridging over of a quarrel. Reconciliation implies that the parties being reconciled were formerly hostile to and/or separated from one another.

NOTE: there are situations where reconciliation is *not* necessary, possible, or even needed, such as:

- An emotionally or physically abusive parent or ex-spouse.
- A random person that hurt you or a loved one: a rapist, a drunk who hurt or killed a loved one, a teacher or coach that verbally hurt you, etc.

Wisdom applies when considering reconciliation, which is different than forgiveness. In all of our relationships, to establish boundaries for emotional and physical well-being is essential. And any reconciliation that is going successfully will be accompanied by kindness and peace rather than anger and turmoil.

“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”
-Ephesians 4:31,32

The Scriptures instruct us to *“Let all bitterness... be put away from you... be kind... tenderhearted, forgiving...”* It guides us and instructs us in each of these questions.

- ◆ **How do we put away bitterness?**
- ◆ **How do we reconcile with someone that we have offended?**
- ◆ **How do we repair the hurt we have caused others?**
- ◆ **How do we forgive someone who has offended us?**
- ◆ **How can we change our own feelings about a wrong done?**

If You Need To Be Forgiven

As an act of the will, you must:

1. **CONFESS YOUR SIN TO GOD, ASK HIM TO FORGIVE YOU AND BY HIS HOLY SPIRIT TO FILL YOUR HEART WITH HIS LOVE.**

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered...When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin to You and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,” and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.”

-Psalm 32:1,3-5

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

-1 John 1:9

“As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

-Psalm 103:12

- **Take a moment right now to cry out to God, asking Him to forgive you and to fill you with His Holy Spirit to strengthen you to obey.**
- **God alone forgives sins. He forgives and He forgets. By faith, accept God’s absolute forgiveness and cleansing.**

“Forgiveness is not an emotion...Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart.”

-Corrie ten Boom

2. IF POSSIBLE, GO TO THOSE YOU HAVE WRONGED, HUMBLY MAKE CONFESSION AND ASK FOR THEIR FORGIVENESS.

“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”

-Matthew 5:23-24

Write out your commitment to obey Matthew 5:23,24.

Write out names and briefly what needs to be said for forgiveness from each person.

Six of the most powerful words
in the English language:
“I was wrong. Please forgive me.”

When possible, do this face to face. However, due to logistics or possible confrontation, you may have to communicate with the person by telephone or in writing.

Note: Don't let distractions or other obstacles delay this act of obedience. In our modern society, the telephone, postal service, email, and texting can put us in touch with others rapidly.

Share your decision with a trustworthy Christian friend, asking them to prayer partner with you and hold you accountable to follow through on this commitment.

Note: If the person you have wronged has passed away, you need simply go to God with your confession.

3. SPEND TIME DAILY WITH THE LORD IN HIS WORD AND IN PRAYER.

One of the many negative consequences of not seeking or giving forgiveness is a *hindered relationship with God*. Praise the Lord that He never leaves us or forsakes us, but our own heart is what grows cold and feels separated, thus affecting our intimacy with Him. I believe this is a *consequence* that God designed to motivate us to practice forgiveness in our life.

*"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."
-Matthew 6:33*

Write out your decision to spend time *daily* with God by reading of His Word, and in prayer and meditation.

4. PONDER THE MEANING OF THE CROSS AND THE SACRIFICE JESUS MADE FOR YOUR SINS.

*"For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."
-Titus 3:3-5*

Take a moment right now and thank Jesus for all that He has done for you: for forgiving all of your sins; for His perfect plan of transforming you into His image; and for the gift of His Holy Spirit.

IF YOU NEED TO FORGIVE

1. PRAY AND ASK GOD FOR THE STRENGTH TO OBEY AND FORGIVE THE PERSON OR PERSONS.

“So Jesus answered and said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt...if you say to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ it will be done.”

-Matthew 21:21

God promised to give us the strength to move mountains. This may be your Mt. Everest!

“Whenever I see myself before God and realize something of what my blessed Lord has done for me at Calvary, I am ready to forgive anybody anything, I cannot withhold it. I do not even want to withhold it.”

-Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

We know that it is God’s will that we forgive others, so we can be confident that if we ask for this strength, it will be granted.

2. COMMUNICATE YOUR FORGIVENESS TO THE PERSON OR PERSONS.

“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.”

-1 John 5:14

“Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.”

-Romans 14:19

Get Motivated!

In Matthew 22:36-40, the Lord Jesus revealed an essential truth when answering this question: *“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?” Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”* Jesus Himself said that our love for others is equally as important as our love for Him.

We want God to forgive us and, in fact, we ask for this regularly and depend upon it. God shows His love to us, and we are to respond by first loving Him and then loving others. This verse is NOT saying our love for others will ever put us in conflict with God’s desires or will for us, but that all love that we show to others will be within the scope of our obedience to Him. We will not put our own desires or the desire to satisfy others over our obedience to God.

Matthew 5:22 reads, *“But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.”*

Let’s bring some clarity to the words in this verse. To be “angry with his brother” means; treating someone in thought, word or deed in an unloving way. How common is it among believers today to treat a spouse, child, friend, employee, or even a stranger, in an unloving way and excuse their behavior rather than seek reconciliation?

The word *raca* means to hold someone in contempt, judge, or believe them to be worthless or less than you are in some way. The word *fool* means one who is morally worthless and undeserving of salvation. These are serious charges that many believers are aiming at others for one reason or another. The Lord says in 1 Corinthians 6:20, *“for you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s”*.

We are to glorify or, in other words, reflect Christ to all with no exception. Lingering thoughts or behaviors toward others that are unloving or not Christ-like are inexcusable and require **repentance** both toward God and the person. Matthew 5:23-24 says, *“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift”*.

When do we go to the altar? This is referring to our fellowship with Jesus, our time in prayer and thanksgiving and asking petitions of Him. It is our daily acts of devotion and our desire to abide in Him. John 15:5-6 says, *“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing”*. To abide means to dwell with; to live in a constant awareness of being the temple of the Holy Spirit. And it says that **IF** we do it, we will bear much fruit, for without His *grace* we can do **NOTHING**. So, going to the altar refers to our fellowship with Jesus and our ability to receive the grace necessary for bearing fruit and obeying His will.

When we owe someone forgiveness, either by the asking or giving, God says we first must clear this up before we can expect His blessing and grace. What are the gifts in Matthew 5:23? *“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar...”*. We know that bringing sacrifices to the temple was a common practice for the Jews as part of atoning for their sins. Our gifts today are praise, tithes, worship, obedience, and service to Him. Yet Jesus said He will not receive these gifts if you owe anyone reconciliation.

1 Samuel 15:22 says, *“Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.”* So we see that service and work for God will not fix this problem.

In 1 Corinthians 11:26-32, we are exhorted to *examine* ourselves before we take communion: *“For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. **For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.**”*

How often do Christians come to church and partake of communion without first examining their heart to see if they are harboring bitterness and/or have sinned against someone, and do not repent or plan on being reconciled with that person/s?

The word reconcile means to make things right; to change ones feelings or perspective toward another; or to pay a debt owed.

Romans 13:8 tells us, “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.” As Christians we have a debt to pay that God Himself says we owe to others: to love them in thought, word, and deed. This also includes forgiving those who have hurt us; many Christians are harboring bitterness, resentment, or un-forgiveness toward someone. They justify harboring these feelings because this person has not yet paid any deserved consequences, nor have they taken any responsibility for their behavior. It is a fact of life for all people: we will be hurt by others, even those who are supposed to love us. Our parents, siblings, spouses, uncles, aunts, friends, pastors, teachers, etc. can hurt us both ignorantly and/or deliberately.

The word *forgive* is a verb, or an **action** word. God is using His Word to speak to you right now, revealing truth to act upon.

Forgiveness is not an easy thing to do, therefore you must not try to stand alone, but seek the *support* and accountability of a mature Christian friend, spouse, or prayer partner to help you follow through.

Write out your commitment to forgive the person, or to ask for forgiveness of a person that God reveals to you. Give yourself a deadline for contact so you don't put it off!

*“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you.”
-Matthew 6:14*

In some cases, due to logistics, cost of travel, safety to you, or the ability of the other person to accept what you need to say, a letter, email, text or telephone call may be the best way for you to accomplish this.

Keep these points in mind when either speaking or communicating in writing:

- 1. You are doing this out of obedience to your Heavenly Father who loves and cares for you.** He wants you to be free from the bondage and oppression you have been experiencing as a result of unforgiveness.
- 2. You do not have to rehearse every detail of their offense against you.** Many times, especially when forgiving parents, they are completely unaware of what they may have done to hurt you. In other cases, offenses may have been blatant such as sexual, physical, or emotional abuse, rape, abandonment by a parent, friend, or spouse, slander spoken against you, etc. Then you can be more specific as to why you need to forgive.
- 3. Do not try to compel others to own up to their offenses.** God has called you to obey, not to be a prosecuting attorney, jury, judge, or to try and make them confess that what they did was wrong!

- 4. Keep it short.** In many cases, due to the high level of emotion, we can find ourselves saying things we didn't intend and actually undermine the purpose of the meeting, letter, or conversation.
- 5. Finally (if applicable), ask them to forgive you for harboring bitterness toward them.** Remember that what they may have done was wrong and offensive, but bitterness and unforgiveness is *equally wrong*.

*"In the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel."
-Romans 2:16*

*"Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things."
-Romans 2:1*

*"The degree to which I am able and willing to forgive others is a clear indication of the extent to which I have personally experienced God my Father's forgiveness for me."
-Phillip Keller*

Maintaining Your Commitment to Forgive

The person you have forgiven may continue to be a regular part of your life; possibly a parent, father/mother-in-law, your child, or a spouse. When this is the case, you may encounter a battle between the Spirit and the flesh after you have asked for forgiveness or have forgiven them.

*"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another."
-Galatians 5:22-26*

The forgiveness experience has changed you, but it does not necessarily change *them*. God has had a major victory in your life, bringing you to this place of surrender and obedience; however, their position and/or their brash personality may not have changed! And they may continue to hold bitterness toward you; this circumstance will require that you seek God *daily* and possibly in the moment for *His strength* to continue on your path of mercy and compassion.

For example, you forgive a parent for being harsh and unloving, ask them to forgive you for harboring bitterness, yet they continue to be harsh and unloving. Your *flesh* may want to react in the way you did in the past, but God will be faithful to produce His fruit in your life as you *surrender* to Him moment by moment.

*"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."
-Ephesians 6:12*

You must *keep in mind* that your obedience in forgiveness was not so that the other person or persons would change. Until they surrender their lives to the Lord, they

cannot change. Only **God** can change our hearts and renew our minds, but it will only happen as we surrender to Him.

We are involved in a spiritual battle every day. The enemy, Satan, does not want you to obey God or have victory over sin and hurts; therefore, he will attack your mind with past memories, evil thoughts, lies, temptations, and condemnation. *You* must exercise mental self-control and remember *what* and *whom* you are battling!

“Be angry, and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give an opportunity to the devil.”
-Ephesians 4:26,27

This is the reality in which we live! Satan hates to lose ground in your life. He does not like the idea that he has lost the ability to rob you of God’s peace and joy.

◆ HOW DO I STOP GIVING THE DEVIL OPPORTUNITIES TO WORK HIS DESTRUCTION IN MY LIFE?

1. Test each thought that enters your mind by God’s Word to see if it is from Him, from your flesh, or from the enemy.

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.”
-2 Corinthians 10:3-5

“Finally brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things.”
- Philippians 4:8

2. Pray in each instance, asking for God’s power to do His will.

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”
-Romans 12:21

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”
-Romans 15:13

3. Resist and rebuke the devil in the name of Jesus – FIGHT!

“Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil...dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, “The Lord rebuke you!””
- Jude 1:9

“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God...casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you...your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith...”
-1 Peter 5:6-9

“... I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.”
-2 Corinthians 2:9-11

God wants you to be aware of the devil's devices so that you can have victory. Unforgiveness is one of Satan's most powerful tactics to keep God's people in bondage! Jesus showed us the importance of using Scriptures to combat the enemies' deceptions and lies (Matt 4:4, 7, 10). Have an *action plan* by using the Scriptures above, and the many Scriptures in this study to *combat* any unbiblical thoughts into God's perspective. Use some 3x5 index cards to write the Scriptures on. Then try to memorize them by carrying them around in your pocket and reviewing them in the morning and night. As you pray over and memorize these Scriptures you will hide God's Word in your heart (Ps 119:11), and you will be able to quote the Scripture, to yourself to reinforce the truth, to replace evil thoughts, and to the enemy as Jesus did. When the enemy brought lies to Jesus, Jesus said, "*it is written*" (Matt 4:4, 7) and quoted Scripture back to him, we must do the same. Truth will always prevail.

You May Need to Establish Boundaries

It is important to know that when you give or ask for forgiveness, it does not release another person to treat you disrespectfully and/or harshly. *Example:* your mother was very harsh or manipulative when you were growing up and she continued after you moved out, got married, etc. After forgiving her, you can set boundaries for the relationship: "Mom, I want a relationship with you but need to establish some boundaries. I need you to speak to me in a loving way and I promise to do the same toward you. If either of us says something unkind to the other, we can say 'that hurt' and/or 'I wish not to talk about that subject', then we need to apologize and/or stop talking about it. If those boundaries are not respected, then I will leave/hang up and we won't talk for a few days. Mom, the only way we can truly know if we desire to have a relationship is by the way we love and respect each other."

◆ What if the person I need to forgive is deceased? Can I still forgive them?

Bitterness lives on in the human heart long after the object of that bitterness has died. It is so important to view forgiveness as powerful medicine to heal the soul of many unhealthy conditions; receive this "antidote" and God can bring healing, even fill those voids that trouble your soul. The death of the offender does not nullify God's Word; biblical forgiveness requires us to take action. You must begin with confession to the Lord: *confess* means *to acknowledge or disclose one's misdeed, fault or sin*. It is helpful to make your confession out loud and express your forgiveness of the deceased person in the presence of a trusted friend, spouse, pastor, counselor, etc.

Use the following prayer to help guide you:

"Lord Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross and forgiving me for all of my sins. I agree with Your Word that I must forgive this person for the hurt they caused me. I ask You for the strength to obey and speak these words of forgiveness.

I forgive...for.... I ask you to take away my hurts and forgive me for holding on to this for so long. In Jesus Name I pray. Amen"

◆ What if the person that I am forgiving does not want to reconcile the relationship?

You must keep in mind that you are only responsible for your part of reconciliation. Regardless of the position the other person takes, you must obey God by asking for

forgiveness and giving forgiveness. If the other person refuses to grant you forgiveness or they do not acknowledge their wrong toward you, God will still bless you for your obedience and pour out His peace, grace, and mercy upon your life. You will still experience His freedom from bondage.

You cannot place any *expectations* or *requirements* upon what the other person may say or do, but surrender all to the Lord and *trust Him* to work in the midst of your circumstances. This is a major personal battle that many people face with this act of obedience.

We must not lean on our own understanding, but obey and surrender to God and His will. He has given us spiritual laws to govern, protect, and set us free. His Word gives us understanding and instruction in how to follow these laws. Our flesh, pride and fear will keep us from trusting and obeying God in these situations, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can overcome.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths.”
-Proverbs 3:5,6

Pray this prayer:

“Lord Jesus, I pray for the strength to trust You in these circumstances. Help me to remember that I am doing this for You. I do not look to... for anything, but place my life in Your hands. I pray for reconciliation with this person, but I know that I can only do my part. I pray for...to surrender to You that You might be glorified. I trust you entirely with the results. In Jesus’ Name I pray. Amen”

Conclusion

It can be extremely difficult to forgive, but life is harder when we *do not* forgive because we are harboring sin and missing out on what Jesus did for us on the cross. Our experience of God’s forgiveness is directly related to our ability to forgive others. A readiness to forgive others is one indication that we have truly repented of our own sin, surrendered our life, and received God’s forgiveness. A surrendered heart toward God cannot be a hard heart toward others.

Pride and fear keep us from forgiveness and reconciliation. Refusing to give in or be broken, insisting on your rights, and defending yourself are all indications that selfish pride is ruling your life, rather than the Lord. When fear of “what-if...?” is consuming and controlling you, pray for the faith to trust and obey God. Enemies are very expensive to keep; Matthew 18:21-35, warns that an unforgiving spirit will put you in an emotional prison.

“The first and often the only person to be healed by forgiveness is the person who does the forgiving... When we genuinely forgive, we set a prisoner free and then discover that the prisoner we set free was us.”

-Lewis Smedes