



## CHRISTIANS DO NOT FEEL FREE IF THEY DO NOT FORGIVE

Many people believe that forgiveness is important, but they do not realize what an essential part of life it actually is. Forgiving God's way is an intentional choice to release someone who has offended us from what we believe they owe us (e.g. love, respect, acceptance, etc.). True forgiveness brings freedom like nothing else can.

## FOUR COMMITMENTS TO FORGIVENESS

We are called to forgive as Christ forgives. This means that sometimes we grant forgiveness without the other person being aware (Psalm 130:3-4). Other times we must realize that to grant forgiveness without repentance and without their request is to diminish Christ's forgiving work on the Cross. We are to always choose to forgive just as Christ has, but it cannot always be granted. This requires wisdom (James 1:5)

### Granting forgiveness includes:

1. Choose not to remember (Hebrews 10:17, Philippians 4:8)
2. Do not bring up the incident as an accusation (Romans 8:1, Ephesians 1:6)
3. Do not talk about the offense to others (Psalm 103:12)
4. Do not let it hinder your relationship (Romans 8:38-39)

## MANY CHRISTIANS MISUNDERSTAND TRUE FORGIVENESS

Even though many Christians understand that they need to forgive, they often find themselves at odds with their beliefs and end up harboring resentment. This could be due to the fact that they think they have forgiven, but have left some of the process of forgiveness unfinished. This lack of forgiveness is a heavy burden that people carry for years and may not even be aware of it. Another reason we think they have forgiven, but have not, is that they do not think about what happened anymore. Maybe they have begun to pray for the other person or even act nice to them. They may have even gone so far as to ask the other person to forgive them or ask God to forgive them, but none of these are true forgiveness.

Read Matthew 18:21-35. Write down 3-5 observations from this passage:

Read Matthew 18:21-22. During Jesus' time on earth, religious leaders taught that you were to forgive someone three times. This showed a great amount of grace. Peter, in his piety, increased that number to what? \_\_\_\_\_ Why do you think Peter chose to more than double that number?

## WHEN FORGIVENESS IS HARD

Peter knows what many of us know by experience: that sometimes it is difficult to forgive even one offense committed against you. While Peter more than doubled the number of times someone should be expected to forgive, Jesus taught that we are to always forgive. This decision to always forgive is only made possible because God has completely forgiven us of all our past, present, and future offenses we commit against Him and His law. We must be careful to note that God is not advocating for us to stay in a position where we continually get hurt over and over without confronting the sin. Read the previous verse in this chapter: Matthew 18:15-20.

Read Matthew 18:23-35.

In your life, who does the King represent?

In what way do you identify with the first servant?

Did you deserve to be punished for your sin against God? Why or why not?

What was the first servant's response to the King's judgment?

What did the King do in response to the man's request?

Remember back to when you got saved. Write about the burden you felt from your crushing sin debt and the relief you found when Jesus saved you:

Read Matthew 18:28. After the first servant found forgiveness, what was his response to his fellow-servants?

What should have been his response to obtaining such great forgiveness?

### PUTTING PEOPLE IN PRISONS

Christians will put people in prisons of their grudges and bitterness without realizing that they end up imprisoning themselves. They want others to experience the hurt as they have felt the hurt. This is what imprisons Christians. Essentially, those who hold on to the pain they experienced end up becoming what they hate when they imprison people to their demands and pain.



### REASONS FOR NOT FORGIVING ARE NEVER JUSTIFIED

People often come up with reasons they think will justify their refusal to forgive. Some of these reasons include:

- "Waiting for them to admit they offended us."
- "We want to punish them for what they did to us."
- "They don't deserve to be forgiven because of how badly they hurt us."
- "If we forgive we are saying what they did was OK."
- "If we forgive it means we can keep letting them hurt us."

What reason would you include?

Read Matthew 18:28. The fellow servant did do wrong. It is important to note the pain and violations we have experienced in order to work through them in a biblical way.

Read Matthew 18:26, 29. Write the differences in the words that were used between each servant with those they owed a debt to:

What do you think caused the first servant to respond in such a different way than the king did?

Read Matthew 18:30, 27. What was the difference between how the first servant responded to the second servant and how the king responded to the first servant?

Read Matthew 18:31. Who saw what the first servant did?

What did they feel?

What did they do with the information they had?

Read Matthew 18:32. What did the king call the first servant?

Why was the reason he forgave him?

Read Matthew 18:33. Write the question the king asked in your own words:

Read Matthew 18:34. What did the king feel?

What did the king do?

Who do the tormentors represent in your life?

Read Matthew 18:35. From the verses above what did Jesus assure us will happen if we refuse to forgive?

Why would anyone want to experience these tormentors that plague our mental and emotional health in order to hold on to bitterness?



### **FORGIVING DOES NOT MEAN FORGETTING**

Read Hebrews 12:15. The biblical response to an offense is not to dwell on it. Philippians 2:5 tells us that we have the mind of Christ, and chapter 4 vs. 8 tells us what that mind thinks on. A forgiving attitude facilitates the readiness to forgive immediately when the offending party requests it.

You can learn to truly forgive and repeat it every time you feel offended by any person in any situation. This is only done in the power of the Holy Spirit.



### **IF YOU WAIT TO FEEL LIKE FORGIVING, YOU NEVER WILL**

You can enjoy peace of mind and soul, but it is contingent on your willingness to forgive. God has already equipped you to forgive when someone offends you. 2 Peter 1:2-4 shows that God has given you everything you need to live a godly life. When you understand what it means to be forgiven, a genuine Christian will not wait to feel like forgiving. They will willingly and readily forgive those who wronged them because they understand that is how God has forgiven them.



### **YOU CAN BE TORTURED BY UNFORGIVENESS**

Matthew 18:24-25 talks about tormentors. Those who refuse to forgive are imprisoned by the tormentors of bitterness, anger, resentment, weak relationships, shame, and even physical ailments. Ephesians 4:32 tells us to forgive as Christ forgives because the consequences of unforgiveness are a tortured soul. This gives Satan a foothold in our life in which to build a stronghold. Once Satan gets this stronghold, regaining that ground is difficult but possible.

## **WHAT ABOUT CHEMICAL IMBALANCES IN THE BRAIN?**

Many believe that the cause of depression and anxiety are physical symptoms of chemical imbalances in the brain. This is simply not true. There has been much research to debunk this theory. While there are cases of physical deficiencies that feel like depression or anxiety these are extremely rare. Rather, depression and anxiety are a result of a fleshly living pattern. Read 2 Corinthians 10:4. What weapons does God provide for us to combat life-dominating issues we face?

## TWO GREAT MYTHS ABOUT FORGIVENESS:

### **FORGIVE GOD BECUASE YOU ARE ANGRY WITH HIM**

Forgiveness is required when one party has done wrong. The problem with this idea of forgiving God is that He has never done anything wrong; therefore, there is nothing to forgive Him for.

People who are angry with God are thinking that one day they will stand before God and demand that God ask for their forgiveness for the pain and suffering they have endured on this earth. This is not true.

Forgiving God is paramount to blasphemy.

### **FORGIVE YOURSELF AND YOU WILL FEEL BETTER**

Some say forgiving yourself is biblical. They have no verses to support this idea. They are saying this because their goal is to make people feel better and relieve their distress. This is only temporary and partial in its healing properties.

Feelings follow thoughts. The correct feelings come from the truth. Lasting feelings follow the truth when it is believed and appropriated.

We receive God's forgiveness, and it is sufficient. There is no need to add to it to ease our feelings.

## **GREAT TRUTH ABOUT FORGIVENESS:**

Forgiveness can be given, but in order for it to benefit the other person, it must be received. That is why you can offer forgiveness, but it cannot always be granted. There are two parties involved in forgiveness, and both need to do their part. The offending party must repent and humbly ask for forgiveness, and the offended party must freely give it.

There is freedom in true forgiveness, but it can take time for our feelings to catch up to the truth. So what will you do?

Knowing you need to forgive will not help you; you need to have a forgiving attitude. Will you decide today to forgive?

Whom do you need to ask forgiveness from?

Whom do you need to forgive?