

The Power of Forgiveness

“To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you”.

Lewis. B. Smedes

Forgiveness is a key which Jesus holds out to us. It's a key that unlocks our own prison gates. Unfortunately, unforgiveness blinds, and often it blinds us to our own imprisoned status. Forgiveness is a weapon of warfare. It's a weapon we are to use over our own hearts and lives. Failure to do so has multiple consequences. We can hold unforgiveness toward ourselves, others, or towards God. Unforgiveness often leads to bitterness and offense when it is not given.

Isaiah 61:1 NIV

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners...

This freedom is something that has been bought, paid for by the death and resurrection of Jesus on the cross. However, we must still stand and enforce this, fighting for what is rightfully ours in order to live and walk in this freedom.

Many people have an idea of what forgiveness is. Many people struggle with receiving forgiveness from God, forgiving themselves, forgiving others.

I would like to start with explaining what forgiveness is not and what forgiveness is.

What is forgiveness not?

Forgiveness is not:

- Saying what you did was acceptable
- Saying I will trust you fully again and not put in place requisite boundaries to protect myself
- Saying I condone your actions/attitude
- Saying I agree with what you did/said/didn't do
- Being a doormat

- Being permissive
- Being weak

“I never knew how strong I was until I had to forgive someone who wasn’t sorry and accept an apology I ever received”

What is forgiveness?

Mat 6:12-15

(12) and **forgive** us our sins, as we have **forgiven** those who sin against us....

(14) "If you **forgive** those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will **forgive** you. (15) But if you refuse to **forgive** others, your Father will not **forgive** your sins.

Forgive – “aphiēmi”

Thayer Definition:

- to send away
- to send forth, yield up, to expire
- to let go, let alone, let be
- to disregard
- to leave, not to discuss now
- to omit, neglect
- to let go, give up a debt, forgive, to remit
- to give up, keep no longer
- to permit, allow, not to hinder, to give up a thing to a person
- to leave, go way from one
- in order to go to another place
- to depart from any one
- to depart from one and leave him to himself so that all mutual claims are abandoned
- to go away leaving something behind
- to leave one by not taking him as a companion
- 3i) abandon, leave destitute

English definition:

The word “forgive: means “to cancel or pardon.”

To forgive is to absolve from liability to punishment for a crime or fault committed.

Forgiveness is the voluntary release of a person over which one has legal control.

Mat 6:12-15 AMP

(12) And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven (left, remitted, and let go of the debts, and have given up resentment against) our debtors..... (14) For if you forgive people their trespasses [their reckless and willful sins, leaving them, letting them go, and giving up resentment], your heavenly Father will also forgive you. (15) But if you do not forgive others their trespasses [their reckless and willful sins, leaving them, letting them go, and giving up resentment], neither will your Father forgive you.

What does God’s forgiveness toward us look like?

Firstly, it is important to note that God is forgiving by nature. He is love. He is inherently patient, longsuffering and kind.

Exodus 34:6-7

And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful (**compassionate, full of compassion, merciful**) and gracious, longsuffering (**patient and slow to anger**), and abounding in goodness (**kindness**) and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation.”

Luk 6:35-36

But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. (36) Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

His forgiveness is total and complete. With all His essential attributes, He can actually purposefully forget. The God Who is all-powerful, everywhere-present and all-knowing does not know everything. He chooses to forget our forgiven sins.

1. He remembers our sins no more (Jer. 31:34).
2. He removes our sins as far from Him as the east is from the west (Ps. 103:12).
3. He casts our sins into the depths of the sea, never to be retrieved again (Mic. 7:18-20).

When God forgives, it does not mean that He temporarily suspends punishment which He may at some later time inflict. God's forgiveness is complete and it is eternal.

The nature of God's forgiveness is reflected in the Presidential Pardon.

In the United States there is a prerogative that only the President has. It is called the "Presidential Pardon." God's forgiveness is very much like the presidential pardon.

There are five characteristics of a presidential pardon:

- It must be exercised by one who has the power to pardon.
- No other judge or magistrate can overturn the pardon.
- The crime for which the pardon is granted is completely erased from all police or FBI records
- You can never be tried for that crime again.
- That crime can never be held against you again.
- In other words, it is just as if the crime never occurred. Even on a job application that asks for whether you have ever been convicted of a crime, you can legally say "NO!"

Are there any conditions for me to be forgiven by God?

- 1. We must release forgiveness towards those who have wronged us.**

Mt. 6:14-15; Mark 11:26; Luke 6:35-37

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Matthew 6:14-15

Other scriptures: Ps. 18:25; Mt. 5:23-24; 6:12-15; Mark 11:25; Luke 6:37; Col. 3:13

How many times must I forgive?

Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven." Matthew 18:21-22

If we are forgiving the way Jesus suggested that we forgive, we cannot keep track of the number of times the offense has happened. Once we forgive it the list is cleared and we go back to number one.

Surely the culprit should ask for forgiveness first?

Jesus taught that forgiving others was not dependent upon their asking for our forgiveness

Mar 11:25-26

"And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. (26) But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

How do I receive Forgiveness?

- We must **call upon the Lord** (Ps. 86:5). The Lord is abundant in mercy to all who call upon Him. Even though we have offended or sinned against others, we have first and foremost sinned against God (Ps. 51:4). Forgiveness depends on the one who has been sinned against. Against you and you only have I sinned...
- We must **confess our sin** (I John 1:9). If we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

- We must **repent of our sin** (Acts 8:22). To do this you must have a change of heart and mind and godly sorrow for sin. We must see the damnable nature of what we have done.
- We must be willing to **forsake our sin** (Pro. 28:13). Whosoever confesses and forsakes his sins will have mercy.
- We must be willing to **forgive others**.

2. Forgiveness from God must be received.

Jesus speaking to Saul on the road to Damascus:

Act 26:17-18

I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, (18) to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that **they may receive forgiveness of sins** and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'

The gift demo

I can know God has forgiven me and never receive it for one reason or another. Most often this happens because of an inability to forgive ourselves, or a feeling of unworthiness towards receiving forgiveness.

George Wilson

In 1829 George Wilson of Pennsylvania was sentenced to be hanged for robbing the mail and murder. President Andrew Jackson pardoned him but Wilson refused the pardon. Wilson indicated that the pardon was not valid unless it was accepted. The Supreme Court was called upon to decide the matter. Chief Justice John Marshall gave the following decision: "A pardon is a piece of paper, the value of which depends upon its acceptance by the person implicated. It is hardly supposed that one under sentence of death would refuse to accept a pardon, but if it is refused, it is no pardon. George Wilson must be hanged!"

3. We must be willing to forgive ourselves.

Accepting our forgiveness has to do with forgiving ourselves. Forgiveness is completed by our acceptance. If we do not accept God's forgiveness we stay in our prison.

Forgiving ourselves is just as important as forgiving others. Paul indicated that in order for us to win the race that we are running, we must have the ability to forget some things

Php 3:12-15

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. (13) Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, (14) I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (15)

Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.

- Forgetting is not a normal human ability. The New Testament word for "forget" means "to neglect or no longer care for."
- Forgetting means that we are to no longer nurture certain things in our mind.
- There are certain things that we are to disregard and no longer care for in our minds.
- There are certain things that we are not to let predominate our thinking or thought life.
- There are certain things upon which we are not to fix our attention or gaze.
- There are certain things that we are not to cultivate, water or feed.
- There are certain things that we must let starve to death for lack of nourishment.
- Forgetting involves the discipline of one's thought life

Php 4:8

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.

Consequences of not forgiving:

Jesus taught that if we do not forgive we will experience negative fruit.

1. Our prayers will be hindered

Mark 11:25

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

2. Our gifts and ministries will be rendered ineffective

Mt. 5:23-24

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.

3. God will withdraw His forgiveness

Mt. 18:35

So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.

4. We will personally suffer and dwell in a prison house of our own making

Mat 18:21-35 NLT

Then Peter came to Him and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?" (22) "No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven! (23) "Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to

a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. (24) In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. (25) He couldn't pay, so his master ordered that he be sold—along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned—to pay the debt. (26) "But the man fell down before his master and begged him, 'Please, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.'" (27) Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt. (28) "But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment. (29) "His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it,' he pleaded. (30) But his creditor wouldn't wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full. (31) "When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. (32) Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. (33) Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?' (34) Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt. (35) "That's what My heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart."

We will personally suffer and dwell in a prison of our own making if we do not forgive.

Jesus told the parable of the unforgiving servant. From this parable we learn many things:

- There is no possible way that we could ever repay God the debt that we owe to him.
- The forgiveness that we received from God is totally undeserved because our debt was real.
- What others owe to us is totally insignificant when compared to the debt that we owed to God.
- By not extending forgiveness to others we demonstrate a lack of true appreciation for and gratitude concerning God's unspeakable gift to us.
- God is further offended when we do not reciprocate His generosity. We are viewed as a "wicked" servant.

- When we refuse to forgive, this implies that God will withdraw His forgiveness from us.

5. We will experience the fruit of bitterness

Heb. 12:14-15

Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled...

When we do not forgive others physiologically and psychologically we experience some negative reactions. This has been demonstrated from a medical point of view.

- High blood pressure
- Increased levels of stress
- Hostility in relationships
- Anger and intolerance
- Increased heart rate
- Higher instance of substance abuse
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Difficulty in developing wholesome friendships
- Headaches and chronic pain
- Inability to commit to others

When we have a revelation of our own need for forgiveness, our own short fallings, and God's forgiveness for us, we come to a place of humility and it becomes easier, or more apparent why I should release others who have short fallings as well if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.

The Holy Spirit spoke this to me when I was preparing:

“There is a lot of unforgiveness harboured within the context of marriages, work contexts and even towards the church (leaders, members, and the church as a body). I want to bring freedom to my people. Freedom to see a right. Where there is unforgiveness, bitterness and offense, there is spiritual blindness. The

unforgiveness opens a door. Just as forgiveness unlocks the prison door, unforgiveness locks that door and opens another door for evil. Unforgiveness is a place of pride and self-righteousness. If this is not dealt with, it becomes a spiritually barren place, devoid of life.

Offended?

Heb 12:14-15

Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: (15) looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;

Jesus speaking of the end of the age:

Mat 24:10-13

And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. (11) Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. (12) And because lawlessness will abound, the **love** of many will grow cold. (13) But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

Love – agape

This love is the love that is found in the hearts of believers. Or the love that should be found in the hearts of believers:

Rom 5:3-5

...we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; (4) and perseverance, character; and character, hope. (5) Now hope does not disappoint, because the **love** of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Love = agape.

“Agape denotes an undefeatable benevolence and unconquerable goodwill that always seeks the highest good of the other person no matter what he does. It is the self-giving love that gives freely without asking anything in return, and does not

consider the worth of its object. Agape is more a love by choice than “philos” or phileo love, which is love by chance, and it refers to the will rather than the emotion. Agape describes the unconditional love God has for the world.”

Agape does not require any reciprocation, whereas phileo, or philos, does.

Without God, we cannot love with agape. Our love will require reciprocation of some sort.

Agape loves regardless of the response. This is the love Jesus showed when He forgave from the cross.

- Judas betrayed Jesus
- Peter denied Jesus
- All his closest friends abandoned Him, only John followed from afar.

From his friends who had deserted Him, to the Roman guard who had crucified Him, Jesus forgave them all. They didn't ask for forgiveness and may not have recognised their wrong doing, but He gave it anyway.

Rom 5:8

But God demonstrates His own **love** toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

We can feel so justified in harbouring unforgiveness. Truth be told, we may have been treated unjustly or unfairly. We may have been wrongfully treated, taken for granted, misunderstood and so forth. At the end of the day, Jesus requires that we forgive, as He forgave. Without strings attached. We can only do this with God's assistance,- with God's love. It doesn't have to be a feeling. It is simply a decision. Once we have made the decision we may have to choose not to pick up the offence on a regular, minute to minute basis.

Offended at God?

“It's how John the Baptist must have felt. He languished in Herod's prison, the cost of meddling in the king's personal life, daring to denounce his brazen immorality.

Herod's pride and anger and despotic power converged, and he imprisoned John. But then he froze in indecision. He hated John but also feared him: feared his holiness, his boldness, his wildness. Herod, for all his pagan ways, nursed a deep dread that John might be right, and that the wrath of God would befall him, or that the people would overthrow him, which might be the same thing. And, of course, following in the line of all the Herods, he was paranoid, and superstitious, and egotistical, and insecure, and together that concocted a potent brew of self-doubt. From prison, John hears of Jesus' comings and goings, his preaching and his miracles. This is the same Jesus whose mother's voice caused John to leap in his own mother's womb. This is the same Jesus whose sandals John felt unworthy to untie, the same Jesus he declared "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world," the same Jesus about whom he remarked, "He must increase, and I must decrease." And this is the same Jesus who declared John to be great in the kingdom of God. But now, John's not sure. All these bold declarations seem a stretch. If all these things be true, why is he here, rotting and starving? Why does his life hang by a thread held in the hand of a vain and capricious king? If Jesus is the Christ, why is he not coming to the rescue, swooping down in retribution on Rome and all her lackeys? Surely, for the sake of his kingdom, Jesus will act. And if not for the sake his kingdom, then for the sake of John's Elijah-like status as the Messiah's forerunner. And if not for the sake of John's status, then for the sake of Jesus' relationship with him—they're cousins, after all. This is a family matter. So he waits, and his waiting turns to wondering, and his wondering to worrying, and his worrying to open doubt. He hears about all that Jesus is doing—the astonishing miracles. The people proclaim him as "a great prophet." But something sits askew for John. Something doesn't add up. So he dispatches two of his disciples to ask Jesus a pointed question: "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" Luke's commentary and Jesus' reply are cold comfort: "At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. So he replied to the messengers, 'Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.'"

⁶ Jesus says, in effect, "John, I'm busy. I'm busy being the Messiah—healing, liberating, raising the dead, preaching good news—but if you're asking what this

means for you, well, I've got some hard news. I'm not dropping by. Herod will have his way with you. Blessed are you if you don't fall away on account of me—if my performing miracles left and right with nary a one for you doesn't drive you into unbelief. **Blessed are you if I leave you in the dark and you still trust me.**" With that, Jesus sends John's disciples back to him and then turns to the crowd and makes these remarks: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."⁷ I don't think Jesus' remarks are unrelated to the message he sent John. Who is the greatest in the kingdom of God? Who deserves God's favor? To whom does Jesus, by virtue of their faithfulness or status or kinship with him, owe a miracle? Maybe John the Baptist, maybe also the Sons of Korah, as though their closeness with God entitled them to full heavenly benefits here and now, with no deductible. So John's surprised to find himself in this prison, in this winter, lonely and afraid. Abandoned, while his own cousin saves and blesses and cures every beggar and whore and tax collector he comes across, bestows divine favor on every wayward stranger he meets. John sits in the dark, waiting, dreading, brooding. He hears the heavy footfall of the dungeon-keeper approaching, hears the clink and thud of the keys in the lock. He knows in his bones what he's come for. It's not to deliver a pardon. It's not to announce a visitor. It's not to herald a miracle. Darkness is his closest friend." Mark Buchanan – Spiritual Rhythms

What does it mean to extend forgiveness?

Extending God's forgiveness means several things:

- It means that we **express our forgiveness in words.**
- It means that we **refuse to bring the matter up** to the offending party again.
- It means that we **treat the offending party** as if it had never happened.
- It means that we **refuse to talk to others** about it anymore.

- It means that we **refuse to dwell on the offense** in our minds.

What are the results of forgiveness?

When forgiveness is granted and received it brings forth some wonderful results.

These results include:

- **Justification** (Acts 13:38-39).

In other words we are justified before God and man. We can go forward just as if nothing had happened.

- **Clearing of the Conscience** (II Cor. 7:11).

In other words we can be healed from within and the past does not need to leave its mark on us.

- **Joy** (Ps. 51:12).

This means instead of bitterness there can be joy. The joy of our salvation returns.

- **Restoration** (Acts 3:19).

This means that our relationship with God and our relationship with others are restored back to where they were prior to the offense.

- **Love for God** (Luke 7:36-48)

Luk 7:36-48 NLT One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to have dinner with him, so Jesus went to his home and sat down to eat. (37) When a certain immoral woman from that city heard He was eating there, she brought a beautiful alabaster jar filled with expensive perfume. (38) Then she knelt behind Him at His feet, weeping. Her tears fell on His feet, and she wiped them off with her hair. Then she kept kissing His feet and putting perfume on them. (39) When the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, He would know what kind of woman is touching Him. She's a sinner!" (40) Then Jesus answered his thoughts. "Simon," He said to the Pharisee, "I have something to say to you." "Go ahead,

Teacher," Simon replied. (41) Then Jesus told him this story: "A man loaned money to two people—500 pieces of silver to one and 50 pieces to the other. (42) But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?" (43) Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the larger debt." "That's right," Jesus said. (44) Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn't offer Me water to wash the dust from My feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. (45) You didn't greet Me with a kiss, but from the time I first came in, she has not stopped kissing My feet. (46) You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint My head, but she has anointed My feet with rare perfume. (47) "I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown Me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love." (48) Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven."

There is no sin so gross nor so often repeated that it cannot be forgiven. Jesus admonition about forgiving "seventy times seven" reflects the heart of God when it comes to forgiveness. God's forgiveness extends to such things as abortion, divorce, homosexuality, adultery, fornication, stealing, and child abuse, failure in business, failure in parenting and failure in ministry. Paul reminded the Christians in Corinth that they all came from troubled backgrounds (I Cor. 6:9-11). Such were some of you... Jesus reminded us that those who have been forgiven much, love much (Luke 7:47). Those who have been forgiven much, love much.

Conclusion:

Forgiveness is a key which Jesus holds out to us. It's a key that unlocks our own prison gates.

In order to receive forgiveness, I must forgive others who have wronged me. If I do not do this, my prayers will be hindered, my ministry will be ineffective, I will not be forgiven by my heavenly father, and I will dwell in a prison of my own making. However, when I do forgive others and receive my forgiveness, there are many

benefits which include, justification, clearing of the conscience, joy, restoration, healing, hope, and love for God.