



Why Should You Forgive?

“Be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.” (Ephesians 4:32, NLT)

As fresh as yesterday, you remember the pain and hurt. Perhaps your father deserted your family, someone abused you physically or sexually, a friend betrayed your confidence or a teacher or parent called you dumb. People hurt each other in many ways. Is there someone in your life now causing deep wounds and hurt? Are you angry, resentful and bitter? Do you think of getting revenge? Have you ever said, “I will **never** forgive him/her?”

Defining forgiveness

What is forgiveness? It is letting go of your anger and your desire to punish someone who has wronged you. It does not mean that you accept or approve of what the person did. It does not erase the wrong or excuse a person from punishment. However, it does mean that God sets you free from bitterness and hatred and renews his fellowship with you. But what do you do if someone keeps hurting you, do you have to keep forgiving?

The story of the unforgiving debtor

One day Peter asked Jesus that question. “How often do I have to forgive someone?” Being generous, he asked, “Seven times?” (The rabbis taught you should forgive someone three times.) Jesus replied, “No, seventy times seven” – 490 times! In other words, forever! Peter must have been shocked. Then Jesus told this story.

One day a king decided to clear up the bad debts off his books. A man was brought in who owed him \$10,000,000 but he couldn’t pay. The king ordered: “Sell this man, his wife, children and everything he has to pay the debt.” Terrified, the man fell before the king and pleaded, “Please be patient with me. I will pay it.” Being a compassionate man, the king released him and forgave him the entire amount!

Jubilant, the man headed home to tell his wife the good news. On the way, he met a man who owed him just \$2000. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded, “Pay me right now.” The man fell down and pleaded, “Please give me time, and I will pay it.” Then this man who had just been forgiven \$10,000,000 said, “Arrest this man. Throw him into jail until he can pay his \$2000 debt.” What an ungrateful man!

The man's friends went to the king and told him what had happened. The king was furious! He called in the man he had forgiven. He said, "You ungrateful man! After I forgave you the huge debt, couldn't you forgive that small debt the man owed you?" Disgusted and angry, the king said, "Send this man to prison until he can pay his debt." When Jesus had finished the parable, Jesus said, "*That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters in your heart.*" (Matthew 18:21-35, NLT) WOW!

Do you understand what Jesus is saying? In the story, God is the King. You, his servant, had a great debt of sin you could not pay. Because of his grace and compassion, the Lord paid your sin debt, forgave you and granted you full pardon. In light of that, if someone wrongs you and you refuse to forgive him/her in your heart, the Lord will discipline you. You also will lose rewards at the judgment seat. The next time someone wrongs you, if you think of all the sins God has forgiven you, it will be easier for you to forgive.

The process of forgiveness

Has someone abused, neglected, rejected or lied about you? It is hard to forgive someone who has wronged you, particularly if he/she is not sorry. Paul told the Ephesians, "*Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.*" (Ephesians 4:31, 32, NLT) Through the power of the Holy Spirit, you can forgive and even love your enemy. Jesus set the example. When he was on the cross, he looked down at those who were crucifying him and said, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." What love!

How do you forgive someone? It is a process. If you don't feel like forgiving, tell the Lord that you are willing to be made willing. If forgiveness involves sexual or physical abuse, don't be ashamed to tell someone and get help. Did you know that statistics say that one-third of kids have been sexually abused by the time they are teenagers? You are not alone. There are people who can help you work through it.

Confess your feelings toward the person who hurt you to the Lord. Whatever the hurt, God knows all about it. He grieves with you. Remember, forgiveness is a matter of choice, not feelings. Before the Father, you choose to forgive. It is an act of obedience to a command. Remembering what God has done for you, tell him, "I choose to forgive (name the person and the sin against you)." Once you choose to forgive, your feelings will eventually come in line with your choice. It may take time. Praise and thank God for his forgiveness. Then begin praying for the person who hurt you. As God leads, tell the person you forgive him. This is all part of God's healing process.

The blessings of forgiveness

You will have better mental, emotional and physical health. Doctors say that refusing to forgive can have devastating consequences to your physical body, which is the temple of God. It can lead to heart failure, ulcers, high blood pressure and other diseases that

destroy your body. It can change your personality from a sweet, happy person into a cold, hard, bitter person or hard-boiled cynic. Is holding on to a grudge worth it?

You block Satan from gaining a foothold (a base of operation) into your mind. *“And don’t sin by letting anger gain control over you. Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry. For anger gives a mighty foothold to the devil.”* (Ephesians 4:26-27, NLT)
When you hold your anger, it opens up the way to other sins – resentment, hatred and revenge. Satan can have a party!

If you refuse to forgive, your fellowship with God is broken because it is unconfessed sin. **When you forgive your fellowship with Jesus is restored.** (Matthew 6:12, 15) Is it worth it?

You are no longer a victim. Think about it. When you think about how someone hurt you, you feel anger and resentment. You give him/her power over you! Once you forgive, in time you are set free from all that emotional and mental anguish.

When you forgive, you are modeling the love and character of Christ. Forgiveness will set you free. Who knows? By forgiving someone, you may help bring him or her to the Lord.

Attitude Check:

- How does your attitude toward forgiving someone line up with Jesus’ attitude toward you?

Explore:

- Read, “Forgiveness Is Not Selective” (Matthew 5:43-48), “Forgiveness” (in the front of *Student New Testament*) and “Forgiveness Knows No Limits” (Matthew 18:21-35).
- Write in your journal what the forgiveness of Jesus means to you.

Talking with God:

- Father, thank you for forgiving me. May I forgive others as you have forgiven me.