

T H E

P O W E R
O F

F O R G I V E N E S S

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Lesson Five

Jesus said we are to forgive as we have been forgiven! It is a sin for a Christ-follower not to forgive. And how have we been forgiven?

"For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:11-12).

Forgiving Ourselves

"Satan has done a masterful job of keeping the Christian world preoccupied with the thing that God has dealt with once and for all - sin - and ignorant of the thing that God wants us to be preoccupied with - life! This in no way means that we are to minimize what Jesus did on the cross. Thank God for that! But it is only when we understand that the ultimate goal of salvation was the restoration of life that we can truly appreciate the purpose and meaning of Jesus Christ's death for us on the cross" (Classic Christianity - p. 61-62).

Has Satan kept you preoccupied with your sin—something you did that has already been forgiven?

Hebrews 10:10-12:

And by God's will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

Hebrews 10:14:

For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

Why do some people find it hard to accept God's forgiveness or forgive themselves:

- They don't feel forgiven.

Doesn't matter if you feel forgiven or not; you are forgiven. Write down some promises of forgiveness on cards and keep them handy.

- They have a wrong idea of what humility is.

It seems arrogant to really believe that you don't have to feel guilty about your past. This attitude of constantly feeling guilty is false humility, not true humility.

- When you don't know how to defeat your enemy who constantly accuses you.

Revelations 12:10b says, "For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down."

Do you know how to defeat the accuser? It's really important that we know where Satan is trying to—or has—established a foothold in our life.

Footholds:

Ephesians 4:26 – 27:

"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

When you are offended or emotionally wounded, you may think things such as:

- If I forgive the person who offended me, he/she will just hurt me again.
- By holding onto my anger, I can punish the one who offended me.
- This offense is so egregious, I cannot forgive.

Strongholds:

2 Corinthians 10:3 – 5:

...though we live in the world we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

A stronghold is a believed lie that you allow to become reality to you and hold you in bondage to sin.

How to defeat the accuser:

- Recognize the enemy

1 Peter 5:8:

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

What is he looking for in your life?

2 Corinthians 2:10 – 11:

Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, ¹¹ in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

Again we see that unforgiveness opens the door for Satan to "outwit us." How does Satan come at you?

You can give him access, or you can post a sign that says:

- Resist the Devil



James 4:7:

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Don't make it comfortable for Satan to come into your mind, your heart.

- He hates praise so praise the Lord all the time.
 - He hates the Word of God, so quote scripture all the time.
 - He hates a joyful spirit, so be joyful always.
 - He hates a thankful heart, so overflow with thankfulness.
- Claim the victory that is yours

Colossians 2:15:

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Jesus defeated Satan for you so you can reap the benefits and have at your disposal everything you need to enforce the devil's defeat in your life.

1 John 3:8:

The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

Romans 8:37:

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Live in the joy of your forgiveness

Forgiving others must begin in our ability to accept forgiveness.

Galatians 5:1 says, *"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."*

Are you living in the freedom of your forgiveness? If God has forgiven you, who are you not to forgive yourself?

Forgiving Others

Let's review some of these truths about forgiveness:

- Forgiveness is not forgetting.
- Forgiveness is letting go of resentment; we forgive in order to heal.
- Forgiveness is not seeking revenge (overtly or covertly).
- Forgiveness is something you do for your sake; it is between you and God.
- Forgiveness is a crisis of the soul; it is an act of the will—a choice we make even if we do not feel like it.
- Forgiveness sets the offended one free to heal and grow beyond the pain of the offense.
- Forgiveness is agreeing to live with the consequences of another's sin. We pay the price for the evil we forgive, just as Christ did.

1 Peter 4:12 - 16

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

Is there someone you are having difficulty forgiving? Ask yourself these questions. If you say “yes” to any of them, then it indicates you need to keep forgiving.

1. Do you get angry every time you think of _____?
2. Do you have a secret desire for _____ to pay for his or her offense?
3. Can you pray for _____ without resentment?
4. Do you tell everyone how _____ hurt you?
5. Do you talk negatively about _____ when his or her name comes up?

It takes time to forgive those who have wronged you. Sometimes a long process.

Think of these particular forgiveness situations:

- **Forgiving those who don't deserve it**

Forgiving doesn't make the situation okay, it just makes you okay.

Can you forgive someone if they are not sorry? Don't confuse forgiveness with reconciliation. Forgiveness is something you choose to do despite your feelings; it is extended, not earned. It only requires one person—you (plus God).

Reconciliation involves two people who are committed to working on the relationship; it is a slow process of trust that is gained over time through repentance and change.

Forgiving those who don't deserve it, who have never asked for forgiveness and most likely never will, means you are agreeing to live with the consequences of another's sin.

1 Peter 2:21

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

- **Forgiving those who don't know or refuse to believe they have harmed you**

If someone has offended you, are you certain they are aware of it?

- **Forgiving those who are no longer alive or it's no longer possible for you to contact**

What can you do when they are gone? Here are some suggestions:

Write a Letter

Visualize the deceased and write them a very detailed letter. Don't hold anything back as you write and don't censor your word choice. Write as you feel.

I would advise you to destroy the letter as soon as you can.

Talk Out Loud

Pick a time when you're alone and visualize yourself having a conversation with the person you need to forgive.

- **Forgiving people in your family**

Countless family situations present the need and opportunity for forgiveness. Have you learned to just let some things go and not hold a grudge? Have you learned to pick your fights? How often do you ask for forgiveness?

Don't you find that living with someone requires regular forgiveness?

If you are living with other believers, you have a basis for forgiveness. If you are living with non-believers, remember that they don't have the same biblical directive to forgive, not until they are born again. That does not mean that you must endure hurtful situations because they are not believers. It just means you would probably need to take a more careful, prayerful approach to offer or ask for forgiveness.

Is there a family member you have not forgiven?

If so, first write down any grudges or hurt that you are harboring. Are there patterns of behavior that continue to hurt you. Are you willing to see their side of the story and even if it's not equal, even if you've suffered the most, are you willing to make the first move to forgive?

Expect forgiveness to take time. Remember that forgiveness is a gift you give yourself.

Forgiving everyday hurts

All of us face everyday kinds of situations which are painful:

- A friend who says something about you behind your back, and it gets back to you.
- A co-worker who does you harm on the job through deceitfulness or office politics.
- A boss who passes you over for a deserved promotion or recognition.
- A relative who is critical and unloving.
- A mate who won't listen or try to understand us.

How can we live in forgiveness—not allowing the little things that happen to pile up and create big problems?

- Pray for a forgiving spirit.
- Figure out where you are most vulnerable and ask God to help you overcome.
 - What/who pushes your buttons most often and most easily?
- If you need to confront, do so after prayer and planning, at the right time in the right way.
- Avoid unnecessary retelling of the offense.
- Remember that forgiving rarely entails memory loss but freedom from preoccupation with the offense - do not let your thoughts, emotions, and reactions be consumed by the offense.