

Forgiveness Homework

WHAT IS FORGIVENESS?

Sometimes forgiveness is misunderstood. Please consider these statements and how they might help you understand forgiveness biblically.

Forgiveness is:

- First and foremost something God grants us when we repent of sin against him (Psalm 51; 2 Corinthians 7:9-11)
- Exemplified and empowered by Christ (Colossians 3:13)
- A way to release others from the obligation that is owed because of their sin (2 Corinthians 2:5-7; Matthew 18:21-35)
- Costly (Matthew 18:21-35)
- A choice and a process (Luke 6:37; Matthew 18:21-35)
- Praying for and returning good when possible (Luke 6:27; Romans 12:17)
- Necessary to stay in right fellowship with God (Matthew 5:24, 6:14-15)
- Letting go of vengeance and bitterness (Romans 12:19; 1 Peter 2:23)
- A heart attitude even without repentance (Mark 11:25; Matthew 18:35)
- A relational transaction when repentance is present (Luke 17:3-4)

Forgiveness is *not*:

- Needed where sin or offense is not present
- An endorsement of sinful behavior
- Forgetting the past
- Agreeing with a one-sided narrative
- Necessarily reconciliation or restoration, which are not always possible (Romans 12:18)
- Trusting motives
- Immediate restoration of trust ("Trust is lost in bucketfuls, but rebuilt in drops.")
- Enabling sin in others
- Denying truth for the sake of grace
- Flattery to win favor or appease
- Avoiding others (unless the sins committed against you are malicious and it would be unwise to confront)
- Moving on with silent disdain

IDENTIFYING A NEED FOR FORGIVENESS

Work through the following five steps to help identify where you need to grant and/or receive forgiveness in your relationships.

1. Read Matthew 18:21-35 and 2 Samuel 9. Who are you more like – David or the unforgiving servant?

I am like:

Because I see that:

2. To grant and receive forgiveness well, we must understand how much forgiveness God has already granted to us through Christ. Meditate on the following passages:

Psalms 103:11-12, 139:23-24; Isaiah 38:17, 43:25; Zephaniah 3:17; Micah 7:19;

Matthew 6:11-15, 18:21-35; Romans 8:1; Ephesians 4:31-32

3. Mercy is “God withholding what we duly deserve, i.e. punishment.” To understand God’s mercy towards us as well as how God asks us to view mercy toward others, read through the following passages:

Psalms 18:25, Matthew 5:7, 9:12, 12:7; James 2:12-13

4. Complete a *Forgiveness Table* on the next page.
 - Fill in the first column with: “*What has God forgiven me for?*” Use categories with bullet points.
 - Fill in the second column with: “*What do I still need to forgive others for?*” Where are you holding on to anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness? List names and specific sins they committed against you.
 - Fill in the third column with: “*For what do I still need to ask forgiveness from God and others?*” List names and specific ways you have offended them.
5. Review the [Four Promises of Forgiveness](#) below. This is what granting forgiveness looks like. You have forgiven others from your heart when this list is true for you. If you break one of these promises, forgive again.
 - I promise not to use or bring up the sin against you in the future.
 - I promise not to tell others about the sin.
 - I promise not to dwell on the sin.
 - I promise not to allow the sin to hinder our relationship in the future.

FORGIVENESS TABLE

What has God forgiven me for?	What do I still need to forgive others for?	For what do I still need to ask forgiveness from God & others?

HOW TO GRANT AND/OR RECEIVE FORGIVENESS

Review the second and third columns of your *Forgiveness Table*. Examine if you need to either forgive others or ask forgiveness from God or others. Is there anything unresolved in the second or third column? If so, what's your plan for forgiveness? What steps will you take to reconcile? Consider the following:

Forgiveness Is Both a *Crisis* and a *Process*:

Forgiveness is a *crisis* because you have to agree with God that we must forgive because of how much he has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32).

- So in my heart I make that choice, regardless of whether people ask for forgiveness.
- When the disciples asked Jesus about forgiveness, they were essentially asking, "Do we always have to forgive?" Jesus basically said, "Yes, always" (Luke 18:21-35).

Forgiveness is also a *process* because it's an ongoing event.

- Once you make the decision in your heart to forgive, you must guard against rehashing the event and growing bitter over it because you're stubbornly lingering on how you were injured.
- Or, in the case of more severe offenses against you, recognize that there are different facets of sins committed against us. You can initially forgive an offense against you without fully comprehending all the pain and consequences of that sin. When the pain and/or consequences resurface, you are experiencing another facet of that offense. Take that as an opportunity to forgive again and again and again.
- Remember the *Four Promises of Forgiveness* above? Whenever you break one of them, you need to have another crisis and restart the process.

Planning Forgiveness:

Now, for each of the "bullet points" that you wrote in the second and third columns of the *Forgiveness Table*, try to think about clear action steps towards reconciliation.

- What was the specific offense? (Was it against me, or did I commit it?)
- If I was the offended person, can I let it roll off or must I receive forgiveness no matter what? What is God's best for you in this?
- Is it possible for me to connect with the person who offended me or that I sinned against?

- If it is possible to connect, is it wise for me to approach them to ask forgiveness? (If you're not certain, talk to a pastor or elder about this, especially with offenses against us like abuse, abandonment, etc. It may be wise not to pursue this. Again, ask others for input.)
- If I do decide to connect with the person, what needs to be expressed?
 - How they offended me and that I have forgiven them (be specific) OR
 - How I have offended them and that I'm grieved by my actions (be specific)
- Pray about taking the step of connecting with the person. Remember that just because someone says, "I forgive you," not everything will be wonderful and that just because someone won't grant forgiveness or doesn't even acknowledge the hurt, it doesn't mean that we should get bitter (remember the promises) or that the person couldn't change sometime in the future.
- Be sure to have others pray with you/for you regarding these steps
- Before you take the next step of having an actual conversation, think about these things:
 - *Timing* – Is the time right or should I wait on God to make that clear?
 - *Tone* – How I'm going to deliver what needs to be said will impact how it is received. Is my heart right in this matter or does God have to change me more first?
 - *Testimony* – How can I give God glory in this situation? What am I going to say to point to the change that has occurred in my heart because of God's grace?
- Is there anything else that you think needs to be addressed or thought through regarding next steps?

How to Ask Forgiveness¹:

Asking forgiveness from someone requires more than most typically realize. When approaching someone for forgiveness, utilize the following:

- Never just say: "I'm sorry," or "I apologize." By themselves these words are meaningless to the other person. All it communicates is that we are either nonchalant about the matter or that we are sorry we got caught but don't feel the full weight of our actions. So don't just throw out those words hoping things get better. If forgiveness is about "releasing someone from the obligation that was owed," we need to show that we know exactly what it is that was owed or what caused the obligation. Remember the king in Matthew 18? He gets specific numbers about the debts owed.

¹ Reference "[How to Make a Confession and Extend Forgiveness](#)" by Thabiti Anyabwile

- How then do you start asking forgiveness? The following is a *template*, not a formula:
 - Begin with *acknowledging the pain caused*
 - Go on with *acknowledging the sinfulness* of your actions
 - Next, *name the specific offenses* (as much as you feel is necessary to be said to make full restitution)
 - Now, *name the biblical alternative* (What should you have done instead? What would wisdom say? What would love do?)
 - Then, *ask forgiveness* (the exchange of forgiveness - without this, moving forward is difficult)
 - *Wait for a response* (which ideally is a response of accepting your request and granting forgiveness).
- It may all sound like this: *“I’m so very sorry I hurt you so badly. I was wrong for doing that. My angry outburst, calling you names, and throwing things have caused you great pain. I sinned against God and against you. Would you please forgive me?”*
- Regardless, then, of the other person’s response, we need to entrust ourselves to God, believing that what we asked was done with a pure heart and a desire to please God and make restitution with the people around us so as to live peaceably with all men as far as it depends on us (Romans 12:18).

Always Resolve Everything Now:

Now, lastly, remember one thing. It’s always best to resolve things as soon as possible. You don’t want this to linger in your life. Be determined to resolve these past and future offenses as quickly as possible with one another. Matthew 5:21-26 (especially v. 24) reminds us of the importance of taking care of conflict immediately; so much so that we should consider how we’re approaching God in worship while things are unreconciled.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Milton Vincent sermons on Forgiveness

- Audio — [01](#), [02](#), [03](#), [04](#)
- Notes — [01](#), [02](#), [03](#), [04](#)