

The Power of Forgiveness



Lesson Objective:

The objective of this lesson is to gain an understanding of the standards of forgiveness that are to operate in our lives towards others and the supernatural power that is released through forgiveness.

Key Scripture:

***Ephesians 4:32** Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (NIV)*

The Treachery of Our Humanity

There is one thing that every human being on the face of the earth has in common. They all bear the image of their Creator.¹ Therefore, every individual carries a revelation of God within him or her. Like treasure hidden in the earth, what is truly valuable is God's glory within us all. What is this glory? This glory is the intended image that bears an identity with the potential of great purpose being revealed as the Father God designed.² God created humanity in diversity and uniqueness. There are no two individuals who are alike. While we may have similarities in personality types, gifts, and callings, we carry an identity that is unique to each of us alone. Even those who are identical twins are not actually identical. They carry their own diverse uniqueness.

Seven Aspects of Our Humanity

- 1) **Godly Humanity:** All people bear God's intended design in their humanity. We have each been given an identity with personality, strengths and weaknesses, talents, gifts, and a calling that motivates us towards accomplishing our dreams and fulfilling a purpose.
- 2) **Free Will:** God created us with a free will. This is one of the greatest blessings our Father has gifted us with. From our free will we respond to opportunities to make choices according to our desires and ambitions.

¹ Genesis 1:27

² Jeremiah 1:5; Psalm 139:15-16; Romans 8:29

- 3) **Cultural Heritage:** All people carry a cultural heritage. This heritage has helped shape our values, perspective of life, and our self-image. Certain cultural values have influenced the way each of us think and behave. These influences include social cultures, religious cultures, and family cultures.
- 4) **An Independent Nature:** Because we each carry a diverse uniqueness about us, there is a natural drive within us to express ourselves that is often different to those around us. Thus, we push the limits of acceptable standards of behavior established by the cultural influences we are raised in as an attempt to express the freedom to be ourselves.
- 5) **Life's experiences:** All people carry a history of struggles and successes, failures and accomplishments as they journey through life on planet earth. These life experiences have helped shape our personal sense of significance and self-confidence.
- 6) **A fallen sinful nature:** All people have been born into a sinful nature we have inherited from our forefather's failure to manage their free will. Through their decision to sin, they exchanged the glory of God's design for a nature of evil. We have all been born into slavery to sin and the slaves of the masters of darkness.

Ephesians 2:1-3 ¹ And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Key Point: *As captives and prisoners of the sinful nature, humanity lost their divine sense of identity, purpose, and significance.*

As slaves of the prince and powers of darkness in heavenly realms, we were all following a course leading to loss, destruction, death, and judgment. As captives and prisoners of the sinful nature, humanity lost their sense of purpose, significance, and identity God created within them. Like sheep, all men have gone astray, and veered off the course God intended for him.³

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

The evil intent of Satan and his forces is to pull humanity as far away from the glory our Father intended for us. Through lies and deception, manipulation and control, he coerces us down his planned course, away from God. To the degree to which we fall away from God's intended glory, to that degree we fall further and further into the clutches of evil.

A man does not wake up one morning a serial killer, a rapist, or a violent husband or father. This happens over a period of time as evil works on the mind, emotions, and will to weaken man's free will to the surrender of evil's ways. Satan cannot over-ride the free will of man. He cannot just come and take control over man's conscience and take possession of his soul. Instead, he harasses, oppresses, and tempts man's thoughts to a breaking point. Once he is able to break man's will he rewards him with a false sense of peace, until the process of breaking the will begins again. Over a period of time, this person is sucked into habitual behavior that weakens his will until that person eventually descends into

³ Isaiah 53:6

the place of yielded surrender to Satan's will. This degree of control is recognized as demon possession. This person has surrendered the power of his free will to demonic influence and control.

Key Point: *There are two tactics the enemy uses to pull humanity off their divine course: the course of lust, and the course of pride.*

There are two courses the enemy seeks to pull humanity down; the course of lust and the course of pride. The first has its hook in the lusts of man's flesh that desires the pleasures of self-will. The second has its hook in man's quest for self-esteem and preeminence that desires power over others. Both of these courses will either result in the self-exaltation above our true selves, or degenerating below our intended glory.

This brings us to our seventh point of the aspects of our humanity:

- 7) Casualties of war:** All of humanity has been victimized as casualties of war by the powers of darkness. We each bare the scars of war through fear and rejection, abuse, betrayal, slander and malice and a host of malicious attempts that attempt to imprison us and destroy us.

Key Point: *All humans bear the battle wounds from a fierce warfare with darkness.*

There is no one who has escaped the attempts of evil to deceive, steal, kill, and destroy our lives and future. Some of us have been held as captives of war, encaged within strongholds of false belief systems and lies. Others of us have been imprisoned because of the poor decisions we've made and found ourselves enslaved by our passions and desires. And there are still others who may have escaped captivity and imprisonment, and yet bare the battle wounds of not only the attacks of the enemy through the vessels of men yielded to evil, but also from friendly fire. The ones that can cause the worst damage and pain to us tend to be family and friends.

The point is this: Every one of us on this planet is on a quest to discover their significance and enjoy life. We have all been through battles in a war that has sought to keep us from discovering the truth of who we truly are and why we are here. These battles have left wounds which cause us to be fearful, self-protective, and untrusting towards others. They have programmed our thinking to believe that looking after one's self is the only way to obtain security in one's sense of significance, while feeling so lost. Being a casualty of war has led us to believe the lie that love is conditional and rewarded to those who deserve it. Being so bent towards selfishness, we all were both hostile towards God and a treachery to humanity.

Conflict is Inevitable

There are going to be opportunities for conflict with those who are different from us. Who we believe we are and how we express ourselves is going to be influenced by life's experiences, social conditioning, and cultural perspectives. These can all create opportunities for offence to those who are different from us. Because we possess various mindsets and opinions, speculations and philosophies, values and priorities; there are going to be points of conflict where disagreement arises by the simple fact that we all perceive life through distorted and colored lenses - the way we interpret what is right from what is wrong, and what is significant from what is irrelevant.

Key Point: *Our differences enhanced by life's experiences, social conditioning, and cultural perspectives create opportunities for disagreement and conflict.*

God loved us while we were yet sinners with all of our faults and foolishness. This means that God's unconditional desire for relationship with us was while we were so far off from His will and ways, and entirely off the course of our intended purpose. Yet, He met us where we were, although we were wretched and ugly and hostile towards Him.

Ephesians 4:32 *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (NIV)*

Key Point: *Grace is required to love one another in all our diversities, belief systems and cultural perspectives.*

When we truly love as God commanded us to love one another, we are to relate to one another within their own personal context. We are to extend grace in all their diversities, belief systems, and cultural perspectives, even when we believe and may even know they are off track and wrong. We are all on the journey of God revealing Himself that we may know Him and His ways. This journey is a process of being justified, sanctified and transformed into His image. Until we actually obtain Christ likeness in His character and ways, we are somewhere in the process, operating at different levels of maturity. Because God relates to us uniquely and individually, each of our paths will look different from one another. While the Holy Spirit may be dealing with me in the area of patience, He may be dealing with my brother in the area of self-control. If I become frustrated with my brother's lack of patience, then I can fall into judging his lack of patience and fail to see my own lack of self-control.

I have noticed this about myself. When I am doing well with my diet and weight control, I become conscious of my belly shrinking and becoming flatter. But then I also begin to notice the bellies of others around me. When I find someone else who has a bigger belly than I do, then I feel good about my efforts at self-control. The problem is, I can also find myself judging those with bigger bellies as having a lack of self-control. Similarly, you will notice other's lack of patience when the Holy Spirit is working on your patience. We will tend to become offended with issues we ourselves are struggling with or feel like we've gained some level of victory in.

Example of Steve and Doug's Conflict

During a conversation, Doug felt free to discuss his opinion concerning a task Steve performed, as to how he could have executed it differently. Even though he struggled with the task, Steve felt like he accomplished it successfully to the best of his abilities. While Steve held his composure with a straight face, Doug then proceeded to tell Steve that if he had done the task according to the way he intricately described, he would have saved time and done a more excellent job. How would you respond? Would you be offended with Doug?

As graciously as Steve could, he defended what he perceived as an insult to his work with regards to the fact that his accomplishment was a success. Doug, on the other hand, interprets Steve's body language and voice tone as being frustrated by his advice and becomes obviously confused. He now feels like he needs to defend his opinion as being wise observation, which doesn't seem to be valued. Feeling threatened, the adrenaline coursing through Steve's veins, causing all the thoughts in his brain to blur, he finds himself instantly feeling the need to react to this perceived threat to the value of his abilities. Steve wisely dismisses himself from the discourse because he realized it was escalating beyond his control over anger.

Over the course of time, the issue runs over and over in Steve's mind. "I should have done that...." "I should have said this..." Before long, this conflict has escalated in Steve's mind from being an offence into what he classified as "righteous anger."

Steve saw Doug with his family at the shopping center and changed his direction to avoid them. Seeing Doug seemed to stir up those feelings of anger all over again. He saw him at church, but avoided eye contact and pretended he didn't see him. Doug's attempts to phone Steve were ignored as Steve justified his broken relationship with Doug because of the pain of dishonor he was still feeling. Unless this cycle Steve continues to experience with Doug over and over again doesn't change, bitterness will continue to grow within Steve's heart, which will eventually cost him their relationship. Steve notices that the time that it usually takes for him to calm down and become capable of relating kindly with Doug is growing longer and longer between episodes. With each instance of conflict leading to offense, anger builds towards hatred and bitterness.

As a "good Christian," Steve has extended forgiveness over and over again, but he could not deny his ill feelings towards Doug, which created a wall of resistance to any civil relationship with Doug. What is happening? What would you do in this situation? Do you continue to forgive? Do you accept the fact that some people just don't get along with each other and justify keeping a safe distance from those people who are offensive?

Doug's parents moved from northern Europe when Doug was still a boy. Because of the long winters there, his forefather's learned that when the time for planting crops came, you had to prepare the ground and get the seed into it quickly in order to reap a good harvest before the season ended. This mindset became so much a part of their culture that accomplishing tasks in a timely manner was a highly valued character trait. This trait worked its way into their mindset so that tasks performed with excellence in a timely way was highly valued in everything one did. This trait worked its way into Doug's value system so that he learned how to accomplish tasks excellently and expediently. These were Doug's strengths, which were repeatedly acknowledged favorably by his leadership and peers. Doug was a few years older than Steve, so he saw himself as being a great source of wisdom for Steve. From Doug's viewpoint, his advice to Steve was not to criticize him but rather help him to become more skillful with his abilities. He loved Steve as a father would a son. So, he was being to Steve like Doug's father was to him.

Steve was raised in a different environment. He was raised with the value of giving yourself into everything you do. He understood that the best work is accomplished when you can accomplish your tasks with passion and joy. His skills may not have been the most proficient, but doing it with all your heart made up for his lack of perfection. Steve believed that passion was a greater character quality than trying to be perfect. As long as he did his best with joy, that is what truly mattered. Skill was something that developed naturally over time while doing what you love to do.

From the way Doug was raised, tasks accomplished were not a matter of your personal sense of value. Working with passion and being emotionally involved in the things you do was not logical to Doug. It was a concept he couldn't grasp. Projects were accomplished because they needed to be done. There was no emotional connection with them, just a matter of getting what needs to be done in a timely, efficient and excellent way. Steve, on the other hand, felt value from the things he accomplished from his heart. In his mind His self-value was entwined with those things he was passionate about. Separating self-value from what you accomplish is a concept that was foreign to his understanding.

The mind seeks to understand situations of conflict to initiate a response. But when information is ambiguous and confusing, the rational mind tends to supply our own facts based upon past issues of conflict. Much of this brain process happens within milliseconds in the subconscious. Thus, conflict that is not easily resolved within reason manifests typically in a negative reaction. What may have been initiated with friendly and innocent intent is misinterpreted by the one offended. When we have been trained in life to default to a negative response during conflict, the clash builds into the offense spreading to both parties and can result in a disconnection in the relationship unless compassion manifests into the situation. When a conflict is encountered, or buttons are

triggered, the goal then needs to be gaining understanding of the other person's perspective rather than becoming offended when the other party refuses to come into agreement with us.

Example of Conflict in Mexico City Airport

Jack was on a return ministry trip from Argentina. He had a three-hour layover in the Mexico City Airport before continuing his trip home to Chicago. He settled into his seat next to a seemingly friendly Mexican man. But, because of the language barrier, their conversation was limited to occasional looks, grins and friendly nods to one another. Jack was feeling like he wanted something to snack on while he waited for his flight to be announced. So, he placed the book he was reading into the small carry-on bag at his feet, and to the best of his ability requested if the Mexican man sitting next to him would be willing to save his seat and watch his bag.

Upon purchasing a bag of cookies, a magazine, and a cup of coffee at a nearby vendor, Jack returned to his seat and graciously thanked the Mexican man for watching his things. Jack placed the bag of his newly purchased items at his feet between him and his now Mexican friend. Jack then proceeded to place his cup of hot coffee in the cup holder attached to his seat to retrieve the book he was reading.

Jack no sooner settled back with his book and was preparing to reach down and grab up the bag of cookies at his feet that the Mexican man sitting next to him reached down at his feet and pulled up the bag of cookies. Jack sat there startled that this man would be so brazen as to help himself to his cookies. He watched with shock as the Mexican man opened the bag of cookies, took a couple out and started eating them. "The audacity of this man," Jack's mind began to react. "This is the rudest thing I have ever experienced." "How dare this man assume that just because I asked him to watch my bag and save my seat that he could help himself to my cookies."

The Mexican man, aware that he was being stared at by Jack, looked over at him and grinned. He then graciously offered the bag of cookies to Jack so that they could sit and eat the cookies together. "Seriously?" Jack's mind continued in shock. "Oh, how nice of you to share MY COOKIES!" As the two of them continued eating cookies together, they finally worked their way down to the last one. The Mexican man looked at Jack, grinned, and then offered to him the very last cookie in the bag. "Wow! That is nice of you to offer me the LAST COOKIE IN MY BAG!" In his mind, of course, Jack was yelling at the man. But Jack kept his composure and smiled back at the man and said, "*Gracias.*" To which the man replied, "*De nada.*"

Before too long, the Mexican man left to catch his flight, leaving Jack to process through what had just happened. Still feeling a little violated by this Mexican man, Jack began to console himself with the fact that he has come to this man's nation from a totally different culture. Evidently, this culture values sharing and taking opportunities to build a relationship regardless of language barriers. Eventually, Jack was able to calm his heart, and shake off the offense he had experienced. He extended an attitude of forgiveness towards this man and his strange culture. And consider this as another experience to remember and a story to tell his friends.

How would you respond in this situation? What would be the feelings you would be dealing with? What kind of thoughts would you have towards this brazen individual?

Upon hearing his flight number called, Jack began to gather his belongings to prepare to board his plane. Upon reaching down and taking hold of the store bag holding his magazine, Jack noticed that it was heavier than the bag should be with only one magazine in it. So, he opened the bag to discover that the cookies he had bought were still in the bag. Evidently, the Mexican man had purchased the same cookies, and shared his cookies with Jack.

How have your feelings towards this Mexican man changed? How does gaining this man's perspective give you insight into his role in this situation? How do you think he perceived Jack? Until we are able to obtain the understanding of another's perspective, we are vulnerable to make judgments from misconceptions, personal opinions, and speculations that are untrue.

The Measures of Judgment

While we are keenly aware of the potential threat others bring into our lives, there is something within us that keeps us from seeing our own faults and failures. We thus attempt to justify ourselves and place blame for our negative reactions elsewhere. We can fall short of clarity when it comes to our own faults and the failures of those we are closely connected with.

Key Point: *In order for us to judge rightly another's choices, we would have to have experienced the same circumstances that shaped their belief system.*

Some say we are a product of society as being the positive or negative influence of family, religion, and the social cultures we were raised in. While these have played a big part of who we believe we have become, we are actually the product of the choices we have made along life's journey and what lies we came into agreement with. Had any of us experienced the circumstances and pressures of another's journey, how would the choices we would make be any different? In order for any of us to actually judge the intent of another's choices, we would have to experience the same pressures, temptations, and circumstance from a perspective of their unique personal mindset. Judging the heart of man is an exclusive right to the only one who can discern accurately the heart of man. God gives this right to no one. Not even His Son, Jesus, assumed this right.⁴

In Galatians chapter five, the apostle Paul makes a clear distinction between the fruit of the sinful nature and the fruit of the Holy Spirit active in the life of a believer. *The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.* While Paul identified these as "obvious" acts of the sinful nature, he doesn't list them all. There are other obvious bad fruits such as murder, stealing, lying, and coveting, that can be added to this long list. Then there are the not so obvious ones such as, gluttony, malicious gossiping, slanderous accusations, fault finding, and the like, which are also fruits of darkness. Paul goes on to say, *"I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."*⁵ This is not an issue of losing eternal salvation through bad behavior. This is an issue that something is wrong at the core of one's values and beliefs, which are preventing them from living in the Father's blessing.

Key Point: *Only God is able to identify root issues of deception and consequent choices that have pulled His beloved off the course of His intended glory.*

While we are fully capable of judging between which fruits are bad from which are good, we are not permitted to judge as to the intent or the motivation of the heart of those who obviously have something wrong. Only God is able to identify root issues of deception and those choices that pulled those He loves off the course of His intended glory for them.

⁴ John 3:17; John 12:47

⁵ Galatians 5:19-21

Key Point: *Outside the revelation by the Holy Spirit, none of us are qualified to diagnose root problems to obvious bad fruits.*

To diagnose a problem, without the proper qualifications, is what is called malpractice in the medical field. In the same way that we are not allowed to pretend to be doctors and give a diagnosis of another's ailment, the truth is, we are not qualified. Outside of revelation by the Holy Spirit, none of us are qualified to diagnose root problems to obvious bad fruits manifesting in another's life.

Matthew 7:1-5 ¹ "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ² For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. ³ "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴ How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. (NIV)

Key Point: *Unjust judgments opens the doors to those influences that led the one being judged astray.*

Jesus was very clear about how the Father feels about judging. He states that the same measure we use to judge someone else is the measure that is used to judge us. What does that mean? I believe it means that when we judge someone for their faults and failures, we are inviting into our lives the same circumstances, temptations, and pressures that they encountered to be released upon us. In other words, it is as if the Father says, "You want to judge them for their behavior? Well let's see how you do in their shoes." We can literally invite the hordes of hell against ourselves by stepping into judging someone else. If it were not for the grace of God, none of us would be able to stand in the midst of intense temptation and life's storms.

Key Point: *We are all susceptible to failure short of God's enabling grace. Judgment quenches the flow of grace into our lives.*

We are all susceptible to failure short of God's grace enabling us to live in Christ's righteousness and victory. God gives his grace to the humble, but resists giving grace to the proud.⁶ To actually believe any of us are qualified to judge another is the evidence of pride at work in us. In other words, when we judge another for their faults, we not only invite the same circumstances, temptations, and storms that the one being judged incurred, but God withholds His enabling grace from us in those situations.

There are never grounds for making judgments. Jesus' command, "Do not judge," did not come with qualifiers as to the severity of the sins or offense committed. In other words, Jesus did not say, "Do not judge, unless it is adultery, or violence, or something really bad." However, Jesus does admonish us to remove the speck from our brother's eye, but only after He qualifies who is worthy to do so. This was only to follow by removing all the obstacles that interfere with our own perspectives. It is from the same value which Jesus addresses those prepared to stone a woman caught in adultery. "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."⁷ Only after dealing with the issues of our own personal failures are we qualified to help others. It is

⁶ James 4:6 & 1 Peter 5:5

⁷ John 8:7

not until we have overcome and gained victory over an issue of temptation that we become qualified to help another overcome the same issue. Only then do we gain the compassion necessary to minister with gentleness to other's sensitive areas.

Does this mean we have to become an ex-drug addict in order to help drug addicts? No! But it does mean that we have better deal with those issues where we attempt to find escape and comfort in order to find peace, outside of God's will for us. In other words, if I am turning to food to find peace and comfort in times of stress rather than turning to God, then I have the same addiction issue, just a different substance.

The Ministry of Reconciliation

John 8:15-16 ¹⁵ "You judge according to the flesh; I am not judging anyone. ¹⁶ "But even if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone in it, but I and the Father who sent Me.

Key Point: *If Jesus refused the role of Judge while on earth, what authority do we have to judge?*

Any judgment short of the Father's involvement is identified as being according to the flesh. In other words, determining what are wrong behaviors according to what is seen through our personal perspective, which are then followed by calculated opinions and assumptions, are considered as human foolishness and void of divine influence. What some have come to believe is discernment by the Holy Spirit is nothing more than suspicion breathed upon by a fault finding demon of accusation. If Jesus refused to take the role of a judge, then by what authority do any of us have?

2 Corinthians 5:16-19 ¹⁶ Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. ¹⁸ Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹ namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

The apostle Paul recognized that their perception of Christ needed to change. While Jesus walked on the earth, He lived a life of righteousness according to the law. He fulfilled all the requirements of being holy and acceptable to the Father in his behavior, attitudes and motives. He lived with a mission of taking the sins of all mankind to the cross and paying the penalty of judgment man's sins deserved. The disciples had an understanding of Christ in the flesh. In other words, how they perceived Him in his mission on earth. However, when Christ took the throne at the right hand of the Father, with all power and authority in heaven and on earth, His role changed. He walked this earth as a Deliverer and Savior, and He will always be recognized as our Savior. But, in His position as Lord and King, He is the fullness of His Father's glory. Therefore, living according to Christ in the flesh is attempting to live in fulfillment of the laws of righteousness, which Christ did on our behalf.

Key Point: *As we consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God, we are to consider others in Christ the same way.*

The apostle John identifies the life in which we now live, *"As He is, so also are we in this world."*⁸ Our role has changed from sinner to saint. Our position in Christ has changed from slaves of sin to the Father's beloved children, seated with Christ in heavenly places.⁹ As we are to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God,¹⁰ as being new creatures of righteousness in Christ, we are to consider our brothers and sisters in Christ in the same way. We are no longer allowed to recognize each other according to the flesh, but as being a brand new person.

As in Christ we have each been reconciled to the Father through mercy and grace, our mission has joined with His mission in this age of grace. In Christ Jesus, we now have the ministry of reconciliation. Reconciliation simply means, *"the restoration of friendship and fellowship after estrangement."*¹¹ Our sinful nature was hostile to God's nature and ways. In order for relationship to be restored that brings relational connection with the Father, the nature of sin had to die in us. Through Christ Jesus, the old sinful nature died with Him and we have become a new creature in Christ Jesus. There is no more hostility between the Father and us. Jesus became the mediator of a New Covenant, abolishing the Old Covenant, so that we are now reconciled in relationship with God. Nothing can now separate us from the love of God being expressed to us in an intimate relationship.

Two Functions of the Ministry of Reconciliation:

The same ministry of reconciliation that Christ Jesus has accomplished between the Father and us is now the ministry He commissions us with.

1. It restores relationship and fellowship between man and Father God
2. It also restores relationship between one another.

Key Point: *The ministry of reconciliation functions by not holding the offenses of others against them.*

How does this ministry of reconciliation work? *By not counting the trespasses of men against them.* Our partnership with Christ Jesus on this earth is in the mission of reconnecting relationship and fellowship with God. The work of Christ was to remove all accusation of sin being held against man for the purpose of disqualifying them from relationship with God. When we hold the sins of someone against them, we are not functioning within the mission of Christ Jesus, but rather the mission of the accuser of the brethren. Simply put, we've partnered with the wrong spirit when we judge someone and hold them accountable for their sins and failures.

The Standard of Forgiveness

Ephesians 2:4-8 ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the ages to come He might show

⁸ 1 John 4:17

⁹ Ephesians 1:20

¹⁰ Romans 6:11

¹¹ The New Unger's Bible Dictionary

the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Key Point: *Redemption, reconciliation, and restoration, are the benefits of God's forgiveness of our sinfulness.*

In our sinful condition, wretched, lost, and unworthy, God loved us. Out of His great love for us, He showed us mercy we did not deserve, and extended us grace we were unworthy to receive. Jesus bore all the punishment that our sins deserved. By grace He brought restoration and reconciliation as the benefits of His forgiveness. We are thus, un-punishable in that Christ Jesus paid the full price of judgment our sins deserved.

Psalm 103:10-14 ¹⁰ *He does not punish us for all our sins; he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve. ¹¹ For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. ¹² He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west. ¹³ The LORD is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. ¹⁴ For he knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust. (NLT)*

Micah 7:19 *He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.*

Jeremiah 31:31-34 ³¹ *"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ³² It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. ³³ "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (NIV)*

The Benefits of Forgiveness

The Old Testament pointed to an age where mercy and grace would triumph over judgment. ¹² An age where God's desire to relate to man in an intimate relationship, as He had designed, would be restored. In this age, mercy would become the source of forgiveness, and grace would become the channel of the Father's blessing to those who choose to honor Him. The benefits of forgiveness possessed promised blessings:

1. **Mercy** - We would not receive the punishment, or judgment, our sins, iniquities, and failures deserve.
2. **Faithful Love** - The Father's unfailing and faithful love would be accessed through honor - an inner value for relationship with the Father.
3. **Cancelled debt of sin** - He will remove the debt of sin against us as far as the east is from the west.

¹² James 2:13

God's perspective of the distance between east and the west is not confined to earth's parameter. If you were to stand in a certain spot and shoot a powerful laser beam directly east and another one directly west you could begin to fathom just how far the Father removes our sins from us. Laser beams don't bend with the curvature of the earth. Instead, they would both shoot off into space and continue traveling at the speed of light to the uttermost distance of the universe. After hundreds, thousands, and millions of years, your sins would still be traveling further and further away from each other. This is an unfathomable distance. It would be just like God to create a universe so expansive, just to make this one significant point; So He could reach out His arms between its expanse simply to say, "I love you this much."

4. **Unobtainable recall** – While casting our sins far from us as the east is from the west is more of God's reference to our sins, casting them into the deepest of seas is more of an earthly reference. While the Father chooses to never recall into account those sins He has forgiven us, so too are we never to recall our own sins against us or each other. Once we have received forgiveness of our sins, we can now consider them as unobtainable for account. The ability to forgive ourselves is a benefit of God removing our sins from us. What He has done for us, we can choose to do for our own guilt and shame and the failures of others.
5. **Restored relationship** – Having obtained peace with God, the reconciliation of relationship will bring us into an experience of a loving Father with His beloved children.
6. **Experiential knowledge of God** – Father God knows us. He remembers that we are but dust and extremely frail. Yet, He has placed within these earthen vessels the treasure of His image and presence. Thus, we have been given the mind of Christ that we may know Father God and his ways.¹³
7. **He will remember our sins no more** – Forgiveness is not about forgetting the sins someone has committed against you. God does not remove our iniquities from His memory. Rather, He chooses to never bring up those issues forgiven again. He chooses to never recall our failures.

Key Point: *No One Can Fall Too Far From God's Saving Grace*

Daniel 4:34-37 ³⁴ *At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation.* ³⁵ *All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"* ³⁶ *At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before.* ³⁷ *Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble. (NIV)*

King Nebuchadnezzar was an epitome of evil as there can be. He was so full of pride that he erected an image of himself so that all in his kingdom could worship his image as a god. Those who refused to recognize him as a god, were subjected to the death penalty of being burned alive. His pride eventually succumbed to total demon possession so that he went utterly insane. As a mad man, he lived among the animals, eating grass as oxen.

¹³ 1 Corinthians 2:16

Then suddenly, clarity came to his mind and he was able to acknowledge the Lord God as being the King of heaven.

I met a pastor in Mexico that had the most incredible testimony I have ever heard. He came out of a lifestyle connected to the Mexican mafia. His job was to execute the wishes of the head of the cartel. He carried out torture against those who dared not fulfill their obligations to the mafia and even committed assassinations. He carried out the orders to storm certain churches to kill the pastors and the entire assembly of saints who attempted to rescue their drug dealers, prostitutes, and drug addicts from their control. Yet, God was able to rescue him from this lifestyle, forgive his many sins, and place him as a pastor over those he is now rescuing from darkness. After the many failed attempts at his own assassination by the mafia, he is still bringing the light of salvation to many.

The point is this. There is no one who has fallen so far away from God that He is not able to reach down and save. As horrific and treacherous man can become, and as great as the evil that possessed their souls, God is able to love them back into His mercy and grace. His standard of forgiveness is unfathomable. Yet, we are required to forgive as He forgives. This means, there is a supernatural grace to empower us to forgive like He forgives. "I can't forgive..." loses its legitimacy in the light of His empowering grace to forgive.

The Model of Christ's Forgiveness

Luke 23:33-38 ³³ When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. ³⁴ But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves. ³⁵ And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One." ³⁶ The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, ³⁷ and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!" ³⁸ Now there was also an inscription above Him, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS."

Stripped naked and hung on display, beaten to the point that His flesh hung from His bones, then taunted by His tormentors and mocked by those considered as the leaders of men, Jesus utters these profound words, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." Jesus was basically saying, "Father, relate to these as if they had the true revelation of who I am. And so, remove these sins from them as far as the east is from the west. In this way, nothing will be held against them. Cancel this debt against them, for they are reacting according to deception rather than knowledge of the truth. Instead, relate to them according to just as if they had never sinned, and as if sin no longer was an issue between them and You. Relate to them according to how You imagined them before the foundations of the earth, according to their true identity and significance of being one with your image and likeness. Relate to them as having a right relationship with You, Father."

As Jesus continued to hang upon that cross in utter agony, bearing the full weight of the punishment of all humanity, He was hit with the ultimate blow of judgment against sin. The separation that sin caused between God and the human race was realized as Jesus experienced His Father pulling away and turning His face from Jesus for the first time in His life. Heart connection was lost as the oneness that bonded them together was severed. Jesus endured the suffering of pain and humiliation, acknowledging that it was the payment necessary for man's punishment, without complaint or request for rescue. But it was this point, the issue that superseded

His physical suffering, that made Jesus cry out, "My God, My God, Why have You forsaken Me?"¹⁴ The ability that Jesus had in bearing through this punishment on man's behalf was possible because he was aware that His Father was with Him. This final blow of judgment was the concluding expression of sin's ultimate blow upon the heart of Father God. The sin that caused the Father's heart to break at the onslaught of man's failure to say no to temptation, Jesus now experienced as His heart broke upon that cross. It was at the bursting of His heart that Jesus uttered His final words, "It is finished." The full payment was paid in full. All judgment against sin was satisfied in the Father's eyes.

Matthew 27:50-54 ⁵⁰ And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. ⁵¹ And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split. ⁵² The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; ⁵³ and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many. ⁵⁴ Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

Key Point: *The power of forgiveness opens the eyes of the offenders.*

The same spirit of revelation from the Father that opened Peter's understanding to say, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,"¹⁵ now had an influence upon those who had once brought so much suffering to Jesus. Forgiveness opened the eyes of these lost sinners, demonically induced heathens, worshippers of false gods, hateful, vengeful, and demented men. The sun being darkened, the earth shaking, rocks splitting, tombs opening and the dead being raised; all carried the revelation from the Father of this message through forgiveness. Those who would listen to the Spirit of God's invitation to salvation could acknowledge Jesus was truly the Son of God. Forgiveness being granted is one thing. Receiving that forgiveness is the responsibility of the one to whom it is revealed and offered. What did these centurions do with the revelation that Jesus was truly the Son of God? We do not know. However, we do know that with the revelation comes the grace for repentance. Had these centurions responded to the revelation of Jesus being the Son of God with repentance, they could have bore the fruit of salvation.

Jesus forgave man, for they did not know what they were doing. Forgiveness brought revelation so that they would discover what they were doing. With revelation being embraced by faith, came the invitation for repentance and the grace to bring an experience of their cleansing of sins. The Father responded to the prayer of Jesus to forgive, by opening their eyes to what they were doing.

Forgive Us, As We Also Forgive

Matthew 6:12, 14-15 ¹² 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹⁴ Matthew 27:46

¹⁵ Matthew 16:16

¹⁴ "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ "But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

Jesus was very clear about how the Father feels about forgiveness. It is the one trait of His character that is required for us to practice and manage. How we may feel about others who offend us should never negate the standard of forgiveness we extended as we manage our choices with determination to forgive those we find conflict with and offend us. How we manage conflict is an attribute that can open the way towards our destiny, or derail us into a downward spiral of cycles of offense, anger, hatred, and bitterness.

Key Point: ***Spirits of darkness seek our permission, either by our agreement or behavior, to lead us down a path that leads to the destruction of relationships.***

In the moment we encounter conflict leading to offense, the spirit realm of darkness wars against our thoughts and emotions. During a conflict, there are triggers happening in our brain that have been programmed by how we deal with threats or offenses. When adrenaline is activating these triggered memories, our self-defense mechanism to either fight or to flight is activated. However, how we respond or react is still a choice. Emotional reaction is never an excuse for choices made from a free will. Our emotional and mental reaction can only point to a problem that needs to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Key Point: ***It is in times of conflict that we need to have core values in place that default our response to love.***

It is when the adrenaline is coursing through our brains that we become vulnerable to deception, rejection, fear, and shame. The spirits of darkness are waiting for permission, either by our behavior or by our agreement, so they can lead us down a path that leads to broken relationships, destroyed trust, and killing any future revelation of God He intended us to draw from relationships. It is in those times that we need to have core values in place that default to love expressed through forgiveness rather than finding fault. We always have two choices, even when we feel like we are losing control of ourselves. We can choose to deny love, or press into compassion.

The Path of Offense Leads to Destruction

***Psalm 3:1-6** ¹ O LORD, how my adversaries have increased! Many are rising up against me. ² Many are saying of my soul, "There is no deliverance for him in God." Selah. ³ But You, O LORD, are a shield about me, My glory, and the One who lifts my head. ⁴ I was crying to the LORD with my voice, And He answered me from His holy mountain. Selah. ⁵ I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustains me. ⁶ I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people Who have set themselves against me round about.*

This psalm of David was recorded during one of the darkest periods of David's reign as king. It is one of the saddest stories in the Bible. David wrote this psalm just after he had to flee from Jerusalem to escape a cue against his reign, led by his son Absalom. Prior to this government take over, Absalom was able to win the hearts of the people of Israel to his cause. What was it that turned so many of the Israelites against David? So many

multitudes had turned against him that David says, "Oh Lord, look how my enemies have increased! Many are attacking me. Many are saying about me, 'Even with God on his side, he won't be victorious'" (GW).¹⁶

Second Samuel chapter thirteen through chapter eighteen tells of this traumatic story. Amnon, the firstborn son of David's wife, Ahinoam, believed he was in love with his half sister Tamar, the daughter to David's wife, Maacah. But because Tamar was a virgin, and more than likely set apart for a peace treaty marriage to some other prince in another kingdom, she was protected by David's guards. So, Amnon devised a plan to get Tamar alone together with him by pretending to be sick. In the manipulation of his father, he requested David to be cared for by his sister, Tamar. But, as Tamar was caring for Amnon at his bedside, Amnon took advantage of her vulnerability and raped her. Now that Amnon had his way with Tamar, his lust was satisfied, so he had her excused and refused to have any more to do with her. Scorned, and now no longer suitable for marriage to another, Tamar was taken into the home of her brother from the same mother, Absalom.

When King David heard what had happened between Amnon and Tamar, he was furious. But, because he was David's firstborn son, he didn't punish Amnon for his actions. This injustice against Tamar stirred Absalom's hatred for Amnon that continued to grow for the next two years. Waiting for his father to execute justice his heart became bitter and not only turned to hatred against his brother, Amnon, but for his father as well.

Absalom came to believe that his father didn't care about justice, so he devised a plan to carry out the judgment Amnon deserved himself. During a festival he held to celebrate the closing season of sheep sheering, Absalom carried out the judgment against his brother. He waited until Amnon was drunk with wine and unable to protect himself and then gave the order to his servants to execute him. The festive mood suddenly changed at the realization that Absalom had taken his brother's life. The rest of Absalom's brothers went fleeing in every direction for fear of their own lives. His plan to carry out justice succeeded. Absalom's escape had already been secured. He found refuge with his maternal grandfather, King Talmai, in Geshur. The name of King Talmai has a very specific meaning. It literally means, *a damn that heaps up water*. In other words, rivers of life, joy, peace, and hope are now restricted from flowing into Absalom's life. The city to which he fled was *Geshur*, meaning, *walled up*. In other words, Absalom found a place where he becomes walled in, as an effort to protect himself. He lives within this walled up city for three years in separation from his father.

Over the next three years, David's grieving heart began to subside and he began to long for Absalom's return. However, after his return, David still couldn't look him in the face. After two years of separation from his father, Absalom pleads with Joab, the commander of David's army, "let me see the king's face, and if there is iniquity in me, let him put me to death." Absalom saw his judgment against Amnon as righteous justice against a horrific sin. As David saw Absalom come before him and prostrate himself humbly before him, his heart turned with compassion and the king kissed Absalom.¹⁷

Having the favor of his father returned to him, and the restoration of his position as prince in his father's kingdom, Absalom placed himself before the city gates where the king's magistrates would hear the legal cases of the people. "You have a good strong case that deserves justice. But, the king isn't going to listen to you," Absalom would tell them. "Oh that one would appoint me judge in the land, then every man who has any suit or cause could come to me and I would give him justice."¹⁸ Although his father, David, extended him forgiveness, Absalom still could not forgive his father of the injustice he perceived. Comparing himself to his father, he usurped his authority and promoted himself in the eyes of the people as being truly just and worthy of taking the seat of governing rule. Like a thief, he stole away the hearts of the people of Israel.

As the story unfolds, Absalom led a rebellion against his father resulting in David fleeing from Jerusalem with those loyal to him. Had they not escaped they would truly have been executed by Absalom. Absalom's bitter heart had grown into hatred, murder, and wickedness. Not satisfied with taking the throne from his father,

¹⁶ "God's Word Translation" Copyright © 1995 by God's Word to the Nations. Used by permission of Baker Publishing Group

¹⁷ 2 Samuel 14:32-33

¹⁸ 2 Samuel 15:2-4

Absalom sought to pursue David to kill him, his wives, all his brothers and all who sided with David. But David was a powerful warrior, and the men devoted to him were David's mighty men of war. They strategically confronted the forces of Absalom and Israel within a dense forest. By the time the battle had finished, Israel had lost 20,000 men and Absalom was left hanging from an oak tree by his hair. David's general, Joab, discovered Absalom hanging from the tree and slew him, believing God had delivered him into Joab's hands.

Absalom's name means, *Father is peace*. Yet, in the events that happened in Absalom's life, he lost his identity and the sense that his father is peace. Was David wrong to extend mercy in order to bring peace into his home? In an age of the law, did David fail to represent God's word, or was this yet another expression of David pulling grace into his age? Does the lack of any confrontation against wrongs committed convey a message that mercy and grace annuls justice? Was Absalom right in seeking justice for the wrong done to his sister? All of these are very hard questions to answer without stepping into making judgments ourselves against David or Absalom. Without actually knowing the heart of David, as to the reasons he failed to act justly, we can easily make the wrong assessment of his choices. Is there a point where you surrender justice to those God has placed in authority and trust that they will rule righteously? We must come to a point where we are able to surrender our need for justice to those God has placed in authority and trust that they will rule righteously. Until then, we continue to surrender all injustices to God, as the supreme judge of all.

What we know from this story is that there are dire consequences to holding onto resentment and allowing anger to grow into bitterness and hatred. Like an infection in our souls and minds, offense festers in the hearts of those infected by it. It becomes a source of hatred that harbors a growing need for justice and revenge. Bitterness eats away any sense of peace in our love connections with people. The trust you gain from a healthy relationship begins to rot like gangrene to body parts. The rot continues to spread until the only solution is to amputate that part from the body.

Key Point: *The way we know we have a bitter root of unforgiveness is that we give ourselves permission to think negatively in order to build a case against the offender.*

The way we know we have a bitter root feeding poison into our hearts is that we find a way to excuse ourselves from judging someone else because of our sense of injustice. We find reasons to accuse for other's obvious faults and injustices and then give ourselves permission to think and behave negatively. We keep a running account of offenses to build a case against them. We then begin to present our case to others in the search of affirmation. We seek to gather to our side those who we can convince to agree that we are the victim and this person is the perpetrator. We present our case as the victim without allowing the other person to gain fair representation, the whole time believing we are just in our judgments. This is called undue process of law and is considered as an injustice. Thus, we can commit an injustice because we judge another's injustice without due process. What is due process? Giving our sense of injustices to God and allowing Him to be the supreme judge. When negativity is influencing our language and behavior, we have taken the position of a victim, and opened our hearts to a root of bitterness.

Is There a Limit to Forgiveness?

It was Peter that came to Jesus to basically find an answer as to the limit a person is obligated to forgive another's fault. Peter probably thought he was being pretty lenient when he said, "Up to seven times?" However, Jesus takes the limit off of the amount of times you should forgive and places it at a unaccountable amount of times. Jesus then tells a parable to better illustrate the principle of forgiveness in the kingdom of God.

Matthew 18:23-35 ²³ "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴ "When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. ²⁵ "But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. ²⁶ "So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.' ²⁷ "And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt.

²⁸ "But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' ²⁹ "So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' ³⁰ "But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. ³¹ "So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. ³² "Then summoning him, his lord *said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ 'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?'

³⁴ "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. ³⁵ "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

Key Point: *Unless there is a change in our hearts towards those we are in conflict with, offense will lead us down the path towards destruction.*

What are these torturers or tormentors, as other translations render it? We can actually open the door to demonic activity in our lives by holding onto resentment. The tormentors are those demonic forces that inhabit darkness. Fear, anger, resentment, jealousy, rage, hatred, and bitterness are all environments we give them permission to dwell within. When we choose to partner with darkness, we give them an open access into our thought life, into our emotions, and even into our bodies with sickness and disease. Hospitals are full of people who are dealing with anxiety related illnesses due to bitterness and unforgiveness.

Because of this, many people attempting to receive healing to their physical bodies cannot receive the grace for healing because of unforgiveness in their hearts. 90% of inner healing starts with this one issue, "Who do you need to forgive?" The evidence of the destruction unforgiveness brings into one's life is overwhelming. Unless there is a change in our hearts towards those we are offended at, offense unresolved will lead us down the path towards destruction.

Forgiveness: The Way to Promotion and Prosperity

Joseph makes different choices than that of Absalom. If anyone deserved to be offended and hold a grudge and want to see justice served, it would be Joseph. Jealousy against Joseph grew in the hearts of his brothers until the day came that they sought to kill him. Instead, they sold him as a slave. Yet, in an attitude that believed all things would work for the good according to God's will, Joseph devotes himself to serving in whatever condition he

found himself. In serving wholeheartedly, he receives promotion. Because of the hand of God upon Joseph, God's favor ultimately promotes him to the highest office in Egypt, just under the headship of Pharaoh.

When Joseph's brothers came to Egypt for supplies, they are brought before Joseph, but they did not recognize him. Joseph had the authority and power to instantly have the brothers arrested, imprisoned, and even executed. He could have carried out against them the justice they each deserved. Instead, Joseph saw the hand of God at work, even in their failures. In his wisdom, Joseph understood that true reconciliation can only come through true repentance of heart. So he creates a scenario where his brother's hearts are tested to see if they have experienced a change of heart. Joseph attempted to move towards love and reconciliation, but the restoration of their relationship was dependent upon the choices his brother's would make.

Joseph extends forgiveness that resulted in the whole family becoming restored together. He even protects his brothers by not allowing anyone else know what they had done to him. The secret of their offense, which included lying to their Father, was covered over by Joseph. It became an issue Joseph resolved between him and his brothers alone.

Key Point: *Choosing the way of love will keep us from falling into the trap of bitterness.*

Choosing the way of love will keep us from falling into the trap of envy, jealousy, and hatred. When love is far from us, we cannot find the compassion necessary to protect us from offense. Training our minds to default to love during conflict is essential in maintaining healthy relationships and connection. Default to love means that when we experience a conflict we choose to gain understanding through believing the best in the other person. Ambiguity and confusion is assumed to be due to the lack of understanding rather than the ill intent of the other party. It is choosing to believe the good and to remain in a positive mindset in the face of conflict. It is choosing not to be offended, but rather forgiving.

Key Point: *Forgive means to give forwards – to give mercy and grace before it is deserved.*

Forgive means, to give forwards. In other words, it means to give mercy and grace before it is merited or deserved. Mercy focuses on not giving one the judgment they do deserve. While grace focuses upon giving one favor they don't deserve. *"For God so love the world that He gave His only son."*¹⁹ While we were yet sinners, destined for wrath and judgment, Christ died for us. He fore gave His Son before we even asked for mercy. He fore-gave us salvation, while we were still lost in sin and hostile towards Him.

As unforgiveness closes off the grace the Father desires to pour into our lives. Forgiveness opens the way for greater grace.²⁰ Love operating in mercy, grace, and forgiveness, always trumps justice and the need for punishment.

Understanding Forgiveness

Forgiving someone doesn't necessarily mean we need reconciliation with them, but it does mean that we stop the negative thoughts about them, reduce the ill feelings concerning them, and release the anger in our hearts against them so that we are able to want good things for them.

¹⁹ John 3:16

²⁰ James 4:6

Forgiveness does not...

- 1. Justify the offense:** Forgiveness does not mean that we endorse sins being committed against us. Sins against us are still offensive. God never condones sin. Our sins cause Him to grieve and while He is slow to anger, He does become angry.²¹ These responses are normal to perceived offensives. But, as the apostle Paul warned the Ephesians, *"Be angry, and yet do not sin..."* leaves the responsibility to our response as a matter of choice. To choose poorly gives the devil an opportunity for access into our lives.²²
- 2. Excuse poor behavior:** Forgiveness does not mean that we excuse the offenders guilt in searching for explanations as to why they acted with such poor behavior. As it is wrong to judge as to pointing out blame on assumed bad motives and accusations, so also is it wrong to judge as to point out reasons to excuse poor behavior. God alone judges the intents and innocence of the heart.
- 3. Pardon the offender:** A pardon is a judicial decision that releases the offender from the consequences of their actions. Just as we do not have the right to judge another person as to the punishment there offense deserves, neither do we have the right to release them from their consequences. This is solely the right of God, as judge.
- 4. Constitute the repression of genuine feelings:** Denying that the offense is painful and grievous so as to repress what we are emotionally experiencing, is suppressing what we feel. Expressing our feelings to Papa God is an important part of releasing our pain to Him and receiving inner healing. Sharing our pain with others is to only be done with those individuals who are mature in that they will lead us to complete forgiveness. They encourage us to keep our love on, and to come into wholeness.
Warning: Sharing our pain in offense is aimed at coming into wholeness. It is not an excuse to dump our feelings on others so as to win their sympathy, gain support as being a victim, or to win others to our side against the offender. Love covers sin, not exposes it.
- 5. Pretend the offence didn't occur:** Believing that to forgive is to forget is unrealistic. Once an offensive memory is created, to wipe it from our memory leads us to only pretend the offense doesn't exist. God does not literally forget our transgressions. Rather, He chooses not to bring the memory of them back into His mind. Traumas that lead us to block out the event from our memories is not equated to being healthy. It is still a very real incident that needs forgiveness leading to wholeness. Choosing not to dwell on an offence is not the same as pretending it didn't happen.
- 6. Require reconciliation:** Forgiveness and reconciliation are not the same. Reconciliation requires the participation of those involved in a broken relationship making the choice to rebuild connection between them. It requires both parties choosing to meet in the middle of the bridge to restore the relationship. Forgiveness has to do with the individual who is offended choosing to release the offense, regardless of the other's choices. The person we extend forgiveness to may not want to reconcile the relationship. Their choice should not effect our forgiveness towards them.
- 7. Comprises of instant trust:** Reestablishing trust has to do with the process of reconciliation. Relationships that have been broken through offense have violated the level of trust in the connection. Forgiveness does not mean we eliminate safe boundaries with those who are unsafe. Reconciliation has to do with trust being restored through repentance and changed behavior. Forgiveness carries no condition of repentance or change from the other party.

²¹ Ephesians 4:30; Matthew 8:34; Romans 12:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:9

²² Ephesians 4:24-27

Key Point: *True forgiveness is a choice, rather than a feeling. It is an expression of agape love – choosing to love unconditionally.*

True forgiveness is a choice, rather than a feeling. It is an act of the will, with the understanding that feelings will eventually follow. If we harbor the desire to see our offender punished, we will eventually lose the anointing of the Spirit through which grace flows into our lives. But when we choose to love, and express compassion, the desire for our offender to be punished leaves. True forgiveness is refusing to allow our thoughts to dwell upon the offense and to desire punishment.

Forgiveness chooses...

- 1) **To acknowledge an offense has triggered an emotional response:** In the recognition that we have been emotionally charged by an offence, we choose to believe the best in the other person, regardless of their behavior. We take ownership of our response, and without looking for blame, we discern what exactly we are feeling. Acknowledging feelings of rejection, dishonor, intimidation, the sense of injustice, etc., we draw upon the reality of our true value and significance in who we are and the purposes of our calling.
- 2) **To be merciful:** True forgiveness refuses to punish the offender. It denies the need to see the offender reap the consequences of their behavior. When we acknowledge our pain and are aware of feeling offended, we then refuse to make the offender pay for their sin against us. Therefore, we refuse to erect walls of resistance against them, give them the cold shoulder, communicate our ill feelings with our body language, sneers, or rolling our eyes, or attempt to turn others against them.
- 3) **To be graceful:** True forgiveness not only extends mercy, but furnishes grace. Mercy means, *I choose not to give you the punishment you do deserve*, While grace means, *I choose to give you favor you don't deserve*. Favor looks like the willingness, with active obedience, to bless those who offend us. It looks like asking the Papa God to forgive their offense so that He can bless them with revelation knowledge of truth and His ways.
- 4) **To keep no record of wrongs** – Love “keeps no record of wrongs.”²³ Keeping records of sins against those who hurt us only serves to be held against them at a later time. True forgiveness releases the person from all wrongs and reestablishes a clean record. It chooses to never use the offense against them again.
- 5) **To cover over a multitude of sins** - Although we may justify the action of telling our friends and even our leaders as to our pain in an offense, believing it as being therapeutic and helping us “process” is not valid in true forgiveness. Therefore, covering the sins of others looks like refusing to talk about what happened to us when the motive of sharing is not aimed at personally coming into wholeness.
- 6) **To set a guard over our hearts** – True forgiveness is an act of the will, but should ultimately impact our feelings. If we have not truly forgiven those who offend us so that our hearts find release, then our mouths will eventually expose our hearts. Jesus stated, *“Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.”*²⁴ Therefore, keeping a guard on our tongues, as an insight into heart issues, is a key to keeping bitterness from taking root.

²³ 1Corinthians 13:5

²⁴ Matthew 12:34

*"If our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God."*²⁵ Living in mercy and grace with Papa God bears the confidence of peace with Him while in His presence. Our relationship with Papa is founded upon His forgiveness towards us. The Holy Spirit is good at convicting our hearts when we fall short of His standard of forgiveness. Keeping a heart that is humble and sensitive to His conviction guards us against bitterness.

- 7) To take our thoughts captive to obedience of Christ**²⁶ - When we recall that forgiveness is forgiving others as we have been forgiven, we then choose to remember what His forgiveness means to us. Therefore, we set a guard over the thoughts that come to our minds that seek to place blame, rehearse the offense, and demand justice. Instead, we choose to destroy speculations, cast down internal arguments, and resist every proud obstacle that keeps us from the experiential knowledge of God's standard of forgiveness.

Forgiving is choosing to say "no" to negative thoughts and turn them to the acknowledgment that the offender is in a process of being sanctified, just as we are. It is choosing to think about our offender as Papa God sees them, at the end of their process of glorification.²⁷

Three Aspects of Forgiveness

- 1) Forgiving Others** - As we have been seeing, the main aspect of forgiveness is in how we deal with those who offend us. We release ourselves from the responsibility to obtain justice and surrender all judgments to God. We choose to honor those who may act dishonorable because God sees in them value and greatness He is still in the process of bringing them into. So, we focus our attention in blessing the value of God's image in them.
- 2) Forgiving Ourselves** - Complete forgiveness will also include the forgiveness of ourselves for the sins we commit against God and others. Shame holds us to a state of guilt for our faults and failures. Shame is basically the refusal to forgive ourselves. Conviction of our guilt is to lead us to repentance. But repentance accompanied by confession bears the fruit of forgiveness. As God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, so also are we to not judge ourselves as unworthy to receive forgiveness. His standards of forgiveness apply to us personally as well as others. As it is wrong to not forgive others, it is equally wrong to not forgive ourselves.
- 3) Forgiving God** - All our traumas, crisis', and conflicts can ultimately be blamed upon God. We can easily judge them as being God's fault for not protecting us, providing for us, or avenging and vindicating us, as we expect from Him. Since He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and just, He is expected to keep us safe from bad things happening to us.

All our suffering can literally be aimed at God's failures to fulfill our expectations. These expectations are called judgments. So, we can find ourselves actually judging God. Knowing that it is wrong to actually judge God, we can hide these judgments within unanswered questions we ask, such as, *"Why is this happening to me?"* Meaning, *"God is allowing this to happen to me."* Or, *"What have I done to deserve this?"* Meaning, *"God is holding something against me."* Then there is the question, *"Why is this person able to get away with this behavior?"* Meaning, *"God should do something about this person,"* with the implication that He is not ruling justly. Or, *"Why is there evil and suffering in the world?"* Implying, *"God is not really loving. He is allowing evil to prevail when He has the power to stop it."* We fail to realize that these "innocent" questions we ask ourselves are actually revealing that we have taken the seat of prosecutor and judge against God.

²⁵ 1John 3:21

²⁶ 2Corinthians 10:5

²⁷ Romans 8:30

The “accuser of the brethren” is also the accuser of God seeking agreement from us for his case against God. Taking these thoughts captive is necessary so that we don’t fall into bitterness against God.

How do you know if you are bitter against God? When bad things happen that trigger your feelings of hurt, disappointment, discouragement, and frustration, do you give God the silent treatment? Do you sense a distance between yourself and God? These are both symptoms of punishment.

Psalm 91:1-2 ¹ *He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.* ² *I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!"*

Psalm 125:1 *Those who trust in the LORD Are as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved but abides forever.*

Hebrews 10:32-36 ³² *Think back on those early days when you first learned about Christ. Remember how you remained faithful even though it meant terrible suffering.* ³³ *Sometimes you were exposed to public ridicule and were beaten, and sometimes you helped others who were suffering the same things.* ³⁴ *You suffered along with those who were thrown into jail, and when all you owned was taken from you, you accepted it with joy. You knew there were better things waiting for you that will last forever.* ³⁵ *So do not throw away this confident trust in the Lord. Remember the great reward it brings you!* ³⁶ *Patient endurance is what you need now, so that you will continue to do God’s will. Then you will receive all that he has promised. (NLT)*

Key Point: ***Trust is not secured upon the absence of conflict, but upon the confidence of God is accomplishing towards their future.***

Trust is not secured upon the absence of conflict. It is based upon the confidence in that God, who began a good work in us with the promise of bringing it to completion, is also at work in others. Trust in the midst of storms, which appear threatening to our relationships, is the basis of hope from which faith draws the power to calm storms. Trust is willing to say, “I don’t understand, but I choose to rely upon He who speaks the words of eternal life.”²⁸ Trust is the confidence in the promise that God causes all things to work together for the good to them that love Him.²⁹ God did not send His Son into the world to explain why bad things happen, but rather to save us from evil. Through trust in Him, we exemplify a life of thriving through suffering for the joy of glory set before us.

The Tension Between Justice and Mercy

Matthew 18:15-17 ¹⁵ *“If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back.* ¹⁶ *But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses.* ¹⁷ *If the person still*

²⁸ John 6:68

²⁹ Romans 8:28

refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won't accept the church's decision, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector. (NLT)

Key Point: *Reconciliation begins by not holding onto offenses, but reaching a point of understanding.*

We not only have the capability of sinning against God, but we can also sin against one another. Sinning against God is simply missing the mark of His will and falling short of the glory of His intended blessings through relationship. Therefore, sinning against one another is simply missing the mark of another's will and falling short of the blessing of a healthy relationship. What is the purpose of forgiveness? Reconciliation. What does the ministry of reconciliation look like? Not holding our sins against one another.³⁰ So the goal is not to bring blame and to point out the other's failures. The goal is to listen for the gaining of understanding which leads to confession. Confession isn't aimed at getting the other person to admit what they did wrong, although it can include that. It literally means, *to say the same thing as*. The point is this, both parties coming into and understanding where they can each tell the other person what they understand.

The beginning of reconciliation begins with the offended parties gaining an understanding of each other. However, it takes two people to create a healthy relationship. When the other party is refusing to fulfill their part of the relationship, it is time to get one or two other believers who are strong in the Lord, to bring the relationship to reconciliation. If that fails, then those chosen as leaders over the church become involved in the process of reconciliation.

There are measures of severity of sins. For example, murder is a worse offence than lying. John differentiates sin from greater sins that lead to death.³¹ If a believer commits a grievous sin that is a violation not only of God's ways, but threatens the health and safety of others, then the confrontation of those sins become a more serious case. For example: sexually molesting children is not only a violation of God's standards of purity, but it is against the laws of the land. Reporting such a crime is necessary for the protection of other children.

1 Corinthians 5:1-5 ¹ *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife.* ² *And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?* ³ *Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present.* ⁴ *When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present,* ⁵ *hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.* (NIV)

Evidently, the sin of unforgiveness is not the only sin whereby one can be turned over to the tormentors. Paul rebukes the Corinthian church for having such a person who is actively sinning by committing sexual immorality fellowshiping among them. This was such a sin that merited a confrontation resulting in repentance, confession, and restitution. Yet, the Corinthian church failed to find that balance between the tension of mercy and justice.

³⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:16

³¹ 1 John 5:16

Key Point: *God has placed governing authorities on earth and in the church for creating safety.*

We have this tension concerning justice on earth. The first is that God holds exclusive rights to judge each man according to the motivating intentions within his heart, along with what manifests in his behavior. Secondly, man has been given authority to govern justly with those who violate human rights. Thus, laws for governing humanity were given such as, Do not worship false gods (demonic entities), do not kill, do not steal, do not lie, do not dishonor your mother and father, do not commit fornication or adultery, do not commit homosexual acts, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, etc. Those who committed such acts were sentenced for punishment, and even death.³² All these laws stemmed from the loss of loving the Lord God and loving one another.³³ Government was instituted by God to protect human rights. Yet, when governing forces fail to rule justly, righteous people deal with a sense of injustice and the need for justice to prevail. Thus, the governing forces failed and fallen short of her God given role. How do you deal with that sense of righteous anger when those guilty of crimes against humanity are released back onto the streets? How do you manage the anxiety you feel when you no longer feel safe to walk the streets for fear of becoming a victim of those who have fallen through the cracks of a failing judicial system?

God has placed leaders within His church whereby healthy relationships are encouraged and protected, plus creating a safe environment for people to become what God has called them to be. God has placed first within His government Apostles who call out the identity and callings of those they are leading and aim them towards God's vision with a mission. Prophets have been placed secondly in His government to not only point the way to which God is taking His church, but to bring edification and guidance, but also correction where God sees it is needed. Thirdly, God has assigned Teachers to instruct the church in the ways of God and His value system. They teach the way of righteousness and justice while training us to draw upon the Father's grace for victorious living.

Conclusion

As we know, all people have been injured by the fall, by sin's hold on the world, and by the power's of darkness that have been working at keeping humanity from discovering who they are and why they exist. Yet God's grace is present for all people in all cultures. As we humble ourselves, meaning we don't hold our personal value and belief system above those of others, we can gain understanding of what God considers valuable in the differences of others.

Forgiveness doesn't mean that I am free to do the same wrong committed against me. Once forgiveness is granted, the standard of righteousness is restored. Forgiveness restores the standard of making right choices. The standard is that the righteousness of Christ Jesus is now available to us through grace. That same grace that was extended to us, when we were sinners, is the grace we extend to others who are unrighteous and undeserving.

Past offenses in our history can restrain us from loving others with the grace and mercy of God. These offenses distort the lenses through which we deal with conflict. These harbored ill feelings influence our thoughts to default to negative patterns and constrain us from drawing upon the grace of the Father. By refusing to forgive someone, we determine that we are qualified to execute the justice the other deserves. Even if that punishment is simply removing our kindness towards them and building a wall of distance from them. We then assume the right to carry out punishment upon the offender, and yet we are guilty of our own crimes and offenses against a

³² Genesis 9:6; Exodus chapter 20; 21:12; Leviticus 24:17; Numbers 35:33;

³³ Matthew 22:37-38

righteous king and His kingdom. To refuse to forgive is an act that is contrary to the will of the king. This is considered as an act of treason.

The basis of forgiveness is this: I was undeserving of forgiveness. Yet, because of God's great love, He forgave me of my unrighteousness. Therefore, I am disqualified to act as a judge in determining anyone else's worthiness of forgiveness. We are called to love all people, regardless of our differences. Love requires understanding those we are supposed to honor, especially those in leadership who are to get double honor. This means that love is going to be the default response to every opportunity to become offended. It is love that covers a multitude of sins.

End of Lesson 505

Recommended Resources:

1. Audio Message: *"Forgive from the Heart"* by Danny Silk
2. Audio Message: *"Bitterness Is an Equal Opportunity Destroyer"* by Kris Vallotton
3. Audio Message: *"Managing Your Inner World"* by Kris Vallotton
4. Audio Message: *"Practical Steps to Change"* by Bill Johnson
5. Book: *"Total Forgiveness"* by R.T. Kendall
6. Book: *"The Importance of Forgiveness"* by John Arnott