

Lord, Help Me to Forgive!

Key Scriptures:

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift at the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.” Matt. 5:23-24

“Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled...” Heb. 12:14-15 (NASB)

Portion for the Journey:

“Jesus taught us to pray, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” The word for ‘debt’ in the Greek is ‘opheilēma’ (Strong’s #3783). It means that which is owed, an offense or trespass which requires repayment. The scriptural use of this legal term refers to our sin, for which an accounting must be made. The penalty for not paying this debt is death. Jesus offers us forgiveness for this debt through His own sacrifice and payment of the penalty. Matt. 6:12

The LORD’s Prayer makes it clear that as much as we need His forgiveness for our sins, we also need to forgive others who have sinned or offended us. These two facets of forgiveness go hand in hand. It is only as we realize how much He has forgiven us that we can truly appreciate His desire that we would forgive others. It is only when we focus our eyes on the LORD and His immense love and forgiveness that we are able to freely release others into His hands and trust Him to work in their lives. Take time to meditate and let the truth of God’s word regarding His forgiveness to penetrate your heart with gratitude for His forgiveness of your sin and to open your heart to forgive others.

- ♥ Forgiveness is such an essential aspect of God’s character and very person that He is named a “Forgiving God.” One of the Hebrew names for our God is “God-Who-Forgives,” The Hebrew word for “forgive” is “sahlohch” (Strong’s #5545). This word means to pardon, spare, to relieve someone of the burden of their offense. The word appears in the Old Testament 50 times and in each occurrence, it is used in the context of God forgiving man. Sahlohch never refers to man forgiving anyone for their sins for only God had the authority to forgive sins. This is why the Jews were so amazed when they heard Jesus say, “your sins are forgiven.” Ps. 99:8; Dan. 9:9; Ps. 103:1-5,12; Isa. 55:7; Jer. 33:8
- ♥ Jesus’s blood was poured out with His death on the cross so that there was a legal basis to forgive our sins and provide for His cleansing and rebirth as a new creation. God’s forgiveness not only demonstrates a legal transaction in which we are freed from the penalty of our sins, it includes His cleansing and newness of life. Matt. 26:28; Luke 23:34
- ♥ God’s forgiveness is perfect and complete. If we meet His conditions of repentance, we can have perfect faith that our sins are truly forgiven. 1 John 1:9; Isa. 1:18; Eph. 1:7
- ♥ The Word says that God forgets our sins and remembers them no more. The Hebrew word for “remember” is different from our conception of this word. It means, to call to the forefront of one’s mind, or to place one’s attention upon someone or something. So, when the Word says God forgets, it means He no longer calls those sins to His attention or focus. It He does not dwell upon or rehearse our sins. It means He no longer holds our sins against us. In the final

judgment, God will not “remember” those sins but instead will focus His attention upon Jesus and His provision for our cleansing. “One Minute Bible Love Notes” explains it this way, when someone says, “I owe you for lunch.” You might say, “Forget about it!” We are telling them we will pay for their lunch and to put out repaying us completely from their minds.” When someone sins against us, do we rehearse and repeat in our minds what they have done, keeping their “account” with us fresh in our thinking? Forgiveness means we need to let go of those sins and not recall them to mind over and over. Isa. 43:25-26; Heb. 8:12; Heb. 10:17

The Lord’s forgiveness is perfectly complete!

- 1) **It is said that our sins are “blotted out.”** In David’s prayer for repentance¹, he asked the Lord to “blot out” his transgressions. This word is ‘maha’ (Strong’s #4229). It means to wipe away utterly; abolish, fully destroy. If our sins were written in a book, they would be erased so completely it would be as though they were never written. (See Isa. 43:25. A beautiful application of this word is found in Isa. 25:8, where the LORD promises that He will blot out every tear from our faces!

Another Hebrew word used in reference to the “clearing” or “cleansing” of iniquity is “Naqah” (Strong’s 5352) This word means to clear, acquit, cleanse, make clean, blameless, to free, exempt, to empty by pouring out the contents of something, to empty the cup of something leaving it clean and clear. Ps. 51:2

The Greek word for “blotted out” or is “exaleipho” (Strong’s #1813) from “ek” which means “out” and “aleipho” which means “to anoint. To wipe out, to wash out. The word signifies the obliteration or removal. It can refer to the removal of sin, words, or tears. Acts 3:19; Col. 2:13-14; Num. 14:18-21; Ps. 51:1

- 2) The Lord gives some beautiful pictures to help us understand the completeness of His forgiveness.
 - ♥ He will “cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.” Micah 7:18,19
 - ♥ He will remove the stain of our sins, making our hearts to be as white as snow. Isa. 1:18
 - ♥ He removes our sin from us, as far as the east is from the west. The east and west will never meet! Ps. 103:1-5,12
 - ♥ He makes us to be new creations, as if we had never sinned. We are delivered from the power of darkness and conveyed into the kingdom of His love. 2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 1:13-14
- 3) When we receive His forgiveness, we are freed from the power of sin as well as the penalty. We no longer need to carry the weight of guilt and condemnation. There is an even greater benefit than that! We are restored to relationship with our beloved Father and may come boldly into His presence. He pours out times of refreshing found only in the presence of the Lord. Acts 3:19

Our relationship with the LORD can only be as good as our relationship is with others. Forgiveness is not an option for Christians. We cannot be in a right relationship with other people unless we are in a right relationship with the LORD, but our relationship with the LORD is only as good the purity of our hearts toward other people. “Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness.” (1 John 2:9) Having unforgiveness or broken relationships in one’s life hinders God’s power of

¹ For further study of this incredible model prayer for repentance found in Psalm 51, see Portions for the Journey study 181 “Create in Me a Clean Heart.”

God from moving freely in our lives. It may also hinder His working in the lives of those we are holding in unforgiveness. Matt. 18:18

The Word makes it clear that harboring unforgiveness in our hearts is like a poison. Meditate on the following verses and list some of the consequences to those who do not obey God's commandment to forgive others: Matt. 5:23-24; 6:14-15; Matt. 7:24,26; Matt. 18:24-35 [tormenters (Strong's #930) torturers, jailers; Mark 11:22-26; Rom. 12:19-21; Eph. 4:26-27; Prov. 16:32; 2 Cor. 2:10-11; Eph. 4:26-27; Lev. 19:17-18; Prov. 10:12; 1 Cor. 6:9-11 [Reviler: someone who hates, hold grudges, is unforgiving and bitter.] Luke 17:34

There are two unhealthy responses when someone "trespasses" against us:

1) Superficial forgiveness. This person forgives quickly but in an automatic, rote manner. This results in a quick and easy pardon with no processing of our emotions or coming to terms with the extent of the injury. It often places the person in a repeating pattern of abuse. Those who engage in superficial forgiveness often compulsively seek to repair relationships apart from God's wisdom or direction. They offer unsanctified mercy toward the offender. They often beat themselves up when someone mistreats them. They make excuses for the offender. They repress or deny the violation and fail to recognize their anger or despair. Because they are not offering true godly forgiveness, they continue in a pattern of being bound to the abuser and do not become free. They fail to bring their wounds or needs to the Lord to allow him to heal their hurts. These individuals often feel powerless, trapped or manipulated.

2) Refusal to forgive. Forgiveness brings healing to the wounds we have received. When we choose not to forgive, these wounds in our hearts are not healed and create a bitter root. Once a bitter root has formed in our hearts we become more easily wounded by others and our bitterness wounds others. When bitterness takes root, many are defiled by it. Bitterness in our hearts blinds our eyes from seeing the truth about ourselves and others. Simon the Sorcerer is one who had allowed his spirit to walk in unforgiveness, which had allowed him to become poisoned bitterness. Peter identified the source of Simon's sorcery's bitterness-the deepening effect of unforgiveness. "Here is warning regarding the danger of tolerated or embraced unforgiveness, which may, like poison, permeate and bind the soul, ultimately corrupting everything around it. In Simon, his bitterness shaped his passion to control others. ...Forgiving others from our heart flushes out the poison with the power of the Cross. In contrast, unforgiveness as with Simon, led down paths we would never have imagined we would travel." Heb. 12:14-15; Acts 8:14-23

There is a pattern in the lives of those who choose not to forgive. These individuals get insulted and are quick to take an offense against another. They have frequent confrontations with others. They jump to conclusions and take what people say and do too personally. They tend to harbor a grudge for a long time. They never seem to feel that the other person's apology is good enough to warrant letting go of an offense. They are often very quick to cut off those who have hurt them without wrestling through to the truth about what actually happened. Those who refuse to forgive isolate themselves and tend to leave relationships when offended, only to seek out new relationships. They readily take on the role of victim and rehearse what has been done to them without being willing to take responsibility for their own role in the situation. Dream of defeating their opponent and finding ways to remain powerful, superior and in control.

Pride is at the basis of our lack of willingness to forgive. The broken person is so aware of their own sin and their own failings that they are gracious to forgive others when they sin. When we are truly broken

before the LORD, we will have no difficulty forgiving others. Brokenness frees us from “self” and a spirit of entitlement and allows us to receive all that happens from God’s hand with humility and trust.

Roy Hession, in his book, *Calvary Road*, described the characteristics of “self” that prevent us from receiving the full blessing of God’s Spirit, these are “self-pity, self-seeking, self-indulgence, sensitiveness, touchiness, resentment, self-defense when we are hurt or injured by others. Self-consciousness, reserve, worry, fear, all spring from self and all are sin and make our cups unclean. But all of these were put into that other cup, which the Lord Jesus drank from momentarily at Gethsemane, but which He drank to the dregs at Calvary—the cup of our sin. ...It is not enough just to take our reactions of irritation to Calvary. We must first be broken, that is, we must yield to God over the whole question and accept that person and his ways as His will for us. Then we are able to take our wrong reactions to Jesus, knowing that His blood will cleanse away our sin, and when we have been cleansed from sin, we find peace. ...We do not lose peace over another person’s sins, but only our own. God wants to show us our reactions, and only when we are willing to be cleansed there, will we have His peace.”

Genuine Forgiveness:

Brother Yen, a Chinese believer, went through years and years of imprisonment in which he suffered horrific torture for his faith. He had sharp needles jabbed under his nails until he passed out from the pain. His legs were smashed by prison guards. On one occasion he was beaten so badly that his own family could not recognize him when they came to visit him. He was denounced and betrayed by other Christians. He says, “By the grace of God, I have freely forgiven all of those who brought pain into my life.” In his book, *“Living Water,”* he goes on to say, “When we have learned to live in a flow of forgiveness, we will live in freedom.” He made the comment that you may have heard a hundred sermons on forgiveness before, but the only way to allow these messages to become a reality in our lives is to receive the opportunity to forgive someone. He makes the profound statement, *“Forgiveness is the greatest gift God has given us so we can survive in an evil world where people hurt us, betray us, and do terrible things to us.”*

The Word gives a beautiful picture of genuine forgiveness through the detailed description of Stephen’s murder. As Stephen was dying at the hands of an angry mob, he knelt down and prayed, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” In his last breath we see his heart was for their forgiveness, that their sin would not be held against them. Acts 7:51-60

We will not find true fullness and freedom of joy in the LORD until we have forgiven everyone who has hurt or wounded us. Forgiveness is a choice and not dependent on feelings. It is not based on the person coming to us and asking us to forgive. Forgiveness comes as an act of our will in obedience to God. If we ask Him, He will enable us to forgive all who have “trespassed” against us. We can only be responsible to repent for the sin in our own hearts, we cannot be responsible for the other person’s response or their willingness to forgive us. That is “As much as it is possible, live in peace with everyone.” Rom. 12:18 (GW)

It has been said that harboring unforgiveness is like having a dead body chained to you. Until you forgive you will have the stench of this corpse dragging with you wherever you go. We are bound to that person and may keep that person in bondage until we forgive them.

False beliefs about forgiveness:

- The disciples had the idea that there was a set number of times we were required to forgive someone and then we no longer needed to forgive. Jesus made it clear that we are never to run out of forgiveness for a person. Forgiveness is often a process by which we may need to return to the place of forgiveness again, as we find God's grace to forgive more deeply. It is possible to believe we have forgiven but unless we process the effects that the person's actions have had on our heart, feelings, emotions and life, that early forgiveness may be very superficial.
- Some people believe that we must wait for the person to be sorry or ask our forgiveness before we forgive them. This is not true. We must always forgive unconditionally. Some people may not even be aware they have sinned against us and others may never feel repentant for what they have done. That is between them and God.
- Sometimes we are afraid that to do that, we will allow the person to be free from the consequences of the wrong they have done. This is not true. They must account to the LORD for their sins, and He will always be just. Bill Gothard said that "Forgiving a person is cleansing his record with us and transferring the responsibility for any punishment to God."
- Some people feel that in forgiving a person for what they have done we need to return to our original relationship with that person. God wants us to walk in wisdom and His leading. When we forgive, we are releasing that person from our judgment but we must continue to walk in discernment, wisdom and allow the Holy Spirit to lead us. To forgive is not synonymous with trusting that person. Phil. 1:9-11
- There are those who feel reluctant to forgive because they feel it minimizes that magnitude of what the person has done to us. Our forgiveness does not diminish the magnitude of their sin. They are still responsible to repent for the sins they have committed and God will hold them accountable.
- Some feel that in refusing to forgive they are punishing the person and making them pay for their actions. Unforgiveness results in holding onto anger and hostility but keep us bound in the circumstances of our pain rather than freeing us. They do not forgive because they do not want God to forgive. Jonah refused to obey God's call to preach the Gospel of repentance to Israel's enemy because he wanted God to judge rather than give His mercy to Nineveh. Some people equate forgiveness with mercy and they the other person punished. If we want the other person to experience God's justice rather than His mercy, we place ourselves in a position of receiving His justice in our lives and no one can stand before the justice of God.

Digging Deeper in the Word:

The Lord wants us to be free from all bitterness and offenses. True forgiveness resides only in the heart of God and must be achieved by His grace. Allow the Word to search your heart and ask the Lord to reveal any unforgiveness hidden in your heart.

1) We must accept God's forgiveness through the blood of Jesus for our sins; without God's forgiveness there is no way that we can be freed from our sin. When we truly recognize the magnitude of our sin in His sight and the price He paid to forgive us, it is easier to obey His command to forgive others.

2) The Word says that many were offended by Jesus and that they fell away because they did not understand or receive His teachings. God is God and we are not. It is sin and rebellion to hold an offense against the LORD. True submission to the LORD will allow for acceptance of all that happens as from His loving hand. We must not hold bitterness against God for things we do not understand or that we don't think have gone right in our lives. If we believe God is sovereign, He is ultimately responsible

for all that comes into our lives. Disappointment in God can be one of the biggest reasons for falling away from Him. When we do not understand why something happened, we need to learn to trust the LORD and put our faith in Him. To hold offense against God is one of the ultimate forms of rebellion! (Matt. 11:6; John 16:1; Matt. 19:16-33)

3) True love in Christ comes when we find ourselves interceding for and blessing those who have harmed us. The true and deep forgiveness of others for their sins against us (real or imagined) is the deepest perfection of our love. Love doesn't just forgive when another person repents or bless when we are hurt. Love endures and forbears when we are hurt. Christians are called to a higher form of love in which we return good for evil. Love covers a multitude of sins. 1 Pet. 4:8, Prov. 17:9; Prov. 4:23; Matt. 5:44; 1 Pet. 3:9; Col. 3:12-14 (KJV); 1 Cor. 13:7; Luke 6:27-18; 1 Pet. 2:19, 23; Rom. 12:16-18.

4) When we sin, we cannot walk in true freedom of Christ's victory in our lives if we allow ourselves to continue to blame, condemn and hold ourselves guilty when He has clearly shown us that He has forgiven us. I know people who profess to believe that God forgives sins, but who continue to walk in guilt and condemnation and refuse to accept the cleansing and freedom Christ offers. It is not that in forgiving ourselves we have any "redemptive" power, but unless we accept God's forgiveness, we cannot be truly free. (See Isaiah 52.) Jesus broke the chains and has accomplished all that is needed for total freedom from our sins and sin nature, but unless we receive the truth of His forgiveness, we will not be truly free.

Examine the following verses and note the LORD is speaking to your heart about forgiveness:

Matt. 6:14-15; Rom. 12:19; 1 John 3:15; Matt. 5:24; 2 Cor. 2:11; Col. 3:13, 15; Mark 11:25-26; Eph. 4:32

What Is God speaking to your heart?

Responding to God:

Here is a sample prayer: LORD, thank you for forgiving my sins when I confess them to you. I confess that I have had unforgiveness in my heart toward others. LORD, I lift up the following people to You. (Name each one). I do not necessarily feel like forgiving them, but I ask that You will enable me to forgive in obedience to Your will. Forgive me that I may have bound them and hampered Your work by judging them. As You forgive me, I now choose to freely forgive them. These people may or may not be wrong, I renounce being their judge. I want to be set free. I choose to forgive them and release them from all of my judgment. I step out of the way so that Your Spirit can begin to work in this person's life. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Closing Prayer:

LORD, I ask You to search my heart with the light of Your Holy Spirit and show me any unforgiveness that I might have hidden in my heart. LORD, I want to keep no one in bondage to my judgment. I want to be free to love you and trust You to be God. You are the all wise and merciful judge. Please heal my heart from all unforgiveness. Help me to mount a guard against judging others and holding them in unforgiveness. Defend my heart and keep it totally focused upon You, the LORD who makes all things work together for good for those who love You and are called according to Your purpose. In Jesus Name, Amen