



How to Forgive the Unforgivable (And Set Your Spirit Free!)

<http://blog.healingstreamsusa.org/forgive>

This world is a dangerous place. Every one of us knows what it is like to be hurt by someone else. Some things are easier to recover from than others. Many things we can readily excuse. But, when we can't just let it go, when the damage was too great, when the wound seems incurable, ***what can we do to set our spirit free?***

Our God has one outstanding answer: forgive! It is the path He chose for Himself when humanity's incessant sins against Him were wrecking His own Great Heart. He went to the cross and made a way to release His pain and His wrath once and for all. Now, He is telling us to do the same whenever we, too, feel bound by pain and anger.

How much should be forgiven, how often, and how thoroughly? Absolutely everything: as much as needed, as often as needed, and as thoroughly as needed. Flip the question around. How quickly would you like to get free of those negative emotions? How thoroughly would you like to regain your lost peace and joy? How great is your desire to recover a childlike sense of wholeness—with all thoughts of emotional damage long forgotten? Then you will need to do what Jesus says to do and learn how to forgive even the unforgivable.

Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father, who is in heaven, may also forgive you your transgressions. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your transgressions. Mark 11:25-26 WEB



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Freedom through Forgiving

The incredible truth is that a childlike heart of joy is actually waiting for us on the other side of that wall of unforgiveness we keep building and defending. Take it down! It ruins the Enemy's day to see us releasing to God's mercy the very ones he used to wreck and ruin us. We were supposed to stay bound in pain and brokenness and they were supposed to stay "cursed" by us. Just as our own unforgiveness unwittingly binds us and them to their sin, so our forgiveness releases both of us into God mercy and His grace-based ways of bringing correction and redemption.

God really wants to turn the tables on the Enemy, but He needs our total willingness to go at it His way. When injustice, sin or offense comes against us, we have to be willing to work with the Lord, not against Him. Unforgiveness in all of its forms is an agreement with the Deceiver, not God. By holding unforgiveness, we are doing the opposite of what God says is necessary for righting those wrongs. And it hurts us more than them! It not only hardens our hearts (separating us from peace and joy), but it also damages our bodies (through the stress response). These strongholds have to be torn down.

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Bad Fruit from the Root

Consider the terrible effects upon us of our own unforgiveness. First and foremost, it holds all of the pain in place, constantly reminding us of the past and hindering our way into the future. Besides stirring up a witches brew of anger, self-pity and depression, bitterness also becomes a major block to healing for two reasons. It leads to unanswered prayer (Mark 11:25) and it holds in place a host of deadly emotions that wear down the immune system. Someone said that it is like drinking poison and hoping the other person will die. Grudges do bad things to our bodies, minds and hearts. We simply have to choose between getting even and getting well. The writer of Hebrews warns that if we have a root of bitterness it will trouble us and defile many others through their contact with us.

Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled. Hebrews 12:14-15

Bitterness is a stressor to the body and can lead directly to illness, but it also keeps past trauma from being healed and that adversely affects our health as well. How does that play in? Unmended trauma of the past increases the levels of anxiety and fear we carry which are so damaging to health, since the pain from unforgiven offense is always telling us that God and others can't be trusted. Do you want to get free of fear, anxiety, shyness or worry? Forgiving everyone from the heart will go a long way towards restoring your lost confidence and peace!



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Four Sections to Help You Do It

To help you regain your freedom by “forgiving the unforgivable,” I have assembled some of the most powerful things I’ve learned in seeking my own recovery from pain, injustice and abuse. Take your time going over these four main sections. Stop and pray as you go along. Then, put your heart into the final steps and give it all you’ve got. Honest effort never fails to gain the Lord’s help and favor.

- 1) Seven Things that Forgiveness Is Not
- 2) What Forgiveness Is
- 3) Five Motivations to Forgive
- 4) Ten Steps to Freedom

1

Seven Things that Forgiveness Is Not

This may seem like the wrong place to begin. Why not just cut to the chase and say what it is? That’s coming of course, but forgiveness is something that we have attempted all our lives, often without anyone explaining it to us. There are lots of well-intended, but completely misguided ideas floating around that really muddy the water. It’s no wonder that people don’t want to do it, or fail to succeed fully when they do.

Genuine forgiveness, however, is not only highly desirable, it is eminently doable. God Himself is committed to helping every last one of us learn how to do it. If you are a Christian then you already have right inside of you the same Holy Spirit who helped Jesus fully forgive everyone’s sins at the cross. Let Him work with you to bring you into that liberated place where inner peace and spiritual freedom fills your heart.

Let’s clear away any confusion you may have about this by taking a closer look at seven things forgiveness is not.

- 1) **It’s Not a Feeling.** The Lord commands us to forgive because He knows we won’t naturally want to do it. He doesn’t have to command us to eat ice cream or drink hot chocolate, does He? No, He knows we’ll go for that, so He only advises us to “do all things in moderation.” Instead, think of forgiving others like going to work when you’d rather be at the beach. You do the right thing—the harder thing—for the sake of a paycheck or your



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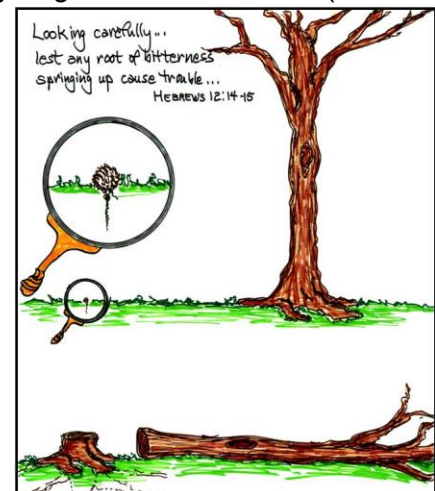


career goal. With forgiveness our "pay check" is emotional healing and a fresh lease on life; our "career goal" is to please the Lord!

2) It's Not Minimizing the Wrong. Saying to yourself, "Oh, that's OK, it didn't really bother me" may work at times, but it's like training wheels on a bike. They helped us get going in the beginning, but they got in the way once we really wanted to go fast and free. Downplaying the harm that was done or the hurt we felt may have worked in the beginning, but it's not the same thing as forgiving the wrong. Besides, some things eventually show up that just can't be minimized. Genuine forgiveness sees sin for what it is—and forgives it. Only then is our spiritual health restored.

3) It's Not Replaying the Memory. Have you ever been caught in a holding pattern with your plane circling the airport waiting for its turn to land? A remembered wrong grips our heart with a similar kind of "holding pattern." No matter how we try to refocus our attention elsewhere, our thoughts keep returning to it. When we fully forgive "from the heart" (as Jesus requires), our feelings come in for a landing. Wonder of wonders, all the pain is gone! Our minds are free to move forward, because we joined our God in His ability to forgive and forget.

4) It's Not Excusing. Wrong is wrong. There are no excuses for it when someone sins against us or our loved ones. We may wish to find reasons why they did what they did. We would even be wise to seek reasons for having compassion on them. God certainly sees past our sins to see the hurt or confusion which prompted them. The sight of our inward wretchedness moves Him to have pity upon us. Even so, He doesn't condone or excuse anyone's sin. He hates sin so thoroughly He punished it at the cross. It was also there that He made a way for sin to be forgiven. That was hard for Him; it is hard for us. But it is well worth doing!



Removing "A Root of Bitterness" Is a Process ([Learn More](#))

5) It's Not a Reward. When someone wrongs us that makes him "the bad guy." But if he regrets it and tries his best to make up for it, then we become "the bad guy" if we don't forgive him. Why? Simple justice. Justice actually demands that we forgive the person who genuinely repents and seeks reconciliation. As good as this is, however, it is not the same thing as Christian forgiveness. Our life in Christ is mercy based, not justice based. Nobody has to make anything up to us: We forgive by Jesus' command and by following His Example. True Christian forgiveness is a pure gift of mercy that the offender might never do anything to deserve.

6) It's Not a Divine Pardon. Somehow we seem to think that the fate of the person who wronged us is ours to decide—as if we have a giant meat hook and can hang people on it at will. So, forgiving seems like we're "letting them off the hook" when in reality we are putting them in God's Hands. No one cares about the justice issues more than our God! Yes, in His goodness He will seek to lead them to repentance, so that their lives can be freed from the sin we have forgiven. Hasn't He led you and me to repentance at times? We didn't get any real relief until we came clean and confessed up, did we? Trust Him to work with them His own way.



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7) It's Not Blindly Trusting. There is a huge difference between forgiveness and trust. We are required to forgive every offender, but we don't have to trust ourselves to anyone. Our forgiveness can (and should) be given away. Our trust, on the other hand, has to be earned. If a visitor steals your TV on the way out of your house, you have to forgive him (or her). But you don't have to let them back in for a second visit. You can even call the police on them, but you cannot call down wrath. Forgiveness is always required; trust is optional.

2

What Forgiveness Is

If forgiveness isn't those seven things, what is it? Here is the best definition of forgiveness I ever heard. I was deep in the Amazon basin on a mission trip in 2006 with Global Awakening, when I heard this preached by Tom Jones. I immediately took notes and have used it ever since.

"Forgiveness is giving your pain, the person and the injustice to God and trusting God with it all!"

That's it! Keep it clear and focused. This is exactly what we are being asked to do by our God: Give it all to Him and trust Him with it. Trust Him with why He allowed it and with what He's going to do to redeem it now that you're giving it back to Him.

Forgiveness means being open to loving and even liking the other person, accepting them just as they are, just as we would desire to be accepted and loved if we were them. It means releasing them, setting them free, letting them go, letting them be themselves, and setting our own hearts free in the process!

Cast off those seven tattered misconceptions that may be causing you to cling to your hurt when you need to let it go. Restoration, inner peace and joy are waiting for you just around "the bend." Bend your will before the Lord and this command, give it all to God, then breathe the sweet air of freedom!

3

Five Motivations to Forgive



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In ordinary life the harder and more irksome a job is, the more we need powerful motivations to stay with it and finish it. It is no different with forgiveness. Bitter feelings stick to us like caked on grime. Our feelings against it seem so much stronger than God's reasons for it. And we suspect it will take some concerted time and energy to get free. How can we stay powered up to go the distance? Let these five powerful reasons come to your rescue.

1) Your Freedom. Not releasing the person from our bitter judgments guarantees that we will stay a victim of the pain of the past. But we are never victims! Scripture says that we are "more than conquerors" through Him who loved us. How? Why? Because God has promised to make anything that has ever happened to us work for our good—if we will only give it to Him. By not forgiving we imprison our heart behind walls of hard feelings, then say to our enemy, "You did this to me!" The truth is that you are the only one who can lock up your heart. Others can put the pain in by their actions, but only you can keep it in by your choice. No one can inflict damage that your God cannot redeem. Turn the key that sets captive hearts free!

2) Their Ignorance. When they are sinning against someone, all but a very few completely hardened and deceived individuals know deep down that what they are doing is wrong. That is due to conscience and the whispers of the Holy Spirit. However, no one ever makes an action (for good or ill) in the full knowledge of all consequences, of all effects on others, and how it is going to impact their lives in the long run, or even what their own heart will think about it later.

We know this, yet we easily fall into thinking, "How could they do that? They knew perfectly well what they were doing!" That's not the way Jesus saw it. At the cross He declared, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing." If this motivation worked for Him, then it is genuinely based on truth and it will work for us also.

3) Our Loss of Perspective. Typically, two things can go off in our minds. Well, one goes off like gangbusters and the other is mysteriously silenced. First, we may rise into righteous indignation saying something like, "I would never have done that!" This makes it terribly hard to forgive. While that may be true about that one particular misdeed of theirs, what about all the others wrongs for which we are rightly guilty? Or did Jesus not have to die a brutal, pain-wracked death for us, too? Funny how it works that when we focus only on the other person's sin, we lose all sight of our own. Yet, if we allow the knowledge of our own appalling sinfulness to stay in mind, we marvel at the mercy which so willingly covers us. Then, it becomes much easier to pass it on to some other poor, sinful soul not so very different from ourselves, after all.

4) Compassion for Them. This is the one which works best for me. The unassailable truth is that the person who hurt me or my loved one didn't come into the world with doing that in mind. That person began life as a baby whose only desires were to be held, loved and nourished. Something obviously went wrong. An attack from an invisible enemy broke through their God-given innocence and began carrying that person down the darkened, twisted corridors of self survival. They are "acting out" of their own pain and brokenness. We ought to know. The same thing (in different ways) has happened to all of us. Whenever I remember this, I realize that I deeply desire everyone to be set free from what spiritual darkness has done to them. I want the real enemy punished, not them.

5) The Inheritance of the Lamb. Here is where the gloves come off—at least for devoted Christians. That person you or I may hate and blame is someone for whom Jesus died a horrible death in order to make atonement for their sins. He deeply desires to have that



person in heaven with Him. Why hate what He loves? Why deny Him what He worked so hard to gain? By refusing to forgive, we are saying to the Lord, “No, Jesus! You’ve made a terrible mistake. This person should never be forgiven. He deserves to burn! And I’m not going to release him to You!” It’s shocking when we see it that way, but may this hard look at truth always shock us back into our right mind. Let’s give the Lamb the inheritance He deserves.

Our bitterness is the complete opposite of what Jesus did in going to the cross. It is actually the nature of the evil one in us, not the nature of our new life in Christ. If we have been deeply wronged, then we are in the best possible position to pray with real authority for the release of that person from a snare of the evil one--their enemy and ours. ***We join Jesus on the mercy seat interceding with Him!***

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4

Ten Steps to Forgive

Hard jobs not only require stronger motivations, they also benefit from being broken down into smaller steps. Take these steps one at a time, making sure that you fully accomplish each one in your heart and mind before going to the next. Inevitably, they will lead you out of the place of bitterness and pain, into the bright sunshine of a liberated and restored life and you will discover that Jesus has been walking with you all along the way. It is only fair to say, however, that for my hardest tasks, I had to take these ten steps repeatedly until my stubborn heart released its “death grip” on bitterness and finally opened wide to grace. Don’t give up! Review the motivations as often as you need to and press in to gain that break through.

1) Pray for God’s Help. You can do this on your own and many unbelievers have, but why not invite your best Friend to help you? Grace means that God wants to help us to do everything that He requires us to do. A good way to begin is with the “want to want to prayer”: “God, help me want to want what You want and hate what You hate.” The power of this honest prayer is that it gives God permission to work inside our heart.

2) Confess the Pain. Don’t try to minimize the wrong that was done or the harm you felt. Sin hurts! Be honest with the Lord about how wounded you may feel. But don’t stop there. Acknowledge the ways that God has sent people to comfort you. He weeps with those who weep. Your pain has wounded Him, too. Believing that God cares for us and shares in our sorrows, helps us entrust our pain to Him. This is crucial to see and embrace for we would never give what wounded us to an uncaring God.



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3) Ask God to Forgive Them. Father God reconciled Himself to everyone at the cross, “not counting” their sins against them. In that sense there is no further need for God to forgive anyone. However, there is a great difference between God having mercy stored up and that same mercy being released. He still needs our prayers in order to work with anyone who is separated from Him by sin. If we cannot ask God to forgive them, how will we declare it ourselves?

4) Punish the Real Enemy. Justice demands that someone suffers punishment. That’s why we’ve been holding the grudge. Even though Jesus took the full punishment they deserved, and even though we now want them to get the full benefit of His suffering, there is still plenty of punishment to go around. The invisible kingdom of darkness needs to get its due! Many Christians are angry at people; few are they who know how to hate the real enemy. Ask God to make sure that the dark kingdom gets pushed back, even as the Lord’s kingdom is advanced through the forgiveness you are releasing today.



5) Ask to Be Forgiven. It may be hard to see at first, but through the lens of scripture we can learn to recognize that the sin of bitterness is a very dark thing indeed—a sin that cannot be excused for it goes against everything that Jesus died to achieve. Being honest with God about our own hardness of heart, allows the Lord to release fresh grace to us. Don’t take that mercy (as we might have in the past) as something to claim for our self alone. Rather, use it to liberate others, beginning with this person who needs it from you.

6) Declare Your Forgiveness. This is the key moment. Hold them in your mind’s eye, setting all the past feelings aside. This isn’t about your feelings. This is all about a choice, a decision to obey God and the act of your will to declare that choice and seek to live by it. Speak forth emphatically, “I forgive you and release you from all my bitter judgments.” Forgiveness is giving the person, the pain and the injustice to God and trusting God with it all. Keep releasing everything about what happened to God. His Spirit will be working in your heart as you do.

7) Forgive Yourself. This is rarely difficult even though the unsuspecting accomplice has been our self. The truth is that we could have been free a lot sooner, could have suffered far less pain, had we only been willing to do the forgiving from the beginning. By the way this proves what was mentioned in motivation number 2. We kind of knew that our unforgiveness was wrong; we just didn’t realize how wrong it really was. We sinned by not really knowing what we were doing—just as Jesus said of all who sin.

8) Believe What God Promises. What an incentive this is! The magnificent promise of Romans 8:28 is that God will make all things work for the good of those who love Him. Jesus defines love as obedience. Now that we are obeying His command to forgive, we are in position to receive this promise in its fullness. Open wide to believe that nothing is impossible with God—He really can bring a greater good out of all this pain and suffering than the enemy put into it in the first place. Don’t ask how; just believe He can. And rejoice!



9) Pray for Them. Just as Job's fortunes were restored when he prayed for his false friends, so now it is our turn to pray for our former “enemies.” Pray vigorously for God to bless the one(s) you have forgiven. Join Jesus on the Mercy Seat. Make sure you can honestly ask Him to do for them all of the good things you would desire Him to do for you. Otherwise, return to steps 1-6.

10) Thank God by Faith. Now that you are feeling some release, begin thanking God for being so patient with you. Acknowledge that His ways really work. Even if you feel nothing yet, thank God by faith. He loves it when we trust Him enough to believe His Word is true, even when the “evidence” hasn’t shown up. Finally, why not fully surrender to Him in love, recognizing that He really does know how to mend you and has your best interests at heart?

Nobody said forgiving deep injuries is easy, only that it is necessary. Walk your heart through these ten steps. They are guaranteed to work, but only if you work them through to the end. Don't wait any longer: Say “YES!” to God and do what Jesus does. He forgives everyone for everything—from the heart. He did it for us. Now, we do it for Him.

Then, a glorious resurrection of life and love can happen!

About the Author: [Steve Evans](#)



For over a decade Steve Evans and Healing Streams have been helping people recover inner peace and freedom. Find out how to gain mastery over negative emotions and live with childlike freedom of spirit by taking his completely free "[eCourse for Healing](#)" at healingstreamsusa.org. [Get started now!](#)



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