

**Finding Freedom
Through
Forgiveness**

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*Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture
references are taken from the New King
James Version of the Bible.*

Freedom. The word itself conjures up images of happiness, wholeness, and peace. As Americans, we treasure our freedom. Men and women have given their lives so that you and I can enjoy the freedom we have as Americans. We cherish our freedom of speech as well as our freedom to worship God. Even as I write these words, our service men and women are stationed at home and abroad...putting their lives on the line each day so that you and I can be free. We owe them, and those who have served our country before them, a debt we could never pay.

We value our freedom so much that we, as a nation, set aside one day each year just to celebrate it. On the 4th of July, we gather together with family and friends to grill hamburgers and hotdogs, to eat watermelon and ice cream, and to watch the fireworks light up the night sky. In our prayers, we thank God for the privilege of living in America. We thank Him that we are free.

While we could never put a price tag on the freedom we enjoy as Americans, God offers us an even greater freedom. He offers us freedom in our hearts. The freedom we enjoy as Americans is an **external** freedom. It is the freedom to speak, to worship, to work, to

travel, and to do as we see fit. The freedom that God offers us is an **internal** freedom. It is the freedom to face death with no fear, to have peace regardless of our circumstances, to know that our past is forgiven, and to love others with all of our hearts.

Are you experiencing this **internal** freedom? If not, you can. God wants you to be free. He has the power to set you free. Jesus said, “If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36).

While there are many things that threaten our freedom, the purpose of this booklet is to focus on **the one issue** that is perhaps the most responsible for robbing us of the freedom we long for. That issue is **forgiveness**, and the problem is that most of us don’t understand it.

As we will see in the pages that follow, there are two aspects of forgiveness. One aspect is our need to **receive** God’s forgiveness. The other aspect is our need to **extend** forgiveness to those who have hurt us. Unless we do both, we will never be completely free.

My prayer is that God Himself will speak to you through these pages. I pray that you will

experience an “ah-ha moment” that will unlock the prison doors and set your soul free. Just as God miraculously set Paul and Silas free from their prison cells, may He set you free from yours. May your chains fall off, and may the prison doors swing open as you discover what it really means to be forgiven by God and what it really means to forgive others.

Receiving God's Forgiveness

The first step to living the life of freedom is to **receive** the forgiveness that God offers. God's forgiveness is available because His Son, Jesus Christ, has paid the penalty for our sins. The Bible says that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22, NIV).

It is only because Jesus shed His blood on the cross that you and I can be forgiven. Jesus is the only sinless Person who ever lived. Yet He died on the cross to pay for your sins and mine. His blood is the only thing that can wash our sins away. As we think about what it means to **receive** God's forgiveness, I want to share with you four important principles:

Principle #1: We all need to be forgiven.

I think that most of us are aware that we need to be forgiven. I don't need a preacher to preach me a long sermon convincing me that I have sinned. I know that I have sinned, and I imagine that you know that you have, too. The Bible says, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6).

Now when God compared us to sheep, He wasn't exactly paying us a compliment. Sheep are not intelligent animals. Sheep are prone to wander from their shepherd. And that's what we do every time we sin. We wander farther and farther away from God. God invites us to return to Him. We must first admit, though, that we have sinned...that we have broken His laws.

I heard about a little boy named Billy who had been very mean to his sister. He had called her a bad name, spit in her face, and pulled her hair. His mother found out about it and went to discipline him. She said, "Billy, the devil has gotten into you. He's the one who made you call your sister a bad name. He's the one who made you spit in her face. He's the one who made you pull her hair." Billy said, "Mom, the devil made me call her a bad name, and the devil made me pull her hair, but spitting in her face was **my** idea." Now Billy understood sin. He knew he had done wrong, and he knew there was no one to blame but himself. That is what we need to do with our sins. We need to admit that we have done wrong and that we need to be forgiven. That leads us to the next principle.

Principle #2: We must ask God to forgive us.

Knowing that we need forgiveness and actually **asking** God for forgiveness are two different things. Have you ever asked God to forgive you of your sins? The Bible says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:9). The word **confess** simply means that we “agree with God” about our sins. We don’t “sugarcoat” them or blame somebody else for them. We agree with God that we have done wrong, and we ask Him to forgive us. Have you done that?

Principle #3: We must accept God’s forgiveness.

Most of us are better “**askers**” than we are “**accepters.**” For me, asking comes naturally, but accepting is a little harder.

We have a young man in our church who was an All-American kicker for his high school football team. His talents caught the eyes of many major college football scouts and coaches across the nation. After much prayer, he decided to go to Florida State University and

kick for the legendary coach, Bobby Bowden. He just felt like that great school, under the Christian leadership of Coach Bowden, was the best fit for him.

A few days before national signing day, Coach Bowden flew to Texas to meet with this young man and his family in their home. On the day of the visit, about three hours before Coach Bowden was scheduled to arrive, the family called and invited me to their home to meet the famous coach. They knew I was a big sports fan, and they thought I would enjoy meeting Bobby Bowden. I've got to tell you, though, that when I was invited, I was reluctant to go. After all, Coach Bowden was coming to meet with the kicker, not with me. He was coming to his house, not to mine. This just seemed like a family thing, and I'm not part of their family. I expressed my feelings to the father who had called me, and he explained to me that my thinking was out in left field. He insisted that I come to their house. Finally, I accepted his invitation, and I am so thankful that I did. Meeting Coach Bowden was an experience I will never forget.

I tell that story to make this point: *Sometimes we have a hard time **accepting** great invitations.* We don't feel worthy. We feel like

the invitation couldn't possibly be for us. We don't want to be forward. And, as a result, many times we miss out on something great.

This can certainly be true when it comes to God's forgiveness. Sometimes we really struggle to accept it. We know we don't deserve it, and it just seems too good to be true.

To prove to you that we often struggle to accept God's forgiveness, let me ask you a question: *Have you ever asked God to forgive you for the same sin more than once?* Why did you do that? Because it is easier to **ask** for forgiveness than it is to **accept** it. In fact, our continual asking for God's forgiveness of the same sin over and over is an indication that we haven't truly accepted God's forgiveness. After all, why would we keep **asking** if we had already **accepted**?

In order for forgiveness to be ours, we must accept it. If we don't accept it, we won't be forgiven. In the 1800's, there was a man named George Wilson who had been convicted of a serious crime. He was later sentenced to be hanged. In a tremendous act of mercy, President Andrew Jackson issued him a pardon. To everyone's amazement, though, George Wilson refused to accept the pardon. No one

knew what to do so the case went to the Supreme Court. After much deliberation, Chief Justice Marshall spelled out the court's decision in one of the most bizarre cases in American history. Marshall wrote, "A pardon is a slip of paper, the value of which is determined by the acceptance of the person to be pardoned. If it is refused, it is no pardon. George Wilson must be hanged." And sadly, he was. He was hanged because he refused to accept the pardon that had been extended to him.¹

That tragic story is a vivid illustration of what many people do with God's forgiveness. For whatever reason, they cannot bring themselves to accept it. If you are one of those people, I beg you to change your attitude and accept God's forgiveness right now. You say, "How do I do that?" You do it **by faith**. You simply ask God to forgive you of your sins based on the fact that His Son, Jesus Christ, fully paid the penalty for your sins by dying on the cross. **His death is your pardon.** Pause right now and ask God to forgive you of your sins. Pray this: "*Heavenly Father, I have sinned. I have broken Your law, and I am truly sorry. I ask You to forgive me of my sins. I believe Jesus died on the cross for me. I am asking You to wash me in His blood.*" Did you

ask Him to forgive you? Then **accept** His forgiveness by faith. Pray this: *“Lord, I have asked You to forgive me of my sins and right now, as an act of faith, I accept Your forgiveness. I may not feel any differently, but I don’t live by feelings...I live by faith. And by faith, I accept Your forgiveness.”*

Friend, if you just prayed that prayer, your sins, all of them, are forgiven. By faith you have **asked for** and **accepted** the forgiveness God so freely offers. Now let’s think about what God’s forgiveness really means.

Principle #4: Understanding God’s forgiveness is the key to enjoying God’s forgiveness.

Unless we understand what forgiveness means, we will never fully enjoy it. The only thing better than **being** forgiven is to **understand what it means** to be forgiven. So let me explain what forgiveness really means!!

Some Important Truths

Truth #1: When God forgives your sin, He removes the sin from you.

The Bible says, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12). Notice the last two words of that verse... **“from us.”** That means when God forgives our sins, He literally takes our sins **off of us**. Now that is an interesting thought because many of us are still carrying around sins that God has forgiven. We say that God has forgiven us yet we drag our old sins around like a weight attached to our ankles. Friend, when God forgives you, He takes that sin off of you so that you and that sin are no longer connected. **Stop carrying around what God has removed!!**

Truth #2: When God forgives your sin, He blots it out and clears your record.

God Himself has said, “I, *even I, am* He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake” (Isaiah 43:25). The whole idea of “blotting out” is very interesting. The people living in

the day in which the Bible was written understood perfectly well what God was saying. In the ancient world, when people made a purchase they couldn't afford, the merchant would get a wax tablet and make a mark by the person's name. He would write down in the wax how much the person owed. When the debt was fully paid, the merchant would take the marking instrument and "blot out" the debt. He would literally smooth out the mark that had been written by the person's name so that not only was there no mark by the person's name, but you couldn't even tell that there ever had been!! The wax was once again smooth.

What a picture of God's forgiveness!! He "blots out" the record of our sins. Not only is the sin removed, it is as though it never happened!! When we blot something out, like a checkbook entry with an ink pen, we actually make a bigger mess than we had to begin with. But when God blots something out, there is no mess. There is no record. That is why the Bible says that God "has not dealt with us according to our sins" (Psalm 103:10). From His perspective, forgiven sins no longer exist!!

Truth #3: When God forgives your sin, He no longer remembers it.

God has graciously promised, “I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:34). Think about that. God has promised to no longer even remember the sins that He has forgiven. God’s mind is greater than ours. He has the ability to do what we cannot do. He has the ability to forget!! You may spend a lot of time dwelling on your old sins, but God doesn’t. He has forgotten all about them.

King Hezekiah praised the Lord by saying, “You have cast all my sins behind Your back” (Isaiah 38:17). Imagine that. God has cast your sins over His shoulder. They are now out of His sight and out of His mind. The prophet Micah tells us where He has cast them. He said, “You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:19). Many of us are “going fishing” for those old sins, but that is such a waste of time. If God is satisfied to leave them in the depths of the sea, then we should be, too.

I once heard Billy Graham explain how, years ago, toxic chemicals from factories in England were carried into the ocean. The

waters approximately twenty miles offshore were so deep that when the chemicals were emptied into them, the pure waters of the ocean actually absorbed the chemicals so that in only a matter of minutes they could no longer be detected. The depth of the ocean waters literally absorbed the toxic chemicals.

In a similar way, the depth of God's grace has absorbed our sins. Our sins have been cast into the ocean, and God's grace has caused them to disintegrate!! Are you beginning to get a better understanding of what it means to be forgiven?

Truth #4: When God forgives your sin, He also removes the stain.

Now I firmly believe that this is the part of forgiveness we don't really understand. We know that God has forgiven us, but we still feel stained because of our sins. Friend, *the Bible makes it clear that when God forgives our sins, He also removes the stain.* God Himself has said, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18).

Not long ago, I was eating a meal in my recliner while watching television. That was a mistake because some of the meal ended up on one of my favorite shirts!! I have washed that shirt over and over again, and even though the shirt is now clean, the stain remains. Every time I see the stain, I am reminded of the day I spilled my meal on my shirt.

Many of us think that our old sins are like my shirt. Deep down, we know that God has forgiven us, but for some reason we feel like the stain of that sin is still there. But it isn't. The stain is gone.

Let me say it just this plainly: *If the stain of your old sins is still there, then you really aren't forgiven. But if you are forgiven, then the stain is gone.* It is impossible to be **forgiven** and **stained** at the same time. The Bible says that “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (I John 1:7). And the blood of Jesus is better than any detergent I've ever used because His blood not only removes the **dirt**, it also removes the **stain**!!

When you begin to understand what forgiveness really means, you are going to be one happy person!! Your sin is no longer “on you”...God has removed it. Your sin is no

longer “on your record”...God has blotted it out. Your sin is no longer an issue with God. He has cast it behind His back and forgotten all about it. And you are no longer stained!! Your old sins, to use God’s own words, are “as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18). The scarlet stain, the crimson stain, has been removed by the cleansing blood of Jesus. You, friend, are clean!! This is why there is “no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). There is no condemnation because the stain has been removed.

What About The Consequences Of Sin?

Before we go any further, we would be wise to think for a moment about the consequences of our sins. As wonderful as forgiveness is, forgiveness doesn’t mean that we are free from all the consequences of our actions. Sin always has consequences. Some of you are reading this booklet in prison. God has forgiven you, but you are still dealing with the consequences of your sin. Some of you are reading this booklet after a moral failure of some kind. God has forgiven you, but you are still dealing with the consequences of your sin. Some of you are facing the consequences of a sin someone else chose to commit.

We need to understand that **even forgiven sins have natural consequences**. And the word “**natural**” is the key. A forgiven thief still has a debt to pay to society...not to God, but to society. A forgiven prostitute may still have to deal with a sexually transmitted disease.

Lest I take the wind out of your sail, let me quickly share something you need to know if you are facing the consequences of forgiven sin: *God's grace is even greater than those consequences*. The Bible says, “Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” (Romans 5:20). That means that God's grace is even more powerful than the consequences of your sin. God's grace will enable you to face the consequences of your sin and deal with them appropriately. The Bible says that “all things work together for good to those who love God” (Romans 8:28). The consequences of your sin fall under the category of “all things.” That means that God can even bring good out of the consequences of your sin.

Please don't misunderstand me. I am certainly **not** encouraging you to go out and sin. Sin is an offense to God, and it devastates our lives. I am just encouraging you to

remember that God's grace is so powerful that He will even help you to face the consequences of your sin, and somehow He will bring you to a place of victory. He did that for Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, Jonah, Peter, and Paul. And He will do that for you, too. That's just the kind of God He is!!

Extending Forgiveness To Others

Receiving God's forgiveness is certainly the greatest thing we will ever do in this life. It erases our past and guarantees our eternal future in heaven with Him. It even enables us to deal with the consequences of our sins and to come out on top. But **extending** forgiveness to those who have hurt us is sometimes something we are reluctant to do. It doesn't make sense, but it is true. How could those of us who have been so freely forgiven have so much trouble forgiving others? I don't know, but sometimes we do.

As we begin the second half of this booklet, I want to do so by asking you some questions: *Is there anyone in the world whom you have bad feelings toward? Has someone hurt you or hurt someone you love? Do you struggle with*

feelings of anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness? If so, the remainder of this booklet was written with you in mind.

Why Should You Forgive?

Now that is a good question. Why should you forgive the person who has hurt you or who has hurt your loved one? Let me mention three reasons:

1. You should forgive because God commands it.

The Bible says that we are to “be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another” (Ephesians 4:32). That is simple enough. We are to forgive others because God tells us to.

2. You should forgive because people need to be forgiven.

If you are mad at someone, the odds are that the person knows it. He is living under the pressure of being **unforgiven** by you. While he

would probably never admit it, deep down he longs to be forgiven.

I read a story about a father and son who lived in Madrid, Spain. The son's name was Paco, and he had always been very close to his father. In Paco's teenage years, though, he began to rebel against his father's authority. Things became so bad that Paco ran away from home. His father was heartbroken. He did everything he could to find his son. He called his friends and went to the places where he thought his son might be. Nothing was working. Finally, in an act of desperation, he ran an ad in the local newspaper which read, "Dear Paco, meet me in front of the newspaper office at noon. All is forgiven. I love you. Your father." The following day at noon, 800 young men named "Paco" showed up at the newspaper office. They were all longing to be forgiven by their fathers.²

That story is a powerful example of how badly people want to be forgiven. Your offender is longing for your forgiveness.

Now that raises a question: *Are you supposed to go and tell them that you forgive them?* **Probably not.** That would only make things worse. Unless, that is, they have

previously asked you to forgive them, and you refused to do so. As we will see later, forgiveness is primarily something that you do **in your heart**...it is between you and God. Those who have hurt you just need to see kindness and love from you. That will show them that all is forgiven. Now you may need to apologize to them for something **you've done**, but you probably don't need to tell them that you forgive them for what **they've done**...just show them by your love!!

3. You should forgive because you need to forgive.

Unforgiveness is a killer. It leads to anger which causes tension which raises blood pressure which damages arteries which leads to heart attacks. Those in the medical community are constantly coming out with more and more information explaining the connection between our emotions and our health. God addressed this connection a long time ago. The Bible says, "A merry heart does good, *like* medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones" (Proverbs 17:22). I'll guarantee you that if you are holding a grudge, you have "**a broken spirit**," and your body will suffer because of it.

You need to forgive not only for **physical** reasons, but also for **spiritual** reasons. The Bible says, “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice” (Ephesians 4:30-31). Notice the connection between being angry at someone and grieving the Holy Spirit. When you are angry at someone, you bring sadness to God’s Spirit. His Spirit then communicates sadness back to your spirit. As a result, you become sad, depressed, and powerless in your Christian life. For this reason, you need to forgive for your own spiritual well-being.

Clearing Up Some Confusion About Forgiveness

I truly believe that many sincere Christians struggle with this matter of forgiveness because they don’t really understand what it means. Sometimes the best way to understand what something **is** is by learning what it **is not**. Let’s think for a moment about what forgiveness is not.

1. Forgiveness is *not* forgetting the offense.

Some people think they haven't forgiven because they can still remember what happened to them. That doesn't mean you haven't forgiven. That just means you're human!! Our minds don't just "forget" major life experiences. Now God can forget, but we really can't. He is greater than we are!! We're not God!!

When we forgive someone, that doesn't mean that we are no longer aware of what happened. It just means that we choose to forgive them even though we can still remember.

When we forgive someone, our memory isn't deleted, but the pain is taken out of those memories. Think of all the bad things Joseph had been through in his life. He had been terribly mistreated by his brothers, accused of a crime he never committed, and then thrown in prison for several years. After he got out of prison, God blessed him with a wife and two sons. The Bible says that "Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house" (Genesis 41:51). Joseph actually gave his firstborn son a name that means "to forget."

Did that mean that he could no longer remember what had happened to him? Obviously not. After all, he was still talking about it!! What he meant was that God had taken the pain out of those memories because he had chosen to forgive those who had hurt him.

That's what forgiveness does. It doesn't remove the memories; it just takes the pain out of them. Our memories become **scars** instead of **wounds**. The memories are still there, but they don't hurt anymore. They have been healed through the act of forgiving those who have hurt us.

2. Forgiveness is *not* condoning the offense.

Some people evidently believe that in order to forgive someone they have to condone, or at the very least minimize, the offense. That's not true. Be honest with yourself about **their** sins just as you are honest with yourself about **your** sins. Call it what it is. If they deliberately hurt you, they sinned. You have not been instructed by God to minimize the offense, just to forgive it.

3. Forgiveness is *not* necessarily trusting the offender.

Sometimes a person will say to me, “Jon, I don’t think I’ll ever be able to forgive that person because I just don’t trust him anymore.” I always respond by saying, “Forgiveness and trust are two different things. Forgiveness has to do with the past. Trust has to do with the future. God doesn’t expect you to trust people who have proven themselves to be untrustworthy, but He does expect you to forgive them of their past behavior.”

Let me use this silly illustration. Suppose I am in my office working at my desk. The receptionist calls and says, “Jon, a man named Jim is here to see you.” I say, “Send him in.” Jim comes into my office, punches me in the nose, and walks out. A couple of hours later Jim calls to apologize, and I forgive him.

The next day I am working at my desk, and the receptionist calls and says, “Jim is here to see you again.” Reluctantly, I say, “Send him in.” Jim comes in, punches me in the nose, and leaves. This time my nose is bleeding, and my eye is swollen closed. A couple of hours later Jim calls to apologize. He says that he doesn’t

know what has gotten into him, but he again requests my forgiveness. Again, I forgive him.

The next day Jim comes by the church to see me again. The receptionist calls and says, “Jon, Jim is here to see you.” To which I respond, “Tell Jim I’m busy.” On day three, after two consecutive punches to the nose, Jim’s not getting in!!

Now, does that mean that I haven’t forgiven him? Not at all. It just means that I don’t trust him. How could I? His behavior has proven him to be untrustworthy.

And that leads to an important question: *If trust has been broken in a relationship, can it be rebuilt?* The answer is: *Yes, if three things happen.* First, the offender must **repent**. There must be a genuine change of heart and of behavior. Second, the offended person must **forgive**. Without forgiveness, there is no hope of the relationship being rebuilt. Third, it takes **time** to rebuild trust. It won’t happen overnight, but it can happen. **Repentance, forgiveness, and time** are three powerful ingredients. When they are present, trust can be rebuilt. But if the offender doesn’t repent, then you obviously can’t trust him. Remember, forgiveness and trust are two different things.

4. Forgiveness is *not* necessarily reconciliation.

It would be wonderful if every story in life had a happy ending, but not every story does. While it is true that forgiveness will often be a bridge to reconciliation, that is not always the case.

The apostle Paul addressed this in Romans with these words, “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12:18). Paul knew that reconciliation isn’t always possible, and he knew that it doesn’t always depend on you. By their very nature, relationships involve more than one person. And for there to be reconciliation, all the parties involved must be willing for that to happen. Remember, there must be repentance, forgiveness, and time. If any of these ingredients is missing, there will be no lasting reconciliation. But keep in mind that you must forgive your offender whether it leads to reconciliation or not. Hopefully it will, but you must forgive regardless.

So What Exactly Is Forgiveness?

We have discovered that forgiveness is not forgetting. It is not condoning. It is not the same as trusting. And it doesn't necessarily lead to reconciliation. What, then, is forgiveness? I want to answer that question here.

1. Forgiveness is seeing the other person through God's eyes.

This is the first thing you must do if you are going to forgive. You may never have thought of this before, but God loves the person who has hurt you just as much as He loves you. Jesus died for that person just like He died for you. God doesn't have favorites. He loves us all the same. That person, just like you, was made in the image of God. God loves that person, and you must love him, too.

You also need to understand that at some point in that person's life, he or she has probably been hurt. Something was said. Something was done. Something happened. Learn this principle: *Hurt people hurt people*. The reason they are striking out at you is because someone struck out at them. Wounded

animals are dangerous. So are wounded people.

When you begin to view your offender as someone for whom Jesus died and someone who is hurt, you will begin to have compassion for that person...and that compassion will help you to forgive.

2. Forgiveness is letting the person “off the hook.”

Again, forgiveness is not condoning what they did. Instead, it is letting them “off the hook” for what they did. The word **forgiveness** literally means “to send away; to release.” When you forgive their sin, you are sending their sin away, and you are releasing them of their obligation to you. Do you remember how God forgives us? He separates our sins from us. He clears our record. He casts our sins behind His back. And He treats us as if we had never sinned. Well, that’s what you need to do for your offender...let him off the hook!! When you do, you’ll discover that **you** were actually the one “on the hook.” When we forgive, we actually set ourselves free.

3. Forgiveness is letting go of your desire to get even.

When you forgive, you stop thinking about revenge. You stop trying to figure out ways to “settle the score.” The Bible says that you are not to “avenge yourselves” (Romans 12:19). That is God’s job. And He will always do what is right. We must let Him bring about justice. That is not our job. Let me add here that if you are always asking God to judge your offender then you haven’t truly forgiven your offender. When we forgive, we ask God to forgive that person, too. That’s what Jesus did on the cross. He prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34). Not only did Jesus refuse to “get even,” He asked the Father not to “get even” either. There was no revenge in the heart of Jesus, and there can’t be any revenge in our hearts either. Ask God to forgive your offender and relinquish your desire for revenge.

4. Forgiveness is asking God to bless the person who hurt you.

You say, “Jon, I was with you up to this point, but now you’ve gone too far.” If that is your attitude, then your heart still isn’t right.

Jesus said that you are to “love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

I have learned this: *You can't be mad at someone whom you are asking God to bless.* When you begin to pray for your offender to be blessed, your heart will change.

Now, if your offender is living in sin, you are certainly not asking God to bless the sin, but you are asking God to bless the person. Obviously that person would need to repent of his sin in order to **be blessed**, but you just let God handle all of that. Your job is to pray for God to bless him. If he is living in sin, God will bless him by leading him to repent.

How Do I Go About Forgiving This Person?

We have talked about forgiveness from every imaginable angle. We have talked about some reasons we need to forgive. We have learned what forgiveness is and what it isn't. The time has now come to **stop talking about forgiveness and actually forgive**. Are you ready to take that step?

You say, “Jon, how do I go about doing this?” Do you remember that earlier I said that forgiveness is first and foremost between you and God...not between you and the other person? For that reason, the process of **extending** forgiveness begins in the same place where you **received** forgiveness...on your knees before God. I’m serious. I encourage you to physically get down on your knees right now. You are about to release this person to God, and down on your knees is the appropriate place for this “**prayer-meeting**” to take place.

You say, “Jon, I don’t feel like forgiving.” Learn this truth: *You forgive as an act of the will, not based on how you feel.* You make a decision to forgive. Feelings come and go. We can’t live by them. But we’re going to do this “**forgiveness thing**” down on our knees as an act of the will.

I am including a model prayer which I encourage you to pray. You may want to use your own words. Either way is fine. But I encourage you to pray, right now, and forgive the person who has hurt you.

The Prayer Of Forgiveness

“Dear Heavenly Father,

You know what _____ has done to me. You know the pain _____ has caused. You also know that I’ve been holding on to these bad feelings for a long time and that I can’t be angry anymore. Father, You have forgiven me of all of my sins because of Jesus’ death on the cross. I’m so grateful for that.

Right now, Father, as an act of my will, I choose to forgive _____. I release _____ to you. I ask You to forgive _____ and to bless _____. I place _____ into Your hands, and I forgive _____ right now. And as I do, Father, I thank You that I am now free because I have released _____ into Your hands. I pray for an appropriate opportunity to show kindness to _____ in the days ahead.

*In Jesus’ Name,
Amen.”*

Freedom!!

Friend, if you just prayed that prayer, welcome to the **land of freedom!!** I realize that for many of you that was not an easy step. But I congratulate you for taking it. You have done the right thing, and you are now free.

In the days ahead, if some of those negative thoughts begin to resurface, don't panic. Just let them serve as reminders to ask God to bless that person. And let them cause you to say, "I have forgiven _____ already. _____ is off the hook. _____ is free, and so am I!!"

A Closing Word

If you have never received Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, or if you're not certain that you have, I encourage you to pray this prayer from your heart to God's heart:

“Dear Jesus,

I need You in my life. Please forgive my sins. Please come into my heart. Please make me a Christian. And please do it right now.

Thank You, Jesus, for hearing and for answering my prayer. Thank You, Jesus, for saving me. Welcome to my heart. Begin now to make me the person You want me to be.

*In Your Name I pray,
Amen.”*

If you just prayed that prayer, God just saved you!! The Bible says, “For *whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved*” (Romans 10:13).

I want to welcome you to the family of God. I also want to encourage you to share your decision with another Christian. And finally, I

want to encourage you to become a part of a good church.

May you experience the **peace** that comes from **receiving** God's forgiveness. And may you experience the **freedom** that comes from **extending** His forgiveness to others.

¹ James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited*, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Il., 1988, pp. 223- 224.

² *Ibid.*, p. 218.

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