

Can you think of anything more compelling, more liberating or more transforming than forgiveness? It is a quality that cannot be manufactured or comprehended by this world – it is the very essence of heaven. It is the aroma of life. It is what you and I were made to give and receive.

Because of the power of forgiveness it will be contested strongly in your life by the enemy of your soul. Both accepting and extending forgiveness can be one of the most difficult things you will face.

The secret to the power of forgiveness is that it confronts and has the ability to set us free from our pride. Pride is always contrary to the Kingdom of God. Forgiveness frees, forgiveness humbles and forgiveness loves.

³ *As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd.*

⁴ *“Teacher,” they said to Jesus, “this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?”*

⁶ *They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. ⁷ They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, “All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!”*

⁸ *Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.*

⁹ *When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. ¹⁰ Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, “Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?”*

¹¹ *“No, Lord,” she said.*

And Jesus said, “Neither do I. Go and sin no more.” John 8:3-11 NLT

The forgiveness Jesus offered this woman was a picture of the grace and forgiveness of God.

1. It was a grace that cleansed her shame

It doesn't matter what you have done or who you are, Jesus Christ came to this earth for one reason and one alone. He came to give us the opportunity to leave behind our life of sin and shame. The Bible says that all are like sheep have gone astray. In our willfulness, we find ways to do the opposite of what God ever intended for us to do.

But when you get sick of it. When you get tired of trying to fix and self medicate your problems away, there stands Jesus.

He stands at the end of your broken dreams.

He stands at the end of your hurt and shame.

He stands at the end of your sinfulness.

He stands at the end of your broken life and the mess you have made.

And what do you hear Him say at the end of everything you have done wrong?

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you. Let Me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light." Matthew 11:28-30 NLT

What did Jesus say to this woman?

¹⁰ Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?" John 8:10 NLT

What brought most of us to Jesus was a deep sense of shame for the way we were living our lives. When He saved us He gave us a cleaning up that is for real. When you follow Jesus Christ you don't look back. You don't go back to your old sinful ways.

2. It was a grace that covered her past

Forgiveness and salvation provide us a new life. Forgiveness offers a chance to start over. Whatever we have done will not be remembered against us. We adopted into the family of God. As hard as it may be to believe the theology of adoption is a viable and legitimate doctrine.

Listen to the words of Psalm 103:

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. Psalm 103:11-13 NLT

When you are adopted your past doesn't matter. Now it might matter to you and many people like to go back and find out about their birth parents. Sometimes its good and often it might not be what you were hoping for. When it comes to being adopted into the family of God, your past doesn't matter. It is forgiven and you become a child of God.

Gerald Penix writes: My wife and I waited 15 years for a child that never came by the natural way. However we were approached one day with a lead of a newborn not yet born. I remember standing in front of the judge on our day of adoption. He pointed his finger and asked of me, "Is anyone coercing you to adopt this little boy?" After we had assured him that we were doing so out of love for our son, he made this statement. "From today on, he is your son. He may disappoint you, even grieve you but he is your son. Everything you own one day will be his and he will bear your name." Then he looked to the clerk and gave this command. "So order a change in this child's birth certificate and may it reflect that these are the parents of this child."

It was then that I realized that my Heavenly Father loved me so much that, without coercion, He loved me and gave His all to me. On that day, He changed my name and I gladly bear His name and His image.

He covers our past. His forgiveness adopts us into God's family.

3. It was a grace that called and compelled her to a new life

"Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?" "No, Lord," she said. And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more." John 8:10-11 NLT

This is what grace and forgiveness does. When we experience God's grace He also calls and compels us to "go and sin no more."

The word “go” is a loaded word. It may be little but it is found in some of the most powerful scripture in the Bible.

Jesus said that word to His disciples before He left this earth and He meant it for every disciple that would come after the first ones. He said, *“Go everywhere in the world and share the Good News.”* Mark 16 ERV

That call from God has never stopped from that day till this. Go is the word. Go is the call. Go represent Christ body on this earth. We are called and we are compelled to go. That’s why Jesus added the second instruction for this woman and all of us. He didn’t intend for her to embrace her sin as some would teach. There was no “miserable sinner” theology here. He didn’t say Go and sin every day in word, thought and deed. He said simply and forcefully, Go and sin no more.

Forgiveness changes everything.

When we come to Christ and accept His forgiveness our lives should be radically and powerfully altered. Our priorities in life will change. Our worldview will change. Our life will be viewed with eternity in view. Our daily and even moment by moment decisions will be made with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Here’s what forgiveness will do in us. Because we have been forgiven we will practice forgiveness. It’s what Christians do.

Get along with each other, and forgive each other. If someone does wrong to you, forgive that person because the Lord forgave you. Colossians 3:13 NCV

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4:32 NJKV

If a fellow believer hurts you, go and tell him, work it out between the two of you. Matthew 18:15 MSG

Forgiveness is something that each of us has had to deal with in one way or the other. What might take you just a short time to work through might take someone else time, prayer and Godly counsel. But it is a process we cannot and must not ignore, if we want to be free to become the people God wants us to be.

Let me give you some clarification regarding some myths about forgiving others.

- a. Understanding why someone acted a certain way toward you is not the same as forgiving them.
- b. Time doesn’t heal all wounds. Forgiveness heals not time.
- c. Denying that you have been hurt is not the same as forgiveness.
- d. You may not have to talk to the person to seek or extend forgiveness especially if they are not asking for it. (Awkward moment of young man in church asking a young lady to forgive him for lusting.)

In Matthew 18 there is a parable of a slave that had been forgiven a huge debt by his master but he went right out and prosecuted a fellow servant who owed him a very small amount. You might be tempted on reading that to think, “how could anyone be so ungrateful?” But the Christian who will not forgive another person is even more guilty and more ungrateful than that slave.

“The kingdom of God is like a king who decided to square accounts with his servants. As he got under way, one servant was brought before him who had run up a debt of a hundred thousand dollars. He couldn’t pay up, so the king ordered the man, along with his wife, children, and goods, to be auctioned off at the slave market.

26-27 “The poor wretch threw himself at the king’s feet and begged, ‘Give me a chance and I’ll pay it all back.’ Touched by his plea, the king let him off, erasing the debt.

28 “The servant was no sooner out of the room when he came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him ten dollars. He seized him by the throat and demanded, ‘Pay up. Now!’

29-31 “The poor wretch threw himself down and begged, ‘Give me a chance and I’ll pay it all back.’ But he wouldn’t do it. He had him arrested and put in jail until the debt was paid. When the other servants saw this going on, they were outraged and brought a detailed report to the king.

32-35 “The king summoned the man and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave your entire debt when you begged me for mercy. Shouldn’t you be compelled to be merciful to your fellow servant who asked for mercy?’ The king was furious and put the screws to the man until he paid back his entire debt. And that’s exactly what my Father in heaven is going to do to each one of you who doesn’t forgive unconditionally anyone who asks for mercy.”

We’ve been forgiven and we have to forgive others.

We should release the person from whatever debt we think they owe us for their actions.

We have to accept others as they are and release them from any responsibility to meet our needs. Every now and then I run across someone who places their acceptability on me or someone else. It would seem that certain people can make or break their day depending on how much attention gets paid to them. But when we forgive we absolve others of any responsibilities to meet our needs.

View others as tools of growth in our lives.

People we have to forgive will expand our capacity to understand the grace and forgiveness of Jesus Christ. (Study the story of Joseph and his brothers)

Make reconciliation

It could be a relative, a close family member, a coworker, a former employer or employee or maybe an ex-friend. We have avoided them because of the hostility in our hearts against them I must remind you as a faithful pastor that there is no room for unforgiveness in a Christian. You may say, but what if they won’t accept my words. Their reaction is not on you but your actions and reactions are on you. Try and do your best to act like Jesus.

When you forgive others you extend that same grace in the same life-changing and powerful way. Here is what practicing forgiveness will do in you.

It will:

1. Heal your heart: I know people that have carried a broken heart around for years. Let me assure you that practicing forgiveness is the first step in healing your heart. Do you feel like something is broken inside of you? Do you know down deep that there are unresolved conflicts that are eating away at you in your soul?

When you forgive a person, this does not mean you are immediately healed.
When you forgive a person, this does not mean you are going to be buddy/buddy.
When we forgive a person, this does not mean we surrender the right to restitution or justice when appropriate.
When we forgive a person, this does not mean that we trust them, yet.
When we forgive a person, we are not avoiding pain, we are opening the door to healing.
When we forgive, we take the journey at the pace we are able to handle...the deeper the hurt, the longer the journey.

2. Soften your spirit: Usually people who carry long time grudges or unforgiveness will develop a hardness in their spirit and attitude. Sometimes it is so gradual you may not realize it, be self-aware.
3. Free you to function:

Amy Biehl died a violent death in 1993. She was a 26-year-old Fulbright scholar who had gone to South Africa to help register black voters for their first free election. But even though she was seeking to help the people of South Africa, as she was driving one day, she was dragged out of her car, stabbed and beaten to death by a mob which was committed to violence in order to overthrow the apartheid government. Soon afterward, Amy's parents, Linda and Peter Biehl, quit their jobs and moved from their Orange County, California home to South Africa — not to seek revenge, but to start a foundation in Amy's name. Today, two of her killers work for the foundation. They call Mrs. Biehl "Makhulu," or grandmother, because of the way she treats them. She says, "Forgiving is looking at ourselves and saying, 'I don't want to go through life feeling hateful and revengeful, because that's not going to do me any good.' We took Amy's lead. We did what we felt she would want."

That is the picture of reconciliation. It not only forgives, it reaches out to restore. It pays back good for evil. It is following the heart and character of God, for the Bible says, "All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). I am so grateful that God made the sacrifice to reconcile me to himself in spite of all that I have done, and now I want to follow Jesus and offer that same reconciliation to others — even those who may have harmed me.

In his book, *What's So Amazing About Grace*, Phillip Yancey tells the story of Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway grew up in a very devout evangelical family, and yet there he never experienced the grace of Christ. He lived a libertine life that most of us would call "dissolute"... but there was no father, no parent waiting for him and he sank into the mire of a graceless depression. A short story he wrote perhaps reveals the grace that he hoped for. It is the story of a Spanish father who decided to reconcile with his son who had run away to Madrid. The father, in a moment of remorse, takes out this ad in *El Libro*, a newspaper. "Paco, meet me at Hotel Montana, Noon, Tuesday... All is forgiven... Papa." When the father arrived at the square in hopes of meeting his son, he found eight hundred Paco's waiting to be reunited with their father. Was Paco such a popular name? Or is a father's forgiveness the salve for every soul?

Forgiveness is a process that can be painful and at times seem unending. Whatever our pain, whatever our situation, we cannot afford to hold on to an unforgiving spirit another day. We must get involved with the process of forgiving others and find out what it means to be really free. If we will persevere and keep our eyes on the One who forgave us, it will be a liberating force like nothing else we have ever experienced.

Lord, I forgive (name of person) for the (specifics). I take authority over the Enemy and in the name of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, I take back the ground I have allowed Satan to gain in my life because of my attitude toward _____ and give this ground back to my Savior Jesus Christ.