
The Call of Forgiveness

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Psalm 32; Matthew 18:21-35

The Call of Forgiveness is just that; it is a direct call from our Lord. It is something extremely special which we are given, and something precious we are to replicate to others. It is not easy. It requires the practice of maturity, the patience to allow the process to unfold, and the tact to endure it. Forgiveness is also a mandate from our Lord. We can take great comfort in knowing that He is working while we are waiting, and even suffering. We can best practice forgiveness by realizing how much we have been forgiven. We can then be imitators of that forgiveness when others willfully or unknowingly cause us setback or harm. The magnitude of forgiveness from our Lord for what we have done can never measure up to anything others could do to us. When we put forgiveness into practice, we will be free from the bondage of bitterness and pain that imprisons us, disconnecting us from life and its wonders, which God has provided for us.

I was watching one of those reality shows recently where a bunch of young people were put into a nice beach house to live and work together. The show is about the drama and strife each one causes the other, and how they “do not” work it out. After all, if they were a big happy family, it would not make good TV, so I am told by a friend in that business. One young woman, in her early twenties, kept making the statement, “I refuse to forgive anyone for anything.” So, in the episode I watched, the attention was centered on how she was alienating everyone in the house. The result was that she ended up alone, hated by the others. She would make a big deal if someone took her cookie, or gave her an objectionable look. She was a very sad and pathetic person, whose self-imposed code of conduct, created out of pride, made it impossible for her to make friends or cooperate with anyone in her life. She could not see that she was the problem; she refused to take any responsibility. In her interviews, she blamed everyone else for her problems. The sad fact is that this is typical behavior amongst many people today, even Christians in the church!

As human beings, we are prone to make mistakes, either intentionally or unintentionally. We all have hurt people, and we have all been hurt; we are all in the same boat. So, when we refuse to forgive one another, it is like escaping the disaster of the sinking of the Titanic in a lifeboat, only to poke holes in the very lifeboat that saved us. Our escape from the sinking ship is our redemption, which we did not deserve. Since every one else in the lifeboat needs the cross too, why try to sink one another? All you will accomplish is to sink yourself.

Out of mistakes we make, or others cause us, comes our pain, hurt, and resentment. This resentment escalates into animosity, and builds into bitterness, until it destroys relationships and causes us isolation, just as it did with that young woman. She refused to forgive, and built an impenetrable wall that caused bitterness and

isolation as she wallowed in her troubles, blaming everyone else for them. She would not allow forgiveness to break down the wall, allowing for the building of life and relationships. Forgiveness is the only human force that can stop the disintegration of relationships. This is why it is so essential. This is why our Lord calls us to forgive. If you have been hurt, or you have hurt others—and we all have—open your eyes and realize that it is the call of the Christian to dispel these conflicts. Without forgiveness, our growth and maturity with Christ, and our integrity with others, cannot be built.

We may suffer betrayal from friends, family, coworkers, and even church members. However, we are called to forgive, anyway! Why? Because, **we** need it, and because we are imperfect, fallen, and full of sin. Even the Christian who is saved by Grace is still in process of growth and sanctification. We are yet imperfect, no matter what the level of maturity. If you are thinking, *I refuse to forgive others*, just as that young woman did, consider this reason to forgive. *We forgive because God has forgiven us*. If we do not, the resentment will build and build—like battery acid that slowly eats away a car—until, unless we fix it, it will destroy us. Even secular psychologists tell us that resentment is the most powerful, self-destructive emotion in our arsenal. Will you allow forgiveness to build, or bitterness to destroy your relationships and life?

God desires that we seek forgiveness, because God is a God of relationships, and is committed to relationships. God knows our human weaknesses and our self-destructive nature, and that our relationships tend to be fragile. Broken relationships come out of our sinful nature and our fallen world, which seeks its own gain. God's desire is to show the world our potential. Because of what Christ has done for us, we should not take pleasure in destructive situations, those that divide and draw relationships apart. Relationships are what life is all about! Satan seeks to destroy relationships. His first attempt was in the Garden of Eden, nearly defeating our relationship with God and with one another. God's plan is to prove Satan wrong, and, our call is to build one another up, not destroy one another.

When we have been wronged, we experience feelings of betrayal, and consider retaliation to be justified. God calls us out of retaliation and into reconciliation. When we fail to forgive, we are the ones who suffer the most. Anger, resentment, shame, bitterness, contempt, and defensiveness all synergistically build on top of one another, so every segment within us is held hostage with these emotions. We are chained like a dog on a leash, unable to reach the destination we desire, what Christ has for us. Do not allow the bitterness to continue so that it festers, corrupting your whole being. The bitterness must not take hold in your life, or it will block the flow of the Holy Spirit and self-controlling love. Or else, the festering will continue to the point that Christ is crying out to us in the wilderness, yet we do not hear Him.

Our Lord is alerting us to the perils of being unforgiving, just as the call of *red alert* in the TV show, "Star Trek," warns its crew of impending danger. If we do not heed the warning, our emotions will run wild, and we will no longer have control or composure, unable to recognize who we are in Christ. Thus, the anger and the uncontrolled emotions will become controlled by Satan. The *red alert* has been ignored, and our ship has been destroyed! Your relationship(s) have been destroyed!

This passage in Matthew, chapter eighteen, is a story of a forgiving king and a wicked servant. The king forgave this servant's enormous debt, which is a parallel to our enormous debt of sin that we held until Christ forgave us. This servant represents the Believer, who, after experiencing the forgiveness of God, did harbor bitterness to another, and then refused to forgive his fellow Christian (or a non-Christian) for a much, much smaller debt. The king became furious, and handed the servant over to be tortured. The Bible is telling us that if we refuse to forgive one another, and continue to harbor bitterness, we can be tortured, too. My personal experience is when I have refused to forgive people in the past, I have become consumed with feelings of guilt and shame, and this is a torture I can do without. I feel much better, and sleep much better with an attitude of forgiveness; I cannot think well or sleep well with an attitude of bitterness. Why would a Christian want to go through life with feelings of bitterness, which consume him with misery and unrest, instead of giving it to the Lord, and receiving forgiveness and rest?

How can we go through our Christian life and experience, and rationalize our actions and deeds, only to face our Lord later at the judgment? By what point are we to make, by what feeling are we to base, by what hope do we have? When we have the knowledge of God's mercy, then we have the responsibility of acting with mercy toward one another (2 Corinthians 5:21).

God calls Christians to operate in the parameters of forgiveness, love, and mercy. And, when we have not been forgiving, we will have a heart filled with suffering and torment. How can we receive Christ's forgiveness, and claim Christ as our Savior, when we are unable to forgive one another? When we have a forgiving attitude, then we will have a heart at rest and in peace!

What Forgiveness Looks Like

Taking our primary lead from Matthew, chapter 18, and looking at various other Scriptures, we can see what God requires of us, and our appropriate response regarding the different categories of forgiveness.

We, as Christians, must extend ourselves to other people with love, and that which flows out of love—forgiveness!

Ephesians 4:29-32 tells us,

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

John 13:34-35 tells us,

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

We are to love one another—period! No strings attached! This is the model we are to use to show God’s love to the world!

We should be clear on this. A healthy Christian is one who puts aside the malicious traits of an evil sin nature, and embraces others in love. What comes out of love is the release of our feelings of betrayal and hurt. The Christian is called to model kindness, love, empathy, compassion—and, out of these, will flow forgiveness. God wants us to get with it, to wake up, and seize the wonders and opportunities He gives us. An unforgiving attitude, and its ugly rotten fruits, will chock us off from His wonders!

Ask yourself this question. *How do I handle forgiveness?* How do you respond when others forgive you? What do you do with opportunities that our Lord has for you? We must realize the generosity of Grace, and being in Christ, which we do not deserve. Our Lord does not want us to forgive begrudgingly, because, He did not forgive us with conditions, or with strings attached. A Christian that does not forgive is like a small child who refuses to share a game ball that he/she received as a gift. Thus, the child will not be able to play with that ball as it was designed to be used. That child will not be using it to its full potential. When the Christian does not forgive, he/she distorts the relationships he enjoys. We are like the child who, unable to play a game because he refuses to share the ball, cries that he is alone and nobody will play with him, or, he cries because he is not having any fun. Without forgiveness, we forfeit relationships with others, and, we are unable to play our games. We just end up cheating ourselves out of our potential, and the best plan that Christ has for us.

First: Forgiveness is Hard

Isaiah tells us, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.’” (Isaiah 55:8-9, NIV)

True forgiveness is one of the hardest things to accomplish in the human experience, even for the mature Christian. Yet, this is our mandate, and call. Forgiveness is hard because it demands a surrender of our right to *get even*. Forgiveness even causes suffering for the person who was wronged, the victim. The suffering, from our human perspective and reasoning, should belong to the instigator of the wrong. It is natural to consider this unfair. And, yes, it is unfair; it was unfair for our Lord to go through what He did to forgive us!

Forgiveness is hard, also, because we can easily avoid it; we can walk the other way, and execute revenge. And, it would be considered justified in the eyes of our friends, our relatives, and, especially of society. We could even receive some kind of medal for coming up with a good scheme of revenge.

As a youth, I loved the comic book, ‘The Punisher,’ where the super hero was a victim of a severe crime, and his wife and kids were inadvertently killed by the mob. So, he makes it his life’s crusade to affect revenge on all criminals who evade the law. This is appealing; the criminals deserve the Punisher’s revenge, especially since the law is unable to deal with them because of bribes, cut backs, and apathy. This pleases our

human nature. However, God does not want us to rely on our human nature, rather, to rely on Him.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways...”

This passage is telling us that our way of thinking is wrong. If God is the Creator of all things, including truth, and He is all knowing, and He is all-powerful, then, His ways are better than ours. We may not be able to recognize this, because our perspective is limited, as is our knowledge and insight.

- God is governed by righteousness; whereas, desires and emotions drive us.
- God has a moral and virtuous purpose; our purpose is self-seeking.
- God’s primary purpose in our lives is to bring us out of our self-destructive and self-seeking nature, and into the reclamation of redemption in Him; this is the work of Christ.
- God’s thoughts are beyond our comprehension and imagination; therefore, we should rely on Him, and not on ourselves.

Second: Forgiveness is Complete

Colossians tells us,

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Colossians 3:12-14, NIV)

Matthew 18:27 tells us, “The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.” Forgiveness is actually canceling a debt. It is as if someone owes you one thousand dollars, and he or she cannot pay you back; you forgive the debt, never expecting to receive the money back. The amount owed to you is no longer owed or expected. You give up your right to seek the repayment of that debt. Forgiveness is bankruptcy; once filed, the creditor may not retrieve the debt, and it is wiped out. We need to see the cancellation of the debt as a write-off, and not some form of embezzlement. When we forgive, we forget; that is, we are no longer to even have the desire for restitution, pay back, or punishment.

There is a man, at a church where I was once on staff, who I admire greatly for exhibiting forgiveness in an instance that I do not think I could ever have done it; yet, with Christ, I should be able to, because all things are possible with Christ. His wife was murdered, indiscriminately, by a drive-by shooter in the Pasadena area a few years ago; she died in his arms. He realized that for him to go on with his life and faith, he needed to forgive that person. And, he did. Now, he did not tell the police to let the shooter go; forgiveness is not necessarily a release of the obligation, especially when a crime is committed. Rather, we, as Christians, are released from our personal desire for retribution. This form of forgiveness even prevents us from those “polite” sly remarks and glances; our revenge is repudiated...divorced from our desire to get even.

Forgiveness is so rare in our society. For it to become a powerful witnessing tool, it must be complete. Forgiveness does not make light of the wrong, nor should it give a license to others to take advantage of us, but, they may. Yet, it is well worth it! Out of the completeness of forgiveness will come the forgetting. Then, out of the forgetting, will come the healing. The healing we get from forgiveness will close the wounds we receive; it will allow us to go on with life. It will prevent our sufferings and setbacks from becoming our identity and obsession. For, without forgiveness, we give in to the bitterness that will consume and take us over, that it may give us a purpose for existing, but not for living. If we just try to forget, then agonize over it, we will get nowhere; but, through the process of surrender (Galatians 2:20-21) will come the forgetting. Forgetting is a process, and we can not expect it to come right away. We must be patient, let the process unfold, and embrace the forgiveness that Christ has given us. That man, who forgave his wife's killer, took many agonizing months to do so. But, in the end, he and his remaining family were able to get on with their lives, and honor his wife's memory by living life. Had he remained in bitterness, not only would his kids have become dysfunctional, but a total breakdown of that family would have occurred, and his wife's memory would have been framed in bitterness, and not life! Forgiveness has to be complete; if not, it will not work, and you will not make it!

Third: Forgiveness is Costly

Luke tells us,

But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. (Luke 6:27-31, NIV)

When we forgive, it may incur a cost to us. We should realize, and even welcome, that cost. These go against our inclination and Will, but, remember, the *vengeance belongs to the Lord*. We are to never forget the cost our Lord paid on our behalf. No cost we could ever incur could compare with the cost He paid for us. When we forgive, we will be refocusing our plans for our pain into God's plan, and God's ways. So, our pain is relieved, and our life can go on—in a better direction!

We can live improved quality lives when we forgive. Our relationships can grow, and we can become more useful to others and, especially, to God. When we understand that it does involve cost, we can gain the right mindset for forgiveness. We will realize from Scripture not to base it on our feelings and desires, but to focus on what forgiveness really is. We can see it as what Christ gave us, as He was our example. John 3:16 is the example on what forgiveness cost our Lord. His undeserved, painful death and separation from the Father was a substitution for what we deserved. This was our Lord's suffering and cost. In comparison, the cost for us will be very minimal and limited, and we need to keep this in view, using it as our strength to get through it. Our cost is to live with the consequence of the evil that was brought on us. We then take the responsibility for the hurt brought on to us. Understanding this is hard, even for

the mature Christian, and, virtually impossible for the non-Christian, since it goes against the common sense of society. In the eyes of the world, the suffering should be put upon the one who did the wrong. Yet, the Scriptural view is a beacon, a witness to the supremacy of Christ.

We could normally avoid this form of suffering, but we are called to face it. We need to accept the consequences of the wrong, such as a parent forgiving a child for breaking a priceless object. The parent bears the cost to either replace it, or suffer without it, and the child gets off free (well, with some sort of punishment). This is the cost of suffering. In the case of the man who lost his wife to murder, his suffering is that he cannot be with his wife anymore. Forgiveness chooses to suffer. It is very hard to make that voluntary choice to take on the suffering, even when we do not deserve it; yet, we must make it so as to grow in our walk with our Lord, and to grow toward our full potential.

Humanity owes a great deal to the Creator of the universe, and our willful disobedience to our Creator is a slap in His face. We owe a debt we could never conceive, or pay. Yet, most people live their lives as an insult to what Christ has done. And, Christ still pursues them with the ultimate love! Christ did not owe our debt, yet He paid it!

Christ was the substitute for our punishment, which we deserved; so is forgiveness. Forgiveness is a substitution too, since it requires a penalty to be paid, and, the victim pays that penalty. It is a faint reflection of what Christ has done for us! We may not understand the mystery behind this, but we can trust in our Lord, who will carry us through it. The relation between what Christ went through so that we could be forgiven, and the call for us to take on the responsibility for a sin we did not commit, will give us a deeper understanding into the character and nature of God. From this, we should mature to a deeper level, and be used in a greater way to further the cause of Christ. The result is that we take our response to evil and redirect it for good, and, even to a point, take the evil on ourselves. The result is that Satan is defeated and prevented from receiving a prize, his reward that he craved to gain, from our refusal to forgive. This is why the cost accepted by our Lord is the greatest cost of all. We need to realize this, and respond accordingly to one another.

Forgiveness is worth the agony we may go through, because, it will heal the wounds and relieve the pain. Perhaps a scar will remain. But, take it to heart, and recognize that scar as a badge of honor to help us grow and mature, to redirect our wrong path onto the *right direction*. Be the person who forgives. Do not be the person who refuses to!

Next month we will look at forgiveness some more with “The Pursuit of Forgiveness.”

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of

summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"--and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him. Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart! (Psalm 32, NIV)

The Pursuit of Forgiveness

Hosea 2:14-15; Matthew 18: 21-35; Colossians 3:13

Last month, we looked at three aspects of what forgiveness looks like. We saw, from God's most precious Word, that forgiveness is challenging, because, it demands a surrender of our rights to *get even*. Forgiveness is complete, so that we, as Christians, are released from our personal desire for retribution. Forgiveness is costly, yet, there is no cost we could ever incur that could compare with what we cost Him. When we put forgiveness into practice in our relationships, whether with family, friends, church people, or our coworkers, we refocus our plans for our pain to God's plan, and God's ways. So, our pain becomes relieved, and our life can go on in a better direction. We can live better quality lives by practicing forgiveness. Our relationships can grow. We can become more useful to others, and especially to God. Forgiveness is even worth the agony we may go through, because it will heal wounds and relieve pain. We need not fear forgiveness, or its results, even if it scars us. We can take to heart and realize that scars can be badges of honor to help us grow and mature, and to redirect our wrong path onto the right direction. Now, we can see how forgiveness searches for, and actually goes in pursuit of us, and how we can put it into practical action in our relationships.

More On What Forgiveness Looks Like

We, as Christians, must extend ourselves to other people with love, and that which flows out of love—forgiveness!

Fourth: Forgiveness Pursues

Hosea tells us,

Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt. (Hosea 2:14-15, NIV)

There is possibly nothing greater and more dramatic to us, as Christians, in regards to God's character, than His capacity to forgive! Most non-Christians cannot fathom this quality, and do not believe God can, or even should, forgive them. So, they blatantly reject His forgiveness. Other Christians only see a small facet of God's forgiveness, because they refuse to apply it in their lives, and hold onto bitterness and strife as their identity. Or, perhaps they understand it a little, but think, *If someone wants my forgiveness, they have to come to me and seek it. Or, I do not have to do anything, because I am the person who was wronged.* But, these attitudes are wrong and unbiblical. The Bible tells us that the Christian has an obligation to actually pursue forgiveness. Even if we are the ones wronged, it is our duty to go after the person who wronged us--not to retaliate, but to forgive! We have to see why this is important, and from our human point of view, how forgiveness will help end the vicious cycle of revenge and pay back. Even when we cannot or refuse to see His plan! We may think it is not worth it, but God says otherwise. We may think it is unfair, but was it fair for our Lord to go to the cross? This may go against our pride and our culture, but this is what we are called to do. God expects us to entice forgiveness from the person we offend, or the person who offends us.

I had a run-in with an Elder at a church where I was on staff a few years ago. I took his daughter, along with twenty other youth, to a winter camp. On the way home, the daughter realized she had forgotten her gloves. This Elder was furious with me because she had forgotten her gloves at camp. I apologized to the dad—the Elder—and took responsibility for the gloves. I told him I would contact the camp the first thing in the morning, and arrange to get the gloves back. But, this just seemed to infuriate him even more, and from then on he persisted in a very condescending and mean attitude toward me. Although I took responsibility, I asked him to forgive me, even though I felt I had done nothing wrong. After all, I was responsible for twenty kids, their safety and spiritual growth, and, according to that Elder, all of their articles of clothing, too.

This Elder just would not get it when it came to forgiveness. From his perspective, I did a great wrong toward him since his daughter did not bring back the expensive pair of gloves; therefore, as the leader, I was responsible. Even though we received the gloves in the mail a few days later, he would not forget the incident, and this tarnished not only our relationship, but also my reputation with him and with several other people in the church. He made it a point to let everyone know what a bad youth Pastor I was, because his daughter's gloves were left at camp. Ten of those kids came to know the Lord, including his daughter, and this was one of the best camp experiences I have been a part of; but, the *gloves incident* is what everyone remembers.

Romans, chapter twelve, tells us:

“Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord. On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” And the Lord will reward you.” (Romans 12:19-20; Proverbs 25: 21-22 NIV)

This experience gave me the chance to realize, firsthand, what the term, *burning coals*, was all about. The more I was nice and forgiving to this Elder, the more he was insolent and belligerent. In contrast, he had an issue with another pastor at this church, and this pastor decided not to follow Scriptural principles, but rather, the ways of the world. They came to a mutual understanding and respect of one another. So, I wondered if forgiveness was worth it. Then I realized that probably neither of these men knew the Lord, or, at the very least, did not have a growing, effectual relationship with Christ. So, they did not know how to express themselves in a godly way. All they knew was Galatians 5:19-20. Verses 22-23 taught a foreign concept they did not want to pursue or acknowledge. So, I realized, that is why we are to offer forgiveness freely, (as I tried to with that Elder I offended) even when we are not in the wrong. Forgiveness models Christ. People do not like Christ, because He calls us from our complacency and comfort into conviction and growth, where few are attracted or willing to go. So, we have to chase down forgiveness, because, out of our pursuit of forgiveness, we will build better relationships and reconciliation. A few years later, that Elder came around, and actually helped me when my car broke down. (Before that, he was more likely to run me over.)

The typical response from society is, “I could care less,” or, “forget about it (in a cynical tone).” These are expressions of hurt, even though they verbally say otherwise. The *burning coals* will convict them or punish them. Because they do not see the cost that the Lord paid for them, they are unwilling to respond to the gift of Grace. Christ pursues them, and all they have to do is respond to His call. The *world's* desire is to tell the person off and seek revenge. To observe this, watch the daytime talk shows. We, as Christians, are called to a higher standard—one that builds, edifies, and reconciles!

Fifth: Forgiveness Is Continual

Luke tells us, “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.” (Luke 17:3b-4, NIV)

For the Hebrew, seventy times seven meant infinity, not just 490, because 490 has a limit. For Christ, there is no point beyond which our accumulation of sins becomes unforgivable. So, our response is to forgive others, as there is no cap, or limit, or expiration to forgive. As followers of Christ, neither the intensity of, nor the number of wrongs should have an impact on us. If we were to place a limit, then our effect of building relationships would have a chain attached to it, instead of having a chain reaction to grow. With a limit, you cannot grow. We must have the realization and capacity to understand how much we have been forgiven by Christ in order to forgive each other; this is crucial to the Christian experience. As our Lord continues to give us grace and forgiveness, are not we to do the same with each other? We show ourselves to be extremely selfish and prideful when we do not practice continual forgiveness!

God's forgiveness is not some cheap markdown or bargain; His cost was immeasurable. Paul, in Colossians 3:13, tells us to forgive freely, as Christ has forgiven us. We must be willing to forgive as Christ has forgiven us. We must be willing to bear the cost, just as our Lord did. Forgiveness demands a substitution. So, how could we ever back away from forgiving each other? If we do, it is a bigger insult to our Lord than

for the non-Christian to turn his or her back on His grace—*because we know better*. Remember, knowledge brings responsibility.

Sixth: What Forgiveness Is Not

In 2 Timothy, we are told, “Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message.” (2 Timothy 4:14-15, NIV)

We know *why* we must forgive. So, the question is, *what* must we forgive? I do not believe we need to forgive trivialities, because, forgiveness is not trivial; its cost is high. So, things like bumping into someone, or typos and minor mistakes, should not call us to forgive. Just a simple, polite apology is given, and then, you move on. If a person was offended by an honest mistake, such as his or her name being misspelled in the church bulletin, he should not expect forgiveness, because it was an honest, un-purposed mistake, with no malicious intent. There must be a reason for forgiveness, such as a hurt, where malice and forethought were at work.

Forgiveness does not minimize the offense. When we forgive, we are not saying, “Hey, that was OK.” The offense does not need to be accepted; however, we are to embrace the person who committed the offense. It is like sin; we are to hate sin but we are still called to love the sinner—unless it continues, and they refuse to repent. Forgiveness is not the approval of the wrong; it only offers the grace of love, rather than vengeance. Forgiveness may not bring us to the level of trust that we had before. If a spouse cheats on you, you are called to forgive and reconcile. But, that trust will be eroded, and will take time to rebuild. Just forgiving the offender will not bring instant restitution of the relationship; perhaps the relationship will be severed completely. Perhaps a business partner embezzles and causes you to lose the business. You are to forgive that person, as we previously discussed, but this does not mean you would enter into a business relationship with that person again.

Forgiveness is directed to people, not causes or institutions. I, as a pastor, cannot forgive the victims of the Medieval Church for some of its notorieties, such as the Inquisition. If I worked for McDonalds, I could not forgive them for someone slipping on their floor, unless I represented them in a legal capacity. Forgiveness will not erase the past. As for that man in last month’s article who lost his wife, he will suffer greatly in her absence until they meet again in Heaven. She will not be brought back to life. We are to forget the past, so the resentment will not build up, but, we also need to realize the event will not be undone.

“Not just human fairness, but excusing those things that could not be excused...”
(C.S. Lewis)

When we do not forgive, we walk a path of self-destruction, brought on by the build up of resentment, and the unfulfilling nature of revenge. Nothing will wither our soul more than storing up this disease of *unforgiveness*. Pride and arrogance will take over, control, and ruin you. A Chinese proverb says, “First, before seeking revenge, you must dig two graves.” The cost and pain of forgiveness—even though we may be the victims of it—will be far easier than the path of not seeking the forgiveness. We read in

Job 5:2, “Resentment kills a fool, and envy slays the simple.” The goal of forgiveness is allowing Christ to transform us to our full potential. Because we may go through bad stuff in life, it is not meant to be a personal attack, rather, a strengthening of our character so we can be better used by our Lord. Consider this, Christ has defeated Satan, so the sins we incur can be turned around to His glory. Forgiveness will refocus God’s plan, and make it our plan. Then, our sufferings will not be in vain, and can be turned around to further the Kingdom of God. The joy and happiness of who we are in Christ will bubble over, covering the pain and hurt.

Romans tells us,

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:28-39, NIV)

How do I know I have forgiven someone properly?

When you feel compassion toward the person who wronged you, then you can be assured you did truly forgive them. Let these Scriptures impact and change you to the core of your being. Let the power of prayer be your focus, and the Scripture your heartbeat. Our standard is not that of the world, but that of God. We would not want to go through life in misery and bitterness, remembering those who wronged us, harboring grudges, and experiencing unhappiness. This is not the plan that Christ has for us! Bitter people have no impact for the kingdom of God except to cause division and distraction. They have the tenacity and drive to show everyone the hurts and wrongs they suffered. Do not let this happen to you, or to the people around you. Take your lead from this verse, not your inclinations.

“When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.” (1 Peter 2:23-24, NIV)

God does not ask us to minimize the wrong, but He does call us to forgive the person. We are not to repay evil for evil, rather, evil for good, just as our Lord did for us.

The Biblical Steps In Forgiving

Now that we have discussed the *why* and *what* of forgiveness, we need a practical way to apply it to our lives. Remember, we need to have the Biblical mandates in mind, and be willing to surrender our desires for revenge, and the storage of wrongs for future bitterness.

First: Know what Christ did for you.

In the book of Romans, we read, “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:22-24, NIV)

For us to grasp the idea and call of forgiveness, we must have a deep sense of the price that Christ paid for us. Christ paid the ultimate price for us, and forgave us for acts deemed unpardonable. When we grasp what Christ has done for us, we should be motivated into overdrive, always seeking forgiveness. When we have the proper perspective of Grace, what it cost and what it is, we then should be able to reciprocate to those around us. God forgave us for our failures, so, why not forgive others? This realization must precede any of our efforts to reconcile, because, with the knowledge of *what* and *why* we are forgiving, we will be able to follow the Will of God, and actually forgive with a willing and loving heart. We are not to let our emotions rule us, or to over-react, making the situation worse.

With the understanding of what Christ did for us on behalf of forgiveness, we can put a bigger piece of trust and reliance onto our Lord. We must be able to fully trust, rely on, and surrender the control over to Christ. Thus, our dependence becomes who we are in Christ. When we then take the risk, we need not worry about the results or consequence of that action. We are to lean on and trust in our Lord, allowing His Grace to flow through us to those around us; this is the mark of a healthy Christian.

Second: We must be willing to take the risk.

“Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.” (Romans 12:19, NIV)

“But a witless man can no more become wise than a wild donkey's colt can be born a man. Yet if you devote your heart to him and stretch out your hands to him, if you put away the sin that is in your hand and allow no evil to dwell in your tent, then you will lift up your face without shame; you will stand firm and without fear.” (Job 11:12-15, NIV)

Forgiveness is a risky business. The person who we choose to forgive may not realize, or admit to the wrong. Nor, will they always accept our forgiveness. But, their response is not our responsibility; we are only to be obedient to our Lord, and give the

forgiveness out of love, not expecting a warm response. That Elder who refused to forgive me for a perceived wrong I did to him is responsible for his actions to the Lord, I am not. I am responsible for my response. So, I sought the forgiveness, and he refused. That is a risk we all have to take. Also, the person who we forgive may continue in the offense, such as that Elder who kept spreading rumors about me. He refused to stop; but, again, this is not my responsibility. We are to allow others the freedom to disappoint us and to fail our expectations.

“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter. So even though I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did the wrong or of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are. By all this we are encouraged.” (2 Corinthians 7:10-13a, NIV)

We need to be willing to put aside the concern that forgiveness will minimize the wrong brought against us. Sin is ugly. We should recognize that fact as well as the fact of its corrupting nature. But, just forgiving someone does not make the sin go away. Forgiveness releases the guilt, and stops the cycle of bitterness and dysfunction.

Third: We need to cancel the betrayal.

“Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.” (Proverbs 10:12, NIV)

“He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.” (Proverbs 17:9 NIV)

We have to give up our perceived right of revenge and retaliation. This can be a tough process, but one that we can accomplish through prayer, and self-surrender. Try to look at it this way; the offense against you is actually an offense against God. As God’s child, you are in His protection and care. When someone offends you, it also becomes an offense against God Himself. Thus, we are to surrender our rights to His, and cancel the debt—completely out of existence, and, out of our heart and mind. Give it over as if it never happened. You will be surprised that once you do this, you will feel the load lifted off you and you can rest in the comfort of the Lord.

When you pray to God, you need to be actually requesting that He would take the desire of revenge away, then relinquish your desires of revenge!

Fourth: We need to offer personal forgiveness.

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12:2, NIV)

We must be willing to go to the person who offended us, and, both verbally and non-verbally, forgive them. Then, seek an appropriate reconciliation to that individual. Offer the love and acceptance to the *person*, not necessarily to *what they did*. God desires that we be involved in growing positive and healthy relationships, the primary purpose of our existence is relationships, relationships with God to us and then us to

others. In relationships we can model, grow in, make known and glorify our Lord. This should be a driving force of who we are as Christians, saved by Grace. It is the responsibility of the person who did the wrong to repent—not the person offended. You cannot force repentance from someone; you can only pray for him or her, and offer the forgiveness. The relationship can only positively continue when repentance and forgiveness are pursued.

If the offender refuses to repent, or refuses to accept the forgiveness, then this means their nature is in denial. They feel no wrong was committed, or see you as trying to manipulate their Will. They may be a *sociopath*, that is, have some form of mental disorder where they may enjoy inflicting hurt and hardship on people. In any case, the reason is not your responsibility, nor are you responsible for their acceptance. Your responsibility is only to genuinely offer forgiveness. We need to accept the fact of human nature; some people just will not *play ball* God's way, especially Christians. So, if this is the case with your forgiveness, then it still remains between you and Christ, as it is anyway, because we are God's children.

“The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.” (1 Peter 4:7-8 NIV)

Fifth: We need to recognize the picture of Forgiveness.

The result of forgiveness is letting go of the offense, and, wishing blessings and compassion to the person who wronged you. Repentance simply means, Biblically, to change one's perspective. In other words, you turn—from your way of thinking to God's way. That is, we change our minds and hearts—from our desires to Christ's desires. When we do this, then we have truly forgiven that person. Leaving out any of the above steps, and only forcing your Will into the situation, means you are deluding yourself into thinking that you have forgiven; you have not. It is not about us, it is about God, and His desire for us is to live in peace and love.

We always need to keep reminding ourselves of our status in Christ, as we previously discussed, because this is paramount to continuing to go on in our lives without the hurt and bitterness. “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8, NIV) This does not mean that we will not feel the pain, or perhaps suffer consequences from someone else's actions. What it means is, we are saved by Grace, by what Christ has done. So, we need to reciprocate grace and peace to those around us, even though we may not want to.

“This is what the LORD says: ‘Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,’ declares the LORD.” (Jeremiah 9:23-24, NIV)

We need to keep ourselves tuned into God constantly and continually, and allow Him to carry us through.

If you are the offender:

If you are the person who hurt someone, and that person is unwilling to forgive you, it is up to you to make it right. You may not receive that person's forgiveness, but that is between them and God, and not you. You need to go through the steps of forgiveness, but with the emphasis on earnestly repenting and offering restitution. You need to confess, openly and publicly, before the person you offended. Then, you need to go to the person in private. Do not rationalize what you did, or minimize it in anyway. Then, go to Christ, humbly and with a repentant attitude—which means, you make a commitment to change your heart, mind, and actions!

If going to the person is impossible because of distance, death, or restraining order, then we need to totally rely on God. Take your lead from 2 Corinthians 7:8-11. This allows Christ to be your Mediator, and, know you are not off the hook for truly seeking repentance. Just because you may not be able to physically go to a person does not mean you do not have to forgive them. You can use a third party such as a pastor or a letter and definitely though repentance and prayer.

When we refuse to forgive or refuse to repent, then we are holding ourselves back from God and His best for us. We rationalize the reality of the infection of sin, and its destructive nature to our being, and to those around us. We create a wall to shut ourselves off from God, and one another. Thus, we turn on ourselves with the consequence, without any reprieve or comfort. Because we become consumed with animosity and vengeance, we then suffer with the guilt and bitterness. Our personal lives dissolve, and our impact on the community, as Christians, becomes a hindrance instead of a blessing. Take a serious look into Psalm 32. Meditate over it carefully, and then surrender yourselves over to the love of Christ. Allow the sin to be forgiven and released. Be courageous. Seek out forgiveness and public confession and reconciliation. Allow yourself to grow and mature to be the best, whole person Christ desires for you to be. There is simply no better way. This is liberation and true comfort:

The Pursuit of Forgiveness

Hosea 2:14-15; Matthew 18: 21-35; Colossians 3:13

Last month we looked at three aspects of what forgiveness looks like. We saw from God's most precious Word that forgiveness is hard because it demands a surrender of our rights to get even. Forgiveness is complete so we as a Christian are released from our personal desire for retribution. Forgiveness is costly, yet there is no cost we could ever make could ever compare with His cost for us. When we put forgiveness into practice in our relationships whether with family, friends, church people or our coworkers we will be refocusing our plans for our pain into God's plan and God's ways. So our pain becomes relieved and our life can go on in a better direction. We can live better quality lives with forgiveness. Our relationships can grow and we can become more useful to others and especially God. Forgiveness is even worth the agony we may go through because it will heal the wounds and relieve the pain. We need not fear

forgiveness or its results, even if it scars us. Because we can take to heart and realize that scar can be the badge of honor to help us grow and mature, to redirect our wrong path onto the Right Direction. Now we can see how forgiveness searches and actually goes in pursuit of us and how we can put it into practical action in our relationships.

More on What Forgiveness Looks Like

We as Christians must extend ourselves to other people with love and what flows out of love is forgiveness!

Fourth: Forgiveness pursues

Hosea tells us, *“Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt.”*(Hosea 2:14-15 NIV)

There is possibly nothing greater and dramatic to us, in regards to God’s character as a Christian, then His capacity to forgive! Most non Christians cannot fathom this approach and do not believe God can or even should forgive them. So they outright reject His forgiveness. While some Christians only see a small facet of God’s forgiveness but refuse to apply it in their lives holding onto bitterness and strive as their identity. Or perhaps they understand it a little but think, “if someone wants my forgiveness they have to come to me and seek it.” Or “I do not have to do anything, because I am the person who was wronged.” But these attitudes are wrong and unbiblical. The Bible tells us that the Christian has the obligation to actually pursue forgiveness. Even if we are the ones wronged it is our duty to go after the person who wronged us not to retaliate, but to forgive! We have to see why this is important and from our human point of view, forgiveness will end the vicious cycle of revenge and pay back. We may think it is not worth it, but God says otherwise. We may think it is unfair, but was it fair for our Lord to go to the cross. This may go against our pride and our culture, but this is what we are called to do. God expects us to entice the forgiveness from the person we offend or the person who offends us.

I had a run-in with an Elder at a church that I was on staff with a few years ago. I took his daughter along with 20 other youth to a winter camp and on the way home she forgot her gloves. This Elder was furious with me because she forgot her gloves at camp. I apologized to her dad, the Elder, and took responsibility for the gloves, and said I would contact the camp the first thing in the morning, and arrange to get her gloves back. But this just seemed to infuriate him even more, and from then on he just had a very condescending and mean attitude toward me. Although I took responsibility and asked him to forgive me, even though I felt I did nothing wrong. After all, I was responsible for 20 kids, their safety and spiritual growth; and according to that Elder, all of their articles of clothing too.

This Elder just would not get it, when it came to forgiveness. From his perspective, I did a great wrong toward him since his daughter did not bring back an expensive pair of gloves; therefore I’m responsible as the leader. Even though we received the gloves back in the mail a few days later, he would not forget the instance

and this tarnished our relationship and my reputation with him and several other people in the church. He made it a point to let everyone know what a bad youth Pastor I was because his daughter's gloves were left at camp. Ten of those kids came to know the Lord, including his daughter, and this was one of the best camp experiences I have been apart of; but, the gloves incident is what everyone remembers.

Romans chapter 12 tells us: *“do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: “it is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. On the contrary: if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. And the Lord will reward you.”* (Romans 12:19-20; Proverbs 25: 21-22 NIV)

This experience gave me the chance to realize firsthand what *burning coals* was all about. The more I was nice and forgiving to this Elder the more he was insolent and belligerent. In contrast he had an issue with another pastor at this church and this pastor decided not to follow Scriptural principles rather the ways of the world. They came to a mutual understanding and respect of one another. So I wondered if forgiveness was worth it. Then I realized both of these men probably did not know the Lord or at the very least did not have a growing effectual relationship with Christ. So they did not know how to express themselves in a godly way. All they knew was Galatians 5:19-20, whereas verses 22-23 was a foreign concept they did not want to pursue or acknowledge. So I realized that is why we are to offer forgiveness freely as I tried to with that Elder I offended, even when we are not in the wrong. Forgiveness models Christ and people do not like Christ because He calls us from our complacency and comfort into conviction and growth where few like or are willing to go. So we have to chase down forgiveness, for the reason that out of our pursuit of forgiveness we will be building better relationships and reconciliation. A few years later that Elder came around and actually helped me when my car broke down. Before he was more likely to run me over.

The typical response from society is “I could care less” or “up yours”, these are expressions of hurt, even though they verbally say otherwise. The *burning coals* will convict them or punish them. Because they do not see the cost that the Lord paid for them, so they are unwilling to respond to the gift of grace. Christ pursues them, and all they have to do is respond to His call. To the world their desire is to tell the person off and seek their revenge, and to see this watch the daytime talk shows. We as a Christian are called to a higher standard that builds, edifies and reconciles!

Fifth: Forgiveness is Continual

Luke tells us, *“If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”* (Luke 17:3b-4 NIV)

For the Hebrew 70 times 7 meant infinity not 490 because this has a limit. There is no point to Christ for our accumulation of sins becomes unforgivable. So our response is to forgive others, as there is no cap or limit or expiration to forgive. Neither the intensity nor the number of wrongs should have an impact on us as followers of Christ. If we were to place a limit, then our effect of building relationships would have a

chain attached to it, and with a limit you cannot grow instead of a chain reaction to grow. We must have the realization and capacity and understanding on how much we have been forgiven by Christ in order to forgive each other; this is crucial to the Christian experience. As our Lord continues to give us grace and forgiveness are not we to do the same with each other? To not practice continual forgiveness is to be extremely selfish and prideful to what we have been given!

God's forgiveness is not some cheap markdown or bargain, His cost was immeasurable. Paul in Colossians 3:13 tells us to forgive freely, as Christ has forgiven us. We must be willing to forgive as Christ has forgiven us. That we are to bear the cost just as our Lord did, forgiveness demands a substitution. So how could we ever back away from forgiving each other, if we do it is a bigger insult to our Lord than for the non-Christian to turn their backs on His grace; because we know better. Remember that knowledge brings responsibility.

Sixth: What Forgiveness is Not

II Timothy tells us, *“Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message.”* (2 Timothy 4:14-15 NIV)

We know why we must forgive, so the question is, what must we forgive. I do not believe we need to forgive trivialities. Because forgiveness is not trivial its cost is high. So the things like bumping into someone or typos and minor mistakes should not call us to forgive. Just a simple polite apology and move on. If a person was offended by an honest mistake, such as their name being misspelled in the church bulletin they should not expect forgiveness, because it was an honest un-purposed mistake with no malice intent. There must be a reason for forgiveness such as a hurt where malice and forethought was at work.

Forgiveness does not minimize the offense. When we forgive we are not saying, “Hey that was OK.” The offense does not need to be accepted; only the person who committed the offense we are to embrace. It is like sin, we are to hate sin but we are still called to love the sinner unless it continues and they refuse to repent. Forgiveness is not the approval of the wrong; it only offers the grace of love rather than vengeance. Forgiveness may not bring us to a level of trust, which we have had before. Such as if a spouse cheats on you, we are called to forgive and reconcile, but that trust will be eroded, and will take time to rebuild. Just forgiving the offender will not bring instant restitution of the relationship; perhaps the relationship will be severed completely. Such as a business partner who embezzles and caused you to lose the business, we are to forgive that person as we previously discussed, but this does not mean we will reenter into a business relationship with that person again.

Forgiveness is directed to people not causes or institutions. I as a pastor cannot forgive the victims of the Medieval Church for some of its notoriety such as the Inquisition. As, if I worked for McDonalds I cannot forgive someone for slipping on the floor unless I officially represented them. Forgiveness will not erase the past. As that man who lost his wife from last month's article, she will not be brought back to life; he will suffer greatly in her absence until they meet again in heaven. We are to forget the

past so the resentment will not build up, but we need to realize the event will not be undone.

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When we do not forgive we will walk a path of self distraction, brought on by the build up of resentment, and the unfulfilling nature of revenge. Nothing will wither our soul more than storing up this disease of unforgiveness. Because pride and arrogance will take you over, control you, and ruin you. The Chinese proverb says, “first before seeking revenge you must dig two graves.” The cost and pain of forgiveness even though we may be the victims of it, will be far easier, than the path of not seeking the forgiveness. Job 5:2 tells us, *“Resentment kills a fool, and envy slays the simple.”* The goal of forgiveness is allowing Christ to transform us to our full potential. Because we may go through bad stuff in life that is not a personal attract but rather a strengthening of our character for us to be better used by our Lord. Consider this, Christ has defeated Satan, so the sins we incur can be turned around to His glory. Forgiveness will refocus God’s plan into our plan. So our sufferings will not be in vain, but can be turned around to further the Kingdom of God. Then the joy and happiness of who we are in Christ will bubble over the pain and hurt.

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Third: We need to Cancel the Betrayal

“Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs. He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.” (Proverbs 10:12; 17:9 NIV)

We have to give up our perceived right of revenge and retaliation. This can be a tough process, but that we can accomplish through prayer, and self surrender. Try to look at it this way; the offense against you is actually an offense against God. As God's child you are in His protection and care, when someone offends you, it then is also an offense against God Himself. Thus, we are to surrender our rights to His, and cancel the debt out of existence, and out of our heart and mind. Give it over as if it never happened. You will be surprised once you do this; you will feel the load lifted off you and rest in the comfort of the Lord.

When you pray to God you need to be actually requesting that He takes the desire of revenge away, and relinquish your desires of revenge!

Fourth: We need to offer Personal Forgiveness

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12:21 NIV)

We must be willing to go to the person who offended us, and verbally and non-verbally forgive them. And then seek the appropriate reconciliation to that individual. Offer the love and acceptance of the person, not necessarily what they did. God desires us to be in growing positive and healthy relationships, as one the primary purpose's of our existence. This should be a driving force of who we are as a Christian, saved by grace. It is the responsibility of the person who did the wrong to repent not the person offended, you cannot force repentance from someone, you can only pray for him or her and offer the forgiveness. The relationship can only positively continue when repentance and forgiveness is pursued.

If the offender refuses to repent or refuses to accept the forgiveness, then this means their nature is in denial, that they feel no wrong was committed or see you as trying to manipulate their will. They maybe socialpathic, that is have some form of mental disorder, that they may enjoy inflicting hurt and hardship on people. In any case the reason it is not your responsibility for their acceptance. Our responsibility is only to genuinely present forgiveness. We need to except the fact of human nature that some people just will not play ball God's way, especially Christians. So if this is the case with your forgiveness, then it still remains between you and Christ, as it is anyway, because we are God's children.

“The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.” (1 Peter 4:7-8 NIV)

Fifth: We need to recognize what the result of Forgiveness looks like

The result of forgiveness is letting it go and, wishing blessings and compassion to the person who wronged you. Repentance simply means Biblically to change ones perspective. That is to turn from our way of thinking over to God's way. That is to change our minds and hearts away from our desires to Christ's desires. When we do this, then we have truly have forgiven that person. Leaving out any of the above steps, and only forcing your will into the situation, deluding yourself in thinking that you have forgiven; you have not. Its not about us, it is about God, and His desire for us to live in peace and love.

We always need to keep reminding ourselves our status in Christ, as we previously discussed, as paramount to continue to go on in our lives with out the hurt and bitterness. *“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8 NIV)* This does not mean that we will not feel the pain, or perhaps suffer the consequence from someone else's actions. What it means is we are saved by grace by what Christ has done, so we need to reciprocate grace and peace to those around us, even though we may not like it.

“This is what the LORD says: “Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who

exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 9:23-24 NIV)

We need to keep ourselves tuned into God constantly and continually, allow Him to carry us through.

If you are the offender

If you are the person who hurt someone, and that person is unwilling to forgive you, it is up to you to make it right. You may not receive that person's forgiveness, but that is between them and God, and not you. You need to go through the steps of forgiveness, but with the emphases to earnestly repent and give restitution. You need to confess openly and publicly, before the person you offended. Then you need to go to the person. Then do not rationalize what you did, or minimize it in anyway. And then go to Christ humbly with a repentant attitude, which means you make a commitment to change your heart, mind and actions!

If going to the person is impossible because of distance, death, or restraining order, and then we need to totally rely on God. Take your lead from 2 Corinthians 7:8-11, this allows Christ to be your Mediator, and know you are not off the hook for truly seeking repentance.

When we refuse to forgive or refuse to repent, then we are concealing ourselves from God and His best for us. And we rationalize the reality of the infection of sin, and its destructive nature to our being, and to those around us. We create a wall to shut ourselves off from God, and each other, thus we turn on ourselves with the consequence without any reprieve or comfort. Because we become consumed with animosity and vengeance. We then suffer with the guilt and bitterness as our personal lives dissolve and our impact to the community as Christians becomes a hindrance instead of a blessing. Take a serious look into Psalm 32, and mediate over it carefully, and then surrender yourselves over to the love of Christ. Allow the sin to be forgiven and released, be courageous to seek out forgiveness and public confession and reconciliation. Allow yourself to grow and mature to the best whole person that Christ has for you. There is simply no better way. This is liberation and true comfort:

"Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"--and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him. Rejoice in

the LORD and be glad, your righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!" (Psalm 32 NIV)

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