



One Step Beyond Forgiveness

Focus Verse:

“And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32, NKJV)

Do you like to forgive? Do you enjoy it when you need forgiveness? God calls us to both—to forgive and be forgiven. But He doesn’t stop there. He calls us one step beyond forgiveness. However, we must first forgive before we can go one step beyond forgiveness.

We know we need to forgive others.

“And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32, NKJV).

We have heard teachings on why we need to forgive others.

“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15, NKJV).

We know we should forgive multiple times.

“Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”

Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven” (Matthew 18:21-22, NKJV).

We have heard unforgiveness will affect our prayer life.

“And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses” (Mark 11:25, NKJV).

One of the last things Jesus did on the cross was to show us forgiveness sometimes takes incredible strength, courage, and love.

“And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. Then Jesus said, *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do”* (Luke 23:33-34, NKJV).

Life Reflection:

How do these passages emphasize the reciprocal nature of forgiveness between individuals and God?

Do your research. What biblical passages underscore the importance of forgiveness, and how do they contribute to the understanding of forgiveness in the Christian context?

FORGIVE

There are several steps I have experienced in forgiving and being forgiven. You can apply them to any relationship you find yourself in husband/wife, boyfriend/girlfriend, friend/friend, employee/boss, pastor/church member, etc.

First, express yourself. **People often don't know what you think or feel unless you tell them.** Expressing yourself is not always necessary, but when it is, it is crucial. You don't always have to do this, though. Not everything has to be “talked through.” This is what I do. Suppose someone says or does something that hurts me, intentionally or unintentionally. I ask myself if it is something I might get over in a few days without ever involving them.

If the answer is yes, then I take a few days and pray about it. Sometimes, after a few days, I can say it is well with my soul. I can forgive them without making a big deal or even bringing it to their attention if forgiveness is still needed. Maybe they were having a bad day and doing their best.

Sometimes, it doesn't work—time does not heal all wounds. When it doesn't work, I have two options. I can seek wise counsel, and I have done that; I have gone to my pastor for guidance to determine if that person needs to be aware of the infraction or if I am overreacting. Is it me, or is it them? And if it's

them, is it something I need to correct, or is it something the pastor needs to address? These are all legitimate questions we should ask ourselves before we act hastily.

If I cannot get over it, the other option is to approach the person and talk it out. Do not approach the person through texting. Too many things get misunderstood when texting because you cannot gauge the other person's emotions.

Remember, unresolved issues and unforgiveness give Satan room to operate. It creates a spiritual and emotional distance between people, and oh, how the enemy loves that!

If I don't think I will get past the hurt within a few days, the hurt can turn into bitterness. I know it is essential to take care of it right away. I have been hurt almost to the point of being spiritually and emotionally blinded by my anger at the person, and I'm sure I am not the only one who has felt this way. This is when you are in the most danger. Don't let the devil use this to manipulate and destroy you.

One of my favorite quotes or stories about a famous woman, and I hope it's true; if not, it's still a good story, and it is about Clara Barton, the nurse who founded the American Red Cross. She was at a party once and spoke kindly to someone who had said bad things about her. After they had spoken, she started to walk away, and a friend approached her and asked her how she could be so polite to the other person. Doesn't she remember what they did to her? And Clara's answer was, **"No, I distinctly remember forgetting."**

There are times we all need to distinctly remember to forget. Satan wants us to remember every hurt, every outrage, every wound, but only for his benefit, not ours. There is no gain, no advantage for us. There is only tremendous loss. **In a world where time is fleeting, investing my limited energy into grievances would make me the loser.** Once we forgive, we need to forget.

Life Reflection:

Reflecting on Jesus' act of forgiveness on the cross, how can we apply His example to our own lives when faced with situations that require forgiveness?

Based on the steps outlined for forgiving and being forgiven, how can you practically implement these principles in your relationships to promote reconciliation and prevent bitterness from taking root?

EMPATHY

Grammatically speaking, empathy is a noun, and it means “the psychological identification with or vicarious experiencing of the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another.”

Empathy is the ability to put yourself in someone else’s place and feel what they are feeling. It is more than just thinking you understand them; it is mentally switching places with them and feeling things from their point of view instead of yours.

For instance, if you have children or have dealt with them, you need to realize that their world is much smaller than yours. Something can happen to them that, in the grand scheme of things, is not important, but you need to realize how important a dropped ice cream cone is to them. Our job as parents, teachers, and adults is to teach children how to put things in perspective, but we also need to show them how to deal with their feelings, and to be effective at that process, we need to sympathize and empathize.

We all function in different worlds. What may not be a big deal in your world may be the center of mine. If we want grace and mercy from our Creator, we need to grant it to others in His creation when it is within our power to do so.

When you sympathize, the focus is on you and your reaction to the other person. When you empathize, the focus is on them and how they feel. See the difference?

So, to forgive, it is sometimes helpful to empathize with the person that you need to forgive. Truly put yourself in their place. Try to understand their life and, as a result, their intentions. Remember the other person’s good qualities, assume their motives were not to purposely cause you pain (unless you have clear indicators otherwise), and you may find it easier to forgive.

Forgiving someone is for your benefit, not theirs. It is so that you do not become bitter and angry. There is an old proverb, not a biblical one but a proverb nonetheless: **bitterness is like drinking poison and hoping the other person dies.**

Forgiveness is between you and God. God expects us to forgive others, whether they are sorry for their actions or not.

Forgiveness is for our benefit. It is necessary to maintain our relationship with God.

People in the world will watch our behaviors more than they will hear our words. If they see that we cannot forgive and love people, why would they listen to us tell them about a God who does the same?



Life Reflection:

How can practicing empathy enhance our ability to forgive others, especially when considering their perspective and intentions?

Reflecting on the statement that forgiveness is for our benefit, how does understanding the detrimental effects of bitterness and unforgiveness on our spiritual and emotional well-being motivate us to actively engage in the process of forgiveness?

RECONCILIATION

What is the one step beyond forgiveness?

Reconciliation. However, not all acts of forgiveness will lead to reconciliation because reconciliation requires the actions of both parties, the injured party who forgave and the party who injured and needed forgiveness. And we cannot control the actions of others.



The behavior requiring forgiveness drove the two parties apart, and reconciliation brought them back together. However, **there can be no reconciliation if the other party does not agree to a reconciliation or changes the behavior that caused the damage.**

If you have been in an abusive relationship, and you left and forgave, you are not expected to reconcile unless they agree to it and change their behaviors. **Reconciliation does not mean you have the same relationship you did before, but it does mean you have some form of a relationship.** You are not required to put yourself back under the power of an abuser.

Reconciliation is essential, especially in the church. It can seriously damage the church body if we hurt one another and cannot forgive and reconcile. Unforgiveness separates us, allowing Satan to cause division.

A minor infection can destroy the body. We should not be as afraid of an infection in the physical body as we are of an infection in our spiritual body.

If the offense is great enough, you may have to involve the pastor or some other authority in the reconciliation. Your pastor will want to facilitate reconciliation swiftly rather than let it fester and damage the church body.

If you have done your part by forgiving and earnestly desiring reconciliation, and the other person does not wish to participate, it's not your responsibility. You can only control your actions, so if the other person refuses to reconcile, you may have to check yourself and ensure your actions aren't preventing it. It's easy to say you've forgiven, but your actions will bear it out. Sometimes, you need to check yourself by seeking wise counsel from either your pastor or another godly individual in the church you trust. **We should never think we are perfect or always right.**

Sometimes, you may have to walk away, leaving the individual in the hands of God.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are not the same as accepting or condoning wrong behavior.

Reconciliation is so meaningful that Jesus said we should not offer our gifts to God if we have unsolved issues with our brothers and sisters.

“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” (Matthew 5:23-24, NKJV)

Reconciliation is so powerful that Paul used it to describe why Jesus came and what He did.

“Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” (II Corinthians 5:18-19, NKJV)



Once we understand that forgiveness is followed by attempts at reconciliation, forgiveness itself appears to be the simpler task.

What if you have done something, intentionally or unintentionally, to hurt someone else, and they seek you in an attempt to reconcile? Don't let your human nature control this interaction, especially if you don't think you did anything wrong. You may have to accept that your actions, intentional or unintentional, hurt someone.

Life Reflection:

How can you actively pursue reconciliation in situations where forgiveness has been extended but both parties are hesitant to engage in the process?

There is no better model for forgiveness and reconciliation than what God did for us. The need for forgiveness stems from a broken relationship; our relationship with the Creator was broken when Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. And we continue to break and damage our relationship with God due to our sinful nature. The Bible is full of examples; we can see and feel it daily in our lives. Throughout the Old Testament, God promises a redeemer—a reconciler. He came in the man Jesus Christ, and His birth and death created the new covenant, the new promise, the new relationship between God and man.

But remember, **forgiveness is one-sided**. God can forgive us, and we can refuse to accept it. But we must accept it to be reconciled with God. If God forgives us and we don't accept it, we still have our sin, and sin cannot enter Heaven.

Reconciliation requires both parties to act. God reaches down, and we reach up. God forgives our sin but does not accept or condone it. He explicitly condemns it. But He created a way for us to be reconciled with Him and, in this case, restore the relationship to precisely the way it should be, the way He intended, the way it was in the beginning.

If we are determined to follow Christ and His example, forgiving and reconciliation shouldn't be as difficult as we make it. **Remember what God did with you, and you will be willing and eager to spread the message of forgiveness and the actions of reconciliation wherever God leads you.**

Author: Patricia Peters