What Forgiveness Is

• Forgiveness is dismissing a debt.
• Forgiveness is dismissing your demand that others owe you something, especially when ...
  — They fail to meet your expectations.
  — They fail to keep a promise.
  — They fail to treat you justly.
• Forgiveness is dismissing, cancelling, or setting someone free from the consequence of falling short of God’s standard.
• Forgiveness is extended even if it is never, ever earned.
• Forgiveness is extended regardless of a lack of repentance.
• Forgiveness is releasing your resentment toward your offender.
  — Releasing your right to hear “I’m sorry”
  — Releasing your right to be bitter
  — Releasing your right to get even
  “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone” (Romans 12:17).
• Forgiveness is releasing your rights regarding the offense.
  — Releasing your right to dwell on the offense
  — Releasing your right to hold on to the offense
  — Releasing your right to keep bringing up the offense
  “Whoever would foster love covers over an offense, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends” (Proverbs 17:9).
• Forgiveness is reflecting on the character of God. Just as God is willing to forgive us, we are called to forgive others.
  — To forgive is to extend mercy.
  — To forgive is to give a gift of grace.
  — To forgive is to set the offender free.
  “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).

What Forgiveness Is Not

• Forgiveness is not circumventing God’s justice.
  — God will execute justice in His time and in His way.
• Forgiveness is not waiting for “time to heal all wounds.”
  — Time does not heal wounds—some people will not allow healing.
• Forgiveness is not letting the guilty “off the hook.”
  — It is moving the guilty from your hook onto God’s hook.
• Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation.
  — It takes two for reconciliation, only one for forgiveness.
• Forgiveness is not being a weak martyr.
  — It is being strong enough to be Christlike.
• Forgiveness is not stuffing your anger.
  — It is resolving your anger by releasing the offense to God.
• Forgiveness is not a natural response.
  — It is a supernatural one, empowered by God.
• Forgiveness is not denying the hurt.
  — It is feeling the hurt and releasing it.
• Forgiveness is not being a doormat.
  — That would make Jesus the greatest doormat of all
• Forgiveness is not conditional.
  — It is unconditional, a mandate from God for everyone.
• Forgiveness is not forgetting.
  — To forgive, you must remember.
• Forgiveness is not a feeling.
  — It is a choice—an act of the will.
  “You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.” (Hebrews 10:36)

The High Cost of Unforgiveness

• Unforgiveness blocks the door to salvation and God’s forgiveness. (Matthew 6:14–15)
• Unforgiveness allows a root of bitterness to grow. (Hebrews 12:15)
• Unforgiveness opens a door to Satan in our lives. (2 Corinthians 2:10–11)
Unforgiveness causes us to walk in darkness.  
(1 John 2:9–11)

Unforgiveness is of Satan. (James 3:14–15)

Unforgiveness reflects a godless heart. (Job 36:13)

Unforgiveness makes us captive to sin. (Acts 8:23)

Unforgiveness grieves the Spirit of God.  
(Ephesians 4:30–31)

God’s Heart on Forgiveness

• God commands that we forgive each other. (Ephesians 4:32)

• God wants us to forgive others because He forgives us.  
(Colossians 3:13)

• God wants us to see unforgiveness as sin. (James 4:17)

• God wants us to get rid of unforgiveness and have a heart of mercy. (Matthew 5:7)

• God wants us to do our part to live in peace with everyone.  
(Romans 12:18)

• God wants us to overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21)

• God wants us to be ministers of reconciliation.  
(2 Corinthians 5:18–19)

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged.  
Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.  
Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”  
(Luke 6:37)

The 4 Stages of Forgiveness

1. Face the Offense.
   • Don’t minimize the offense.
   • Don’t excuse offensive behavior.
     “Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death.  
But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves  
but on God, who raises the dead.”  
(2 Corinthians 1:9)

2. Feel the Offense.
   • Don’t deny your pain.
   • Don’t carry false guilt for hating what happened.  
   “There is a time for everything, and a season  
for every activity under the heavens ...  
a time to love and a time to hate.”  
(Ecclesiastes 3:1, 8)

3. Forgive the Offender.
   • We are called by God to forgive!
   • Genuine forgiveness draws you into the heart of God,  
and your life takes on the divine character of Christ.  
“If you forgive people when they sin against you,  
your heavenly Father will also forgive you.  
But if you do not forgive others their sins,  
your Father will not forgive your sins.”  
(Matthew 6:14–15)

4. Find Oneness—if appropriate.
   • Note if the offender honestly accepts responsibility
   • Set appropriate boundaries.
   • Don’t rush reconciliation—change takes time.  
   “If you have any encouragement from being united  
with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common  
sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,  
then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having  
the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.”  
(Philippians 2:1–2)

How Do You Truly Forgive?  
(How to Handle “The Hook”)

• Imagine right now that there is a hook attached to your  
collarbone. And imagine all the pain attached to the hook as a  
result of the wrong that was done to you.

• Ask yourself, Do I really want to carry all that pain with me for  
the rest of my life? The Lord wants you to take the pain from the  
past and release it into His hands.

• Then take the one who offended you off your emotional hook  
and place him onto God’s hook. The Lord knows how to deal  
with your offender. God says ...  
“It is mine to avenge; I will repay.”  
(Deuteronomy 32:35)

Prayer of Forgiveness

“Lord Jesus, thank You for caring about how much my  
heart has been hurt. You know the pain I have felt because of  
(list every offense ). Right now I release all that pain into Your  
hands. Thank You, Lord, for dying on the cross for me and  
extending Your forgiveness to me. As an act of my will, I choose to  
forgive ( name ). Right now, I move ( name ) off of my  
emotional hook to Your hook. I refuse all thoughts of revenge. I trust  
that in Your time and in Your way You will deal with ( name )  
as You see fit. And Lord, thank You for giving me Your power  
to forgive so that I can be set free. In Your holy name I pray.  
Amen.”
"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, as in Christ God forgave you."
(Ephesians 4:32)

**Key Verse to Memorize**

"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."
(Colossians 3:13)

**Key Passage to Read**

Matthew 18:23–35

**How to Forgive ... Again**

Forbid recurring thoughts of the wrongs to enter your mind.  
"[Love] keeps no record of wrongs" (1 Corinthians 13:5).

Overcome the temptation to bring up the matter again.  
"Set a guard over my mouth, LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3).

Repeat Scripture in your mind.  
"Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs" (Proverbs 10:12).

Give the situation to God.  
"When they hurled their insults at him [Jesus], he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23).

Intercede on behalf of your offender.  
"Far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you" (1 Samuel 12:23).

Value what you can give rather than what you can receive.  
"It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

Extend God’s grace, mercy, and forgiveness.  
"The Lord is full of compassion and mercy" (James 5:11).

---

**Hope for the Heart’s Biblical Counseling Library** contains our **Biblical Counseling Keys**, providing God’s Truth for Today’s Problems on 100+ topics.

The **Quick Reference Guides** contain excerpts from our **Biblical Counseling Keys** and offer immediate, concise answers with biblical hope and practical help. For more comprehensive help and additional resources, refer to our **Biblical Counseling Keys** on Forgiveness.

**Related Topics ...**

- Anger
- Conflict Resolution
- Confrontation
- Evil & Suffering ... Why?
- Guilt
- Reconciliation
- Rejection & Abandonment

---

If you would like more information, biblical counsel, or prayer support, contact:  
1-800-488-HOPE (4673)  
www.HopeForTheHeart.org

The information in this resource is intended as guidelines for healthy living. Please consult qualified medical, legal, pastoral, and psychological professionals regarding individual concerns.

**THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV®**  
Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

P.O. Box 7, Dallas, TX 75221

Forgiveness