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**VICTIM SURVIVOR CONQUEROR**

**Forgiveness**

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**Manual & Workbook**

**Forgiveness**

Dear Friend,

Have you ever had a serious struggle with forgiving someone? In the hidden recesses of your heart, have you wanted to see those who have wronged you receive severe judgment rather than forgiveness? If so, I understand. I know all about harboring an unforgiving heart. For several years, I felt totally justified in harboring unforgiveness toward my father. He was an unbeliever who lived a lifestyle of infidelity. At the same time, my mother was my “soft spot.” If you had known her, you would wonder, *How could anyone want to hurt her?* She was compassionate, kind, and caring. Consequently, I would try to protect her from his cruel treatment…but no matter how hard I tried, I failed. The truth is, whenever she hurt, I hurt. I remember how easy it was for me to focus on my father’s faults! I would look for areas where he was wrong. Of course, since he never admitted to wrongdoing, I felt absolutely justified in my hatred. I would never have *called* it hatred. I didn’t see myself in that light-as bitter. Why? Because the fact that I could still see his faults proved I was right. I later became a Christian and learned about the forgiveness, mercy, and grace of God. Yet, I still felt justified in my hatred and unforgiveness. Why? Because my father had not changed. For me to forgive him, he had to change…that was my requirement. I never will forget the day I came face-to-face with a passage that change my perspective. It’s found in 1 John2:9-11: “*Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.”* I suddenly realized I had been blind to anything good that my father had done. All I could see or wanted to see was negative. I remember asking my mother, “How can you be so nice to him?” Her answer was telling! “Oh, honey, if only he had the Lord, he wouldn’t be that way.” That was the key. She and her friends were praying for him to have a changed heart. Six months before my father died, he was willing to pray a prayer of salvation. I am convinced that this occurred because my mother had nurtured the soil of his heart with compassion and forgiveness-the hardened ground had become soft-so that when the seed of truth was shared, it took root. No matter what your circumstances, it’s never too late to choose the road of forgiveness. My hope is that through this book, God will speak to your heart and deepen your desire to walk the road of forgiveness every day of your life. How I pray that you will experience the freedom that comes from embracing a heart of forgiveness!

Yours in the Lord’s hope,

June Hunt

**What is Forgiveness?**

Assume you need to borrow one hundred dollars to help pay a medical bill. You ask a friend for a loan and promise to pay it back at the end of the month. But when the time comes for repayment, you don’t have the money. In fact, for the next three months, you still don’t have the money. Then unexpectedly, out of the kindness of his heart, your friend ***chooses*** to “***forgive” the debt!*** This is one facet of forgiveness. The Bible says’, “*Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another.” Romans 13:8.*

**. *Forgiveness*** means dismissing a debt.

In the New Testament, the Greek noun ***aphesis*** denotes a “dismissal” or “release.”

-When you ***grant forgiveness,*** you ***dismiss*** the debt owed to you.

- When you ***receive forgiveness,*** your debt is ***dismissed.*** (You are ***released*** from any requirement for repayment.)

-When you ***grant forgiveness,*** you ***dismiss*** the debt from your thoughts.

Jesus expressed the heart of forgiveness when He said, “*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you” Luke 6:27*

***Forgiveness***

Is dismissing your demand that others owe you something, especially when they fail to meet your expectations…fail to treat you justly.

Jesus said, *“If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” Matthew 5:39*

***Forgiveness***

Is dismissing, canceling, or setting someone free from the consequence of falling short of God’s standard.

-The holy standard of God is perfection, yet we all have sinned.

-The penalty for our sins is spiritual death (separation from God)

The penalty for our sins (our debt) was paid by Jesus through His sacrificial death on the cross. *“Everyone who believes in him (Jesus) receives* ***forgiveness*** of sins through his name.” *Acts 10:43*

**Question: Is it possible to sin beyond God’s ability to forgive?”**

**A**nswer: No, God promises to purify us from *all* unrighteousness, not just specific sins, but we need to first confess our sins. (*Confess* means literally “to agree”- to agree with God). And if we agree with God about our sin, we not only admit we have sinned, but we also turn from our sins and turn to Jesus, entrusting our lives to the One who died for our sins.

*“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.” Psalm 32:5*

**What is forgiveness Not?**

Misconceptions abound when the word *forgiveness* is mentioned. Some think forgiveness is the equivalent of *excusing* sin…saying that what was wrong is now right. Yet this is not the example of forgiveness that Jesus displayed. When He encountered the mob of men eager to stone a woman caught in adultery. He chose not to stone her; however, never did He *excuse* her. Instead, He said, “*Go, and sin no more”* John 8:11. To help correct any confusion, you need to know *what forgiveness is not!*

*“Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance.” Proverbs 1:5*

***. Forgiveness is not***circumventing God’s justice…

-It is allowing God to execute His justice in His time and in His way.

***. Forgiveness is not*** waiting for “time to heal all wounds.”

-It is clear that time doesn’t 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 to God’s hook.

***. Forgiveness is not*** the same as reconciliation…

-It takes two for reconciliation, only one for forgiveness.

***. Forgiveness is not*** excusing unjust behavior…

-It is acknowledging that unjust behavior is without excuse, while still forgiving.

***. Forgiveness is not*** explaining away the hurt…

-It is working through the hurt.

***. Forgiveness is not*** based on what is fair…

-It was not “fair” for Jesus to hang on the, cross-but He did so that we could be forgiven.

***. 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 response, empowered by God.

***. Forgiveness is not*** denying the hurt…

-It is feeling the hurt and releasing it.

***. Forgiveness is not*** being a doormat…

-It is seeing that, if we were so, Jesus would have been the greatest doormat of all!

***. Forgiveness is not*** conditional…-It is unconditional, a mandate from God to everyone.

***. Forgiveness is not*** forgetting…

-It is necessary to remember before you can forgive.

***. Forgiveness is not*** a feeling…

-It is a choice-an act of the will.

**Question: “If I don’t feel like forgiving, how can I be asked to forgive? That doesn’t seem right.”**

**A**nswer: Forgiveness is not based on a *feeling,* but rather on the *fact* that we-we-all us-are called by God to forgive. Forgiveness is not an *emotion but* is rather an act of the *will*. Therefore, what “seems right” based on feelings can easily be wrong!

*“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end, it leads to death.” Proverbs 14:12*

**What Does It Mean to Forgive Others?**

**. To forgive** means to *release your resentment* toward your offender.

In the New Testament, the Greek verb ***aphemi*** primarily means “to

send away”-in other words, *“to forgive*, send away or release the penalty when someone wrongs you.” This implies that you need…

* ***To release*** your right to hear, “I’m sorry”
* ***To release*** your right to be bitter
* ***To release*** your right to get even

*“Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.” Romans 12:17*

***.* To forgive** is to*release your rights* regarding the offense.

**-*To release*** your right to dwell on the offense

***-To release*** your right to hold on to the offense

***-To release*** your right to keep bringing up the offense

*“He who covers up an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.” Proverbs 17:9*

**. To forgive** is to *reflect on the character of Christ.* 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.

Jesus taught his disciples to pray,

*“For give us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”*

*Matthew 6:12*

**Question: “What can I do when I don’t feel like forgiving?”**

**A**nswer: Whenever you don’t feel like doing something you should do, examine your thoughts. While you can’t control what your offenders do, you can control your thinking about your offenders. Evaluate your thoughts about those who offend you. Remember: Your thoughts produce your feelings. When you carefully choose what you will dwell on, your emotions will begin to line up, and you will gradually even feel like forgiving.

*“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-think about such things.”*

*Philippians 4:8*

**Is Forgiveness the Same as Reconciliation?**

No. Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. Forgiveness focuses on the offense, whereas reconciliation focuses on the relationship. Forgiveness requires no relationship. However, reconciliation requires a relationship in which two people, in agreement, are walking together toward the same goal. The Bible says,

*“Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?”*

*Amos 3:3*

***. Forgiveness*** can take place with only one person.

-***Reconciliation*** requires at least two persons.

***. Forgiveness*** is directed one-way.

-***Reconciliation*** is reciprocal…occurring two-ways.

***. Forgiveness*** is a decision to release the offender.

***-Reconciliation*** is the effort to rejoin the offender.

***. Forgiveness*** involves a change in thinking about the offender.

***-Reconciliation*** involves a change in behavior by the offender.

**. *Forgiveness*** is a free gift to the one who has broken trust.

**-*Reconciliation*** is a restored relationship based on restored trust.

***. Forgiveness*** is extended even if it is never, ever earned.

***-Reconciliation*** is offered to the offender because it has been earned.

***. Forgiveness*** is unconditional, regardless of a lack of repentance.

***-Reconciliation*** is conditional, because of repentance.

**Question: “After we forgive someone, must we also try to be reconciled?**

**A**nswer: The answer to this question is sometimes *yes* and sometimes *no.*

**.** Most of the time God’s desire for us is reconciliation. Second Corinthians 5:18 says, *“God…reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.”*

**.** However, sometimes encouraging the restoration of a relationship is not at all wise, as with a partner in adultery or with a rapist. First Corinthians 15:33 says, *“Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character.”* For instance, if a husband’s anger is out of control and he refuses to get help for his violent temper, the wife needs to take this Scripture to heart and move out of harm’s way until counseling and lasting changes are a part of his lifestyle.

*“Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man; do not associate with one easily angered.” Proverbs 22:24*

**What Is Divine Forgiveness?**

Do you sometimes struggle with forgiving others? Understand that your awareness of how much God loves you and continually forgives you can be a catalyst to compel you to forgive others. Then you can forgive others with the Lord’s “divine forgiveness.”

*“The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving even though we have rebelled against him.”*

*Daniel 9:9*

***. Divine forgiveness*** is the fact that God, in His mercy, chose to release you from penalty for your sins. (Unfortunately, some people refuse to receive this gift from God).

*“The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love…He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities…As for as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgression from us.”*

*Psalm 103:8, 10, 12*

***. Divine forgiveness*** was extended by Jesus, who paid the penalty for our sins in full-He died on the cross as payment for the sins of all people. While we owed a debt we could not pay, He paid a debt He did not owe.

One of the many Messianic prophecies’ states, *“We all, like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him (Christ, the Messiah) the iniquity of us all”*

*Isaiah 53:6*

***. Divine forgiveness*** is an extension of grace as seen in the Greek word ***charizomal,*** which is translated “forgive” and means “to bestow a favor unconditionally.” The Greek word ***charis*** means “grace.” You are an expression of God’s grace when you forgive others with divine forgiveness.

*“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” Ephesians 4:32*

**Biblical Example**

**Joseph and His Brothers**

What could erupt in more resentment than friction within the family? Joseph is a prime example of someone who could have chosen to be vindictive, rather than forgiving. (See Genesis chapters 37-45). He is the favorite son of his father, Jacob. Joseph’s ten older brothers are so bitter and jealous that they sell him into slavery. Later, he is falsely accused of attempted rape, unjustly imprisoned, and forgotten by a friend who promised to help. Joseph has every reason to sever ties with his family, vent hatred on humanity, and slam the door on God…but he doesn’t. Later when Joseph becomes the prime minister of Egypt, severe famine plagues the land. But through God’s involvement with Joseph, Egypt is well prepared. When his brothers hear of Egypt’s abundance, they make a long journey from Canaan in order to obtain food. While in Egypt they encounter their brother Joseph, who they had thought was dead but has now become the prime minister! What an opportunity for Joseph to take revenge! But instead of settling the score, Joseph speaks kindly to them and recounts the way God used their treatment of him for his good, for their good, and for the good of the Jewish people…

***“Do not be distressed and do not be angry*** *with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that* ***God sent me*** *ahead of you…To preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance…****He made me*** *father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.”*

*Genesis 45-5-8*

Even though Joseph had been tossed into the deepest of pits, he emerged with extraordinary forgiveness toward those who wronged him. What was his secret?

**The Secret to Joseph’s Success**

***. “Do not be distressed and do not be angry.”***

-When you realize that God, in His sovereignty, will bring good out of the *wrongs* done to you…you will have an attitude of forgiveness.

***. “God sent me.”***

-When you realize that God, in His sovereignty, will use your location (wherever you are placed) for good…you will have an attitude of forgiveness.

***. “He made me.”***

-When you realize that God, in His sovereignty, will make every circumstance result in good…you will have an attitude of forgiveness.

***. Conclusion:***

-When you are able to accept God’s sovereignty over your location, your circumstances, and especially the wrongs done to you, and when you trust Him to use them one day for good…you will have success through your forgiveness!

*“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”*

*Romans 8:28*

**Question: “How can I respond in a Christlike way when I’m being treated so unjustly?”**

**A**nswer: Realize that Christ suffered unjustly and horrendously to pay the penalty for your sins-to make possible forgiveness of your sins. Therefore, after you become a true Christian, you rely on Christ (who lives in you) to enable you to endure your unjust suffering…but even more so, to forgive those who mistreat you. Be clear about this point-every authentic Christian is “called to suffer, but with suffering comes a blessing.

*“It is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God…To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.’ 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.” 1 Peter 2:19-23*

**Why Should We Get Rid of Unforgiveness?**

When you refuse to forgive, your unforgiveness keeps you *emotionally stuck to both the offense and the offender.* A *continual* refusal to forgive digs a deeper hole in which you can easily hide your hardened heart. Blaming others is favorite tactic to justify unforgiveness. Your past hurts, though buried, are still very much alive. And because they are not released in God’s way, oddly enough, you *become like your offender* (but you are blind to it). Not forgiving your offender is an offense to God, thereby making you an offender to God as well! The Bible says to confess and renounce this sin…

*“He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them find mercy.”*

*Proverbs 28:13*

**The Unforgiving Heart is… The Unforgiving Heart Has…**

**. *Judgmental-***focusing on the . **Condemnation**-being intolerant

past wrongs that the offender of any present successes of the

committed offender

*“Do not judge…Do not condemn…Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”*

*Luke 6:37*

**. Merciless**-rehearsing the . **Contempt**-looking down

reasons why the offender does without mercy on the offender

not deserve mercy

*“Judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!”*

*James 2:13*

**The Unforgiving Heart Is… The Unforgiving Heart Has…**

**. *Resentful***-begrudging the . ***Envy***-coveting the

successes of the offender accomplishments of the offender

*“Resentment kills a fool, and envy slays the simple.” Job 5:2*

**. *Vengeful***-rejoicing when the . ***Retaliation***-desiring to get

offender experiences failure even with the offender

difficulty, or hurt

*“Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when he stumbles, do not let your heart rejoice.”*

*Proverbs 24:17*

***. Maligning***-talking to others . ***Slander***-sharing unnecessary

about the faults of the offender negatives about the offender

*“He who conceals his hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool.”*

*Proverbs 10:18*



***. Prideful***-elevating self above . ***Haughtiness***-acting with

the offender, who is considered arrogance toward the offender

*“Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.”*

*Proverbs 16:18*

***. Profane***-verbally abusive . ***Bitterness***-harboring hostility

toward the offender toward the offender

*“Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.”*

*Romans 3:14*

**The Unforgiving Heart Is… The Unforgiving Heart Has...**

***. Complaining***-and quick to . ***Resistance***-arguing about any

quarrel over personal choices, advice or constructive criticism words, and deeds regarding the offender

*“Do everything without complaining or arguing.”*

*Philippians 2:14*

***. Impatient***-exhibiting little . ***Annoyance***-feeling easily

patience over personal choices, irritated by the offender

while being easily provoked

*“A man’s wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense.”*

*Proverbs 19:11*

**. Bitterness**-feeling weighed . Negativity-feeling no joy and

down with resolved anger no approval concerning the

offender

*“Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can share its joy.” Proverbs 14:10*

Because of unforgieness, the offended person becomes spiritually dry-trying to feel connected with God but lacking spiritual growth. As a direct result of unforgiveness, the offender’s prayer life is blocked.

*“If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”*

*Matthew 6:15*

**Question: “How can I forgive someone who has not apologized or shown any kind of repentance?**

**A**nswer: Forgiveness has nothing to do with repentance. Forgiveness is not based on what the offender does or deserves, but rather on giving the gift of grace to your offender-a gift that is not deserved. The real question is: “Do you want to be Christlike?” When Jesus was being crucified on the cross, His enemies had neither apologized nor repented, yet He extended His heart of forgiveness by praying,

*“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”*

*Luke 23:34*

**What does the Forgiving Heart Look Like?**

When the spirit of Christ is rooted in you. He produces fruit consistent with the character of Christ. The moment you entrust your life to Jesus, you are “sealed” with the Holy Spirit, who dwells within you for the rest of your life. (See Ephesians 1:13-14). The Spirit of Christ produces the character of Christ in a Christian. Therefore, the next time you are wronged, allow the Holy Spirit the freedom to produce His fruit of forgiveness in you.

*“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”*

*Galatians 5:22-23*

**The Forgiving Heart Is… The Forgiving Heart Has…**

**. *Loving***-not keeping a record . ***A loving Spirit***, allowing the

of the bad things the offender possibility that the offender can

has done change

*“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”*

*1 Peter 4:8*

**. *Joyous***-taking to heart the . ***A joyful awareness*** that God

goodness of God and His will use trails to bring triumph

sovereignty over all events in

life, even the painful ones

*“I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through… the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.”*

*Philippians 1:18-19*

**The Forgiving Heart Is… The Forgiving Heart Has…**

**. *Peaceful***-seeking to resolve . ***A peaceful demeanor*** that

any difficulty, hurt, or division lowers the guard of the offender

and wanting the offender to be and paves the way for

right with God and to be blessed reconciliation

by Him

*“Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.”*

*James 3:18*

**. *Patient***-accepting that the . **A *patient commitment*** to wait

offender is not “fixed in cement” for the right day to deal with

and could possibly change difficulties and the right time to

talk about them

*“Love is patient.”*

*1 Corinthians 13:4*

**. *Kind-****looking for and acting in*  **. A *kind deed*** on behalf of the

practical ways to express kind offender that is unexpected,

deeds and to meet needs unforeseen, and unannounced

*“A kind man benefits himself, but a cruel man brings trouble on himself.”*

*1 Peter 1:13*

**. *Good***-holding to moral . **A *good heart***, reflecting the

principles and purity even in the highest moral character-the

midst of controversy character of Christ

*“Give an answer…Do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”*

*1 Peter 3:15-16*

**. *Faithful***-praying that those . **A *faithful commitment*** to pray

who have caused such pain for those who have been hurtful

might have changed their lives

*“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”*

*Romans 12:12*

**. *Gentle***-taking into account the . **A *gentle response,*** which

woundedness of the offender understands that often “hurt

and responding to harshness people hurt people”

with a certain gentleness

*“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”*

*Proverbs 15:1*

**. *Self-controlled***-deciding ahead . **A *controlled response*** that is

of time how to respond when Christlike so that, no matter

conflict arises what is said or done, there is

a positive attitude toward the

offender

*“Prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled.”*

1 Peter 1:13

**Question: “How do I know whether I have genuinely forgiven someone?**

**A**nswer: After someone has offended you, you can test the “quality” of your forgiveness by asking the following questions:

**.** “Do I still expect my offender ‘to pay’ for the wrong done to me?”

**.** “Do I still have bitter feelings toward my offender?”

**.** “Do I still have vengeful thoughts toward my offender?”

To forgive someone does not in any way mean that you do not want justice, but simply means that you are leaving the offense entirely in God’s hands. You are refusing to harbor hateful feelings toward your offender. Remember, forgiveness is an ongoing process which requires that you choose to forgive every time the offense comes to mind…and that you choose to pray for the offender every time the offense crosses your mind.

*“Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right.”*

*1 Samuel 12:23*

**The High Cost of Unforgiveness versus the High Reward of Forgiveness**

Carrying around unforgiveness is like carrying a sack of cement all day long. If you hold unforgiveness in your heart, you are walking around with a weight that God never intended you to carry. Unforgiveness becomes a burden, and Jesus says, *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” Matthew 11:28*

*“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”*

*1 Peter 5:7*

**Unforgiveness Forgiveness**

**. *Unforgiveness*** blocks the door . ***Forgiveness*** opens the door to

to salvation and God’s salvation and God’s forgiveness

forgiveness

“*If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”*

*Matthew 6:14-15*

**. *Unforgiveness*** allows a root of . ***Forgiveness*** keeps a root of

bitterness to grow bitterness from growing

*“See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”*

*2 Corinthians 2:10-11*

**. Unforgiveness** opens a door to . **Forgiveness** closes a door to

Satan in our lives Satan in our lives

*“I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.”*

*Hebrews 12:15*

**. *Unforgiveness*** cause us to walk . ***Forgiveness*** brings us into the

in darkness light

*“If anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness… Whoever hates his brother is in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.”*

*1 John 2:9-11*

***. Unforgiveness*** is of Satan . ***Forgiveness*** is of God

*“If you harbor bitter and envy and selfish ambition in your hearts…Such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.”*

*James 3:14-15*

**. *Unforgiveness*** reflects a godless . ***Forgiveness*** reflects a godly

heart heart

*“The godless in heart harbor resentment.”*

*Job 36:13*

**. *Unforgiveness*** makes us captive . ***Forgiveness*** frees us

to sin from sin

*“I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.”*

*Acts 8:32*

**. *Unforgiveness*** grieves the spirit . ***Forgiveness*** is empowered by

of God the spirit of God

*“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.”*

*Ephesians 4:30-31*

**Why Is It So Difficult to Forgive?**

People fail to forgive others for a variety of reasons. For example, when you have been deeply offended by a friend, forgiveness can make you feel emotionally “flat.” In contrast, withholding forgiveness can make you feel emotionally pumped. Therefore, you may refuse to forgive the friend who offended you because of pride. The Bible states it this way…

*“An offended brother is more unyielding than a fortified city.”*

*Proverbs 18:19*

**Barriers to Forgiveness**

***. No modeling of forgiveness from parents***

- “I don’t know how to forgive.”

***. Denying that the offense never occurred***

- “I don’t want to think about it.”

***. Fearing to hold the guilty accountable***

- “it’s really all my fault.” (This kind of thinking short-circuits the reality and the pain of being wronged.)

***. Not feeling that you can forgive yourself***

- “No mercy for me-no mercy for you.”

***. Not being forgiven for your past offenses***

- “They didn’t forgive me-why should I forgive them?”

***. Not understanding God’s forgiveness***

- “God will never forgive me-I will never forgive her.”

***. Believing that bitterness is required response to betrayal***

- “God knows that my feelings are normal.”

***. Thinking that forgiveness is excusing unjust behavior***

- “I’m not about to say that what she did was okay!”

***. Requiring an apology or show repentance***

- “He shouldn’t be forgiven because he’s not really sorry.”

***. Feeling a sense of power by hanging on to unforgiveness***

- “He needs to see how wrong he is!”

***. Refusing to turn loose of revenge***

- “He should pay for he’s done.”

***. Harboring a prideful, hardened heart that becomes a spiritual stronghold***

- “I refuse to forgive.”

*“Blessed is the man who always fears the Lord, but he who hardens his heart falls into trouble.” Proverbs 28:14*

**Question: “What should I do if I don’t want to reap the damaging results of unforgiveness?”**

**A**nswer: Choose to change your thinking and consciously ask God to soften your heart so that you will be willing to forgive. Unforgiveness can turn into an emotional stronghold that can damage many areas of your life. You do have control of what you dwell on. That is why the Bible says we are to…

*“Take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”*

*2 Corinthians 10:5*

**How does the Need for Justice Contribute to Unforgiveness?**

We feel outraged when justice is denied. Thus, the cry for justice is common from everyone…everyone except the guilty person waiting to *receive* justice! Then the cry is not for justice, but for *mercy.*

*“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.”*

*Psalm 51:1*

But why is the need for justice so strong and natural, and why is forgiveness so difficult and unnatural?

**Three Reasons:**

**.** God has instilled within every human heart a *sense of right and wrong;* therefore, we feel a need for justice when we are wronged.

*“The requirements of the law are written on their hearts (on the hearts of even the heathen).” Romans 2:15*

**.** Based on the law, forgiveness seems *inappropriate and unnatural.*

*“Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth hand tooth, hand and hand, foot and foot.” Deuteronomy 19:21*

**.** Because God is a God of justice, *somebody must pay.* That somebody was Jesus. The death of Jesus on the cross fulfilled the justice of God. (See Romans 3:25-26). In the same way that God needed to have His justice satisfied by Jesus’ dying on the cross, shouldn’t we expect justice before we extend mercy and forgiveness?

The truth is that although everyone must face *God’s justice,* Jesus was the payment for *everyone’s* wrongs. While governments execute justice, *individually* we are to extend mercy. We are to leave *individual* justice to God. The Bible exhorts us to…

*“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”*

*Luke 6:36*

**How Is a Spiritual Stronghold Developed?**

In a military war, if your enemy gains a *“foothold,”* that means your enemy has gained some of your ground…Your enemy has taken some of your territory. Now, with that foothold, your foe has a secure base from which there can be further advance. If you have been hurt and as a result harbor anger in your heart, realize that your ***unresolved anger*** can be a foothold for the enemy. The Bible says,

*“In your anger do not sin’: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and* ***do not give the devil a foothold.****”*

*Ephesians 4:26-27*

**The Development of a Spiritual Stronghold**

**# 1** When you refuse to forgive your offender, you have *unresolved anger.*

**# 2 Unresolved** anger, in turn, allows Satan to set up a *stronghold in your mind.*

**# 3** This stronghold is a *fortified place* from which “*flaming arrows of the evil one”* are flung (Ephesians 6:16).

**# 4** These flaming arrows of accusation and unforgiveness can continue to burn in your heart and keep you *mentally captive to do the enemy’s will.*

At this point you are engaged in spiritual warfare. In order to win the spiritual war, recognize that the battle for freedom is fought in your mind. You need to take captive every thought of unforgiveness and release your unresolved anger to God.

*“You must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.”*

*Colossians 3:8*

**What Is the Root Cause of Unforgiveness?**

Everyone has been created with three God-given needs- the needs for love, for significance, and for security. Many people who have been hurt feel insignificant and powerless; therefore, they try to get their need for significance met by withholding forgiveness. Unforgiveness gives them a sense of power and superiority.

If you were ever betrayed by a friend, for a time you may have felt powerless to stop the pain. Since no one likes to feel powerless, unforegiveness provides an illusion of power. By refusing to forgive, you feel a sense of power. By holding on to hatred, you feel infused with strength. By retaliating with revenge, you carry out a power play.

**. Wrong Belief:** “It’s natural for me to resent those who have wronged me, if I forgive them, they will get away with it. My offenders need to pay for the wrongs committed against me.

**. Result:** This belief reflects an attitude of pride that sets you up as a judge higher than God Himself-God, who is willing to forgive and forget.

*“I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.”*

*Isaiah 43:25*

**. Right Belief:** “Because God has totally forgiven me, I can release my resentment and choose to forgive others. I will rely on Christ, who is living within me, to forgive through me.”

**. Result:** This belief reflects a heart of humility that results in a desire to forgive others in the same way God forgives you.

*“If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”*

*Matthew 6:14-15*

**Why Should We Forgive?**

**. God wants** us to get rid of unforgiveness and have a heart of mercy.

*“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”*

*Matthew 5:7*

**. God wants** us to do our part to live in peace with everyone.

*“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” Romans 12:18*

**. God wants** us to overcome evil with good.

*“Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.”*

*Romans 12:21*

**. God wants** us to be ministers of reconciliation.

*“God…reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.”*

*2 Corinthians 5:18-19*

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**What are the Four Stages of Forgiveness?**

When you choose to forgive, you *give* someone a *gift*…the gift of freedom from having to pay the penalty for offending you…the gift of dismissing the debt owed to you! Because this can be difficult “gift” to give, you may travel through four stages of forgiveness. But realize that you are also giving yourself a gift…the gift of “grudge-free living.” That is true freedom.

*“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people but love your neighbor as yourself.”*

*Leviticus 19:18*

**# 1 Face the Offense**

**. Don’t minimize the offense:** “No matter how badly he treats me, its okay.”

**. Truth:** Bad treatment is not okay.

*“Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.” Ephesians 5:11*

**. Don’t excuse the offender’s behavior:** He doesn’t mean to hurt me. I shouldn’t feel upset with him-he’s a member of my family!

**. Truth:** No matter the age or the relationship of the offender. We need to call sin “sin.” We need to face to truth instead of trying to change it.

*“Whoever says to the guilty, ‘You are innocent’-peoples will curse him.” Proverbs 24:24*

**# 2 Feel the Offense**

“When a person destroys what our commitment and our intimacy created, something precious is destroyed. Then anger or even hatred may be our true feelings in response to deep, unfair pain. Hatred toward our offender needs to be brought up out of our souls and dealt with.

*“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven…a time to love and a time to hate.”*

*Ecclesiastes 3:1, 8*

**Failing to feel the offense results in…**

**. Denying your pain:** I don’t blame her for criticizing me…she is under a lot of pressure…and it doesn’t hurt me.”

**. Truth:** Being mistreated by someone is painful. Feeling the pain must take place before healing can take place.

*“The Lord is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”*

*Psalm 34:18*

**. Carrying false guilt:** “I eel guilty if I hate what was done to me.

**. Truth:** God hates sin. You are to hate the sin, but not the sinner.

*“To fear the Lord is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech.”*

*Proverbs 8:13*

**# 3 Forgive the Offender**

We are called by God to forgive! And when you do forgive, genuine forgiveness draws you into the heart of God, and your life takes on the divine character of Christ.

**. Argument:** “I don’t think its right to forgive when I don’t feel like it.

**. Answer:** Forgiveness is a not a feeling, but rather an act of the will-a choice.

*“When you stand praying, if you hold anything against your anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”*

*Mark 11:25*

**. Argument:** “I cannot forgive or forget. I keep thinking about being hurt.

**. Answer:** When you choose to forgive, you don’t get a case of “holy amnesia.” However, after facing the hurt and confronting the offender, close off your mind to rehearsing the pain of your past. Refuse to focus on your hurt.

*“Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead. I press toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”*

*Philippians 3:13-14*

**#4 Find Oneness…if appropriate**

Relationships filled with resentment ultimately perish-relationships filled with forgiveness ultimately prevail. However, reconciliation in a relationship-the restoration of oneness-is contingent on several vital factors. When these conditions are met, when both parties are committed to *honesty in the relationship,* there is real hope that the two can be of one mind and one heart again.

*“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with 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 purpose.” Philippians 2:1-2*

**How Do You Truly Forgive?**

Have you ever said, “I was severely wronged by someone I once trusted? People want me to forgive, but hoe can I simply let my offender off the hook?” If these words have passed your lips or even rolled around in your mind, be assured that you are not alone. That is precisely why you need to know…

**How to Handle “The Hook”**

**.** Make a list of all the offenses caused by your offender.

**.** Imagine right now that a hook is attached to your collarbone. Then 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 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 your offender onto God’s hook. The Lord knows how to deal with your offender…in His time and in His way. God says,

*“It is mine to avenge; I will repay.”*

*Deuteronomy 32:35*

**How to Forgive…. Again**

**F-forbid** recurring thoughts of the wrong enter your mind.

*“(Love) keeps no record of wrongs.” 1 Corinthians 13:5*

**O-overcome** the temptation to bring up the matter again. After an honest confrontation with the offender.

*“Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips.” Psalm 141:3*

**R-repeat Scripture** in your mind. Allow God’s perspective to change your perspective.

*“Hatred stirs up dissension, but love cover over all wrongs.” Proverb 10:12*

**G-give** the situation to God. Jesus knows how much you have been wronged.

*“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.” 1 Peter 2:23*

**I-intercede** on behalf of your offender. God does not present prayer as an option for you; it is a command.

*“Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you.” 1 Samuel 12:23*

**V-value** what you can give rather than what you can receive.

*“The Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Acts 20:35*

**E-extend** God’s grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

*“The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.” James 5:11*

**Question:” How can I release the bitterness toward my Offender if they are dead?**

**Answer:** If your offender is dead try the “chair technique.”Imagine the person seated in a chair placed in front of you. Say the things that you would like to say to the person if you were seated across a table from you.

**.** Write a letter, stating every painful memory. Openly speak to the person as though you were in each other’s presence.

**.** The fact that your offender has died does not mean you can’t forgive and thereby prevent bitterness from establishing.

*“See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.” Hebrews 12:15*

**How Do You Lighten the Scales of Blame?**

**Playing the Blame Game**

Often the way people justify acting badly toward others is by focusing on the guilt of others. Even if they are 98% wrong, by blaming you for your 2%, they feel justified. Realize, however, that even if you are not the major guilty party, you are still responsible before God for your percentage of wrong-even if it is only 2%.

*“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”*

*1 John1:8*

**Ending the Blame Game**

Regardless of how much someone else has been wrong, you are responsible to ask forgiveness for your own area of wrong, Jesus said.

*“If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”*

*Matthew 5:23-24*

**.** When you humbly ask forgiveness for your sin, your guilt is removed, and the blame game is over.

**.** When you have a spirit of humility, the Spirit of God can use your humble heart to bring godly conviction to your offender’s heart.

True freedom can be found only by asking forgiveness from those you have wronged and extending forgiveness to those who have wronged you.

*“I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.”*

*Acts 24:16*

Material taken from Forgiveness-The Freedom to Let Go by June Hunt Hope for the Heart

**Forgiveness Workbook**

1. **Have you ever had a serious struggle with forgiving someone? If, so please describe.**
2. **Have you ever justified hatred and unforgiveness toward someone? If, so why did you?**
3. **For you to forgive someone do they have to change?**
4. **What is forgiveness?**
5. **Is it possible to sin beyond God’s ability to forgive?” Please explain.**
6. **What is forgiveness Not?**
7. **“If I don’t feel like forgiving, how can I be asked to forgive? That doesn’t seem right.”**
8. **What Does It Mean to Forgive Others?**
9. **“What can I do when I don’t feel like forgiving?”**
10. **Is Forgiveness the Same as Reconciliation? What is the difference?**
11. **“After we forgive someone, must we also try to be reconciled?**
12. **What Is Divine Forgiveness?**
13. **“How can I respond in a Christlike way when I’m being treated so unjustly?”**
14. **Why Should We Get Rid of Unforgiveness?**
15. **Name the ten things that an Unforgiving Heart is and describe them.**

1. **“How can I forgive someone who has not apologized or shown any kind of repentance?**
2. **Name the nine things that a forgiving heart looks like.**
3. **“How do I know whether I have genuinely forgiven someone?**
4. **Name the eight things that are a high cost to having unforgiveness.**
5. **Name the eight things that are a high reward to giving forgiveness.**
6. **Name the twelve barriers to forgiveness.**
7. **“What should I do if I don’t want to reap the damaging results of unforgiveness?”**
8. **How Is a Spiritual Stronghold Developed?**
9. **Name the four stages of development of a Spiritual stronghold.**
10. **What is the wrong belief about forgiveness?**
11. **What is the result from this belief?**
12. **What is the right belief about forgiveness?**
13. **What is the result from this belief?**
14. **Why Should We Forgive?**
15. **What are the Four Stages of Forgiveness?**
16. **”How can I release the bitterness toward my Offender if they are dead?**