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The Blessings of Forgiveness

There is too much conflict in the world. Too much stubborn selfishness; too much “my way or the highway!”; far too much blame and anger and bitterness. Jesus never said that we should butt heads and try to satisfy ourselves at another person’s expense. He told us to love each other. And He was particular about our needing to forgive anyone who has harmed us.

God loves you, and because He loves you, He forgives all of your sins. He loves you, and His desire, and His plan, is that you will love Him in return, and let Him guide you and transform you into the better person He created you to be; and that you will live with Him in eternity — in Heaven — forever.



Why does God love us? Not because we’re so lovable and good. We are all sinners: ... *as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one. (Romans 3:10) God loves us because that is who He is. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. (1 John 4:8)*

And because He loves us, God always wants what is best for us — and He knows that what is best for us is to love Him in return, to agree to become His adopted children, and ultimately to live joyfully in Heaven with Him forever. He really wants to spare us from the suffering of being separated from Him and His love and everything good — which is Hell — forever.

God not only forgives all of our sins; He even chooses not to remember that we have ever sinned. He made that promise in His New Covenant with His chosen people, Israel. *“Behold, the days are coming, declares the*

*Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” (Jeremiah 31:34) With the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus He extended that promise to all people — even you and me. (see *Hebrews 10:17*)*

Do you and I deserve God’s forgiveness? No. Can we earn it? No, we can’t. It is available, and it’s free. *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)*

Now, because God has forgiven us, we are supposed to forgive others. ... *forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. (Colossians 3:13b) Jesus said it, too: *For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:14-15)**

What happens when we don’t forgive another person who has hurt us in some way? Of course there are consequences.

First of all, if we don’t forgive, we are letting that injury continue to hurt us. We’re not leaving it in the past, where it belongs; we keep dragging it into the present. It’s just like a sore or a wound that won’t heal.

Secondly, that injury defines, or at least affects, our relationship with the one who injured us. This is especially harmful if it is someone we love, like a spouse, parent, another relative, or a friend. Love and trust are lost; bitterness and anger take control.

And third, as Jesus said, our unforgiveness keeps God from forgiving our sins. It's like putting up a roadblock with a sign on it that says, "Sorry, God, I'd rather hang onto my anger and resentment than obey you."

Refusing to forgive is a form of selfishness, which is the opposite of love. Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:43-45a) We are told not only to forgive the one who has hurt us; we must also love and pray for him or her.

... pray for
the one who
has hurt you



But of course the question arises: How can we forgive and love, when the injury and the pain were real, maybe even with lasting effects? The answer is, we probably can't, unless we let God help us do it. We must ask Jesus to take the pain and anger and bitterness and nail them to His cross, where they are dealt with properly; and this sets us free to go beyond all that to the place where He wants us to be.

The best way for our forgiveness to become real is to do what Jesus said — start praying sincerely for God to bless that person. Even if it doesn't seem to be working at first, and we're still feeling injured and angry, in time that will disappear, and we'll really want God to bless him or her. We can trust God for that.

Also, remember that conflicts are often not one-sided. There may be some fault on our part. If that's true, we may also need to ask the other person to forgive us. God can help us know that, and He will also help us do it.

Good things happen when we forgive. We open the doors for a bunch of blessings ...

First, we will experience the blessing of peace, the peace of knowing we are obeying God, doing what He asks and commands us to do.

Secondly, we'll get the blessed relief of knowing we don't need to "get even" or somehow punish the one who hurt us. If there is vengeance to be done, that is God's business, so we can leave it to Him. *Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:19, 21)* Our example of obeying God may even change that person's life. We can include that in our prayers, if we think it is appropriate.

A third blessing is that we will have removed a serious hindrance to relationship. Maybe there is more that is needed on both of our parts to build a better relationship, but at least our unforgiveness will no longer prevent it.

But the biggest blessing will be the change that occurs in us from subordinating our will to the will of God. I sincerely believe, and I think you will find as well, that every act of willing obedience to the instruction of God's word and the guidance of His Holy Spirit — every single time — results in a blessing, because God truly delights in blessing those who obey Him.

A final scripture passage: *Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. (1 Peter 3:8-9)*

Peter "got it." We should be good to each other, but sometimes we are not. When we hurt someone or are hurt, forgiveness must be our highest priority, so that the unity God is calling us to have with each other can be restored.

Heavenly Father, please give us the grace and wisdom we need to treat each other kindly and with Your love. When there is conflict and injury; guide us and help us to forgive and ask forgiveness, so that You may bless our obedience marvelously. Amen.

Peace.

Bro Roland

The Powerful Practice That Protects Your Heart From Bitterness

by Elizabeth Laing Thompson

“But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:44-45a NLT)

I could feel bitterness trying to sink its jagged claws into my heart. It called to me, its voice silky smooth and oh so enticing: *You have every right to feel resentful. Her behavior is sinful, inexcusable — and she claimed to be your friend! Come on. Give in. Feed your hurt with hatred.*

My conscience prickled with a warning from the Holy Spirit: If I let bitterness take hold, it would spread inside me like an invisible sickness. Corroding my heart. Making me cynical. Even tainting my healthy friendships with suspicion and mistrust.

Desperate for help resisting this temptation, I opened my Bible. God guided me to Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount:

“You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that?” (Matthew 5:43-46a NLT)

I’d always thought of Jesus’ command to pray for our enemies as a godly to-do — an act of obedience, surrender and trust in God — but what if there is more to Jesus’ command than just saying the right words? What if prayer is also intended to *help our hearts*? Would praying for the friend who hurt me actually help me overcome bitterness?

I decided to try it. At first, my prayers were stiff and a bit reluctant; I had to choke out the words. But day after day, I persisted in prayer: *Lord, be with her. Heal whatever hurt is driving her to act this way. Show her a different way. Please bring healing to both of our hearts.*

I don’t know what happened in my former friend’s heart because of those prayers, but I do know what happened in mine: My heart stayed soft and open. Even though my friend had sinned against me, God enabled me to reject bitterness and choose forgiveness. I never got to have a reconciliation conversation with that friend, but even so, God healed my hurt and protected my heart. Jesus’ way worked.

Obedying Jesus’ command taught me several powerful truths we experience when we pray for people who have hurt us:

- 1. Prayer shields our hearts from bitterness.** It gives us a verbal outlet for our pain, a way to begin releasing our resentment to God. It prevents righteous anger and real hurt from twisting into damaging bitterness.
- 2. Prayer humbles us.** It reminds us that even when we have been hurt, we are imperfect and need grace too. It may even help us to consider the conflict from the other person’s perspective.
- 3. Prayer helps us resist the temptation to seek revenge.** It reminds us that God loves justice and that we can trust Him to defend and protect us.
- 4. Prayer gives us peace while we wait for resolution.** Praying strengthens our relationship with God during our relational conflict. We trust that God is working even when we can’t see or understand all He is doing.

If you’re embroiled in a conflict, wrestling with bitterness, or feeling hurt or confused by a strained relationship, Jesus’ encouragement to pray for your enemy may provide the protection your heart needs. You can pray about your situation, and pray *for* the person with whom you are in conflict, every day — even multiple times a day.

Feeling wounded by a friend’s refusal to accept your apology? You can pray about that.
Feeling afraid she may hurt more people if she doesn’t change? You can pray about that.
Longing to attempt reconciliation but not sure the other person will even speak to you? You can pray about that.

We can pray about *all* of it. God welcomes our requests, and He longs to help His children find forgiveness and unity (John 17:20-23).

It takes time, but when we commit to persistently praying for those who offend us, we give God the chance to work on their hearts — and ours.

Father, thank You for caring about my relationships. Please give me wisdom, and help me find righteous resolutions to conflicts. Please protect my heart from cynicism and bitterness, and empower me to forgive as You forgive. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Questions? If you have a question about Bible truth or the Christian life, I’ll be glad to share my thoughts with you, and maybe with the other readers of the “Good News Guide.” Write to me.

Moving? If you’re released or move, please send me your new address. Inmates, include your SID number. I want to keep sending you the “Good News Guide” for as long as you’d like to receive it.

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Forgiveness

God loves you and me, and He demonstrates that by forgiving us. He tells us to forgive, too.

Puzzle:

I M E S H Z U M X T J Y Z I Q W I S I Q F K R A W O U G W C
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Words:

*Fruits of unforgiveness

BITTERNESS
RESENTMENT
ANGER
FRUSTRATION
ABUSE
BONDAGE
MENTAL IMBALANCE
PHYSICAL ILLNESS
DEBILITY
DEATH

*Fruits of Forgiveness

PEACE OF MIND
PHYSICAL HEALTH
SPIRITUAL CLEANSING
CHRISTIAN GROWTH
MATURITY
REPENTANCE
RECONCILIATION
RESTORATION
HEALED RELATIONSHIPS
A FRESH START
FREEDOM
VITALITY
LOVE
JOY
LIFE

*Those we must forgive

FAMILY
FRIENDS
ENEMIES
THE GOVERNMENT
RICH FOLKS
OURSELVES
OTHERS
EVERYONE

*Reasons to forgive

OBEY THE LORD
HONOR CHRIST'S SACRIFICE
BE LIKE JESUS
PLEASE GOD
BE FORGIVEN