

FORGIVE – so GOD will forgive US



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www.LightontheRock.org

All scriptures are NKJV unless noted otherwise.

Summary: We all know about God's indescribable grace and favor for us when we repent. But be sure you realize God conditions his forgiveness on a very, very important prerequisite. I cannot over emphasize this point. Is there anyone you are holding a grudge against or want to strike with your vengeance? Is there anyone you won't forgive? Find out what Jesus says about this that affects God's willingness to forgive us and why.

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Hi everyone. Welcome to Light on the Rock. I'm Philip Shields.

This is going to be a very personal heartfelt message today. We know, if we've repented, that God has forgiven us. That's a secure and sacred belief we have. But what about the one thing Father says will keep his forgiveness away?

Mark 11:25-26

"And whenever you stand praying, if you have **anything** against **anyone**, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, **neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.**"

We've all forgiven others - - thousands of times in our lifetimes. To lots and lots of people and situations. But Christ here is saying "if you have anything against ANYONE..." and haven't forgiven that slander, that hurt, that offense, that painful adultery or even death caused by someone – what about those?

WHO? Who are you holding a grudge against? Think. Is it your ex? Ex-husband, ex-wife? Ex-boss? Your ex-minister? Your friend who had sex with your wife or daughter? A minister who humiliated you in church? WHO? Your dad, mom? One of your children? Someone in church? A neighbor?

Our Savior means this so much that he will say it in different way, several times.

Some of you don't feel there is anyone you need to forgive or be forgiven by.

One or two of you are wondering what the big deal is. You feel you have no enemies; there's no one you need to forgive or who has to forgive you. Believe me, in the coming years, you will be tested and tested on this. Learn this now.

ROUGH AND TOUGH times are coming. Like Corrie TenBoom who wrote "the Hiding Place" – she had to forgive the Nazi guard who killed her sister by banging her head in with a shovel in the concentration camp of World War 2. We will be tested on this over and over – forgive, as Christ offered forgiveness to the whole world who accepted His offering through his death and resurrection.

Corrie Ten Boom says, "Forgiveness is setting the prisoner free, just to find out, the prisoner was me." Very profound and true.

As you'll see too, TRUE full forgiveness is not just SAYING "we forgive you" – but involves a CHANGE OF HEART. OUR heart. All malice, grudges, hurts, hatred, vengeful desires – leave us! THIS is SO important. As much as possible, we go for restoration, for reconciliation, a loving relationship in spite of anything in the past.

Not many entire sermons have been given just focusing on this one topic: forgive if you want to be forgiven by God. Why? It's messy.

Ministers know people – maybe ourselves, or our wife or husband, or one of our children who were badly sinned against – and have not forgiven others. **So ministers would rather not stir this topic up!** We know people who have not forgiven their EX – ex-husband, ex-wife. Or people who will not forgive that adulteress who stole away their husband.

And WE UNDERSTAND – all of that was painful and continues to be. So we just don't press the point much! It's easier to talk about Russia-Ukraine or the mark of the Beast or something. But we ignore to our own peril this point of forgiving others totally from the heart.

Passover will soon be here, which is all about God's forgiveness through the shed blood of Jesus Christ his son – will be here soon. And remember this: TOTALLY forgiving is painful. Yeshua had to DIE, shed his blood for us, because without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness from God. LIFE is IN The BLOOD, we're told in **Leviticus 17:11.**

So to totally forgive those people, those really, really bad people – in your estimation – will hurt, be hard and painful to do. Forgiveness often IS painful. Christ's forgiveness cost him his life. But Jesus and Father thought you were worth it – in spite of all your offenses against God. In spite of all the sins you've committed and continue to commit from time to time... you were worth the ultimate price.

So remember that: the cost of forgiving can go all the way to one's sacrificial death.

This is SO important. There's a lot going on in the news that can pull us away from focusing on Christ, God our father and being ready for Passover.

And remember this: if we aren't forgiven by God because we haven't forgiven – from our HEARTS – EVERY single person who has caused us pain – what does that mean? It means in spite of all I've said about the cross, about grace and favor, about Yeshua and our father – WON'T HAPPEN. And we won't have a future!

You feel that's too strong? Really? Well, listen to a few more from our Master and Savior. Keep in mind that even beyond forgiving, God wants us being KIND to each other, no matter what:

Matthew 5:23-24

“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.”

So in Mark 11, Yeshua says if YOU have a problem with someone else, forgive him!

In Matthew 5:23 he says if you know your brother has something against YOU – first be reconciled before offering your gift or sacrifice to God.

Are we seeing how seriously God takes this?

God started talking about the way we feel about people who have offended us right from the beginning. We know the Old Testament speaks of loving your neighbor as yourself. But did you know what the context was?

Leviticus 19:17-18

'You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him.

18 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall **love your neighbor as yourself**: I am YHVH.”

Can't hate. Can't bear a grudge – but work it out, best you can – or YOU and I could be the one bearing a sin because of him! (V.17).

Oh, believe me, Jesus isn't done teaching us how we MUST do this. In the “Lord's Prayer” of Matthew 6, we have this:

Matthew 6:12-15

12 And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

13 And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

14 "For IF you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

God – I'm SURE – will do all in his power to bring you to the point of realizing your need to forgive others, because I'm sure he doesn't want to keep you out of His kingdom. But the scriptures are clear: if we want to be forgiven, we have to forgive. If we want to receive God's grace, WE have to extend it to others. And if God doesn't forgive us because we haven't forgiven others, we have no future.

***WORKING THINGS OUT; FORGIVING SOMEONE
OVER AND OVER***

I've struggled in the past – especially about 15-20 years ago, when 5 people came into my life and did their best to destroy my relationships, my friendships, my reputation. I knew all about these verses on forgiving, but right then I wanted nothing to do with forgiving them. I came to loathe them, to hate them. I'm talking 20 years ago. I frankly came to the point I just wished they somehow would just die. (Yep, I've struggled with this too in the past).

I had known all these verses, but I thought I had an “ace in the hole”. Based on a scripture I'd seen, I believed they had to repent to me first; *then* I'd have to forgive them. But if you notice, NONE of the verses I've read so far mention the one causing offense repenting first. None so far.

Here was my “ace in the hole!” Ah hah, So I didn’t have to forgive or reconcile unless they repented first! Let’s read it. Is that right?

Luke 17:3-4

“Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and **IF HE REPENTS**, forgive him. 4 **And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and *seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him.***”

This teaching from Messiah comes directly at us from different levels. If we feel offended, we are to talk to the brother or sister – even rebuking them. Many of us don’t feel like talking to an offender, let alone rebuking him. Then, if he repents, forgive. But obviously, Christ is teaching us: “Work it out!”

But then he adds this tasty little bit: Even if he sins against us 7x in ONE DAY – *seven times in one day!* – and says he repents, I have to forgive him! Really? 7x in a day??

To me that’s saying, “just forgive”. **But you and I would decide if someone is offending us 7x in one day, that they just haven’t truly repented!** Where are the **FRUITS** of repentance, after all, if they’re offending over and over and over in one day! **But that’s what Yeshua says: forgive them.**

So this sermon and this teaching – from Christ – *is not just that we should forgive – but learn to work things out with “difficult” people, and to get along and be nice to people, be KIND, quit losing your temper, BEAR with one another... and I’ve had to apply these too, as I’m naturally an impatient person who once had a hot temper when I was younger. And if customer service wasn’t servicing me well, I let them know: sharply, plainly, sometimes loudly. That was the old me. But that’s not God’s way. And I am growing and changing by God’s help.*

Our Father’s House teaches us to not just forgive – but, if possible, RECONCILE. Get along. Be of one mind. Think of others as better than ourselves. Serve their needs, more than our needs.... If you want to be great, Jesus said, become the greatest bondservant. YOU know those scriptures! Well, here a couple more:

Philippians 2:3-4

“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

This is not about **WII-FM (“what’s in it for me”)**. This is not about ME-ism – but looking out for everyone. This is not about looking out for #1, unless by that you mean God or Jesus Christ as #1. **The “Boundaries” teaching** can be severe. It’s all about YOU, they say in the end. They tell you to have your own truths, your own mind on things. That’s so ungodly and unscriptural though.

I’m seeing so many **Facebook** posts that talk openly about how people have **decided to just drop people – friends, relatives, anyone – if they’re not helping that person to grow**, develop, make them better. “If they’re not helping me, and just using up my time, it’s time to drop ‘em!”, the posts say.

That is not God’s way!

THINK about this: once we are in God’s kingdom as immortal beings, nobody’s “going away”. Everyone has to get along with everyone – for forever. We can’t just go dropping people from our lives as the “Boundaries” movement advocates, once we’re all together, immortal, in the kingdom. So we have to work things out and get along. That goes beyond mere forgiveness.

Christ wants us to be as ONE (John 17:22-23), as one as he and Father are! Go read it. Paul decried divisions and people breaking up into their own cliques and tribalism (**1 Cor. 1:10**). He wanted them to speak the same thing, with the same mind and judgment. I’ll speak more about this “boundaries” trend in a few months, God willing.

I mention that here because listening to this “**boundaries**” teaching is causing people not to forgive and rebuild relationships – or to keep interacting with people – way beyond just those who are “nice” to you. It’s causing divorce too soon, cutting out people from your life too soon.

Colossians 3:12-14 read 2x

“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;

13 BEARING WITH one another, and FORGIVING one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also MUST do.

14 *But above all these things put on LOVE, which is the bond of perfection.*”

Matthew 5:43-48 NIV

“But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

So release yourself from the bile and acid of bitterness and lack of forgiveness.

Hebrews 12:14-15

“Pursue peace with ALL people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: **15 looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any **ROOT OF BITTERNESS springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;”****

FORGIVE HIM – BUT ONLY IF HE REPENTS? My story...

So back to “and if he **repents**, forgive him”.

So sure – if the offender repents, that would be great. But none of the verses I’ve read so far speaks of that, except Luke 17:3-4. But as I continued taking my case to God, I began to see God was NOT smashing us every single time we offend. He overlooked an awful lot of sin by Israel until he intervened – over and over.

But I took comfort knowing they had not confessed and repented to me their sins against me – so 20 years ago I didn’t feel I had any need to forgive them.

But as I prayed about it, you know what thoughts were given to me? God’s SPIRIT was smiting my heart! So I started praying anew. I was “told” in strong thoughts to look at **Jesus’ own example**, after we humans beat and whipped him (scourging) to within an inch of his life, then crucified him so

painfully and in shame. Keep in mind crucifixions were for the worst criminals.

Yeshua said this to Father – and this was without any repentance from his accusers for what they had done. This is His example for us:

Luke 23:33-34

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.

34 Then Jesus said, "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.*"

And they divided His garments and cast lots.

Had the Roman lictors repented and apologized? Had Pilate repented? Had the High Priest come and begged forgiveness? NO, NO, and NO. But Jesus forgave them ALL – anyway – before they repented. That's our best example.

Yeshua also reveals a big point here too: sins of ignorance deserve far more mercy and leniency – than sins of intention, sins where you know what you're doing is wrong, are more seriously punished than sins of ignorance. (Be sure to study **Numbers 15** to see for yourself about this).

Just remember how forgiving Jesus was to everyone even during his last 24 hours before dying:

- Jesus washed the feet of his betrayer, just as a servant would do.
- Jesus then called his betrayer – “**Friend**, why have you come?” (Matthew 26:50)
- Jesus healed the cut-off ear of one of those who came to arrest him in Gethsemane.
- Then by our sins, every man, woman and child – all of us, nailed this perfect man to his cross. But his cross just showed his and Father's love and forgiveness for the whole world that crucified him.
- He was able, in spite of his terrible pain, to be sure his mama was well taken care of. He asked John to see her as his own mom.
- And then from the cross he said, “Father, FORGIVE them, they don't know what they're doing.”

WOW! That's the kindness and forgiveness of our Savior. He didn't just cut them all out of his life! His worst attackers were Pharisees – and the one especially bad Pharisee was jailing and killing Christ's family of believers – but Yeshua forgave HIM: Paul. And God used him to write MOST of the New Testament. What forgiveness. What trust in someone who had been so awful.

STEPHEN: Another one who extended forgiveness *before* there was any repentance --was STEPHEN. He had explained earlier in his talk to the Sanhedrin that Jesus was the Messiah, but in their fury, the Jews proceeded kill him.

Acts 7:57-60 NLT

Then they put their hands over their ears and began shouting. They rushed at him 58 and dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. His accusers took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul.

59 *As they stoned him*, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

60 He fell to his knees, shouting, "*Lord, don't charge them with this sin!*" *And with that, he died.*

So don't stay bitter waiting for those who have offended you to repent first. *Our great examples are to forgive now!* Leave the judgment of whether they have truly repented or not – up to God.

MY STORY – CONTINUED

15-20+ years ago, I had about 5 people really attacking me. *I was badly hurt. Felt totally rejected by so many. And I had hurt many as well leading up to all this.* It was just a terribly rotten, painful time for all involved. And at first I handled it all very badly. As I said, for especially 4-5 involved, I got to where I hoped they would just DIE. Yep. You heard me right. I – a minister of God – feeling that badly about people made in God's image. *So I understand, believe me, how hard it can be to forgive.*

But God's spirit was convicting me. The example of Jesus and Stephen spoke to my soul. I wrestled with being able to turn my hate into love; to turn revenge into prayers of blessings for them. I'm sharing this highly charged and personal story so you know – I understand how HARD it can be to fully forgive from the heart.

And praise be to God, he saved me and God DID lead me to forgive them from my heart – even in the absence of repentance on their part.

But until God did, these emotions of bitterness, grudges, boiling anger, daydreams of how I could "get even"—just made me feel worse and worse.

Bitterness is a deadly emotional ACID so strong that it corrodes its own container – you and me, our bodies.

So finally one day, as I cried kneeling beside my bed, I could finally say in prayer to Abba in heaven, as tears ran down my face:

“Father, I forgive all 5 of them. I feel now I could even die for them, to protect or save them. Forgive me for taking so long and for being so hard-hearted. Now I ask you to bless ... (and I went into details on each one). If we can reconcile, I’m willing and would love to. ...” (more on the audio)

As I wrapped up my prayer, my phone rang – and I can’t go into details, but the news of the call was exactly related to the topic of my prayer. Timing could not have been a coincidence. It was as if God himself was saying to me: “Philip my son, I hear you. And now I can bless YOU and ... welcome to our Family, our kingdom, son.”

WHY this is so important

1. SO WHY do we need this topic CLEARLY understood? Because if our trespasses are not forgiven by God, we SURELY have no future. This is as serious as it gets. We can’t sugar coat it. Ministers frankly don’t give a lot of sermons on this because it’s a MESSY subject. We know too many – maybe our very own husband or wife or close friends – who struggle with forgiving their “Ex” or someone who ruined your marriage, etc.

When the offense is so personal – it hurts so bad – it’s hard to really forgive from your heart. When the offender caused the death of a loved one, when adultery and sexual sin is involved, where there’s total betrayal, people who hurt you big time – It’s just plain hard to let go of the bitterness and anger.

I’ve fought this too.

Is there someone you know you need to forgive? Or reconcile with?

It’s the WAY of the FAMILY OF GOD. God needs to see his family – who claim they understand his grace/favor – EXTENDING THAT GRACE THEMSELVES TO others, to those who have hurt and offended THEM. He’s just NOT going to allow into his family any who cannot forgive, when He’s had to forgive all of US of so much.

NO one can say he/she understands God’s grace and favor if we’re withholding grace and favor to those who have hurt us.

We must SHARE God's forgiving way as our way of life now. GOD means this He demands we LIVE the forgiving way of his kingdom, to allow us to be a part of it. It's that REAL!

James 2:12-13

“So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. **13 For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”**

Remember sermon on the Mount –Matthew 5:7

“Blessed are the MERCIFUL, for THEY shall obtain mercy.”

Matthew 5:9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for THEY shall be called sons of God.”

The kingdom's way is to HUMBLY forgive, and work things out, reconcile, make peace – by understanding *how much* GOD had forgiven each of US. I must give a sermon or blog soon on Matt.18:15-18, which is the topic just before the one I just read. It's about approaching someone who has sinned against us. The goal, when we go to our brother-alone – privately – is to win back our brother, not win an argument. I will speak on this more later.

2. WHY we need this: because blessing our enemies, forgiving those who offend us, reconciling as much as we can, IS The FATHER'S WAY! It's the WAY of the Kingdom.

Even the apostles Paul and Barnabas argued over MARK – yes, the same man who wrote the gospel of Mark. Mark had quit on them on an earlier trip, and Paul didn't want Mark along for the next one. Paul preferred Silas to be their assistant on the next trip; Barnabas preferred his cousin Mark. You can read of this pretty sharp tiff they had in **Acts 15:36-41**. The contention was sharp, we're told.

So it can look like Paul was being unforgiving of Mark. But Paul didn't leave it with that. We find Paul had later reconciled with Mark and was very complimentary of him. Look at what Paul says later about Mark:

Colossians 4:10 (also Philemon 23-24)

“Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him),”

2 Timothy 4:11

“Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.”

We find Mark actually really growing a lot and he became the primary helper to Peter (**1 Peter 5:13**), whom Peter calls “my son”. My point though is: **Paul forgave, worked things out, gave Mark another chance** apparently some other time, reconciled and was blessed by Mark. And Mark wrote one of the gospels!

We must let each other grow in the Holy Spirit as we all focus on Christ as 2 Cor. 3:17-18 says. BE like Paul. Whoever you dislike now for any reason, commit that person in prayer to God and hope and pray for growth in their life and yours! Work things out. In so doing, YOU will grow also in love and compassion.

That whole passage **in 2 Cor. 5:15-17** – about how we’re a new creation in Christ – is to also tell us in verses 15-16 that we should not keep thinking of people the way they were when we first met them or heard about them. If you heard garbage, maybe even true garbage gossip, believe they too can change by the power of the Holy Spirit that transforms us to be more and more like Christ (**2 Cor. 3:16-18**) **as we focus on him, not on the sins.**

We’re talking about WHY we need to apply this topic:

3. These offensive and painful times and people actually help us grow in faith, compassion and learn to love our enemies.

I’ve already talked about Paul and Mark. *I believe God puts us in contact with various difficult people throughout our lives to help us ALL, eventually, grow up spiritually.* The ones causing the most pain also – if we thank God for them (remember, we praise and thank God IN and FOR all things—**Phil 4:6-7**), will also cause the most spiritual growth in us as we finally let go, let God do his work, and rejoice in seeing that God is using “bad” things even to help us grow. Even those invited to the wedding of the Lamb and his bride eventually ended up being “whoever you can find, both good *and bad*” (**Matthew 22:8-10**).

The story of Joseph and his brothers – truly illustrates this. (more on audio)

The story of Pharaoh and the Israelites – **as bad as it was, it ended up being the most inspiring story to the Israelites. Esther/Mordecai**

and Haman in the book of Esther. God turned all these around to great blessings and victories, though in the beginning it sounded like all the Jews were to be exterminated.

So once I started thanking God for those 5 people, and forgiving them, and asking God to bless them and not hold their actions against them – I found God blessing ME more and more! And JOY replaced my bitterness. Peace came upon me – instead of anguish. And it's obvious to me now: I HAD to go through that to grow in a vital area.

4. These times show GOD that we “GET IT” – that we see and understand how much HE’s forgiven us. The lesson is in Matt.18.

I’ll include all the scripture in the notes, but just summarize it on the audio for time’s sake. (Many in communist countries do not have Bibles, and so I write out all these verses to help them.)

Matthew 18:21-35

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

22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

23 Therefore the kingdom of heaven [back to discussing the kingdom’s way] is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.

24 And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents [375 tons’ worth of silver/millions of dollars]. 25 But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made.

26 The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' 27 Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

28 "But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; [1 denari = a day’s wage; so 100 denarii = several thousand dollars] and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' 29 So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.'

30 And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. 31 So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done.

32 Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33 Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?'

34 And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.

35 "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his HEART, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

The POINT IS: Let's not claim we can't forgive someone because of their lies, adultery, offenses! That's telling God we have no sense of the enormity of our OWN sin debts HE forgave, cancelled for us!

But when we let go, forgive, let God handle any issues – it releases so much stress. This applies to your feelings about MINISTERS you've left. We believers who understand our own sin debt have NO delight in hearing or talking about sins of televangelists, regular ministers, popes, anyone! Leave all that to God. Who knows if they've repented and God's forgiven them.

A woman for example might say, "I can forgive the guy who insulted me in front of others, but please don't expect me to ever forgive or have anything to do with that woman who committed adultery with my husband! I thought she was my FRIEND! OK – I'll forgive her, but I can't stand the thought of her. She robbed me of my relationship with my husband. Yeah, and my husband too; it's hard to forgive him too. It's never been quite the same since! And now I can't trust my husband having any female friendships because of her."

That understandably bitter woman can experience JOY if she would forgive and leave the judgement to GOD for what should happen to those who did offensive things to her. Remember: *ALL of us have done far worse to GOD than anything anyone has done to us.*

- 5. We cannot FULLY FEEL and experience the forgiving grace of our Abba in heaven very well if his children (believers) don't extend that loving grace to sinners who repent.** 2 Cor. 2 is all about that (bringing back with love the man thrown out of the church in

1 Cor. 5, for his deviant sex sins). As is also the story of the Prodigal son and his father in Luke 15:11-31.

- 6. When we are bitter and hateful and unforgiving, we place ourselves into a terrible jail whose bitterness will destroy us** more than the ones we won't forgive. Receive the release that forgiving gives you.

So WHY – again - do we need to learn to forgive from the heart?

- If we don't forgive others, God won't forgive us.
- It shows God we understand the Kingdom of God way of living. If we don't forgive, we WON'T fit in to God's kingdom.
- It helps us realize all these "toxic" people were placed into our lives for good reasons, and they exposed areas where we needed more spiritual growth. THANK God for them.
- It shows God we "GET IT" and understand how much WE have been forgiven by HIM and by others for our own misdeeds.
- When we forgive others and bless them, they more deeply experience God's grace and love because they experience it thru you, God's children. And vice versa.
- Bitterness and being unforgiving will hurt you more, rob more of your joy, than it does the other person.

HOW we can come to forgive the worst of sins against us

- 1. Realize when you forgive someone, that doesn't mean you're condoning their bad behavior towards you.**
- 2. Pray God help you to forgive completely from your heart.** Believe me, God has been sinned against and rejected a billions times more than you have. God understands. Jesus understands. GOD WILL HELP YOU – if you step out in faith and just do the next steps next.

Ask God to please change YOUR HEART to a forgiving one! True forgiveness for an extreme offender will require a change of HEART.

- 3. In faith - - Stretch – start doing what we're told to do, no matter how hard it seems.** Pray for them. Ask God to bless them. Watch your heart turn as you do this! It's such a great experience. Take the first steps in faith, even as Peter stepped out of the boat and started to walk on water. But you continue looking to Jesus as you stretch.

Here are some solid instructions we can “stretch” with:

Romans 12:14-21

“BLESS those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. **16 Live in harmony with one another.** Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.

18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, 20 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."

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

It may seem easier just to move on, ignore people who've hurt us, cut them out and forget them. But scripture tells us to make amends, reconcile if possible, live at peace as much as you can and work things out. Obviously someone who is dangerous to you or your family, you may have to love from a distance. But as much as you can, WORK THESE OUT.

2 Corinthians 5:18-19

“Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, **and has given US the ministry of reconciliation, 19 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.”**

Ephesians 4:31-32 NLT

“Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior.

32 Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, *forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.*”

4. **Analyze how the hate/bitterness is hurting YOU, and keeping you from happiness. There's such a RELEASE of JOY and LOVE – truly – when you LET GO of the hate and grudge.**

5. **Whatever you do, work things out PRIVATELY. No gossip! Talk to the offender; alone. Matthew 18:15** is clear on that. No sharing with your friends about others' sins. Love does not enjoy hearing about bad stuff! We don't keep track of sins of others.

Matthew 18:15

"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him ALONE. If he hears you, you have gained your brother."

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NIV

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, **it is not SELF-SEEKING, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.**

6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

We are to become more and more like our Savior. He forgave us, but it took his life to do so. Sometimes when we finally decide to give up our bitterness and forgive someone, a bit of us also dies. It may be hurt. But Christ did it for you and me because "he loved me and gave himself for ME" – as Paul says in Galatians 2:20. Our bitterness and even hate, through the love of God in us, also starts to look tenderly at the one we used to hate and deplore – and now we forgive also, just as God and Christ forgave us.

The cost of forgiving terrible people who hurt you - is always high. It hurts a lot. But then there's such a release of peace and joy when you do forgive, totally, from your heart. Please do it. Your eternity is at stake. Give up any notion of having any "right" to deplore someone. God thought every single person on earth was worthy of the life of his son, if they would but accept that sacrifice. Now you and I must put that same value – from our heart – on to every single person out there too. Now we love our enemies – even as God so loved the world, even while we were still sinners. So as we recognize this, now we can forgive from the heart.

One more thing: I said the cost of forgiving terrible people. But a lot of people aren't really as terrible as we've thought once you really get to know them. We don't know their stresses, their issues, their circumstances, what **kind** of day they're having, **but literal aches and pains they endure ... instead of hating them back, how about we bring some sunshine into their lives?**

And if GOD can forgive the worst of sins, and accept those people, we should be able to accept that person into our fellowships too. "As much as is possible", Paul had said.

Some people don't make it possible. They won't reconcile. God knows you tried. God knows you have forgiven. Now YOU TOO will be in God's kingdom if you truly forgive everyone who has offended you.

Let's extend God's forgiveness to us – to those we must forgive. Let's accept God's grace for us – and now extend that same grace for others. Please do it. You'll feel so much better if you do....even to your ex-husband, ex-wife, that adulteress, that slanderer – you forgive -- and leave the judgment to God.

And we'll see you in God's kingdom. (closing prayer)