

Taking a Stand to Forgive

By Donna Pyle

Opening

Forgiveness is a hard yet tender subject. It implies that a relationship has experienced conflict resulting in hurt, anger, and broken fellowship. The first step toward forgiveness may often prove the most difficult, so let's unpack this delicate topic with great care and prayer.

Prayer

Open with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to guide your study of the Word.

The Call to Forgive

Regardless of the issue or offense, you and I are commanded to forgive. Deciding to harbor unforgiveness disobeys God's explicit instructions. Similar to a child's disobedience resulting in time out away from parents, our disobedience disrupts our relationship with God. Unforgiveness results in broken fellowship.

According to **2 Corinthians 2:5–10**, what is the result of unforgiveness?

Broken fellowship and unforgiveness cause excessive sorrow. In **Ephesians 4:30–31**, Scripture tells us that the Holy Spirit is grieved when we harbor bitterness, rage, and anger.

In order to more fully understand our call to forgive, write out the words found in **Colossians 3:13**:

The Greek word for forgive is *charizomai*, which means to pardon or grant as a favor, to bestow favor unconditionally. God's Word calls us to extend that unconditional pardon without limitation or reservation. How do you see the call to forgive in

Colossians 3:13

Ephesians 4:32? We cannot even begin to list the ways that we have grieved our Lord, yet He forgave us all the way to the cross.

If you have experienced a deep betrayal or breach of trust, the call to forgive may be hard to swallow. We do not have the capacity to forgive in and of ourselves. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit and His love flowing through us are we able to honestly and wholeheartedly extend forgiveness.

The Character of Forgiveness

What attributes does God list about Himself in **Exodus 34:6**?

God is slow to anger and forgives wickedness, rebellion, and sin. God's ultimate act of forgiveness shone in high-definition magnificence on the cross. We receive God's forgiveness by faith. Forgiving someone else reflects a real understanding of, and faith in, God's forgiveness in Christ. When we stubbornly refuse to extend forgiveness, it clearly reflects a blinded and hardened heart that lacks true understanding of grace. As God's image bearers (**Genesis 1:26–27**), forgiveness correctly reflects His love through us.

Forgiveness is also characterized by compassion. Compassion looks at the entire picture of a person's life, not the isolated incident that caused the hurt. It takes into account the influences that may have caused that person to behave in a hurtful manner. When we understand that, compassion fosters forgiveness.

The Action of Forgiveness

Read Luke 15:11–24. When the father saw the prodigal son on the horizon, what was his reaction in **verse 20**?

The father did not wait for the son to grovel or apologize. He did not tap his foot while demanding to hear the son's outlined plan (**verses 18–20**) in order to be accepted once again. The father *ran* to extend forgiveness. Likewise, we are instructed to reach out rather than to stand back and wait to be approached.

We may find taking that initial step difficult because we may fear exposure to unkind words, rejection, and further hurt. Nevertheless we are called to extend forgiveness, regardless of how the recipient of our forgiveness responds. Whether or not they accept forgiveness resides with them. We are called to extend genuine forgiveness, not to ensure those who hurt us accept it.

We also learn from the story of the prodigal son that forgiveness may be misunderstood and unappreciated by others. When the father forgave and welcomed back the younger son with open arms, what was the older son's reaction in **Luke 15:28–30**?



Extending forgiveness may provoke anger and hostility in others generated from their own sinfulness. Worrying about how others will perceive our forgiveness only delays our taking that first step. Keeping our eyes on God and following His guidance allows us to live a renewed, restored life.

What does God tell us about forgiveness in **Mark 11:25**?

Unforgiveness and hardened hearts prevent God's healing to penetrate. When the wound is deep, we remember the hurt often. Each time we remember, we are to forgive. Over time, God's salve of love heals our hearts and repairs our brokenness.

The Motivation of Forgiveness

The motivation to forgive occurs when we fully acknowledge the vast sin debt that God has canceled in our own lives. Forgiveness understands God's amazing grace and the trespasses that Christ forgave each of us. When we truly grasp the enormity of our canceled debt, it is unthinkable to withhold forgiveness from another. **Read Matthew 18:21–35**. In that parable, God is represented as the king and we the servants. He completely forgave our mountain of debt and therefore sets the example for our behavior regarding forgiveness. Take a moment now to list the debts God has canceled in your life.

Why do we forgive according to **Colossians 2:13**?

God's forgiveness is motivated by His love. Even though it may be extremely difficult for us to forgive the person who has hurt us, our love for God and obedience to His Word serves as our chief navigation. The thought of extending

forgiveness may seem impossible, but keep praying and asking God to mold in you a tender and forgiving heart. At first, you may pray through gritted teeth but persevere. God will not disappoint!

The Result of Forgiveness

Unforgiveness keeps the pain alive, prevents deep wounds from healing, and imprisons us in the past. Assigning blame or re-living the wrong done to us only builds up escalating degrees of anger. Forgiveness sets us free from our past and allows us to joyfully live in the present. It permits us to open our hearts and hands to receive the hope and future that God has planned for us (**Jeremiah 29:11**).

Closing

If you struggle with unforgiveness, pray for a changed heart — not for the offender but for you. Forgiveness has everything to do with our actions, not theirs. Ask trusted, godly friends to pray for you. If need be, seek godly counseling to work through deep-seated anger and resentment. Then, through the power of the Holy Spirit, start walking towards that person that you need to forgive. God is right beside you. He will guide you and give you the words needed. Begin that walk today.

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