



FORGIVENESS

Introduction

If we were to have pillars of Christian living, forgiveness would be one of them. When Jesus was on the cross, He forgave the people who put Him there (Luke 23:34). When Jesus was teaching the most important fundamentals of human life and the Kingdom, He said, “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us” (Matthew 6:12,14-15). The entire mission of God coming to earth through Yeshua (Jesus) was predicated on forgiveness of sins. Therefore, forgiveness should be in the DNA of every Christ-follower.



Leader’s Story About Forgiveness

Participant’s Story About Forgiveness

I believe that one of the true manifestations of the Holy Spirit operating in someone’s life is forgiveness. I also believe there is a supernatural power in forgiveness. However, before we look at the spiritual side of things, let’s see what science has to say about forgiveness.

Science of Forgiveness

When we live with unforgiveness, when we harbor bitterness, it can cause us to slip into depression. It can cause us to have poor mental health, which then triggers poor physical health. There was a study done at Hope College by Charlotte Witvliet examining the effects of bitterness. In this study, they asked people to think about someone who hurt them, mistreated them, or offended them. While they asked these questions, they monitored blood pressure, heart rate, facial muscle tension, and sweat gland activity. Sure enough, when people recalled a grudge, the monitors began lighting up. Their blood pressure and heart rate increased and they sweated more. “Ruminating about their grudges was stressful, and subjects found the rumination unpleasant.” It made them feel angry, sad, anxious, and less in control.

On the other side, “Witvliet asked her subjects to try to empathize with their offenders or imagine forgiving them. When they practices forgiveness, their physical arousal coasted downward.” Researchers found that when people receive apologies or restitution for offenses they experience changes in physiology, including lowered blood pressure, heart rate, and sweat activity as well as lowered tension in the frown muscles of the face.”



Do you believe that forgiving someone can cause improved health? Why or why not?



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The Science of Forgiveness (cont.)

There is a physiological element to bitterness that we cannot ignore. Forgiveness offers us the ability to recognize the wrongs that other people have done to us and it allows us to be freed from that bondage that we've chained ourselves to. I like what Lloyd and Enright have to say: "Forgiveness is anything but weak because the forgiver is not condoning, excusing, forgetting, or necessarily even reconciling with the other because none of these qualities is a moral virtue centered in goodness as is forgiveness. When a person forgives, he does not abandon justice, but instead exercises this virtue along with the mercy that is forgiveness." As Christ-followers, we should always strive for reconciliation and living in peace with others. However, there are some situations that don't allow that type of forgiveness to happen. Nonetheless, we are still called to forgive.

The Bible On Forgiveness

I think it's safe to say that unforgiveness plays a part in every aspect of the human mind, body, and soul. We have been given a mandate and responsibility by Jesus to forgive others. Forgiveness is one of the most important and significant acts of the Christ-follower in spiritual transformation (Matthew 6:9-15; Ephesians 1:7, 4:31-32; 1 John 1:9). It is a beautiful action that demonstrates the Holy Spirit and the believer working together towards the shared goal of making us like Christ. Since the cross is the ultimate expression of love and forgiveness, so too, I believe, the ultimate expression of the Holy Spirit working in one's life is love and forgiveness.

Let's read Ephesians 4:31-32:

"Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of magic. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

Let's read 1 John 1:9:

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Let's read Matthew 6:9-15:

"This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

Notice what Jesus said directly after the prayer. Forgiveness is one of the most important acts of spiritual growth because it's a practice that Jesus commands when we begin following him.



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Forgiveness in Modern Culture

We currently exist in what's called a "cancel culture." This means that everyone gets to be offended whenever they want and people who don't agree with you get to be boycotted and canceled. As Christians, however, we are called to be against this "I'm always offended" culture. This doesn't mean that we aren't for justice. Quite the opposite, when injustices occur we should always be on the side of true justice because our God is always for justice. Like Lloyd and Enright said above, forgiveness does not condone wrong behavior. Our forgiveness for situations can but does not always necessitate consequences for one's actions. There are so many people today who live for being offended and allow themselves to be consumed by bitterness. Each time we choose to remain in bitterness we chain ourselves to a life of hate and anger. In truth, harboring bitterness does more damage to ourselves than it does to the person we're upset with. When we choose forgiveness, we break ourselves free from that person and no longer allow them to have control over our behaviors or actions (unless you have to forgive God, of course).

There are elements of cancel culture that are good when it comes to injustice - true injustice. Nevertheless, as Christ-followers, it's not a suggestion that we forgive others - it's a command. Once again, forgiveness does not excuse sinful, unjust, or wrong behavior, but it does free you from those chains of bitterness that will only destroy you. So let us live our lives in freedom from the bondage to bitterness and unforgiveness so that we can live a life of joy, of peace, and of kindness for others.

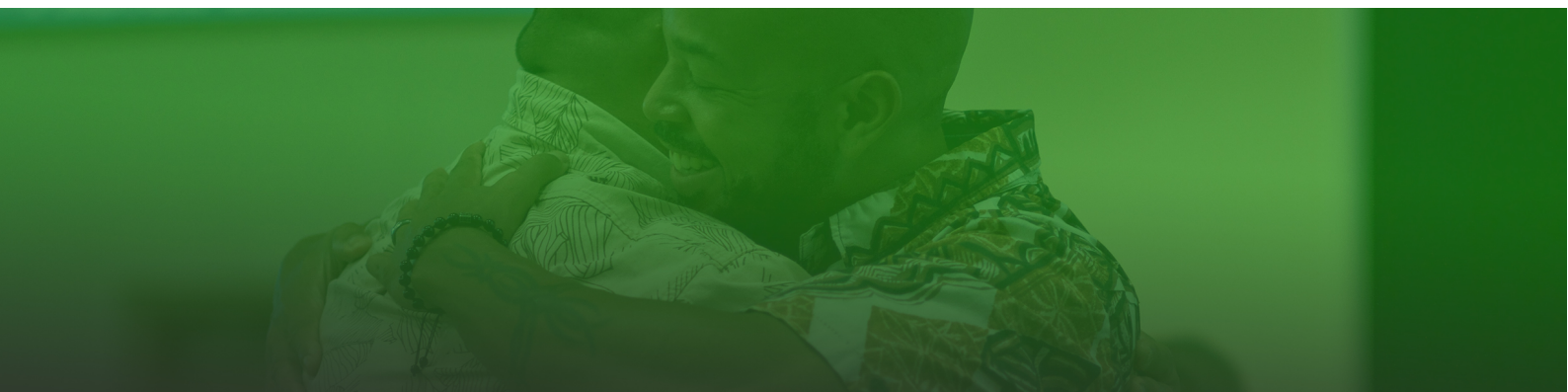
Whom do you need to forgive? Maybe it's someone you know personally. Maybe yourself? Most likely there isn't a lack of options when it comes to people you need to forgive. It could even be someone like a politician or a pastor. My challenge to you is to pray and ask God to reveal to you whom you need to forgive so that you can experience a spiritual transformation. This transformation can lead to spiritual maturity as well as improved physical health.



What is something you need to forgive someone else for?

What is something you need to forgive yourself for?

What is something you need to forgive God for?



Articles on the Science of Forgiveness

<https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/VanOyenWitvliet-GrantingForgiveness.pdf>

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-science-of-forgiveness_b_613138

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/the_new_science_of_forgiveness

<https://www.salon.com/2015/08/24/>

[the_science_of_forgiveness_when_you_dont_forgive_you_release_all_the_chemicals_of_the_stress_response/](https://www.salon.com/2015/08/24/the_science_of_forgiveness_when_you_dont_forgive_you_release_all_the_chemicals_of_the_stress_response/)

<https://www.amazon.com/Forgiveness-Choice-Step-Step-Resolving/dp/1557987572>

