

# Step 3

## Bitterness vs. Forgiveness

We need to forgive others so Satan cannot take advantage of us (2 Corinthians 2:10,11). We are commanded to get rid of all bitterness in our lives and forgive others as we have been forgiven (Ephesians 4:31,32). Ask God to bring to your mind the people you need to forgive by praying the following prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, I thank You for the riches of Your kindness, forbearance and patience toward me, knowing that Your kindness has led me to repentance (Romans 2:4). I confess that I have not shown that same kindness and patience toward those who have hurt me. Instead, I have held on to my anger, bitterness and resentment toward them. Please bring to my mind all the people I need to forgive in order that I may do so now. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Before you begin working through the process of forgiving, take a few minutes to review what forgiveness is and what it is not.

Forgiveness is not merely forgetting. People who want to forget all that was done to them will find that they cannot do it. Don't put off forgiving those who have hurt you, hoping the pain will one day go away. Once you choose to forgive someone then Christ can come and begin to heal you of your hurts. *But the healing cannot begin until you first forgive.*

Forgiveness is a choice, a decision of your will. Since God requires you to forgive, it is something you can do. Sometimes it is very hard to forgive someone because we naturally want revenge for the things we have suffered. Forgiveness seems to go against our sense of what is right and fair. So we hold on to our anger, punishing people over and over again in our minds for the pain that they've caused us. But we are told by God never to take our own revenge (Romans 12:19). *Let God deal with the person.* Let him or her off your hook because as long as you refuse to forgive someone you *are still hooked* to that person. You are still chained to your past, bound up in your bitterness.

By forgiving, you let the other person off your hook, but they are not off God's hook. You must trust that God will deal with the person justly and fairly, something you simply cannot do. You might say, "But you don't know how much this person hurt me!" You're right. We don't, but Jesus does; and He tells you to forgive others for your sake. Until *you* let go of your anger and hatred, the person is still hurting you. You can't turn back the clock and change the past, but you can be free from it. You can stop the pain; but there is only one way to do it- forgive from your heart.

You forgive others for your sake so you can be free. Forgiveness is mainly a matter of obedience to God. God wants you to be free; there is no other way.

Forgiveness is agreeing to live with the consequences of another person's sin. You are going to live with those consequences anyway whether you like it or not. The only choice you have is whether you will do so in the *bondage of bitterness* or in the *freedom of forgiveness*. But no one truly forgives without accepting and suffering the pain of another person's sin. That can seem unfair and you may wonder where the justice is in it, but justice is found at the Cross which makes forgiveness legally and morally right.

Jesus took the *eternal* consequences of sin upon Himself. "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). We, however, often suffer the temporary consequences of others people's sins. That is simply a harsh reality of life all of us have to face.

Do not wait for the other person to ask for your forgiveness before forgiving them. They may never do so. Remember, Jesus did not wait for those who were crucifying Him to apologize before He forgave them. Even while they mocked and jeered at Him, He prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34, NASB).

Forgiveness must come from your heart. Allow God to bring the painful memories to the surface, and then acknowledge how you feel toward those who've hurt you. If your forgiveness doesn't touch the emotional core of your life, it will be incomplete. Too often we are afraid of the pain, so we bury our emotions deep down inside us. Let God bring them to the surface, so He can begin to heal those damaged emotions.

Forgiveness is choosing not to hold someone's sin against him or her anymore. It is common for bitter people to bring up past issues with those who have hurt them. They want them to feel bad. But we must let go of the past and choose to reject any thought of revenge. This doesn't mean you must continue to put up with the future sins of others. God does not tolerate sin and neither should you. Don't allow yourself to be continually abused by others. Take a stand against sin while continuing to exercise grace and forgiveness toward those who hurt you. You may need help in setting wise limits and boundaries to protect yourself from further abuse. (Eph.4:29-32)

Forgiveness cannot wait until you feel like forgiving. You will never get there. Make the hard choice to forgive even if you don't feel like it. Once you choose to forgive, Satan will have lost his power over you in that area and God's healing touch will be free to move. *Freedom is what you will gain right now, not necessarily an immediate change in feelings.*

Let's look at some Scriptures about forgiveness:

Matthew 6: 12--Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.....God assumes we will forgive.

Matthew 6:14,15 -- For 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 sin. God's forgiveness is conditional on our forgiveness of others.

Ephesians 4:30-31-- And 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. Our unforgiveness grieves the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 4:32-- Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Forgive as Christ forgives.

Hebrews 10:30-31 ---For we know Him who said "It is mine to avenge: I will repay" and again " The Lord will judge His people". It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Judgment and revenge belong to God alone. We must trust it to Him!

Ephesians 4:26-27---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. Sinning in your anger gives Satan a foothold in your life.

Hebrews 12:15---See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. Unforgiveness causes a bitter root.

See ADDENDUMS 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d, 3e, 3f and 3g.

### Anger

Proverbs 29:11 – A fool gives vent to anger, but the wise quietly holds it back.

James 1:20-21 – You must understand this, my beloved; let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness.

Now you are ready to begin to list the names of people who come to your mind. At this point don't question whether you need to forgive them or not. *If a name comes to mind, just write it down.*

Often we hold things against ourselves as well, punishing ourselves for wrong choices we've made in the past. Write "myself" and *be sure that you write down everything you have to forgive yourself for and all the feelings or sense of identity it created.* Forgiving yourself is accepting the truth that God has already forgiven you in Christ. If God forgives you, you can forgive yourself! *Also write "thoughts against God" at the bottom of your list.* Obviously, God has never done anything wrong so we don't have to forgive Him. Sometimes, however, we harbor angry thoughts against Him because He did not do what we wanted Him to do. Those feelings of anger or resentment against God can become a wall between Him and us so we must let them go.

*Dont forget to check out: parents, in-laws, children, grandparents, siblings, other relatives, previous lovers, childhood friends, therapists doctors, clients, teachers, students, employers, co-workers, the church.....*

Name: (People Who Hurt Me)	Offense(s): (What They Did)	Made Me Feel/my identity What I Believe About Myself
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- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.

Now, you are ready to begin. *Starting with the first person on your list, make the choice to forgive him or her for every painful memory that comes to your mind. Focus on that individual.*  
For every painful memory you have for each person on your list, pray aloud:

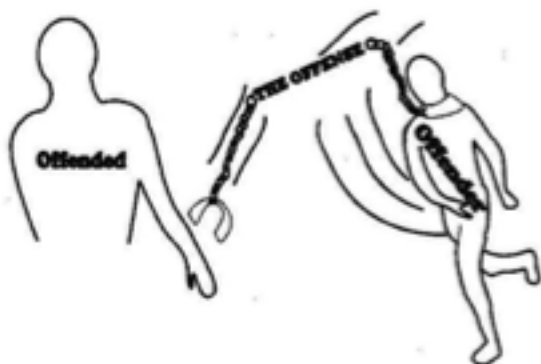
Lord, I choose to forgive \_\_\_\_\_ (name the person) \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ (say what they did to hurt you) \_\_\_\_\_ even though it made me feel \_\_\_\_\_ (share the painful feelings) \_\_\_\_\_.

After you have forgiven each person for all the offenses that come to your mind and after you have honestly expressed how you felt, conclude your forgiveness of that person by praying aloud:

Lord, I choose not to hold on to my resentment. I relinquish my right to revenge and ask you to heal my damaged emotions. I thank you for setting me free from the bondage of my bitterness. I now ask you to bless those who have hurt me. In Jesus Name I pray. Amen.

## ADDENDUM 3a

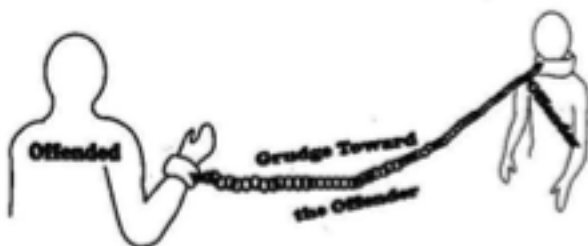
1



Offenses against us cause hurt. At the same time guilt is placed by God on the conscience of the person who hurt us.

We become *bound* to the offender by the bitterness we harbor in our heart. That bitterness actually sustains the hurt we feel.

2



Mere separation cannot break this *bondage* – only forgiveness can. The offender should ask for forgiveness, but might never do so. Then the one hurt by the offense must initiate the process of forgiveness.

3



The offended one releases the offender to God for judgment. This is forgiveness.

4



The one who was offended then gives the offense, the hurt, the bitterness and the offender to God and His perfect will for that person.

## EMOTIONAL PAIN WORDS

abandoned  
accused  
afraid  
all my fault  
alone  
always wrong  
angry  
anxious  
apathetic  
ashamed  
bad  
belittled  
betrayal  
betrayed  
bitter  
blamed  
can't do anything right  
can't trust anyone  
cheap  
cheated  
condemned  
confused  
conspired against  
controlled  
cut off  
deceived  
defeated  
defenseless  
defrauded  
degraded  
desires were rejected  
despair  
destroyed  
devalued  
didn't belong  
didn't measure up  
dirty  
disappointed  
disgusted  
disrespected  
dominated  
embarrassed  
empty  
exposed  
failure  
fear  
foolish  
forced  
frustrated  
good for nothing  
guilty  
hatred  
hate myself

helpless  
hollow  
hopeless  
humiliated  
hurt  
hysterical  
impure  
inadequate  
indecent  
inferior  
insecure  
insensitive to my needs  
insignificant  
invalidated  
left out  
lied to  
lonely  
lost  
made fun of  
manipulate  
mindless  
mistreated  
misunderstood  
molested  
neglected  
no good  
not being affirmed  
not cared for  
not cherished  
not deserving to live  
not listened to  
not measure up  
not valued  
opinions not valued  
out of control  
overwhelmed  
pathetic  
pressured  
pressure to perform  
publicly shamed  
rejected  
rejection  
repulsed  
revenge  
ruined  
sad  
scared  
secluded  
self-disgust  
shamed  
stressed  
stupid

suffocated  
suicidal  
taken advantage of  
thwarted  
torn apart  
trapped  
trash  
ugly  
unable to communicate  
unaccepted  
uncaring  
uncared for  
unchosen  
unclean  
unfairly judged  
unfairly treated  
unfit  
unimportant  
unlovable  
unloved  
unnecessary  
unprotected  
unsafe  
unsympathetic  
unwanted  
used  
violated  
vulnerable  
wasted  
wicked  
worthless  
wounded

## THE FATHER'S LOVE LETTER

To My Child,

You may not know me, but I know everything about you... Psalms 139:1

Even the very hairs on your head are numbered... Matt 10:29-31

For you were made in my image... Genesis 1:27

I knew you even before you were conceived... Jeremiah 1:4

I chose you when I planned creation... Ephesians 1:11

And I knit you together in your mother's womb... Psalms 139:13

You are not a mistake, for all your days are written in my book... Psalms 139:16

I determined when you would be born and where you would live... Acts 17:26

Because I love you with an everlasting love... Jeremiah 31:3

I have been misrepresented by those who don't know me... John 8:41-44

I am not distant and angry but am the complete expression of love... 1 John 4:16

And it is my desire to lavish my love on you... 1 John 3:1

For every good gift that you receive comes from my hand... James 1:17

I offer you more than your earthly father ever could... Matthew 7:11

Because I am the perfect Father... Matthew 5:48

And I am the provider who meets all your needs... Matthew 6:11-33

My plan for your future has always been filled with hope... Jeremiah 29:11

My thoughts toward you are as countless as the sands on the seashore... Psalms 139:17, 18

And I rejoice over you with singing... Zephaniah 3:

I will never stop doing good to you... Jeremiah 32:40

For you are my treasured possession... Exodus 19:5

Delight in me and I will give you the desires of your heart... Psalms 37:4

For it is I who gave you those desires... Philippians 2:13

I am able to do more for you than you could possibly imagine... Ephesians 3:20, 21

For I am your greatest encourager... 2 Thessalonians 2:16,17

I am also the Father who comforts you in all your troubles... 2 Corinthians 1:3,4

When you are brokenhearted I am close to you... Psalms 34:18

As a shepherd carries a lamb, I have carried you close to my heart... Isaiah 40:11

One day I will wipe every tear from your eyes... Revelation 21:3,4

Because I love you even as I love my son, Jesus... John 17:23

For in Jesus, my love for you is revealed... John 17:23

He is the exact representation of my being... Hebrews 1:3

He came to demonstrate that I am for you, not against you... Romans 8:31

And to tell you that I am not counting your sins... 2 Corinthians 5:18, 19

Jesus died so that we could be reconciled... 2 Corinthians 5:18,19

His death was my ultimate expression of love for you ... 1 John 4:10

I gave up everything that I loved to gain your love... Romans 8:31,32

If you receive the gift of my Son you receive me... 1 John 2:23

And nothing will ever separate you from my love again... Romans 8:38,39

Come home and I'll throw the biggest party heaven has ever seen... Luke 15:7

I have always been Father, and will always be Father... Ephesians 3:14, 15

My question is.... Will you be my child? John 1:12, 13

I am here if you ever want to talk

Your Father.