

FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is granting pardon for a wrong, offense, or sin. Related to this definition is releasing someone from an obligation or debt. Forgiveness is mentioned frequently in the Bible in our relationship with God and among human beings, especially for people of faith.

God's Forgiveness

Forgiveness is one of the key themes of the Bible. God's human family sinned against Him (**Genesis 3**). The penalty for sin was spiritual death (**Romans 6:23**) and brokenness in the relationship between sinful humans and a holy God. Because of the depth of God's love, mercy, and grace, God made a way for our relationship with Him to be restored and for the penalty of death to be removed.

God accomplished this by coming to this earth in human form (Jesus) dying on a Cross, taking the penalty of death we deserved, and placing the sins of humanity on Jesus, our Savior (**1 Peter 2:24**). God did this for everyone, including you. It was the *ultimate* act of forgiveness and love. All you have to do to be in right relationship with God is acknowledge and confess your sins, believe that Jesus was raised from the dead, and profess *Jesus is Lord* with your mouth (**Romans 10:9-10**).

When you do this, you will be restored, you will have a right relationship with God, you will be able to commune with God in spirit, and you will live *eternally* in God's presence. That is what forgiveness can accomplish. Forgiveness is what God requires you to accept in your relationship with Him and it is expected *of* you in your relationships with others. If you have been born again (**John 3:3**) and you are a follower of Jesus Christ, forgiveness should be part of your nature and behavior, whether in forgiving others or having them forgive you. **Forgiveness is a two-way street.**

Forgiving Others

God's forgiveness for you flows out of love. Your forgiveness of others must flow out of that same love. Jesus provided His disciples clear guidance on this when He taught, "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of

you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over” (Matthew 18:15). Notice that despite the fact that someone else sinned against you, *you* are to initiate and extend forgiveness. Jesus said ‘*you go,*’ raise the issue with the person who offended or sinned against you, and extend loving forgiveness. Notice also that Jesus did not say tell others about the sin against you. He said it is only between the two of you. Many times when this step is taken, forgiveness is extended, and a relationship is mended.

If the person who sinned against you does not accept your forgiveness, the next step is dependent on whether they are a believer. If they are not a born-again follower of Jesus, i.e., they are not saved, not much more can be done except to extend forgiveness again if the opportunity presents itself. If the person, however, is a believer and does not accept your forgiveness or want to make things right, Jesus provides additional steps to follow.

Jesus proceeds to say, “But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses” (Mt. 18:16). The offender is given a second opportunity to accept your forgiveness and make things right, this time in the company of believing witnesses. If they still do not accept your forgiveness, then Jesus continues, “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church” (Mt. 18:17a). The audience has been broadened to many believers. Finally, Jesus said, “and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector” (Matthew 18:17b). You have done all you can to make it right, and your brother or sister will have to answer to God for his or her refusal in the matter. There is nothing else you can do.

A couple of additional thoughts on extending forgiveness. **The person you want to forgive may not *deserve* your forgiveness.** What they did to you may be horrendous. But you need to understand that you nor anyone in the human family deserves God’s forgiveness, but it was extended anyway to all the world in grace and love. You must extend it too. It does not mean that you will immediately forget what happened and abandon any feelings of resentment. It may take a while for those to abate or disappear. But it does mean that you recognize that, because you are forgiven and loved by the grace of God, you must forgive others in the same way.

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5-7), Jesus made this crucial statement, “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 sins” (Matthew 6:14-15). Jesus said this right after including in the model prayer, the Lord’s Prayer, the statement “forgive us our debts (trespasses or sins), as we also have

forgiven our debtors (**Matthew 6:12, (emphasis added)**). Your forgiveness by God can only be given when you are willing to be a forgiving person. This is especially important when you come to the Lord for the first time. You may confess sins and ask for God's forgiveness, but God may not extend that forgiveness and the true life you seek until you change your heart and forgive others.

Seeking Forgiveness From Others

But what if the circumstances are reversed and you need forgiveness from someone you have sinned against? Jesus provided the answer earlier in the Sermon on the Mount when he said, "If you are offering your gift at the altar (this may include worshipping or praying) and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift" (**Matthew 5:23-24, (emphasis added)**). Regardless of whether extending forgiveness or asking for it, notice that Jesus assigns the responsibility to **you**. Many people, believers included, remain unforgiven by God, or have continual broken relationships because they refuse to listen to these teachings of Jesus on forgiveness. You must understand God's grace and love and be willing to extend them yourself.

Closing Thoughts

The heart of God yearns for his believing family to fully yield to love and grace, not only for themselves, but in extension to others. Be the forgiving follower of Jesus that He wants you to be. Only then will you have peace in your heart and find true life.

This is an introduction on the subject of **Forgiveness**. Here are other resources you may wish to explore:

[What does the Bible say about forgiveness? What does it mean to forgive? | GotQuestions.org](#)

[Forgiveness in the Bible - what it is and what it's not \(bibleissues.org\)](#)

[10 Things the Bible Says About Forgiveness & Why It's Crucial \(crosswalk.com\)](#)

[What Does the Bible Say About Forgiveness? \(openbible.info\)](#)

[4 Powerful Stories Of Forgiveness From The Bible That We Can Learn From | Think About Such Things](#)

[Biblical Forgiveness Definition - What it Does and Doesn't Mean \(christianity.com\)](#)