



# Set Free

*A Short Manual on Forgiveness*

*Strategiesforovercomers.com*

## 1 — What Forgiveness Is, and What It Isn't

Forgiveness is one of those words we throw around so easily in church that I think we've lost track of what it actually costs. Let's be honest about it: forgiveness is the decision to release a debt someone owes you. When a person wrongs us, something real is taken — trust, safety, dignity, sometimes years of our lives — and forgiveness is the choice to stop requiring payment from them for us to be at peace. It's not mainly a feeling. It's a transaction, made before God, and the feelings tend to follow along behind it rather than lead the way.

I've walked with a lot of people over the years who were stuck in strongholds they couldn't explain, and more times than I can count, unforgiveness was sitting right underneath it. So before we go any further, I want to clear up what forgiveness is not, because I think the confusion is half of what keeps people stuck.

### ***Forgiveness is not reconciliation.***

You can forgive someone completely and still choose not to let them back into your life the way they were before. That's especially true if the relationship is unsafe, or if there's been no repentance at all. Forgiveness happens in your own heart before God. Reconciliation takes two willing, trustworthy people. One doesn't require the other, and you don't owe anyone reconciliation just because you've forgiven them.

### ***Forgiveness is not excusing what happened.***

Calling sin what it is doesn't cancel out forgiveness — it's actually part of it. I've noticed that the offenses people struggle hardest to forgive are usually the ones they never let themselves name honestly in the first place.

Forgiveness doesn't ask you to say "it wasn't that bad." It asks you to say, "it really was that bad, and I'm releasing the debt anyway."

### ***Forgiveness is not forgetting.***

The memory can stay. What forgiveness takes away is the memory's grip on you — its power to hijack your emotions and your body every time it resurfaces.

### ***Forgiveness is a decision, not a feeling.***

This is the piece that trips people up the most, so let me say it plainly: forgiveness starts as an act of the will, made in obedience, often long before your feelings have caught up. That's not being fake with God or with yourself. That's just the order Scripture teaches. Make the choice first. The freedom comes as fruit of that choice, sometimes right away and sometimes a long time later.

## **2 — What the Word Says About It**

Scripture doesn't leave this vague. Over and over, our forgiveness of others gets tied directly to our own relationship with God — not because forgiving earns us Salvation, but because it's evidence that Salvation has actually taken root in us.

Jesus taught us to pray, *"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors"* and then He went right on to explain exactly what that means: *"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses"* (Matt 6:12, 14–15). That's not a suggestion. That's cause and effect.

Paul says the same thing to the Ephesians: *"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you"* (Eph 4:32), and again to the Colossians: *"Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye"* (Col 3:13).

The pattern never changes. We were forgiven an impossible debt, so we forgive the debts that are owed to us.

Jesus makes this come alive in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt 18:21–35). A servant owes his king more than he could ever repay in a hundred lifetimes, and the king forgives it — wipes it out completely. That same servant turns right around and grabs a fellow servant by the throat over a debt that's almost nothing by comparison, and has him thrown in prison. When the king hears about it, here's what happens:

*"And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your heart forgive not every one his brother their trespasses"* (Matt 18:34–35).

I want you to sit with that for a minute, because it's not a soft parable. Jesus doesn't present forgiveness as some nice, optional generosity we extend to people who happen to deserve it. He ties unforgiveness directly to being handed over to torment. That word matters, and I'll come back to it, because I believe it's not only speaking of judgment in eternity — I've seen it play out as very real torment in people's daily lives right now.

Jesus modeled forgiveness at the highest possible cost, from the cross itself, before anyone repented of anything: *"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do"* (Lk 23:34). And when Peter asked how many times he had to forgive someone — offering seven as if that were generous — Jesus told him seventy times seven (Matt 18:22). In other words, don't keep score. Forgiveness isn't a transaction you complete once. It's a practice you keep returning to.

And finally, forgiveness is not the same thing as judgment, because judgment was never ours to hand out in the first place: *"Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord"* (Rom 12:19). Releasing someone from what they owe you doesn't mean declaring them innocent. It means handing the verdict over to the only One qualified to render it.

### **3 — Why It's So Hard**

If forgiveness were simple, God wouldn't have needed to command it as many times as He did. So let's not pretend it's easy, because pretending never helped anyone actually get free.

Unforgiveness usually feels like protection. Holding onto what someone did to you can feel like the only leverage you have left, especially when they never faced any consequences for it. But here's what I've watched happen over and over: what starts out as self-protection turns into a prison you built for yourself. The person you won't forgive keeps living in your head, rent-free, long after they've moved on with their own life and probably aren't thinking about you at all. That's the tormentor from Matthew 18:34 showing up in ordinary, daily form — not always some dramatic spiritual event, but the slow erosion of your peace, your sleep, and your joy, because you're carrying a debt you were never meant to collect.

I've noticed a handful of things that keep people stuck here, and maybe you'll recognize yourself in one of them. Some people are afraid that forgiving means the offense didn't matter, or that it lets the other person off the hook. Some are afraid that if they let their guard down, they'll just get hurt again. Some haven't grieved what happened to them yet, and it's awfully hard to release a debt you haven't let yourself feel the weight of. Some are trying to forgive someone who is unrepentant, or who is gone, or who has already died, and it feels pointless because there's no one left to receive it. It's not pointless — forgiveness is a transaction between you and God, and it doesn't require the other person's cooperation at all. And some people are dealing with an offense that keeps happening, over and over, in an ongoing relationship, which means they may need to keep forgiving the same debt, or a new version of it, again and again.

#### **4 — How You Actually Do It**

Forgiveness usually isn't one prayer that settles everything for good, especially for the deep wounds. It's a process, and I've found it helps enormously to walk through it in concrete steps rather than treating it like a vague spiritual feeling you're waiting to arrive.

##### ***Step One: Name it specifically.***

Vague forgiveness rarely reaches the actual wound. Instead of "I forgive them for everything," name what actually happened — the words that were said, the trust that was broken, the specific thing it cost you.

##### ***Step Two: Tell God the truth about what it cost you.***

Don't minimize it, and don't exaggerate it either. Just be honest before the Lord about what you lost. That's not self-pity. That's an accurate

accounting, and a debt has to be accounted for honestly before it can really be released.

### ***Step Three: Make the choice out loud.***

In prayer, declare it as a decision — say it out loud if you can. Do this before God whether or not the other person ever knows, apologizes, or changes one thing about themselves.

### ***Step Four: Let go of the right to get even.***

Hand the debt to God instead of continuing to collect on it yourself through resentment, gossip, the silent treatment, or replaying the argument in your head for the hundredth time. This is Romans 12:19 worked out in real life.

### ***Step Five: Bless them if you can.***

Praying for the person — even briefly, even through gritted teeth the first few times — is one of the fastest ways I've seen the grip of an offense loosen. That doesn't mean you trust them or go looking for them. It just means you stop cursing them in your heart.

### ***Step Six: Expect to have to choose it again.***

Deep wounds rarely get forgiven once and stay settled forever. A memory can surface a year later and sting just as sharp as the day it happened. That doesn't mean the first time you forgave didn't work. It just means you get to choose it again, and that's not failure — that's just how healing tends to go.

For those of you who, like me, work within a deliverance or inner-healing framework, forgiveness is one of the doors that has to be opened before you can go any deeper into the strongholds tied to that original offense. I've seen unforgiveness held onto long enough become an anchor point for bitterness and self-protection patterns that look a whole lot like the torment of Matthew 18:34. That's exactly why I don't treat this step as optional — it's foundational to everything else God wants to do.

## **5 — What Forgiveness Doesn't Require**

I want to be really clear about this, because I've met too many people who thought forgiving someone meant they had to hand their life back over to them. It doesn't. Forgiveness doesn't require reconciliation with someone who is unsafe or unrepentant. It doesn't require staying exposed to the

person or the situation that hurt you. It doesn't require you to pretend the harm never happened or wasn't serious. And it certainly doesn't require you to trust that person again right away — trust gets rebuilt slowly, through a track record of change, but forgiveness is given all at once, as a decision. Wisdom and forgiveness were never in conflict. You can forgive someone completely and still, for very good reason, keep them at arm's length.

## **6 — The Fruit It Produces**

Forgiveness costs something, but I can tell you — and Scripture backs this up — what it produces is worth far more than what it costs.

### ***Freedom.***

Unforgiveness is a prison you build with your own hands, and forgiveness is the key that was sitting in your pocket the whole time. I've watched people be absolutely astonished at how much lighter they feel the moment they finally release a debt they'd been dragging around for years.

### ***Restored closeness with God.***

Unforgiveness is one of the most common things I see standing between a person and their prayer life. Jesus said it directly: *"And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses"* (Mk 11:25). Forgiving removes the obstacle. It's not that God is withholding His love from you as punishment — it's that a heart holding tight to an offense isn't in a position to receive what it refuses to give away.

### ***Relief in your body, not just your mind.***

So many people carry unforgiveness physically — in their sleep, their shoulders, their stomach, their chronic stress. When the release is real, the peace that follows is often something you can actually feel, not just something you understand intellectually.

### ***You stop passing it down.***

People who learn to forgive stop handing the offense on to the next person — their kids, their next relationship, the next generation. Forgiveness is how cycles get broken instead of repeated.

### ***It becomes your testimony.***

Forgiveness is some of the most visible evidence that the Gospel has actually taken root in a person's life. It's nearly impossible to fake, and it's impossible to produce in your own strength, which is exactly why it's such a convincing fruit of the Spirit at work in you.

## 7 — A Closing Word

Don't try to forgive everybody for everything in one sitting — that's a good way to get overwhelmed and give up. Instead, think of one specific offense right now, the one that came to mind while you were reading this, and walk it through the steps above. Forgiveness practiced one debt at a time, concretely, is a whole lot more sustainable than forgiveness treated as some vague spiritual ideal you're supposed to feel someday.

If it helps, here's a simple prayer of release you can pray right now, filling in the blanks with your own situation:

"Father, I bring before You the debt I've been holding against \_\_\_\_\_. I acknowledge what it cost me: \_\_\_\_\_. I choose, right now, as an act of my will, to release this debt into Your hands. I will not collect on it through bitterness, silence, or rehearsing it in my mind. I ask You to bless \_\_\_\_\_, and I ask You to free my own heart from anything this offense has been holding shut. And where I need to choose this again tomorrow, Lord, give me the grace to do it. In Jesus' name, Amen."