

Want a next step? Consider hosting a movie night to watch one of these movies with friends.

You Again
Unbroken

Afterward, discuss what you can learn about forgiveness from the film. Feel free to also share these resources. Forgiving well is one of the most life-impacting skills we can ever acquire and pass on.

Questions?
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Forgiveness

The Key to Living Well & Loving Well
in a Broken, Fallen World



Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Colossians 3:13

A resource prepared by Deb Entsminger

 **navigators**
Train - Develop - Care



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Mystery In the Room of Grace

A distinguished draftsman, engineer, artist and thinker, Leonardo da Vinci is one of the outstanding intellects of history. Just before he started painting The Last Supper, he had a violent quarrel with a fellow painter. Enraged and bitter, Leonardo determined to paint the face of his enemy – the other artist – as the face of Judas and thus take out his revenge by sending this man down in infamy. Judas was one of the first faces he painted and everyone recognized the face of the painter with whom Leonardo had quarreled.

But when Leonardo came to paint the face of Christ, he could make no progress. Something was holding him back, frustrating his best efforts. Eventually he came to the conclusion that the thing checking and frustrating him was that he had painted his enemy as Judas. He decided to paint out the face of Judas and start fresh on the face of Jesus. He did and this time with the success which the ages have acclaimed.

Leonardo experienced the power and genius of grace. He had discovered a universal truth: We cannot simultaneously paint the features of Christ into our life and paint another face with the colors of enmity and hatred.

Where does God stand in relation to the sin done against us when we live in The Room of Grace? He stands with us. He has his arm around us, giving us his perspective on the sin and the one who sinned. He's close enough for us to hear him say, "If you ask my - and I hope you do - you should forgive this person as my Son forgave you. Trust me with this advice and I'll heal you, restore you, and free you with the truth it brings to you."

God stands with us in The Room of Grace because we trusted him. He says, "You believe that I have made you a saint. Now, live as one. My son died to reconcile you. That was my ultimate Gift to you, IT made possible this mysterious power – the gift of forgiveness. Please value it as I do. Forgive those who have sinned against you."

God has given us three gifts beyond explaining. The best gift we can give back to God is our trust. Trust him with the forgiveness issues in your life.



KEY SEVEN: *Seek Reconciliation, Not Just Conflict Resolution*

When we help someone say, "Will you forgive me?" we engage that person in the relationship. Reconciliation belongs to a completely different stratosphere than mere conflict resolution. Most of us want to settle for just fixing the conflict. So we use terms like, "I'm sorry that happened," or "I really made a mistake on that one." When we are willing to say, "Will you forgive me because I did _____?" we create the opportunity for people to forgive us and sometimes even come back into heart relationship with us.

As recreation director at a day care center, John felt like he was the Henry Kissinger of playground diplomacy when he forced two eight year old boys in conflict to apologize to each other. In his most authoritative playground director's voice, John said, "Alright, what happened here?" Not a great question to ask if you want an honest answer. (What would you answer? "Well, sir, I cheated at baseball and called Kevin out when he was safe. Then I hit him in the leg with the baseball bat. Before he had a chance to react I got him in a headlock and was about to gouge his eyes out when you showed up.")

After listening to both their versions, which were oddly different and after hearing a dozen distinct versions from the assembled mob, John recalls, "I knew I would not be able to render a just verdict so I said, "All right. Trevor. I want you to apologize to Kevin. And Kevin, I want you to forgive Trevor. They looked at me as though I had said "kids, I want you to find a mule and take it bowling.' Solitary confinement they could have understood and obeyed. Sweeping the breezeway for a year would have made sense. But apologizing and forgiving? One what basis? Neither was sorry and neither was ready to forgive someone who wasn't sorry.

"But their lack of readiness didn't stop me. I pushed, saying, "I mean it - now!" Trevor mumbled, "I'm sorry" and Kevin muttered, "I forgive you." By forcing them to do something they didn't believe, I caused them to betray themselves. And by forcing a request for insincere forgiveness, I kept these kids from honestly facing what they had done wrong. I kept them both from an opportunity to be made right with the other."

In our anxiousness to fix conflicts, we sometimes push people to say they are sorry. But have you noticed that people don't get fixed or stay fixed when we try to force it? Grace always invites rather than demands reconciliation. An apology may make the issue go away for the present time, but it won't heal the relationship. Remember - that's what forgiveness always seeks. Jesus paid with his life to bring us reconciliation. This is sacred ground.

As the great, great, great, great granddaughter of a pirate I come from a rough background.

Johnny Depp aside, being a pirate was a rough life - and my ancestor passed down an inheritance not of buried treasure but alcoholism, abuse and adultery. To this day, when you play the Ugame with my dad, every childhood memory is a terrible one.

After years of alcoholism and extreme verbal abuse his father was unfaithful and his parents divorced when my dad was sixteen.

My mother's dad was also an alcoholic, repeatedly unfaithful to her mom and after she divorced him, he committed suicide. That happened when my mom was thirteen.

When my parents met they both agreed they'd experienced too much pain from divorce and they agreed never to do that. So they entered into marriage committed to staying married but by the time I was eight they were realizing why so many people divorce. Their marriage was on the rocks!

But God intervened. My dad was invited to a weekend conference where he heard the gospel, accepted Jesus as his Savior and began to follow Him. A month later my mom followed my dad into the kingdom.

Did that ever help their marriage! And they continued on even though there was still a lot of baggage they were carrying and did it ever impact the way they related.

But then eight years ago they met a counselor named John Regier. He'd been a pastor and for twenty years got down on his knees and prayed James 1:5. "Oh Lord, just preaching at your people doesn't seem to help much. Would you please give me wisdom to know how to really help your children?"

After meeting with him there was such a radical change in the way my parents related - I wanted to hear more!

Now John Regier has a video series entitled, "Rekindling Marital Intimacy." As I was looking through the videos I noticed one on bitterness and I passed right over it thinking, "I'm a happy person. I don't need that one."

I was just going to listen to the first message but somehow the tape just happened to be at the start of the bitterness message - I didn't discover this until I was a ways into it so I continued to listen.

On that tape John said, "You know bitterness has taken root in your heart whenever you recall something and feel the pain as if it just happened."

Wait! There were instances in my past that was so true of! For example, it always was painful for me to attend weddings, especially to watch the new bride and groom dance that first dance... did he ever have my attention!

I learned in our culture we really don't understand forgiveness. And yet, living in a broken world with a sin nature inside that's still very much alive and kicking – it is vital we know how to forgive. And what a difference it makes when we do!

So one morning, after getting up at 4 am to see a friend to the airport, I decided to dive in and begin working through John Regier's bitterness worksheets.

First he has you describe the painful memory. Then there is a list of emotional pain words (see the following pages). This list is pure gold! Many of us have limited vocabularies for describing our emotions. Does it ever help to have a list before you! Then he has you circle 3-5 which describe how a certain situation made you feel.

Then you pray through the prayer at the bottom of the page to forgive the person not only for what he did but also for how it made you feel. This is so key!

Ever said "I forgive you" and then struggled afterwards wondering if you'd really done it? This is because forgiveness isn't just a matter of words. And it certainly doesn't come naturally to us to do it!

We need Jesus' help! And we need to realize in every single incident there are two things that must be addressed – what happened and how it made you feel. That's why it's so important for you to take time to identify how something made you feel – so you can forgive the person specifically for this.

I spent the entire day writing down painful memories (it's amazing how many you can accrue in nearly two decades of marriage!), then identifying how they made me feel and then praying to forgive Jim for what he did and how it made me feel. And by six o'clock that night – while I could still remember the memories of what happened – THERE WAS NO MORE PAIN!!!

Things that had brought me pain every single time I'd think of them for sixteen years I could now recall and the pain was completely gone! It was amazing! I felt like a 50 lb weight had been taken off my back!

And you know, I didn't even realize until after it was gone, how much that "weight" had been influencing my relationship with Jim!

In truth, it hasn't just helped my marriage, it's even helped with my son too! And even in relationships with people I work with! I cannot recommend doing this highly enough!

Ready to try it yourself?

You don't need a premade chart – just use a journal or notebook paper and draw your own. Be sure to start with prayer and ask the Lord to bring to mind what He wants you to focus on.

When we forgive the offender, for his or her sake, it prepares the way for the relationship to be restored.

When we allow God to heal us from being sinned against, we get to turn around and help those who have sinned against us to find healing from their sin! How amazing!



KEY SIX: Distinguish Between Forgiving and Trusting Your Offender

As forgiveness prepares the way for the relationship to be restored, it is important to understand that forgiveness does not mean we have to trust the other person yet. This misunderstanding causes many to balk at forgiveness. Because they can't trust the person, they believe they can't forgive him or her. But forgiving the person and trusting the person again are always separate issues. Even if we have forgiven our offender – even if our offender has repented and asked our forgiveness – we will still, in the future, have to deal with the issue of mutual trust. Trustworthiness must be evaluated. Our expectations should be realistic because while trust is easily broke it is recovered very slowly, and sometimes not at all. Forgiveness carries the hope of renewed trust in the offender, but it does not mandate or guarantee it. For example, when sin violates the commitment of marriage, the offender can be and should be forgiven, but the restoration of the trust necessary to re-honor the commitment takes time.



KEY FIVE: Forgive the Offender When They Repent for Their Sake

Forgiving the person before God releases us of judgment, bitterness, and resentment toward our offender. When we forgive, our heart heals and we are ready to forgive the one who hurt us – person to person – for that person's sake.

Whew, doggies! This is one of those incredible times when the benefits of trusting God are visibly and profoundly mysterious and miraculous. Such is the miracle of God's grace in our heart.

Yet to go to another and declare, "I forgive you" before that person repents does nothing for the relationship and robs the offender of the opportunity for his or her own life freeing repentance. God uses repentance to heal sinful hearts. We shouldn't deprive our offender of that gift. Our forgiveness will not free the other person from their offense, nor will it heal our relationship. If it is premature. The one who sinned against us must repent for his or her own sake – to be healed from sin. Upon the other person's repentance, we can forgive.

We forgive our offender with the goal of restoring the relationship not just resolving the conflict. We desire our offender's repentance, not to hold it over him or her, but so we can continue on in a healthy relationship. Their repentance won't heal our heart – that is what happens when we forgive our offender before God. But their repentance will heal our relationship.

We can pursue reconciliation, but we can't force it. We can't demand repentance. As you may remember from chapter eight, repentance requires a heart that trusts God. That's a grace room moment. Our insistence that another repent has no sway in the matter.

Have you ever noticed that Jesus waits for our repentance before he forgives us? Think about it. On the cross he cried out, "Father, forgive them." If that cry was for our sake then everyone gets forgiveness, receives salvation and goes to heaven regardless of their decision of repentance. We know that isn't the case. On the cross Jesus asked the Father to forgive those who had crucified him, for his own sake, that he would not be contaminated by the sin done against him. Jesus on the cross demonstrates key number five. When we repent of our sins against God and ask for his forgiveness, then and only then does he forgive us and reconcile us to himself. When we repent, Jesus grants forgiveness for our sake.

Resolving Bitterness

By John Regier

The hurts we have experienced from individuals or circumstances can wound us and lead to a bitter attitude toward others. Each heart knows its own bitterness. (Proverbs 14:10) All of us have been damaged in one way or another in our past. How we respond to those hurts will determine whether we become bitter or if we have resolved the pain from our past.

Forgiveness is the way God responded to us in our sin. We have been forgiven forever. Those who, by faith, have believed that Jesus died on the cross for their sin have been released from the penalty of their sins: past, present and future. The sin will never be brought against us in the future because Christ paid the penalty. In Matthew 18:23-35, Jesus told the story of a king who had a servant who owed him 10,000 talents (\$2 million). The king demanded the servant be sold along with his wife and children, to pay the debt. The servant pleaded with the king to be patient and said he would pay the entire bill. The king was moved with compassion and forgave the entire debt. That same servant had a friend who owed him 100 denarii (\$20). His friend pleaded for mercy but the servant imprisoned him until the entire debt was paid. The king, hearing what his servant had done, said to him, "I forgave all your debt, shouldn't you have had compassion on your friend and forgiven him?" "So likewise will your heavenly father do to you if from your heart you forgive not your brother's trespasses." Since we have been forgiven by God – we are encouraged to forgive others.

We are encouraged to forgive others as we have been forgiven by God. Bitterness imprisons a person. They have anger toward others or toward the circumstances in their life. An unforgiving person actually damages himself or herself when they hold onto the hurts others have caused them. Conversely, a forgiving attitude toward others frees one from bitterness and resentment, which can easily destroy a person's joy and fulfillment in life.

Paul traces the development of bitterness in Ephesians 4:31. Unresolved bitterness leads to wrath (outbursts of anger), wrath leads to anger (rage, constant state of anger), anger leads to clamor (making a public scene), clamor is followed by slander (derogatory, injurious speech), and slander leads to malice (inner hatred of the heart). Bitterness leads to an attitude that eventually controls us and damages our heart. It also leads to other damaging effects on our life.

Paul warns that bitterness is like a "root". The longer it is allowed to grow, the more difficult it is to get rid of. Hebrews 12:15 states that a root of bitterness left to grow will defile "the many". The majority of people will be negatively influenced by a bitter person and will develop that pattern in their own life. Unresolved bitterness is like a highly contagious disease that has a contaminating and destructive effect on others.

Bitterness is seldom the core issue. Bitterness comes when one has been hurt by another person causing emotional damage. Focusing on their emotional pain leads to bitterness unless the pain is resolved through forgiveness. The emotional damage is the core issue that leads to feelings of hurt and bitterness. Examples: One may be bitter toward one's father for being critical and angry. Bitterness is not the core/root problem – the deeper problem is the emotional pain experienced from the father's anger and criticism toward them. One may be bitter toward one's father for lust, leading to a bitterness toward a husband who is in pornography. If one is to resolve their bitterness, they must identify the root cause of it. 80% of bitterness comes from an emotional source.

Bitterness can be directed toward...



Others for the pain they have caused us, leading to...

Resentment and anger.
Putting up walls to protect ourselves from further pain.
Broken relationships with others.
Revenge against them.



Ourselves for our own failure, leading to...

Negative thoughts of condemnation.
Feelings of despair and worthlessness.
Rejection of oneself.
Suicidal thoughts.



God for events he allowed to occur, leading to...

Resentment and anger toward God.
Feelings of rejection from God.
Inability to be intimate with God.
The questioning of one's relationship with God.
Questioning God's goodness.

There are two kinds of sin people commit: One kind of sin a person can repay and another kind is sin that cannot be paid for. If one steals material possessions from another, they can repay money or replace the stolen item. If someone damages another person emotionally, there is no amount of money that can undo the damage. Proverbs 6:33-35 indicates that if one is morally impure (like committing adultery against one's spouse), there is no amount of money that can pay for that sin. The individual damaged will not accept a ransom, a gift or a bribe. (Proverbs 6:35 AMP) The only solution to resolve adultery and other emotional pain is for a person to forgive the individual who caused the pain. The person must release the other individual from the emotional damage that they caused.

Forgiveness is costly. Forgiveness is substitutional. Forgiveness is one person being willing to release another from the way they were damaged and be willing to pay the emotional pain that another person's actions or words has caused them. When we forgive another person, we are demonstrating the attitude Christ demonstrated when He forgave us. (1 Peter 2:24, Romans 5:6)

Forgiveness is letting God heal our heart that was damaged by others, or by circumstances, and has led to our hurt feelings and bitterness. "Lord, I choose to forgive _____ for _____ causing me to feel _____ and I am willing to pay the emotional pain and consequences that _____ caused me. Jesus, I am struggling with the pain I experienced. What did that do to my heart? _____ What do you want me to do with the pain? _____ How would you heal the pain I experienced? _____"



KEY FOUR: Forgive the Offender for Your Benefit

Forgiveness has an order – we must initiate the vertical transaction with God before we move into the horizontal transaction with others. First, before God, we forgive the offenders for what they've done and the consequences it has reaped in our life. This is between God and us, for our sake.² Then after we've forgiven our offenders before God, we go to our offender and forgive him or her. We'll call that a horizontal transaction. If we don't get this right, if we move toward the person without having been cleansed before God, we risk moving toward our offender in bitterness, resentment, judgment and a spirit of getting even. If we prematurely attempt reconciliation with the offender, we'll bring the residue of unresolved sin into the equation. And everyone can smell it. Trusting becomes harder than pedaling an angry bear uphill on a unicycle.

If we try to go on without forgiving the one who hurt us before God, or if we say, "I'm not going to repent until they repent," we end up in bitterness, anger, resentment, or jealousy. In our unwillingness to forgive before God, we become the issue.

It's helpful to see ourselves lifting sin and all its consequences to God, to see ourselves laying the entire deal in his hands. Does this take trust? You bet it does. That's why we're on the road of Trusting God. In an act of trust, we hand over the responsibility of what to do next to our fully wise, good, trustworthy, and just Lord. We fully acknowledge the wrong done to us, and we place both the act and the consequences into his hands. The whole incident – the facts, thoughts, feelings, judgments, and resulting pain – moves out of our sphere into God's.

How will we know if we've forgiven someone? When we know we can offer that person our love. When forgiveness stays only in our minds and doesn't sink deep into our hearts, it cannot be effective.

Like repentance, forgiveness is a matter of the heart. The act genuinely clears the mind and emotions of sin and all its effects in us. Bill forgave his friends before God long before he hired them to work for him and had that face-to-face meeting. On that day they received his forgiveness. But Bill had experienced the benefits of forgiving them long before they heard him say, "I forgive you."

When we forgive, first vertically and then horizontally, it's like huge cement bags have been lifted off our shoulders. It makes us ready to love again, and that prepares us for the next key.

² Ephesians 4:32



KEY THREE: Tell God What Happened to You

Once we have acknowledged what has happened and how it affected us, we must pour out our hearts to God, telling him everything about what happened to us.

We might think he doesn't want to hear it all, but we would be wrong. We might think, *No way! This is only for emotionally based people. I don't do that stuff.* But we would be very wrong. We might think that we should be past this, and that any rehearsal of the event is akin to wallowing in it, but we would be wrong. We might think that because God already knows these things, he doesn't want to hear them again from us, but we would be wrong.

We can mumble, cry, sigh, get angry, shout, run around the room, howl like a coyote if we need to - but let's not stop short of getting in touch with all the effects and feelings inside us from that person's sin against us. We shouldn't stop until we're sure we've told God everything that happened to us. Everything.

When Bill came to the realization of the power of forgiveness, he forgave his friends for taking off his pants in the stairwell and holding him down. It took him much longer to tell God about the feelings of shame and the pain, about the multiple nights of dreaming of their demise, about his anger, about his self-consciousness about his blaming them for the inability to date girls. But in time he got it all out. We need to do the same.

Resolving bitterness involves...



Releasing the person who has damaged us. We will not bring it up again or hold it against them.



Releasing the pain within our hearts by asking Jesus, "What do you want me to do with the pain that _____ has caused me?" Allowing Jesus to take the pain from our heart that others have caused.



Allowing Jesus to heal our heart from our past pain. "Jesus, how would you heal my heart from what _____ has caused me?"

It takes one to forgive - It takes two to reconcile a relationship. An individual can release a person through forgiveness without the other person acknowledging their sin/failure. One can be free from bitterness even if another person does not admit to doing anything wrong. Reconciliation can only occur when one person admits to their failure and the other person forgives. The relationship is restored and trust rebuilt.

Forgiveness and trust are two separate issues. One may be willing to release another through forgiveness, but may not trust the other person because of past damage experienced. It may take time and further prayer to be able to trust someone who has damaged us. "Jesus, could you prompt me when _____ has resolved his/her issues and you want me to begin the process of trusting him/her again?"

God is able to take the painful experiences of the past and use them to develop a beautiful person. *God never wastes our pain, but uses it to accomplish His greater purpose for our lives.* The example of Joseph (Genesis 37, 39-40, 50:19-21) and Daniel (Daniel 1, 2:46-48) demonstrates how God uses past pain to fulfill His purpose and design for our future.

"Lord, I acknowledge that over the years I have developed resentment and anger toward others who have hurt me. This has caused me to experience inner pain and to build walls between others and myself. It has kept me from being open with them.

Lord, I choose to forgive each individual who has hurt me. I am willing to pay the price for the emotional pain they caused me. I desire to be free to love and be emotionally open with each person who has hurt me. I want to show them kindness, a tender heart and a forgiving spirit (Ephesians 4:32).

Lord, reveal to me those areas of bitterness, resentment and anger within me that have been buried for so long. I want to identify and resolve each one of them. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Emotional Pain Words

By John Regier

Abandoned / Accused / Alone / Angry / Anxious / Apathetic / Ashamed / Attacked / Bad
 Belittled / Bitter / Blamed / Cheap / Controlled / Deceived / Defeated / Defenseless
 Defrauded / Degraded / Destroyed / Devalued / Dirty / Disgusted / Disrespected
 Don't Belong / Dominated / Embarrassed / Empty / Exposed / Failure / Fearful / Foolish
 Frustrated / Hated Hurt / Inadequate / Indecent / Inferior / Insecure / Insensitive to my needs
 Insignificant / Lied to / Lonely / Manipulated / Mindless / Misunderstood / Neglected
 Not cherished / Overwhelmed / Pressure to perform / Rejected / Repulsed / Revenge / Ruined
 Sad / Scared / Secluded / Stressed / Suffocated / Suicidal / Taken advantage of / Torn apart
 Trapped / Trash / Ugly / Unaccepted / Unclean / Unfit / Unfairly treated / Unlovable / Unloved
 Unprotected / Unsafe / Unsympathetic / Unwanted / Wasted / Wicked / Worthless / Wounded
 Wrongly judged / Violated / Vulnerable



KEY TWO: Forgive the Consequences of the Act Done Against You

Often the consequences of the act done against us are worse – sometimes far worse – than the act of sin itself.

This was true for Bill. and it was true for Bruce. One of the most traumatic seasons in his life occurred when several leaders lied to him and then about him to others. He says:

My struggle was not in forgiving these leaders for the dishonesty. I understand how false statements get made. They seem mild compared to the substantial consequence of those lies – the loss of reputation, friends, finances, and some of my dreams. These were much more heart wrenching than the lies themselves. I needed to forgive more than the dishonesty and betrayal.

Only when I got in touch with the impact that the dishonesty had on my life was I able to trust God in forgiving these leaders for the specific things I held against them: the consequences of their sin against me. Without forgiving for the consequences of the lying, I could not experience healing, freedom, and reconciliation. Being free from just the act of sin would've left me bound to the consequences.

In order to understand the effect a sin has had on us, we find it helps to write down the incident and what happened. But we can't stop there. We need to include how the incident impacted our life, to get in touch with how we felt as a result of that event. We need to ask ourselves questions like these: Did I experience shame? Did I become fearful? Did I feel demeaned and devalued? Did anger and resentment begin to grow within me? Did I feel manipulated? Was I shunned? Were there relational effects? Did I lose my marriage, my children, my friends? Did I lose a business or a sum of money? Did I lose my position or leadership role? Has this sin led to a change in my outlook or attitude toward life?

As we allow ourselves to feel the pain of our responses, we begin to understand the consequences of the sin done to us. This is critical. Harboring enables the sin that was committed against us to define us.¹ Remember, unresolved sins are buried alive, including the ones done against us. This hard work prepares us to forgive.

¹ 2 Samuel 13. Examine Absalom's response to the hurt done to his sister by Amnon: "But Absalom did not speak to Amnon either good or bad; for Absalom hated Amnon because he had violated his sister Tamar" (v.22) Then he proceeded to plot and carry out Amnon's death! This offense also set up the heart attitude of Absalom that later issued in his rebellion against his father David.



KEY ONE: Admit Something Happened!

God's provision for our healing always begins with our recognition that someone has sinned against us.

We often skip this first step in forgiveness for a variety of reasons. We may not realize that we have been sinned against. This is often the case when we are sinned against as a child – abused, neglected, demeaned and so on.

Or we may feel we will lose control of the relationship if we say we've been hurt. We think that if we don't admit it, no one will have any control over us – someone more articulate or powerful will not be able to manipulate us into believing we are the guilty party.

Or we may want to deny that we have been hurt. We think, *This shouldn't bother me. I will just go on.* It may feel too fragile to admit we've been hurt. For example, in Bill's developing adolescence he could've determined he was just going to act tough, be macho, and say, "It was nothing. Didn't bother me at all." Fortunately, he admitted the hurt, or forgiveness would never have occurred.

We cannot forgive *until* we admit we have been sinned against. This does not mean we should start searching for all the things we haven't acknowledged were done against us. We're talking about the things we *know* have been done against us that we've chosen to deny. These offenses nag at us, and most will surface automatically. This is an invitation to stop hiding the sin that someone else has done against us. To forgive, we must admit what is already true.

Forgiveness Worksheet

Name the person who hurt you, and describe the painful memory:

Identify how it made you feel:

"Lord, I choose to forgive _____ for _____ causing me to feel _____ and I am willing to pay for the emotional pain and consequences that _____ has caused me. I ask You Lord Jesus, to take back the ground I gave to the enemy through my bitterness and I yield that ground to Your control."

The Most Mysterious Gift of Grace: Forgiveness

By Bill Thrall, Bruce McNichol and John Lynch

Christianity is the only religion whose God bears the scars of evil.
— Os Guinness

Forgiveness breaks down walls, frees hearts, mends countries, restores families, and draws out the best in us. It can turn hatred into tenderness and the desire to destroy into a passion to protect. It is more powerful than any weapon, government, or wealth. Nothing else can bring such profound healing. Forgiveness forms the foundation of our relationship with God and sustains our relationships with each other. When we unleash this gift, by receiving it in humble trust that God can actually free our heart and heal our relationships, then the miraculous can happen. This powerful gift has one purpose: to protect us from the insidious harm that comes from sin done against us.

We need a way home. We've been told to get over the sin done to us, but we can't find our way out of the shadows. We can't seem to let go of our hurt. Then, in the middle of our misery, Jesus taps us on the shoulder and says, "I have something for you that cost me everything to get for you. Here, it's a gift of my grace for you." Written across the gift is one word: forgiveness. The attached card reads: "Take it, apply it, and trust me to make it real. I love you, Jesus."

Forgiveness produces results so far out of our normal experience that it feels mysterious. Forgiveness brings alienated enemies together again. People who hated each other. People who do whatever they can never to see or talk to each other again. People who have pledged to kill each other. People who have killed each other's family members. When people forgive, their hearts are woven together in love. This is mysterious stuff.

A Teenager's Trauma

Near the end of Bill's first semester as a high school freshman, some of his "friends" played a devastating practical joke on him. In between classes they took off his pants in the main stairwell where kids rushed from class to class. They called it "de-pants-ing." They held Bill down long enough for dozens of people to see him naked. He especially remembered the girls walking by. The de-pants-ing didn't last long, maybe less than a minute, but the scars lasted years. When Bill finally got away from his friends, he immediately started crying and ran home. He felt incredible sadness, pain and shame. Even today Bill can vividly remember every single moment of that minute.

Note: This chapter appeared as chapter 9 in the book *True Faced: Trust God and Others With Who You Really Are*, by Bill Thrall, Bruce Nichol and John Lynch, published by NavPress, 2003. This book is unfortunately out of print but I think it gives a tremendous explanation for how to truly forgive - and why John Regier's materials so powerfully work!

Sometime during that semester Bill's family moved to Arizona. Even though he was more than two thousand miles away from those who had hurt him, he couldn't forget what they had done. Now he was angry, and his anger had an immensely profound effect. Bill began to blame that experience for why he didn't know how to get along with girls. He'd lie in bed at night plotting the deaths of his friends. He ever planned how to do it so no one would ever know the culprit.

In his shame, Bill blamed his classmates for who he was becoming. His inability to resolve what they did against him led to a horrible depression. Bill began to connect many of the issues of his developing sexuality to that embarrassing moment.

After high school, Bill became a Christian. He went to a Bible college and learned he needed to forgive these friends. When he forgave them, God truly healed Bill of the pain of that day. That summer he also forgave his offenders face to face. We'll let him tell you about it in his own words:

I had a house painting business in my old hometown and I hired three of these guys to work for me. During lunch one day, we were all sitting under a tree. I said, "You know, guys, I have something really important I want to share with you. I'd live to talk about the time you de-pantsed me."

Jim quickly answered, "That was you? Gosh, that was funny! We must have laughed about that for weeks." The other two guys laughed and all of them went back to their lunch. I just sat there, stunned. This was one of the most traumatic experiences of my life and they'd forgotten to whom they'd even done it!

Sin done against us profoundly affects us. Sometimes it can distort life and cause us to make some incredibly unhealthy judgments. After a while, these guys could tell that this memory was really important to me. Joe, Jim's brother said, "Hey, I'm sorry. We were just having fun. Is there anything we can do?"

Although it was awkward I told them how that day had impacted me. I told them that my best friends should be the ones to protect me from an experience like that - they shouldn't have initiated it. I realized they'd never thought about most of what I was saying. I moved toward these guys in love and forgiveness. I needed to hear them say they were sorry, and when they told me they were, I believed they meant it and I forgave them.

That summer Bill learned some unforgettable things about forgiveness. We'll use his story and a few others to help us understand the keys of forgiveness in their order.