

What Does The Bible Say About Forgiveness?

February 25, 2024

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Matthew 6:14–15 (ESV)

*...and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
Matthew 6:12 (ESV)*

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4:32 (ESV)

1. Why is forgiveness an essential part of the Christian life?

A. Refusing to forgive imprisons us in the past.

B. Refusing to forgive leads to bitterness.

See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; Hebrews 12:15 (ESV)

C. Refusing to forgive gives Satan an open door.

Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Ephesians 4:26–27 (ESV)

...if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs. 2 Corinthians 2:10–11 (ESV)

D. Refusing to forgive may mean we are unforgiven.

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Matthew 6:14–15 (ESV)

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4:32 (ESV)

bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Colossians 3:13 (ESV)

2. What is the background of the letter to Philemon?

3. Who were the people in the greeting?

Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved fellow worker and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Philemon 1–3 (ESV)

Philemon — A wealthy Christian in Colossae

Apphia — Philemon's wife

Archippus — Philemon and Apphia's son.

4. Why do we forgive?

A. Forgiveness is essential for Christian fellowship.

I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, Philemon 4–5 (ESV)

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. John 13:34 (ESV)

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 1 John 4:7 (ESV)

B. Extending forgiveness is essential to Christian growth.

*and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.
Philemon 6 (ESV)*

C. Forgiving those who hurt us is a powerful encouragement to the church.

*For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.
Philemon 7 (ESV)*

5. How can I encourage forgiveness?

A. Don't command someone to forgive. Encourage it to come from their heart.

Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus— Philemon 8–9 (ESV)

B. My repentance encourages forgiveness.

I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) Philemon 10–11 (ESV)

C. An advocate encourages forgiveness.

I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. Philemon 12–14 (ESV)

D. Understanding God's providence encourages forgiveness.

For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, Philemon 15 (ESV)

Conclusion

- Stories of bitterness and revenge are easy to find. Stories of forgiveness and restoration are in short supply. If I am in a place where I need to forgive someone who hurt me, I am not there by chance. I am there to encourage the church and show the love of Jesus to the world by displaying the unexplainable forgiveness I have from Jesus by forgiving someone else.
-

Life Group Questions

1. Have you experienced a difficult Christian relationship? What was the trouble? How did faith in Jesus make a difference regarding forgiveness and reconciliation? How should it have made a difference if it didn't make a difference?
2. In Philemon 4-5, 7, 20, Paul describes the close-knit nature of the church body. Broken relationships affect the rest of the church. Restored relationships encourage the church. How can broken relationships in the church that linger for years affect the church? Do you have a relationship with a Christian brother that God is prompting you to forgive and restore?
3. Why did Paul not command Philemon to forgive? Is there a time when it is appropriate for a church leader to command instead of appeal?
4. **Read Luke 23:33-34.** Does forgiveness always need to be two-way? What should we do when it isn't two-way?
5. **Read Mark 11:25-26; Luke 6:37; Matthew 6:14-15; Colossians 3:12-13.** What are the dire consequences of a Christian withholding forgiveness or avoiding efforts for relational restoration?
6. What should we do when we forgive but the hurt keeps returning?
7. **Read Romans 12:19-20; Matthew 5:43-44.** How should we treat people after they hurt us?
8. **Read Luke 17:3-4.** Is there a time we should stop forgiving?