

***“Matters of the Heart and Soul”***  
***“Forgiveness and unconditional love”***

***The Shema - “Love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul and with all your strength.”***

***Deut. 6:5***

A woman who wants to love the Lord with all her heart, soul and strength will be a woman who has learned in her walk with God how to forgive others easily and love people unconditionally.

If we fully understand all that Jesus did for us at the cross which includes defeating Satan and his power of evil over mankind; restoring the believer to wholeness through the forgiveness of sin and reestablishing relationship again between God and man, then we would be more ready to forgive the ones that offend us here on earth. We would not commonly hold grudges and resist those that ask us for forgiveness, if we could just comprehend all that Jesus did for us through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus. How could we possibly receive that kind of love and forgiveness through God’s great mercy and then withhold mercy from one that sins against us?

Forgiveness is a great gift. It releases the captive , the guilty sinner is set free from the penalty that was due. Forgiveness in it’s giftedness, restores broken relationships and welcomes a fresh start. True forgiveness extends a hand and a promise for some kind of future relationship over time.

Before I go any further, please let me acknowledge that there are offenses committed that may dissolve a relationship forever. I think of offenses that are so shattering like the sin of adultery, abuse, or molestation. If you have been a victim of one of these tragic, demoralizing sins, you may be wise to set boundaries around your life to stay away from your offender. God does not always ask us to turn the other cheek. He will ask us to forgive the offender but He would never ask you to put yourself in harm's way, where you could risk a life threatening attack upon your life. We need to move with wisdom.

In this study, I am referring to the common offenses we commit every day, against one another, not to the tragic sins that are so horrific they change one's life forever. If you are the victim of the former, I suggest you meet with a pastor or women’s director or spiritually filled counselor to walk through the situation with you, to know how to wisely set boundaries that the Lord would want you to have. You may be in a situation where unconditional love is not the answer, it may be that what is needed in your situation is boundaries set, along with the tough love of enforcing those boundaries. If that is you, God will lead you to the next step.

Jesus said, “It is impossible that no offenses would come to our life!” (Luke 17:1)

That being true, we had better learn how to deal with being offended then right? Every single believer is going to be offended by somebody at sometime. Well then church, how should we respond to those offenses?

Learning how to forgive easily is a “tool” you will use in your spiritual walk with God over and over and over again. It is something you learn by doing and this ability to forgive easily will be a benefit to you in multiple ways. If you can grow to be a forgiver by the power of the Holy Spirit, your life will more likely be filled with peace and less likely plagued by the cancers of anxiety, bitterness and anger.

The greatest gift a believer has been given by God is the gift of forgiveness. We came into this world as carnal little sinners, missing the mark of perfection He had ordained from the beginning. Man’s pride overtook him in the garden and Adam and Eve sinned against God, believing they could somehow be like God they tried to deceive God and fell into sin revealing a carnal nature which has been inherited by every human being since that time.

God, wanting to restore relationship with mankind, sent His Son Jesus Christ to be a perfect sacrifice slain for the sins of man, restoring right relationship between God and man. Man’s sins were paid for, they are forgiven, wiped away forever and no requirement from man is imposed except to receive this great gift of forgiveness from the Creator.

All those who acknowledge their sin and need of a Savior, accepting Jesus as that Savior will be cleared of that sinful debt. Sinners are set free, no debt to pay for the sins that were theirs, they are free to enjoy relationship with God now and forever in eternity! What a great gift to be set-free, released from that debt. The peace of God can now rule and reign in our hearts. To be forgiven is the conduit for peace of mind/peace of soul.

The question we need to ask ourselves is, “How can I embrace God’s great gift of forgiveness for my sins and then withhold forgiveness from someone who has sinned against me”? I have enjoyed the freedom of God releasing me of my great debt, how then can I turn and hold the sinner hostage for how they have offended me?

Forgiveness is really an act of the will, not emotions. True love is very much the same. Long lasting love is the act of the will, not all emotion. An act of the will is then a CHOICE.

We can choose to forgive or not forgive. We can choose to forgive the wrong and set the offender free or we can choose not to forgive and keep the offender imprisoned in the soul of our angry heart. We can live this way, but in the end we will reap dire consequences.

Let’s read God’s Word on the subject of forgiveness, it has a lot of positive and powerful things to say on this topic.

How good it is to be forgiven and set free from our past failures!

1. Our God is full of mercy. How does God show us mercy?

a. Micah 7:18, 19 -

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b. Psalm 86:5 -

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c. 1 John 1:9 -

d. Acts 3:19 -

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2. Stephen lost his life following Jesus and being His disciple. He died a martyr's death. Stephen kept his eyes on Jesus, even in the middle of the physical stoning, he looked up at heaven and scripture says he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God! That picture of Jesus before him was the thing that got him through the horrific pain of the stoning that came from his fellow man.

a. What was Stephen's response to those that were throwing stones?

Read about the end of his life. See Acts 7:51-60.

b. As stones were pelting Stephen one after the other, each one with the pain of a deadly blow, he looked to Jesus for strength and ability to serve his Master well in the stoning.

What was Stephen's attitude to those who were beating him to death with stones?

Acts 7:59-60.

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Only a mature man/woman of God filled with the Holy Spirit could have this response during a beating. Somewhere along in his walk with God, Stephen had learned to be a follower of God that forgave easily, acknowledging all the forgiveness God had extended to his own life. Stephen responded differently than most.

c. In the book of Colossians, Paul told us forgiving others is something we MUST do (Col. 3:13), because it is what Christ did for us.

Friends, conflicts don't mend themselves. Others sometimes say, "Just give it some time it will be better." Time may give you a clear head to see the conflict and the resolution, but the offense will stay, until forgiveness is extended, processed and worked through in a healthy way. If you never go through *the process* of forgiveness and release, you have only buried your

offense and the pain will pop up later at another time in another situation, maybe even unrelated to this one.

***Chuck Swindoll said, “You cannot nurture the bitterness plant and at the same time keep it concealed. The bitter root bears bitter fruit and we will wall ourselves into a lonely isolation chamber.”***

3. Let’s first recognize, forgiveness is a choice. When someone offends you, the ball is thrown into your court, you have the option to extend forgiveness, and throw the ball back into their court or keep that ball and store it, bury it, so it’s out of sight to those looking on.

Scripture encourages us to CHOOSE life by extending forgiveness to the ones that offend us.

Let’s see what God says about “life”, peace and blessing that comes through the choice of forgiveness.

Write out Deuteronomy 30:19 below.

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Deuteronomy 30:20 mentions *clinging to the Lord, loving Him and obeying His voice.*

These will all be necessary if you have been offended and are on your way to extend forgiveness. Extending forgiveness to the offender is no easy task. You will need the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to do it right and to make it real. One of your greatest goals should be, to come out of this trial without dishonoring God and free from the ugly cancer of bitterness reigning in your soul. At this fragile time, godly boundaries may need to be set to protect yourself from another assault, but one of your greatest concerns should be to emerge from this trial clean and with a heart that is right side up, free from bitterness and ready to serve God.

Some offenses have lifelong consequences. Forgiveness may be granted but the law of reaping and sowing still operates, often inflicting the ones involved with great pain and loss. Some reaping goes dormant for awhile and then the consequences are revealed down the road, this makes it difficult for the rebel because I think if we reaped from our sin right away, it just might turn us back to the Lord in a more expedient fashion. But, sin is fun for a season and if we don’t see negative consequences quickly, we can continue in our poor choices.

4. How do you confront one that has wronged you?

Does God give us a plan in His Word that would be the best way to go about this? He sure does and if we will follow it we may save ourselves from making things a lot more complicated.

**Turn to Matthew 18:15-17. Read through these verses slowly. Jesus is giving you a process here.**

Your brother/sister has sinned against you.

What do you do first? Well, let's back up a little. I believe before you do anything. You should spend sometime with the Lord seeking Him for answers as to whether this is something you can forgive without even bringing it up to the offender. There are many things that can be taken care of just between you and God.,the one that offended you doesn't even need to know they offended you if the offense is small and isn't ongoing. If we all went to each other for every little thing we did that was offensive, we would be calling each other out all the time. I don't think that would be healthy, but some offenses need some dialog to come to an agreement changes need to be made for all concerned so that there is no further wounding in the future, others can be forgiven and let go right then and there in the presence of the Lord.

If we decide we need to confront for the sake of unity and growth. How do we go about that? Jesus is very clear.

Matthew 18:15-17 is our instruction on how to attempt to bring unity back into play after an offense has occurred.

a. If someone has offended us what are we to do? v.15

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If you do that and he hears you, awesome! You have restored a broken relationship! Forgiveness can be extended and you are on your way to rebuilding trust and starting something new in Jesus name.

b. If he refuses to hear you, what do you do? v.16

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c. If he refuses to listens to you and other counsel, what is your only recourse? v.17

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At this point you treat him as if he is a non-believer. He might not be, you don't really know at this point. You are then called to love him in Jesus name as you would any other non-believer, but you would make decisions assuming he may be a non-believer until his/her fruit shows otherwise.

Right after Jesus gives instruction about how to confront the offender, He gives us a lengthy discourse about the need to forgive. The placing of these scriptures is perfect. Forgiveness once again is a CHOICE, but a hard one to come to.

d. Read Matthew 18:21-25. What speaks to your heart most about the words Jesus shares with us here?

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Are you in the season of settling accounts? Has someone stolen something from you through a broken promise, lie, half-truth? Have they offended you because they did the one you love wrong? They owe you a debt. This debt may never be able to be paid.

*Oh dear believer, we all owed a debt we could never pay.*

Oh gosh, it's hard for me to even say that to the ones hurting with fresh pain and gaping wounds from being assaulted with the sinful acts of selfish men/women, but the truth is we have been forgiven of so much, and if we don't want to end up bitter, old selfish inward women, we *have* to learn this art of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is not for the offender, but a gift for the offended. It releases us from the bondage to the pain. It enables us to shove off the resentment, anger, anxiety, stress that is a weight too heavy to bear and put it all on Jesus as we decide it will not be us that makes them pay, we will resolve to allow God to be God and judge and rule as He sees fit. "Vengeance is mine says the Lord." (Rom. 12:19) We will decide to allow HIM to be Lord in this matter.

e. Joseph's brothers had committed sin, one they could never repay. Out of their jealousy and hatred for their brother Joseph, they left him for dead and then sold him to slaves in the wilderness. They literally threw their flesh and blood away and at the time had no remorse for doing so. Joseph's life would take a turn for the worse and then never be the same. God saw Joseph and his dilemma. He never left Joseph and what his brothers meant for evil, God transformed into good. God blessed Joseph's life in ways he could have never done if he had left him as a shepherd tending his father's sheep. Joseph had been perfectly content in his old life, just serving the Lord, but God interrupted his life with a tragedy, an offense he didn't warrant or invite. It changed everything.

God highly exalted Joseph and his new life in Egypt. One afternoon, the time of reckoning came. Joseph's brothers came to Egypt looking for food for their people. They had no idea Joseph was alive, served time in Egypt as a slave where he was promoted to highest governor in the land at that time whose job it was to take care of all Pharaoh's goods. Joseph's brothers were going to

deal with their brother Joseph, they were going to face their past sin and they had no idea it was time.

It seemed time for reaping what they had sowed years earlier.

What was Joseph's reputation in Egypt? This came to a man who had great pain in his past.  
Genesis 41:38-41, 42

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How did Joseph view God, even though God had allowed Joseph to go through heartache and disappointment as we was sold by his brothers?  
Genesis 41:51 -52

Genesis 39:2, 3, 5, 21, 23

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Joseph seemed to trust God though all things. Even though it's likely Joseph didn't understand for YEARS why God would allow such turmoil in his life at the hand of those he loved, his family - Joseph decided to go with God and treat those who mistreated him in a godly manner. He was willing when they were repentant to restore their broken relationship.

Joseph responded with these things:

- humility
- faith
- promise for future relationship
- a comforting touch
- Kind, affirming speech

All of these are awesome ways to encourage those you forgive that they have promise for a future relationship with you if they turn from their sin and do everything they can to build the bridge of trust with you again. (Once again, there are some sins unfortunately that have lifelong consequences and can destroy relationships forever and this may not be possible)

f. Psalm 15 describes the characteristics of a trustworthy person. These characteristics would be a good “plumbline” to measure a person’s trustworthiness.

List the characteristics you find there. Do those you're trying to build trust with exhibit these characteristics?

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Joseph was willing to forgive a horrific act that his very own blood brothers conspired to do against him. How sad that he had been left to die by the very ones that were supposed to protect him. Joseph lived with eternal perspective. He understood that time was short, eternity was long, death was brief and immortality was endless. His biggest goal was to bring glory to God, even if it was at his own expense or discomfort. What an awesome man of God Joseph was. Awesome!

5. When we forgive, we should go all in! We should not put conditions on our forgiveness! Have you ever wanted to forgive someone, yet you felt for your own protection you needed to put some stipulations on it? I understand that. We feel vulnerable and want to protect ourselves from further harm.

Try this way of thinking. Forgiveness is a gift for the one offended, not so much for the one who offended you. Extending forgiveness to the offender is NOT saying what they did to you was ok or “no bid deal”. It can be a very big deal and still forgiveness can be granted, just like in the example of Joseph. His brothers left him to die, that was a very big deal!

Then, why do we forgive? Forgiveness says, “What you did was wrong and it hurt me bad, but I will not hold you hostage in my heart with unforgiveness and I will not make you pay by treating you with disrespect.” “I will put you in the hands of God and say what you did was wrong, maybe even evil, but I will allow God to be your judge.” “I have decided to release you and move on.” “In time we will see if our relationship can be restored, but either way I refuse to be consumed with bitterness by what has happened to me by your hand.” “I will go on with the joy of the Lord because God is for me!” “Blessed be the name of the Lord”!

And it is done!

Have you ever struggled with forgiving someone believing that somehow forgiving, signified they were ok in doing what they did? What was the outcome?

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What did you learn in the process? \_\_\_\_\_

Let's move on from the season of settling accounts and allow God to fight that battle for us. He is fully capable of doing that. He can fight that battle for you and bring you out with great blessing. Don't worry about the life of the one who continues to live in sin and wreck the lives of those around him/her. God will deal with them. Just trust God, obey Him and walk your walk!

Colossians 3:8 - Rid yourself of these things:

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Hebrews 12:15 - watch out for the "bitter-root", it causes more trouble!

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Here are the top four excuses people use a reason not to forgive!

1. they are not sorry
2. they have not apologized
3. they will offend me again
4. If I forgive - they will go without paying a price.

Let's examine that way of thinking.

Ok, so maybe they are not sorry. Maybe they never will be sorry. Does that mean you will not forgive and then you will have to let unforgiveness destroy your peace, your joy and your sound mind? How does that help? Take the power away from the sin through forgiveness and release it so that God can bring you the gift of peace, joy and an anxiety free life. Forgiveness is for you, remember?

They will offend again. Well, that may very well be true, but you are not a doormat and if it is proven over time that this person cannot keep their promises, or hold to truth then you can adjust your relationship then. You have the ability to control your future decisions based upon the leading of the Holy Spirit.

They will not pay a price. It is not up to us to impose punishment for sin. Allow God to be God. He is so much better at that than we are. We may be too strict or too lenient.

You are successful in God's eyes if you extend forgiveness, it is not the outcome of the conflict that is your responsibility. Let God be sovereign there.

Ephesians 4:30-32. Let's not sadden the Holy Spirit by the way we treat one another. Write down your thoughts about this scripture.

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Some offenses will have consequences. King David carried a heavy consequences because of his sin of adultery with Bathsheba. Their child died and his family was in turmoil ever since. This was part of the direct consequence to his sin.

Offenses like stealing, sexual offenders, gossips, adulterers, murderers etc. all carry heavy penalties. In other cases you might be able to say; “Forgive them for they know not what they do.”

We have the ability to choose life to flow in our hearts again, after an offense ripped through our life and shredded our heart, we may feel like we will never be the same. You are right, you will never be the same but you can be stronger, even better, more mature in Christ because of it. You may even be thankful for it one day, in an odd way the things you learned through the trial will be so valuable to you, you would almost say you would go through it again, to be transformed the way God transform you! May God’s blessings be poured out over you.

Isn’t God good? He takes our pain and suffering and uses it to mature us and make us vessels of honor and pillars of truth. Only God can do that!

6. After forgiveness is granted, we need to love that person unconditionally. Jesus gives us 4 specific directives (actions) we must do to love our enemies.

***Turn to Matthew 5:43-48. Read through these verses thoughtfully and slowly.***

Here in these verses Jesus gives us tools that if done with love and through the power of the Holy Spirit, have the power in them to break the hearts of sinners, convict the prodigal, and humble the prideful and arrogant man/woman.

What are we called to do to those we don’t like.

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ your enemies.
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ bless those who curse us.
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_ to those who hate you.
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_ for those who have used you.
- If we only love those who are lovely to us, then what do we do different than the heathen? (v.47) Anyone can love those that show them love.

Just some thoughts: When we bless our enemies, we refrain from talking negatively about them. We are challenged to help them with their needs. We pray for direction, power of the Holy Spirit to come upon their life, and that the Lord would draw them unto Himself, cleanse them and bless them.

Now, that's the high call of the believer! People don't often do that anymore. We are a small camp of believers, in the midst of an unruly, ever more evil world with unusual godly goals that the world doesn't understand or applaud us for. You and I are different believers and our ways will be different than the world's ways if we are wanting to love the Lord God with all our heart, soul and strength.

The Lord says, "I have set before you life & death, choose life so that you and your descendants may live!" Deut.30:19 -

# FREEDOM!!

Have a blessed week!