

How to Forgive Others



Forgiveness (Part 5)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again, as we draw near to the close of another week. Today I'm going to continue—and complete—the theme that we've been studying this week: Forgiveness.

I've established the following main points.

First of all, the blessedness of forgiveness. In fact, as the Hebrews says the blessednesses of forgiveness. All the beautiful and blessed consequences that flow from being forgiven by God, and included in that as I said, sometimes is actual physical healing.

Second, I pointed out the basis of forgiveness which is the cross. Only through the atoning death of Jesus Christ on our behalf can we claim forgiveness from God. And only through the grace made available to us by His death can we ever truly offer forgiveness to others.

Then, I spoke about the two dimensions of forgiveness represented by the two beams of the cross—vertical and horizontal. The vertical beam representing the forgiveness that all of us need to receive from God, the horizontal beam representing our relationship with our fellow human beings. And that's a two way relationship. We need to be forgiven. We also need to offer forgiveness to others.

And then, I pointed out on the basis of the Lord's prayer and several other passages of the New Testament this vital principal that we can only claim forgiveness from God in the same measure that we forgive other people. In the Lord's prayer, Jesus said, "Forgive us our trespasses, or our debts, as we forgive those who trespass against us." He tied us down to not expecting forgiveness from God in a greater proportion than we forgive others.

And then you remember, we looked at the story—the unforgiving servant—the parable, who was forgiven a tremendous debt of six million dollars but refused to forgive a fellow servant a petty debt of 17 dollars. And we saw three great lessons. First of all, that unforgiveness is wickedness. Secondly, that our failure to forgive provokes God's anger. And thirdly, that our failure to forgive causes God to deliver us to the tormentors.

I pointed out that many, many professing Christians today are in the hands of tormentors. They're undergoing various kinds of torments—the physical torment of arthritis or ulcers or migraines. The mental torment of confusion, fear. Spiritual torment sometimes of accusations of Satan that God hasn't really forgiven them or they're not really saved or they've committed the unforgiveable sin. I've met Christians in so many different kinds of torment. And I've learned by experience and from scripture that many times the reason that they are in the hands of the tormentors is that they have failed to forgive others.

Now when confronted with this requirement that we have to forgive others as we want God to forgive us, I've often heard people say, "I can't forgive." But this arises from a misunderstanding of the nature of forgiveness. Forgiveness is not an emotion; it is a decision. You can't work up the emotion, but you can make the decision. This means that you can forgive if you know how.

And in this closing talk on forgiveness today, I'm going to explain to you simply and practically how to forgive others—what is involved. I'm going to suggest to you six simple steps that you need to take.

Step number one, recognize your need to forgive, be honest with yourself. Don't try to be too religious or too pious. Don't pretend that there are no bad feelings anywhere in your heart. Acknowledge that there are some people you really are bitter against. You really hold resentment against them. And recognize it, don't cover it up. Be willing to name the person.

I'll tell you something I've learned about unforgiveness and resentment. They're usually directed toward the people closest to us. We don't have much problem resenting the man who delivers the mail at our door. He doesn't get close enough. But the people who share the same house with us and perhaps the person who shares the same bed with us, that's where we are so prone to resentment, and bitterness, and unforgiveness. It usually starts very close to us. So recognize your need to forgive. Be willing to name the person or persons whom you need to forgive.

Secondly, submit to God. Don't resist God. You've got to submit to God in two ways. First, you have to submit to God's word. Accept what it teaches. Don't argue with God. God says, "You want me to forgive you? You forgive that other person. I'll forgive you in the same proportion that you forgive the other person." God says, "Remember, the other person only owes you 17 dollars, but you owe me six million." And God leaves you to do a little arithmetic at that point, and to decide for yourself whether it's really worthwhile forgiving that other person 17 dollars. You see, on its lowest level forgiving others is not being tremendously spiritual, it's in light of self interest. Any person who wouldn't forgive 17 dollars for the sake of being six million dollars just isn't good at arithmetic, or else they've got no sense.

So, I'm not asking you to be a tremendous saint. I'm just telling how to take care of your own best interest in this matter of forgiving others.

Thirdly, once you've submitted to God's word and His Spirit, the next thing you have to do is make the right decision. Remember, don't wait for feelings, because your feelings are not fully under your control. But your will is under your control. Forgiveness proceeds from the will, not from the emotions. Will to forgive that person or those persons. Make the decision. "I forgive. I will forgive. I do forgive."

And then, and this is important too, affirm it verbally. Don't just let it be an inner thought that passes through you mind. Say it out loud with your mouth. Say, "Lord, I forgive. I forgive my husband, I forgive my wife, I forgive my mother-in-law, my children, my grandchildren, the pastor, the neighbor, whoever it is Lord I forgive them." And if it doesn't sound right the first time, say it again. Say it louder. Say it over and over. "Lord, I forgive." Saying it with your mouth gives it tremendous power. It makes it stick.

You know, I've sometimes said to people when they've come to me for help, "Listen, you forgive that person out loud in my presence and I'll be your witness." It's almost like a legal ceremony which has to have witnesses. And I've heard many times, a woman sob out, "Lord, I forgive my husband. I forgive my husband." And I say, "Praise God! I'm your witness. Today you've forgiven your husband"—or the husband who needs to forgive his wife—or the children who need to forgive their parents. Whatever direction the forgiveness may be in.

Let me just summarize those first four steps, because they're the basis:

1. Recognize your need to forgive.

2. Submit to God—to His word and what it teaches; to His Spirit as it pleads with you.

3. Make the right decision.

4. Affirm it verbally and if you're rather weak and shaky, find a witness—somebody that will actually hear you make that statement.

Alright, I'm assuming that you've been willing to make those first four steps—to recognize your need, to submit to God, to

make the right decision, and to affirm it verbally. Now, suppose you're tempted, you feel resentment surging back over you, you keep thinking about that particular thing that was so hard and so bitter in your life. What are you going to do? Are you going to forgive again? Well, my advise would be don't do that, because that weakens your first forgiveness. What you need to do when you're tempted to give up the forgiveness, you're tempted to go back to resentment or bitterness is this—just say, "Lord, I have forgiven that person." Put it in the past. Don't do it again. Just state it, it's done. "I have forgiven. It's finished. There's no question. I tore up the I.O.U.'s. I can't get them back. They're scattered to the wind."

And then the sixth thing I suggest you do thereafter is replace the negative by the positive. In other words, every time you begin to think of that person that you had such a problem forgiving, don't dwell on their bad points, don't dwell on all the bad things they've said and done. Thank God for them. Thank God you've forgiven them. Think of anything good about them, and begin to thank God for that and then pray for them. If there's areas in their lives that need adjustment, pray for them. You see, replace the negative by the positive.

Let me just repeat those two steps. After you've done the first four things, the fifth step is don't go back to resentment. Affirm, "Lord, I have forgiven." The sixth step thereafter, replace the negative by the positive. Think well of that person. Pray for them. Ask God to bless them. Every time you do something positive, you make no room for the negative.

Now listen, in closing I'm going to give you just a type of prayer that you can pray when you need to forgive somebody else. I want you to listen carefully, and then if necessary you say, "Amen," at the end. And make it your prayer. This is the prayer:

> "Lord, I acknowledge my need of your forgiveness. I believe you are willing to forgive me for Christ's sake. But I also acknowledge that I need to forgive others. And so by a decision of my will I forgive _____ (and you can put in the name of the person.) I now forgive as I would have you to forgive me. Trusting in Your grace and faithfulness I now affirm that I have forgiven others and you have forgiven me. Thank You, Lord."

Say, "Amen," if that's what you needed to say. Make it your prayer. God bless you.

Our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again next week at this same time, Monday through Friday. Next week I'll be dealing with another helpful theme from God's word.

Radio Program

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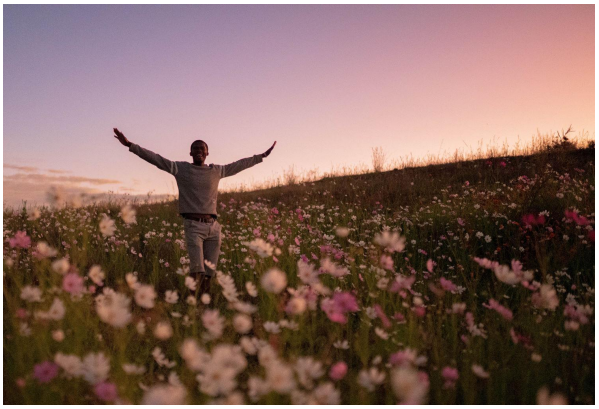

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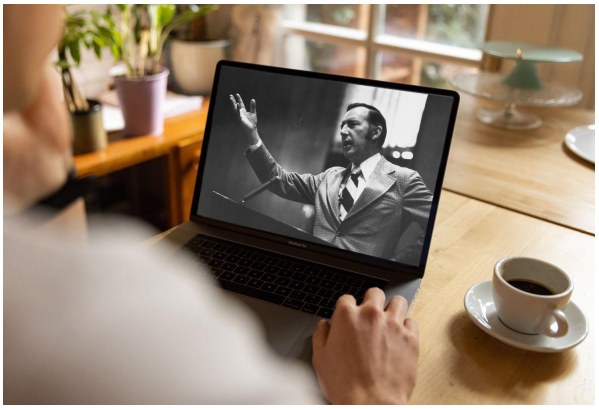

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