



What Does the Bible Say about Forgiveness?

Brent Rinehart



A number of years ago, my childhood best friend and I had a falling out. It started as an issue between our respective parents that boiled over to us. We both said things we shouldn't have, and a once close friendship vanished seemingly overnight. Eventually, we both apologized, forgiveness was granted and the wounds healed. But, the relationship was never the same.

We've all had situations like this. We've hurt someone, or someone has hurt us. It's impossible to have a relationship

between two sinners and forgiveness not be a constant need. Sometimes we are the ones needing forgiveness, and sometimes we are the ones needing to forgive.

Despite its prevalence in our lives, it seems that many of us have a mistaken view of forgiveness and its impact, not only spiritually and emotionally, but also physically. In fact, according to John Hopkins Medicine, forgiveness has a huge impact on your health:

"Whether it's a simple spat with your spouse or long-held resentment toward a family member or friend, unresolved conflict can go deeper than you may realize—it may be affecting your physical health. The good news: Studies have found that the act of forgiveness can reap huge rewards for your health, lowering the risk of heart attack; improving cholesterol levels and sleep; and reducing pain, blood pressure, and levels of anxiety, depression and stress. And research points to an increase in the forgiveness-health connection as you age."

Forgiveness is critical. To gain a better understanding of why, I think it's important to remind ourselves what the Bible has to say about forgiveness:



1. All of us are in need of forgiveness.

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" ([Romans 3:23](#)). From a spiritual perspective, we were all born with a sin problem, eternally separated from God. We'd be lost forever without Him intervening and offering us forgiveness. I often think about how many times I've messed up. Each and every time, God is there with open arms to offer forgiveness. The same is true in my

marriage, particularly in those early years. Yet, every time, my wife offers her forgiveness. It's much easier to extend forgiveness to others when we consider the grace we have been shown. Photo credit: Unsplash-priscilla-du-preez

2. Forgiving others is a prerequisite for our own forgiveness.



Photo credit: Unsplash-steve-halama

“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). This is a difficult verse to process. God stands ready and willing to forgive us, but asks that we extend the same forgiveness to others first. If we have resentment and bitterness in our hearts, it’s time to give it over to God. Let Him heal us and give us the ability to forgive. Our eternity is dependent on it.

3. Lack of forgiveness breaks our fellowship with God.



“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” ([Matthew 5](#): 23-24). The Bible is very clear that harboring bitterness in our hearts is sin. And, if we aren’t actively seeking to kill it, it will break our fellowship with God. We won’t experience everything God has to offer us.

Photo credit: Unsplash-lina-trochez

4. We owe others forgiveness even when they don’t ask for it.



“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother” ([Matthew 18](#): 15). How often do we hold it against someone when they haven’t apologized? When we are wronged, we expect someone to come to us and say, “I’m sorry.” Yes, that is the right thing to do, however, the Bible doesn’t place that requirement on forgiveness. God commands us to be the initiators in the transaction. We should go to our brother or sister and talk it out. It’s not an easy thing to do, but it’s critical in being able to move forward. Photo credit: Unsplash-jake-thacker

5. We owe forgiveness to those who don't deserve it.



“And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep” ([Acts 7](#): 59-60). There are numerous examples that charge us to forgive others, even when they don't deserve it. In addition to this example of Stephen, I think about Jesus on the cross in the midst of his executioners: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” ([Luke 23:34](#)). Every time I find myself having trouble extending forgiveness to someone I've deemed undeserving, I think about how unworthy I am of forgiveness. Yet, God saw fit

to love me and forgive me. When considering the magnitude of that, every situation in my life where I was reluctant to forgive seems trivial.

Photo credit: Unsplash-icons8-team

6. We owe others an unlimited amount of forgiveness.



“Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven” ([Matthew 18](#): 21-22). Forgiving is hard, but doing it over and over again can seem impossible. But, with God, anything is possible. Jesus is clear in this passage that there is no “final straw” that warrants us withholding our forgiveness. God doesn't have a “final straw” for us. To be clear, this doesn't mean allowing others to take advantage of your forgiveness.

God also gave us the ability to be reasonable and make smart choices with our lives. Holding on to resentment only takes our joy, while doing no harm to the other party. We should forgive repeatedly because God commands it and He knows what's best for our lives.

Photo credit: Unsplash-becca-tapert

7. There are consequences for choosing not to forgive.



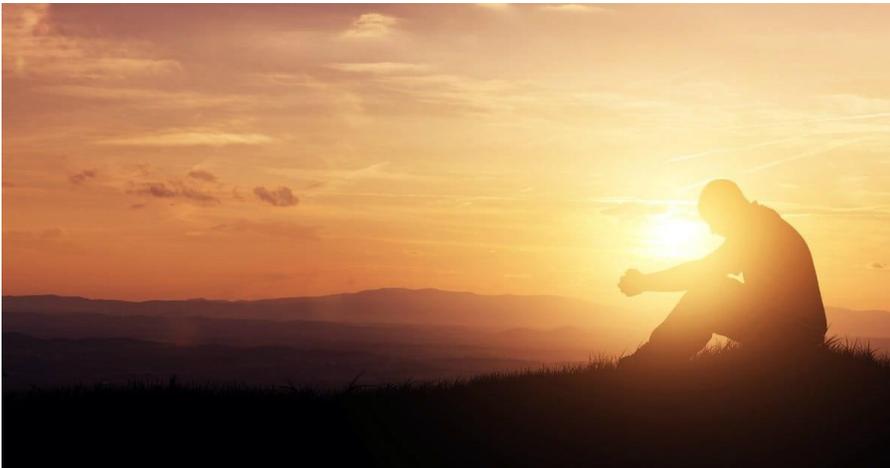
“And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart” ([Matthew 18](#): 34-35). God takes forgiveness seriously, and this parable is proof. If we don’t forgive others, there are consequences – eternal consequences! That’s a scary thing, and it challenges me to evaluate my own heart. “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!” ([Psalm 139:23](#)). If forgiveness is needed, today

is the day to make it right.

Photo credit: Unsplash-caleb-george

8. Jesus, our ultimate example, practiced forgiveness.

“And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw



a stone at her” ([John 8:7](#)). Now, I don’t know what Jesus was writing in the dirt. Maybe it was a list of the Pharisees’ sins. What I do know is this: Jesus calls us to examine our own lives first instead of focusing on the actions of another. It’s easier to forgive others when we have a understanding of our own shortcomings. Jesus forgives the woman, and lovingly encourages her to change her ways: “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more” ([John 8:11](#)). Our challenge is to follow Jesus’s example and do the same.

Photo credit: ©Thinkstock/kevron2001

9. God gives us the ability to forgive others.



“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” ([Ephesians 4:32](#)). Forgiving can be one of the hardest things that God requires of us. But, the good news is He doesn’t command it of us and then leave us to do it on our own. He gives us Jesus as an example. And, He gives us the power, through the Holy Spirit.

Photo credit: Unsplash-ChetanMenaria

10. After forgiveness, comes love – even if forgetting isn’t possible.



“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins” ([1 Peter 4:8](#)). Sometimes things happen in our lives that we just cannot forget, even if we are able to forgive. While we may not be able to erase our memory, we do have control over our actions. We can love those who have wronged us after we forgive them. It’s hard to harbor ill will toward those we actively serve, love and pray for.

Photo credit: ©Thinkstock/monkeybusinessimages

Brent Rinehart is a public relations practitioner and freelance writer. He blogs about the amazing things parenting teaches us about life, work, faith and more at www.apparentstuff.com. You can also follow him on [Twitter](#).

Please understand, you cannot forgive yourself, only God can do that, and he already has done that, through the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Your Lord and Savior.

As you work the 12 steps of Celebrate Recovery, Jesus will take you through a wonderful transformation and a total rebirth and growth, a new heart of flesh and a new spirit will be His gift to you. ***Ezekiel 36: 25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.***

The shame, guilt and sorrow you may be feeling will fade over time, and will no longer have you bound as a slave.