



LESSON ESSENTIALS

FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

LESSON 1: THE FOUNDATIONS OF FORGIVENESS

There is great freedom in extending forgiveness to others, but getting over the first hurdle of letting go of feelings of being justified in your anger is often the hardest part of achieving that freedom.

“I have hated this person and wanted revenge. For three years I planned how I would pay her back, do damage to her where it hurt her most.”

– Female prisoner in Bolivia

Perhaps you have experienced a minor wrong done to you, and with a quick apology from the other person, you easily forgive them. But what about when the wound is great: is it easy to forgive then?

Forgiveness, by definition, is the releasing of negative, resentful, or hurt feelings being held against towards another person or circumstance. To release something means to let it go. What sounds so simple in definition seems most impossible in actual practice.

Perhaps you have experienced a minor wrong done to you, and with a quick apology from the other person, you easily forgive them. But what about when the wound is great: is it easy to forgive then? What if the wrong done to you causes great feelings of negativity and resentment? What if the wound is a great injustice? How easy is it to let go and forgive then?

A woman in Bolivia named Maria (name has been changed) came face to face with just such a wound. Maria is a mother of four children and was falsely accused by some neighbour ladies of a crime she did not commit. As a result, she was arrested and put into prison. Imagine: an innocent woman being torn away from her children to serve a prison sentence that she did not deserve!

How would you feel? Angry? Resentful? Vindictive? Maria felt that way too. She says, "For three years I planned how I would pay her back, do damage to her where it hurt her most."

Was she justified in that anger? Was her revenge justified? Many people would say, 'yes.' And yet, she was not happy. Entertaining those angry thoughts and dreaming up those vengeful plans was not bringing her peace in her soul, or the satisfaction she longed for.

As an opportunity arose to study the Bible while in prison, Maria began to have an understanding of God's Word. The Holy Spirit worked in her and she came to see how she had been forgiven by a gracious and loving Saviour who endured the greatest injustice mankind has ever seen. With that perspective, Maria was able to release her anger and to forgive as she had been forgiven by her heavenly Father.

She says, "Thanks to the Bible study that I have had here with the women and other studies that I have had, the hate and desire to take revenge on these ladies has disappeared. These studies helped me to forget. I felt much better physically, mentally and in my heart. The anger that I had would not let me live in peace. It enabled me to ask for forgiveness from my family and my son. Having been here for six years has been very painful, not just for me but for my whole family."

Hearing Maria's story, many would agree that she had every right to be mad at the injustice done to her. Even though we may understand why she would feel as angry and hateful as she did, it is clear in the Bible that her emotions are not acceptable and are not representative of the grace that she had been given. She was not at peace in her heart as she harboured this hate and revenge. So, she chose the hard road of forgiveness. She chose to see the blessings inherent in her imprisonment. Amazingly, she confesses: "If I have the opportunity to ask for forgiveness from the person who sent me here, I will ask for forgiveness and will say, 'Thank you for sending me to this place.' Because of being here, I have learned to appreciate things that I didn't appreciate before."

What a testimony of the grace of God making a difference in a person's heart and mind! Only the love of Jesus poured out in to a person's heart could make this stark a change in the ability and willingness to release those hard feelings and to freely forgive. And to not only forgive but also to ask for forgiveness for the years of hatred and revenge that she held towards them! This is grace! This is freedom! No amount of prison bars can hold her now. Her spirit is living freely and at peace because of her surrender to the will and prompting of the Holy Spirit.

To be sure, this is a difficult process. As you look at the wrongs done to you, surely you can see areas of life where you are holding on to residual anger and bitterness towards a person or a circumstance. Does that feeling of anger and unforgiveness make you feel good, happy, and free? No matter how justified your anger may seem to be, do you truly believe it is pleasing to God?

Ephesians 1:7-8 tells us that Jesus has redeemed us and has forgiven us through the power of His own blood and sacrifice. This grace has been lavished upon us. Wasn't God justified in His anger towards us? Haven't we sinned against Him in so many ways that He would be completely justified in exercising wrath towards us? And yet, by His great mercy, He extends forgiveness to us through His Son. This forgiveness is not meager. This is lavish grace and forgiveness, overflowing to us for all of our sin for all time. How can we not then do that hard thing of letting go of our resentment and anger and extend that same lavish grace and forgiveness to those who have wronged us?

Understanding the foundations of forgiveness – that we have been lavishly forgiven of our crushing debt – will help us to do the hard work of forgiving others. There is great joy and abounding freedom on the other side of the releasing of hate and revenge. Ask the Lord today to reveal the

Amazingly, she confesses:
"If I have the opportunity to ask for forgiveness from the person who sent me here, I will ask for forgiveness and will say, 'Thank you for sending me to this place.' Because of being here, I have learned to appreciate things that I didn't appreciate before."

As you look at the wrongs done to you, surely you can see areas of life where you are holding on to residual anger and bitterness towards a person or a circumstance. Does that feeling of anger and unforgiveness make you feel good, happy, and free? No matter how justified your anger may seem to be, do you truly believe it is pleasing to God?



residual bitterness in your heart over even the smallest of offenses, and trust Him to forgive you and to free you of it.

IN REVIEW

- No matter how great an injustice has been done to us, and no matter how justified our anger seems to be, unforgiveness is not pleasing to the Lord.
- Because we have been lavishly forgiven by our Heavenly Father, we ought to extend lavish forgiveness to those who have wronged us.
- It is through releasing the anger and revenge in our hearts through forgiveness that we experience the joy in, and the freedom from, the painful circumstances in our lives.

HAVE YOUR SAY

- Think honestly and carefully: are there people in your life towards whom you are harbouring unforgiveness? Is there a circumstance or a person that causes you to feel the weight of anger, revenge, and bitterness? Ask the Lord to reveal this to you, and then turn to Him in humble confession asking Him to forgive you for holding on to the bitterness. If it is appropriate or possible, contact the person that you have not forgiven and extend that grace to them.

- Consider some of the sins you are most grateful that God has forgiven you for! Write them down, and respond in prayer to God thanking Him for His great forgiveness.

- Read [Matthew 18:21-35](#). What do you learn about the importance of forgiveness? How can you take steps to be someone who forgives because God has forgiven you?

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All other content is © 2019 Trans World Radio Canada, and may be used in any way you like as long as you use it with the purpose of reaching the world for Christ and do not charge for the use of the material. See more license details at www.discipleshipessentials.org/licensing.