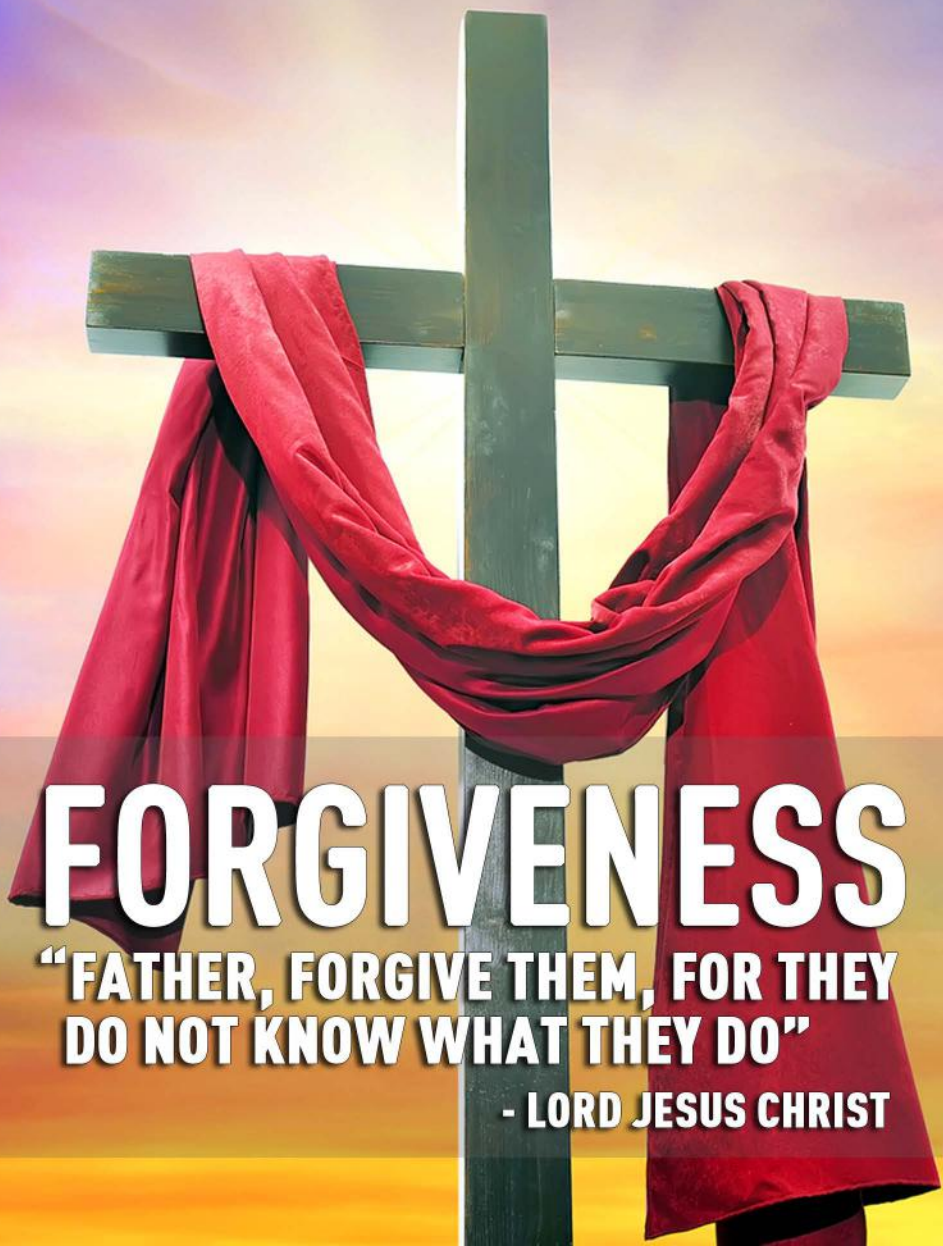


BETHEL AG CHURCH
INTERNATIONAL WORSHIP CENTRE



FORGIVENESS

**"FATHER, FORGIVE THEM, FOR THEY
DO NOT KNOW WHAT THEY DO"**

- LORD JESUS CHRIST

SEVEN SAYINGS OF **LORD JESUS** FROM THE CROSS

With His arms tightly-stretched out and hands torn by nails our Lord Jesus spoke seven statements. Perfection prevailed in the number of statements, in the reasons for using the statements, and in the nature of this Man. He almost never spoke during His trial, or while He was tortured and reviled; but when He hung on the Cross, Lord Jesus spoke out. He spoke out for our sake, for our benefit, and for salvation. His every spoken word had an impact. Even when going through a state of pain and bleeding, He was a giver. Lord Jesus gave forgiveness to His persecutors, gave Paradise to the thief on the right side, gave Mary His beloved disciple John, gave humanity redemption, and gave us security through the act of salvation. In short, Lord Jesus gave everybody what He owed; however, no one gave Him anything. He offered all of these things to humanity though humanity offered Him nothing in return, except gall and vinegar.

First words from the Cross – **FORGIVENESS**

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” (Luke 23:34)

The first words that Lord Jesus spoke after being nailed to the Cross were ones of forgiveness. Even in His deepest agony on the Cross, He did not think about Himself but was preoccupied by the interests of others. Lord Jesus did not think about His sufferings, His pain, His exhaustion, or His wounds. He ignored it all because His love for mankind was greater than His pain. Even though His enemies did not recognize Him as the Messiah, Christ displayed his limitless compassion.

On the Cross, Christ put His own teaching into practise - to *“love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.” (Matthew 5:44)* What good does it do for you when Christ has forgiven His enemies, while you still hate your own or do not pardon them? Know that Christ forgave us, so that we may forgive others and enjoy the bliss of forgiveness.

What is forgiveness?

Forgiveness is willingness to let go of a hurtful past. It is a choice: to no longer find value in hatred or anger. It is when one lets go of the desire to hurt others or themselves because of something that is already in the past. It is the willingness to open our eyes to the light in other people, rather than to judge or condemn them.

The message of forgiveness is so powerful because it is central to the message of the Cross.

The message of
FORGIVENESS
is so powerful
because it is
central to the
message of
the **CROSS**.

So how do I describe Unforgiveness?

Unforgiveness is akin to the saying, "*Bitterness is the poison we drink hoping someone else dies.*" It can be one of the most deceptive and deathly traps of Satan into which we fall. Bitterness is to a heart-wound, what infection is to a flesh-wound. If we do not cleanse the heart-wound through forgiveness, bitterness can quietly set in without us realizing it.

In medical books, 'unforgiveness' is classified as a disease. According to Dr. Steven Standiford - Chief Surgeon, when people refuse to forgive, it makes them sick and continues to keep them sick for a long term.

Are there recognizable signs/symptoms of unforgiveness that we can see in a person?

"Look for bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander and malice"
(Ephesians 4:31-32)

Bitterness always carries something rancid and distasteful. Bitterness always affects how we look, what we say, and what we do.

Wrath means "burning rage, to snort." Euphemisms for someone full of wrath are, 'He lost his cool', or, 'She lost her temper'.

Anger refers to the more subtle and abiding sense of anger. Hidden anger stays long-term and damages its carrier.

Clamor refers to an outcry, shouting, screaming, or 'a cry of strife'. Clamor also refers to an unbridled use of the tongue to verbally tear down the character of someone else.

Slander refers to profane and abusive speech. Slander is to distort the truth in such a way that leads people to believe a lie about someone.

Malice refers to 'wickedness'. It stems from the root word that means: evil, out-working of evil, evil advice. Malice is when we take our bitter attitude and bitter words and put them into action.

Misconceptions about forgiveness

- Some offenses are unforgivable.
 - It takes a long time to forgive.
 - Forgiveness is a process – deeper the wound, longer the time it takes to recover.
- None of the above is completely true because forgiveness is a decision, not a process. When we view forgiveness as a process, our focus remains on the offense and not on forgiveness.

Reasons for unforgiveness

1. **Pride** – We simply don't want to forgive because we believe that in some way, when we forgive the other person, it will diminish us. We are afraid that people will think we are weak.
2. **Control** – This is closely linked to pride. We want to make sure that the person who has wronged us is punished in the way that we choose. We refuse to let go and leave the person in God's hands.
3. **Ignorance** – Some people don't know how to respond to old hurts and painful situations. They have never been taught how to forgive and so they haven't forgiven.

The Consequences of Unforgiveness

1. By harboring unforgiveness, the person experiences emotional bondage. They will find that they have little capacity to love others or to receive love.
2. By embracing unforgiveness, the person experiences damaged relationships. They are likely to have relationships marked by anger and frustrations.
3. Unforgiveness causes people to suffer:
 - They damage their relationship with the Lord - They will feel a deep restlessness and uneasiness in their spirit.
 - They damage their physical being - It will put an overload on the Nervous System and will cause long-standing stress in areas of their bodies.

Our refusal to FORGIVE others dishonours the price Lord Jesus paid for our salvation.

Is forgiveness easy?

C.S Lewis said, *"Everyone thinks forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive."* It certainly seems a lot easier to receive forgiveness than it is to extend it to those who have hurt us. Yet that is exactly what God desires of us. God expects forgiven people to forgive others. He is extremely serious about this, maybe more than any other issue in our lives.

How many times should I forgive someone?

Peter was the first one to ask this question in **Matthew 18:21**. He thought perhaps seven times would be gracious enough. But his jaws must have dropped when Lord Jesus set the bar at 490 times. In essence, Lord Jesus said there is no limit to how many times you forgive.

Lord Jesus then used a parable to make His point (**Matthew 18:23-35 – Parable of the unmerciful servant**)

A wealthy ruler decided to settle accounts with those who owed him money. One servant owed him 10,000 talents. The servant pleaded and said, "Please, please give me time. I will pay it back." (Notice he didn't ask for forgiveness; he asked for time.) The ruler's heart was moved with compassion and he forgave the man his debt. (Because he knew that it would be impossible for him to pay back such a huge amount even if time was given for him). The forgiven man went and found someone who owed him money. The debt this time was 100 denarii. The servant begged for an opportunity to repay the loan. (Please note that paying off 100 denarii was doable in a matter of few years compared to 10,000 talents) But unfortunately, the forgiven man refused to forgive and threw his debtor into prison. When the wealthy ruler heard about this action, he declared him to be a 'wicked slave' and turned him over to be 'tortured'. The torture was to continue until the entire debt was repaid.

After He finished the parable, Lord Jesus made a shocking statement in **Matthew 18:35**. "So shall my Heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart." God in Heaven is so serious for people to forgive others that He will allow us to be tormented when we refuse to forgive. The Father simply withholds His protection from us and gives the enemy and his henchmen the legal authority to torment us.

Our refusal to forgive others dishonours the price Lord Jesus paid for our salvation. As a consequence, God will withhold the liberating effect of His salvation in our daily lives.

Is the measure that we use to forgive others, the same measure used when we get forgiveness from others?

After our born-again experience, God links His forgiveness of us with our forgiveness of others. The only part in the Lord's Prayer (**Matthew 6:9-13**) that is reciprocal of our actions is the statement, "And forgive us our debts as we have also forgiven our debtors." Immediately after He gave the model prayer, Lord Jesus said that if we forgive others, our Father will forgive us. But if we do not forgive others, He will not forgive us.

We find that **Mark 11:25-26** teaches the same truth. "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions."

Does it mean, 'if I do not forgive, I cannot go to heaven'?

No. The parable of the unmerciful servant definitely does not intend to convey this meaning. Lord Jesus does not use this parable to refer to what the theologians call 'salvation forgiveness'. (Salvation forgiveness can't be earned – it is a gift from God, to all who believe in Lord Jesus and His work on the Cross, as full payment for their sins.) Instead, He refers to the flow of God's pardon in our lives on Earth.

1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness".

Reasons to forgive

"Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled."

Hebrews 12:14-15

1. We owe it to God. He forgave us our debts way beyond our ability to pay. Any debt owed to us is minuscule in comparison. We honor Him by having an attitude of forgiveness.

2. We find peace and relief from the torment that accompanies unforgiveness.

3. We validate the reality of the Gospel in our lives so that others can find the forgiveness God has for them – Forgiven people must forgive others.

If you cut the Gospel anywhere, it bleeds forgiveness. Forgiveness of sins is the very reason Jesus came. It is interesting to note that God wanted to forgive us a lot more than we wanted to be forgiven.

In Luke 24:46-49, "Thus it is written, that Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead on the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem..."

Ephesians 1:7-8, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us."

Colossians 1:13-14, "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

7 Protocols to forgiveness

Forgiveness is a decision, not a process. Forgiveness sometimes feels more like a process than a decision because we often have to forgive a series of wounds. What feels like a process to someone is simply a series of decisions they must make regarding another person's actions against them.

James 5:16, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."

1. Thank God for forgiving you.

2. Ask God, "Who do I need to forgive and for what?"

3. Repent of your sin of unforgiveness.

4. Forgive each offense from your heart specifically.

Lord, I choose to forgive _____ (person), from my heart, for _____ (their action that offended you) and I declare before God, that I am free from all unforgiveness against this person. In Jesus' name! Amen

5. Seal it with a blessing. Speak blessings over the lives of those who wounded you. It seals the forgiveness and proves that you are free.

6. Commit to 'not remember' the offense. The enemy of God loves to remind us of our forgiven wounds, but remind the enemy that you have already been forgiven.

When the old memory comes...

a. Say, "I specifically remember forgiving that."

b. Bless the person you forgave - again.

7. Allow the Holy Spirit to heal the painful wounds in your heart and to bear His fruits.

Galatians 5:22-23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance against such there is no law."

Ephesians 4:29-32, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

The enemy of God loves to remind us of our painful wounds, but remind the enemy that you have already been **FORGIVEN**.

Is it true that we shouldn't forgive until the other person asks for forgiveness?

Not necessarily. If it is the case and if the one who caused the wound refuses to acknowledge their wrong, the wounded party gets locked in the state of unforgiveness. We need to follow Lord Jesus' model. Lord Jesus forgave the sins of the whole world – but the whole world is not reconciled to God. Why, because Lord Jesus never forces anyone to accept His forgiveness. He never forces anyone to be in a reconciled relationship with Him.

Reconciliation between God and man requires both forgiveness and repentance. Forgiveness is up to God. Repentance is up to us. The same is true between man and man. Unless there is forgiveness and repentance, reconciliation cannot take place. Reconciliation between the offended party and offending party requires both forgiveness and repentance.

FORGIVENESS + REPENTANCE = RECONCILIATION

Not everyone will repent and desire reconciliation. There are people in our lives who have hurt us deeply, whom we have forgiven, but they have not changed the way they think about their offenses. They have not repented for the wounds that they have inflicted on us. We are not reconciled. Do we desire reconciliation? Yes absolutely, but with wisdom.

Reconciliation is not safe when the offender does not agree that their actions were wrong, and especially when they are likely to repeat the offense. Particularly in cases of physical and emotional abuse, it may not be safe for the wounded person to be alone with the offender. When we forgive someone, it does not give them the right to hurt us again. Wisdom calls on us to protect our hearts from further wounds. Yet, through forgiveness, we do not think the same way about what happened. We now view what happened through the lens of the Cross.

If I forgive everything, how does justice get served?

Ultimate justice was satisfied on the Cross and God is the judge who is ultimately responsible to carry out all appropriate justice.

Forgiveness releases the offender from the personal and emotional offense against the wronged person. However, if a crime has been committed, the offender has broken the law of the land and forgiveness does not supersede the law of the state. We must submit to the expressions of justice of the land and also to the final justice of our Lord.

***Romans 12:17-19**, "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord."*

I know God forgave me, but I can't forgive myself. What to do?

We ought to forgive ourselves; it is not an option, rather a command. We must completely forgive ourselves by accepting God's forgiveness of all our past sins and failures. Just like we forgive others totally, we must forgive our self.

***Philippians 3:13-14**, "One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."*

Moses, David, Jonah, Peter, and Paul had one thing in common - all these men in the Bible had to forgive themselves before they could move into the ministry that God had planned for them. It's time for you to follow their example.

God will take the wasted years and restore them to good. It is just as Joel promised: *"I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten"* (**Joel 2:25**). That is exactly what God wants of you and me. In the end, let the past be past.

Book References:

Total forgiveness by R.T Kendall

The Bait of Satan by John Bevere

Experiencing Forgiveness by Charles F Stanley

Forgiving Forward by Bruce Hebel & Toni Hebel

Life's healing choices by John Baker, Rick Warren

Let it Go: Forgive So You Can Be Forgiven by Bishop T.D Jakes

If you have any further questions, please email us at info@bethelag.in or walk into the church office for any counselling regarding this issue.