



SERIES: DEEPER LIFE

The Bridge of Forgiveness

Life Reference: Matthew 18:21-35

Focus Verse:

Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye (Colossians 3:13).

Have you ever watched a parent intervene in a childish squabble, perhaps a push, a hit, or an unkind word? Mom pulls the offender aside and with a stern voice admonishes, "Say you're sorry." The reluctant words come out mumbled, head down, toe digging into the ground. The other child mumbles a quick "okay" as things are uneasily patched up.



Why is it so difficult to say those words, "I'm sorry. Forgive me." Perhaps just as difficult to say is a sincere, "I forgive you." None of us goes through life without at some point being on both sides of the situation. Sometimes we are the one hurt; other times we are the offender. Hurts and wrongs alter relationships, sometimes forever, unless we learn how to build a bridge of forgiveness to the other person.



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Life Reflection:

Do you find it difficult to say, "I'm sorry. Forgive me"?

Have you found it equally difficult to say, "I forgive you"?

The Bible provides guidelines and examples of how to deal with offenses, even if the other person never acknowledges the wrong.

Realize that you must forgive to truly experience God's forgiveness. We sometimes forget that our being forgiven is dependent upon our willingness to forgive. God's Word tells us this very clearly.

- "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14-15).
- "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32).

The parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:23-35 demonstrates the need to give mercy so that we can receive mercy.

Make the first step, even if you are the wronged party. This seems backwards. Why should the innocent one "give in"? Yet this is what the Lord instructs us to do.

- "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24, NKJV).

Some family feuds have lasted for years, even generations. No one can quite remember what originally caused the quarrel, but neither is anyone willing to make the first step towards resolution. How many friendships have ended because of past hurts and misunderstandings, yet neither party will step forward to begin the



reconciliation. How foolish to let it go unresolved because no one will take the first step.

Life Reflection:

Has there been a time when you were hurt by the words or actions of another, yet that person did not seek your forgiveness?

Did you step forward and seek reconciliation with that person? If so, how were you received?

Do not limit the number of times you are willing to forgive. We become impatient when a person continually offends and hurts. Enough, we think! Peter questioned the Lord: "How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" No doubt Peter thought this a generous amount. After all, the rabbis taught that you only had to forgive three times. Surely seven times was more than generous. But the Lord replied, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:22). Four hundred ninety times!

Forgiveness is not justifying or overlooking a wrong. It is a promise to not keep score, to follow the Lord's example of not remembering the transgression. He forgives and forgets.

- "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins" (Isaiah 43:25).

If we hold onto the memory of the offence, "Remember when you ..." comes so easily to our lips if other problems arise. Like the Lord, we need to forgive and then let the memory go.

When you forgive, you do not seek revenge. When we seek revenge, we want to punish the person who hurt us so he can also feel pain. But even if we think we "got even," we do not end our pain. We only continue the cycle. As Isaac Friedman said, "The sweetest revenge is to forgive."

- "Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing" (I Peter 3:9).



- “Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work” (Proverbs 24:17, 29).

Also read Romans 12:14-21.

Guard that you do not become bitter. Remember as a child how you would fall and skin a knee. Mom always cautioned, “Don’t pick at the scab.” This is sound advice for emotional wounds as well. It is easy to keep hurts open and bleeding. This allows infection—bitterness—to get into your soul. We become reluctant to let the offender off the hook. The longer we harbor these feelings, the deeper the infection grows.

- “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 12:15, NKJV).

Life Reflection:

What are the dangers of not dealing with our wounded emotions?

How do we guard our heart so that we do not develop a bitter spirit?

We cannot pray effectively if we have an unforgiving spirit. How can an unforgiving heart commune with the One who forgives unconditionally? Perhaps we are not even aware of the wrong attitudes that have crept into our heart. That is why we must cry as David, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts” (Psalm 139:23).



- “And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses” (Mark 11:25).
- “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Psalm 66:18).

Life Response:

We have been given the greatest example of forgiveness in Jesus Christ. He was betrayed, lied about, forsaken by those closest to him, denied, spit upon, mocked, beaten, and ridiculed by those crucified with Him. Yet, He was able to say, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” He chose to forgive. We also must make a deliberate choice to forgive those who hurt us.

It has been said that “He who cannot forgive breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass.” All men have need of forgiveness—from God and from each other. Remember, forgiveness is not a feeling or emotion; it is a conscious decision of the will to reconcile to another. Be willing to build of bridge of forgiveness toward reconciliation.

My Prayer:

Father, thank You for providing me with the example of how to forgive. Help me to be as forgiving to those who have hurt me as You were to those who mocked and scorned You. Cleanse me and remove any bitterness or hatred in my heart. I pray You will help me to immediately seek forgiveness when I am the one who has done wrong and accept responsibility for my actions.

More Deeper Life References:

Matthew 18:21-35
Luke 7:14
Romans 12:14-21
Ephesians 1:7
Ephesians 4:32



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I John 1:9
II Corinthians 7:1
I Thessalonians 5:23
I Timothy 6:6

Additional study ideas: What can you learn from the lives of Joseph, David, Stephen, Jesus, and others on forgiveness? How did they handle the wounds and disappointments of life?

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