

Why Forgive?

FORGIVENESS FREES THE FORGIVER

Anyone who has been wronged knows that forgiveness is not easy. However, resentment and bitterness are damaging. If anger is allowed to fester it will spill over into other areas of life, destroying relationships and leading to a path of revenge.

Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. —Hebrews 12:14–15

Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. —1 Peter 3:8–9

“Resentment is like a glass of poison that a man drinks; then he sits down and waits for his enemy to die.”

—Author Unknown

“Forgiveness is unlocking the door to set someone free and realizing you were the prisoner!”

—Author Unknown

FORGIVE SO THAT YOU WILL BE FORGIVEN

If we want to be forgiven ourselves, we must extend that same forgiveness to others, allowing forgiveness to triumph over the desire to extract retribution.

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. —Matthew 6:14–15

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. —Mark 11:25

Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. —Luke 6:37

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment. —James 2:12–13



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HEALING RELATIONSHIPS REQUIRES FORGIVENESS

Often the key to healing relationships begins with forgiveness. God is working in the world to reconcile fallen humans to himself through Christ, and he calls us to be ministers of reconciliation in this broken world.

“Without forgiveness, there’s no future.” —Desmond Tutu, Anglican Archbishop who opposed apartheid (racial segregation) in South Africa

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. —2 Corinthians 5:18–20 (See also Romans 5:6–11)

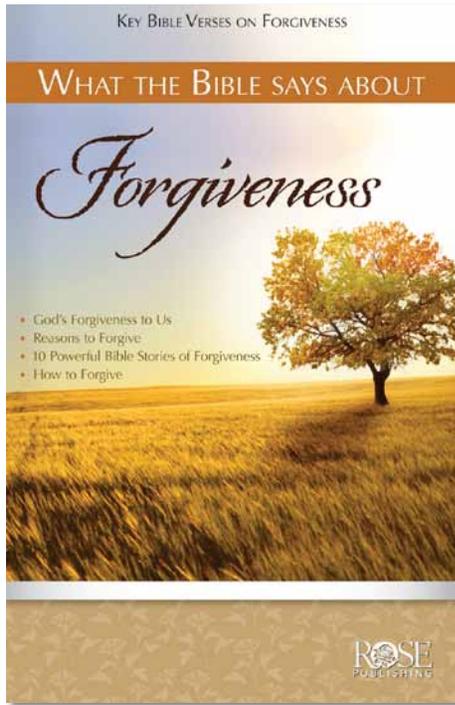
Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. —Colossians 1:21–23a

If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you, to some extent—not to put it too severely. The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. —2 Corinthians 2:5–8

DOES FORGIVENESS MEAN RECONCILIATION?

A common reason people withhold forgiveness is that they think that forgiveness requires immediate and total reconciliation with the offender. People who have been hurt ask: If I forgive, does that mean I have to put myself back in the abusive situation? Must I force myself to be best friends again with the person who wronged me? Am I required to give the betrayer my full trust?

No, forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. Forgiveness involves letting go of vengeance and hatred for being wronged. Reconciliation can be described as “restoration to harmony in relationship.” One person can forgive, but it takes two people to restore a broken relationship. Forgiveness alone neither guarantees nor demands reconciliation. Often much more is needed before reconciliation can (or should) take place, for example: repentance, restitution of the wrong, gaining back trust, or evidence of genuine change. If forgiveness is taken to mean “going back” to the offender as if nothing ever happened, then people will end up only with a cheap imitation of reconciliation, far unlike the genuine harmony in a restored relationship described in Scripture (1 Thess. 5:11; Rom. 12:10).



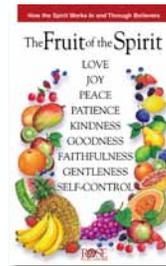
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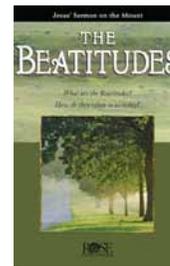
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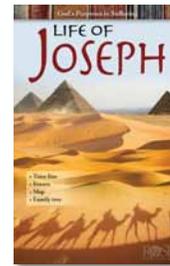
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