

Transform Practices: Forgiveness (Grace)

This week we're looking at how we grow in grace and mercy through the practice of forgiveness. All of us have been hurt by things people have said or done to us. The pain of those scars is real and can be raw. But if unattended to, unforgiveness can leave us living a kind of spiritual half-life, bitter and enslaved from the events of the past. Jesus calls us to follow his example of grace and mercy in forgiving those who have sinned against us, and in doing so, freeing both them and us.

PRACTICE – STEPS TO FORGIVENESS¹

Take some time, either on your own or within your discipleship group or with a trusted friend, to work through the steps and questions below. We often carry more unforgiveness than we realise so it is likely this will not be a one-off exercise.

1	<p>ASK THE HOLY SPIRIT TO REVEAL TO YOU THE PEOPLE YOU NEED TO FORGIVE</p> <p>Write their names in the space below. If someone comes to mind, but you're not sure why, ask the Lord to show you if you are carrying any unforgiveness towards that person and why.</p>
2	<p>ACKNOWLEDGE THE HURT AND THE HATE</p> <p>We often suppress or downplay the hurt that others have caused us. But doing so just avoids dealing with it and allows it to fester and grow.</p> <p>Write down the names of those whom God has brought to your mind again and next to each name, write down what they have done to hurt you and how it has made you feel. Be real about your pain.</p> <p>E.g. <i>Name</i> – They didn't check in with me when my Mum was ill – I feel let down and unvalued.</p>
3	<p>COME TO THE CROSS</p> <p>In Ephesians 4:32, Paul writes, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." The cross is the only hope for our own forgiveness and for being able to forgive others. Forgiveness can often feel unjust and so it is therefore important to remind ourselves of the injustice of Jesus bearing our sin on the cross, yet the grace he has shown us by doing so.</p> <p>Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind your own sin and things you may need to confess to him and repent of. Write them down below. Then bring them to cross and find mercy and forgiveness.</p>
4	<p>ASK GOD FOR HELP</p> <p>Once you have reflected on your own sin and the grace of God in your life, ask the Holy Spirit to help you extend the same grace to those who have hurt you. It may feel impossible but pray that God would help you to see that person / those people as He sees them.</p>

¹ Adapted from 'Forgiving from the heart', The Freedom in Christ Discipleship Course, *Neil T. Anderson and Steve Goss*

5	<p>CHOOSE TO FORGIVE</p> <p>Forgiveness is a decision of the will, not of feelings. If you wait until you feel like doing it, you probably never will. Jesus is very clear that we cannot presume upon God’s forgiveness if we withhold forgiveness from others (see Matt. 6:14-15 and 18:21-35). Therefore, even if we don’t feel like it, we must decide to obey Jesus’ instruction, remembering that it is for our good and leads to life.</p> <p>Go through your list from Step 2, reading aloud the following:</p> <p><i>‘Lord, I choose to forgive (name the person) for (what they did or failed to do) which made me feel (describe your hurt and pain). I release them into Your grace and mercy and ask you to bring me into freedom and healing.’</i></p>
6	<p>IDENTIFY AND GET FREE FROM THE LIES</p> <p>As you pray your prayers of forgiveness take notice of any repeated feelings the hurt and pain caused (E.g. feeling abandoned, stupid, unvalued etc). Write them down below.</p> <p>If there is a pattern of unhealthy feelings, pray that strongholds of wrong thinking will be broken and renounce any lies that you have been believing as a result of the offence against you.</p> <p>E.g. <i>‘I renounce / break the lie that I am abandoned. I announce / claim the truth that God has promised to never leave or forsake me (Heb. 13:5).</i></p>
7	<p>SEEK RECONCILIATION (WHERE APPROPRIATE)</p> <p>In Matthew 5:23-24 Jesus instructs us to seek to be reconciled with those who have something against us. The onus in this passage is on the person who has caused the offence.</p> <p>But you may feel a conviction in the Spirit to seek reconciliation with someone who has hurt you. This would be encouraged if you know that someone’s offence against you has caused a breakdown in relationship with them. In this case, having prayed for their forgiveness, you should go to the person, share their offence with them and its impact on you, and seek reconciliation.</p> <p>However reconciliation doesn’t automatically follow on from forgiveness as it requires the acknowledgement of sin and repentance from the offender. Even if they do this, it may take a long time to rebuild trust with that person, or it may not be appropriate or desired to continue in relationship with that person. In some cases this may be ok.</p> <p>If you’re not sure whether you should seek to be reconciled with someone, seek advice from someone in spiritual leadership in the church.</p>
8	<p>CONTINUE TO PRAY</p> <p>Once you have decided to forgive someone, commit to praying for them regularly. Pray God’s blessing over them, pray for their good. Pray that God would help you to love them as He loves them. As you make a practice of this the Holy Spirit will start to soften your heart towards that person.</p>
9	<p>EXPECT FRUIT FROM FORGIVENESS IN YOU</p> <p>Forgiveness is not about feeling good; it is about being free. However, forgiveness will lead to fruitfulness in your life because you’re walking in Christ’s heart for you. Therefore over time you can expect to grow in joy, peace and freedom. But you will also need to concentrate on renewing your mind and choosing to put off the flesh so that negative ways of thinking are replaced by truth.</p>