

FORGIVING OTHERS

book twenty-eight in the series:

THE OWNER'S MANUAL TO THE NEW YOU

DOUG BRITTON, MFT

Five-day Bible study for individuals, small groups, and churches

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- Day One: Why Forgive?
 - Day Two: Understanding Forgiveness
 - Day Three: Overcome Objections to Forgiving
 - Day Four: Practice Forgiveness
 - Day Five: Review and Test

Forgiving Others: Book twenty-eight in “The Owner’s Manual to the New You”

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The Owner's Manual to the New You

Forty-eight short books

(Each book includes a five-day Bible study and homework)

By Doug Britton, MFT

Twelve books on “Knowing God”

Twelve books on “Developing a Godly Character”

Twelve books on “Enjoying Healthy Relationships”

Twelve books on “Overcoming Personal Problems”

For

Individuals

Small Groups

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The Owner's Manual to the New You

"The Owner's Manual to the New You," published by LifeTree Books, is a series of forty-eight cross-cultural discipleship books by Bible-based Marriage and Family Therapist Doug Britton. LifeTree Books is making these books available free of charge for individual use.

Each book is ideal for a five-day study by small groups, classes, or individuals. Although this is a forty-eight-book series, each book can be studied as a complete book by itself.

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- Book 1: Who is God?
- Book 2: Becoming a Believer
- Book 3: Your Identity in Christ
- Book 4: Quick Overview of the Bible
- Book 5: How to Study the Bible
- Book 6: How to Pray
- Book 7: Key Christian Practices
- Book 8: Successful Christian Living
- Book 9: Living a Joyful Life
- Book 10: Knowing God's Will
- Book 11: Obeying God
- Book 12: Living in God's Power

Developing a Godly Character

- Book 13: Growing in Christ
- Book 14: Changing Your Self-Image
- Book 15: Changing Your Attitudes
- Book 16: Living with Humility
- Book 17: Living with Purpose
- Book 18: Living with Self-Control
- Book 19: Living with Integrity
- Book 20: Growing through Problems
- Book 21: Trusting God
- Book 22: Breaking Free from Our Culture
- Book 23: Handling Money Responsibly
- Book 24: Staying Faithful to God

Enjoying Healthy Relationships

- Book 25: Keys to Healthy Relationships
- Book 26: Making Friends
- Book 27: Showing Grace to Others
- Book 28: Forgiving Others
- Book 29: Serving Others
- Book 30: Resolving Conflicts
- Book 31: Overcoming Peer Pressure
- Book 32: Helping Others with Wisdom
- Book 33: Dating, Marriage, and Sex
- Book 34: Embracing the Body of Christ
- Book 35: Respecting Authority
- Book 36: Sharing Your Faith

Overcoming Personal Problems

- Book 37: Overcoming Your Anger (Part 1)
- Book 38: Overcoming Your Anger (Part 2)
- Book 39: Overcoming Rejection
- Book 40: Overcoming Temptation (Part 1)
- Book 41: Overcoming Temptation (Part 2)
- Book 42: Overcoming Anxiety and Fear
- Book 43: Overcoming Jealousy and Insecurity
- Book 44: Overcoming Self-Sufficiency
- Book 45: Overcoming Guilt and Shame
- Book 46: Overcoming Discouragement
- Book 47: Overcoming Failure
- Book 48: Overcoming the Fear of Death

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Foreword

When I was first asked to write a series of downloadable books for intensive discipleship training, I was excited. Jesus has revolutionized my life, and I am glad to share his truths with you.

The pages you are about to study come straight from God's word. They contain truth that puts our feet on the path to the fullest life possible—truth that sets us free.

As Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

May God speak to your heart as you read, and may he bring his truth alive in your life.

Your brother in Christ,

Doug Britton

P.S. LifeTree Books is offering this downloadable book and all the other books in "The Owner's Manual to the New You" series free of charge. If you find these books helpful, please feel free to spread the news to churches, ministries, and individuals who might benefit from them.

Small Group Leader's Guidelines

Introduction. These studies are for new believers as well as mature Christians. They are for small groups, discipleship classes, mentors, and individuals. They are ideal for studies lasting from sixty to ninety minutes.

Choose the key points, verses, and discussion questions you will talk about. Don't think you need to cover every verse and question. With new believers, go over the main points, key verses, and selected questions. Go into more depth with mature Christians.

Begin and end each study with prayer. Start by asking God to help each person grow from the study. At the end, ask everyone to pray for help to put God's truth into practice.

Review homework. Before starting the current lesson, ask group members to discuss their answers to some of the previous day's homework questions.

Personalize the lesson. Although it's okay to read each lesson word-for-word, the material will "come alive" if you discuss some of the key points in your own words. Share your own experiences and struggles, and how God has helped you.

As you read, identify important points and key parts of verses. Ask group members to circle them, and then explain why you want to emphasize these points.

Get everyone involved. The more people are actively involved, the more they are impacted by what you are studying. Don't ask questions that can be answered by "yes" or "no." For example, don't ask, "Do you have any thoughts about this?" Instead, ask, "How does this insight speak to you?"

Consider breaking up into smaller groups to discuss the questions if you are leading a large group or class.

Use day five for a review and test. Use the questions in day five as a review and/or test. Remove these pages if you do not want group members to see the questions ahead of time.

Want to Learn More?

Free online resources: For more suggestions for small group leaders as well as many online Bible studies on Christianity and daily living (anger, marriage, self-image, finances, and more), visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/small-groups

Small group leader's book: For detailed information on how to lead small groups and overcome typical problems, visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/small-groups.

Day One: Why Forgive?

How do you respond when someone's words or actions wound you? Do you forgive, or do you react with anger, hurt feelings, or similar emotions?

Most of us get mad. We might try to get back at the other person or seek revenge. We might withdraw or feel sorry for ourselves. We might simmer with resentment, thinking we have a right to be angry.

In the coming pages, you will read about a different type of response, one that is written about throughout the Bible—forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a great and sometimes costly gift that can bring healing to your friends, your relationships, and to you personally. But it's not something that comes naturally. It is a choice—sometimes a difficult choice. In today's lesson, you will read why it's important to make this choice.



Discussion questions

1. How do you usually respond when people say or do things that wound you?
2. Why do you think you respond this way?

Forgive...because God says to forgive

There are many reasons to forgive others. The main one is that God commands us to forgive. Since God tells us to forgive, we must forgive.

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Ephesians 4:31-32)

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (Matthew 6:12)

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. (Colossians 3:13)

Discussion question

3. How important do you think it is to God for us to forgive? Explain your answer.

Forgive...because Jesus showed us the way

Jesus was falsely accused, arrested, tortured, and then crucified. As he hung on the cross, he said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). When you are mistreated, remember Jesus' example. Ask God to help you extend forgiveness as Christ did.

Discussion question

4. Have you ever been treated worse than Jesus was? What can we learn from his example?

Forgive...because you have been forgiven

When Jesus died on the cross and then rose from the dead, he took all our sins upon himself and offered us new lives. When we remember how much God has forgiven us, it should motivate us to forgive others.

Discussion question

5. How can remembering God's forgiveness help you forgive others?

Forgive...because God forgives us just as we forgive others

Jesus could have given no stronger message about forgiveness than when he said God will not forgive us if we do not forgive others.

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men 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 him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. (Mark 11:25)

In Matthew 18:23-35, Jesus made the same point when he told a story about the “unmerciful servant.” In this parable, a king canceled a huge debt his servant owed him. The servant then turned around and threw another servant into prison because this man owed him a small sum of money. When the king learned about the first servant's actions, he punished him severely and said:

Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you? (Matthew 18:33)

Discussion question

6. Have you ever been like the unmerciful servant, not forgiving someone although Jesus has forgiven you? Explain your answer.

Forgive...because it brings healing to your relationships

It is inevitable that people—including your best friend, your pastor, your spouse, and your neighbor—will say or do things that wound you from time to time. That's because no one is perfect and everyone is sometimes impolite, selfish, mean, depressed, angry, tempted, or otherwise messed up.

If we don't forgive others' words and actions, we grow bitter or resentful, and our relationships suffer. When we forgive, relationships can heal and grow.

Discussion questions

7. Describe one time that you have seen unforgiveness harm or destroy a relationship.
8. Describe one time you have seen forgiveness heal a relationship.

Forgive...because it strengthens your ministry

God has called each one of us to do “good works”—to make a difference in the world for him. When we harbor bitterness in our hearts, we can't make the difference God intends.

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

Discussion question

- Describe a situation in which unforgiveness could harm your ministry.

Forgive...because it brings healing to you

When you forgive, you may think you are giving up your “right” to be angry. What you really are doing is giving up the “right” to be unhappy.

When you do not forgive, bitterness festers within you, growing and spreading like cancer. As the Bible warns:

See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. (Hebrews 12:15)

You may say, “That person doesn't deserve forgiveness. He would get off too easily.” Or, “I suffered, so now she's going to suffer.” Although your lack of forgiveness may wound other people, it probably hurts you even more. Not only can it hurt your sense of peace and your walk with God, it can affect your physical health.

Forgiveness helps you break free from self-pity and experience God's peace. It puts you in a victorious position and removes you from a victim's position.

Discussion questions

- Describe one time you experienced bitterness and resentment because you did not forgive.
- Now describe a time when you experienced peace because you forgave.

Forgive...because it takes you out of a victim's role

When you forgive someone, you redefine your role with the person who wounded you. Instead of reacting as a weak victim, you are making a godly decision as a follower of Jesus. You see the other person as someone who has a problem—as proven by his or her words and actions—and you are praying for that problem.

Discussion question

- Do you agree that forgiving can take you out of a victim's role? Why or why not?

Do you know Jesus?

This book was written to help believers in Jesus grow in their faith and personal life. You will get the most out of these pages if you know Christ, since it is through his love and power that you can truly change. If you have not yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, let me invite you to accept him as your Savior and Lord. Make this your personal prayer:

Jesus, I believe you are the Son of God, and I need your help. I confess I have sinned and failed you in many ways. I invite you to be my Savior and Lord, and I ask you to help me follow you the rest of my life. Thank you for loving me, forgiving me, and accepting me as your child.

If you prayed this prayer, welcome to the family of God. God has plans for you—to transform you. You have an exciting life ahead of you!

Memory verse

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. (Colossians 3:13)

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5. What are the key reasons to forgive in today's lesson that motivate you? Explain why these reasons motivate you:

6. How does forgiveness bring healing?

7. Write a prayer asking God to help you choose to forgive others:

Day Two: Understanding Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a choice

Many people think forgiveness is an emotion—something you either feel or you don't. But as you will see, that's not what is at the heart of forgiveness. At its heart, forgiveness is an act of the will, a choice.

- It is choosing not to hold an offense against someone.
- It is choosing not to dwell on the offense or continue to rehearse it in your thoughts.
- It is choosing not to keep a record (or keep score).

[Love] is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. (1 Corinthians 13:5)



After we forgive someone, we may continue to struggle with bitterness or anger. However, our emotions often change after we decide to forgive. Although we start by choosing forgiveness, we often end up feeling forgiveness.

Discussion questions

1. Have you thought forgiveness was an emotion? Why or why not?
2. What is an example of something you have done because it was the right thing, even if you didn't feel like doing it?

Forgiveness sometimes is a process

In general, it's best to forgive quickly. However, if someone seriously wounds you—for example, by raping you or physically assaulting you—it may take you a while to make the decision to forgive. If that happens, don't feel guilty for not forgiving right away. God understands your emotions, and he will help you as you go through the healing process. As time goes by, there will come a time when you are ready to forgive.

Likewise, after you forgive someone, you may find yourself slipping back into unforgiveness. If that happens, don't condemn yourself or think you did not forgive in the first place. Sometimes it takes time for severe emotional wounds to heal. Reaffirm your decision to forgive, and ask God to heal the pain in your heart.

Discussion question

3. Describe a time when you found yourself growing in your ability to forgive someone.

Forgiveness does not mean literally “forgetting”

Some people think you have not forgiven unless you have actually forgotten a transgression, but that isn't necessarily true. Although God sometimes removes our memory of offenses, in many cases we remember events for a long time—even if we have forgiven.

Suppose, for example, that someone set your house or apartment on fire last month. Although you forgive the perpetrator, it's unlikely you will forget who set the fire. However, despite your memories, you can change the way you remember the fire and no longer hold it against the other person.

On the other hand, if you tell someone, “I can forgive, but I can't forget,” examine your heart. What you really might be saying is, “I don't forgive you.”

Discussion question

4. If we can't literally forget, does that mean we have not forgiven? Why or why not?

Forgiveness does not mean you should ignore problems

There's no need to point out everything that bothers you about someone else. Many times the wisest and most loving thing you can do is to silently forgive others' words or actions.

A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense. (Proverbs 19:11)

But does this mean you should never talk about problems, make boundaries, or impose consequences? Of course not. You can both forgive and address problems.

For example, if you are raising a child who misbehaves, although you forgive your child, you might also need to discipline him or her. If you have a spouse who continuously forgets to do something, you may need to talk about the problem even though you have forgiven him or her. If you have an employee who continuously breaks company policies, you might fire the employee although you also forgive him or her in your heart.

You will read more about dealing with problems in Day 4.

Discussion question

5. If you say you forgive someone, but you add that you want to talk about the problem, does that mean you haven't really forgiven? Why or why not?

It may be appropriate to gently express your feelings or ask for an apology.

Although it is often appropriate to quietly forgive without saying anything, at other times the wisest and most loving thing to do is to gently speak up. As the Bible says:

Better is open rebuke than hidden love. (Proverbs 27:5)

It's usually more effective to speak gently instead of giving an angry lecture. For example, you could quietly say “that hurt me.”

If an offense is serious, consider following the procedure Jesus described in Matthew 18.

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that “every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” If

he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. (Matthew 18:15-17)

It may be smart to protect yourself or take strong actions.

Forgiving others does not necessarily mean passively letting others harm you. There may be times, such as when someone physically assaults you, when it is appropriate to take legal action. This would be for your self-protection, and it would also be for the other person's good, since it's not healthy for people to abuse others without consequences.

Although Paul taught us to forgive others (Ephesians 4:32) and Colossians 3:13), he didn't hold back from claiming his rights as a Roman citizen when he was about to be flogged.

As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?" (Acts 22:25)

However, there are types of circumstances in which the Bible says not to take legal action. For example, Christians are told not to file lawsuits against one another.

The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? (1 Corinthians 6:7)

You may need to use wisdom in future interactions.

In general, if people wrong you, forgiving them opens the door to reconciliation. It puts the relationship back on a good path. However, forgiving doesn't mean being foolish—even if the other person says, "You're supposed to forgive and forget."

If you loan someone money for food and he or she spends it on gambling, it probably would be foolish to give the same person more money.

Likewise, if someone mistreats you in a significant way, you might not choose to spend a lot of time with him or her. If someone rapes you, after reporting the crime to law enforcement, you would not try to be friends with him or her.

Forgive, but also be shrewd (or wise).

I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. (Matthew 10:16)

Discussion question

6. Is it possible to forgive someone yet still take actions to protect yourself? Explain your answer.

Steps that can help you forgive

Forgiving doesn't come naturally for most of us. The following steps can help you make the sometimes hard choice to forgive.

Ask God to help you forgive.

Some things are hard to forgive. Ask the Lord to help you. Also ask his forgiveness for not forgiving the other person.

Pray for a humble attitude.

If you need to forgive someone else, seek God's help to maintain the right attitude, watching out for self-righteousness. Remember your own failures. Be careful if you think, "Sure I sin, but I would never do what that person did." If you think this, you are assuming that God sees your sins as less serious than that person's. You could be wrong.

Ask God to forgive the person who wounded you.

There's something powerful about praying for people who abused you. A great example of this can be found in the book of Acts. At the end of Chapter 7, Stephen prayed these words as he was being stoned to death:

Lord, do not hold this sin against them. (Acts 7:60)

In other words, Stephen prayed, "Lord, forgive them."

After praying for someone who beat, raped, or otherwise mistreated you, don't think you should make it an ongoing project to pray for him or her. Praying daily for your attackers could keep reawakening the memories in your mind.

Refuse to dwell on what happened to you.

You can control your thoughts. Choose to think about things that are pure and praiseworthy.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. (Philippians 4:8)

Stop talking about your wounds.

In general, once you forgive another person's behavior, do not throw it in his or her face or gossip about it with others. However, if you have trouble dealing with what happened, or you know you have the wrong attitude, it's okay to talk with a mature believer who can pray with you and offer godly counsel.

Don't "take back" your forgiveness.

It's easy to forgive and then have second thoughts. Resist thoughts which tempt you to take your forgiveness back. Instead, walk in the freedom that forgiveness can bring.

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. (Galatians 6:9)

And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right. (2 Thessalonians 3:13)

Discussion question

7. Which of these steps will help you forgive? How will they help?

Memory verse

[Love] is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. (1 Corinthians 13:5)

Day Three: Overcome Objections to Forgiving

In the previous pages you read many reasons to forgive as well as ideas to help you forgive. Yet you still may find it hard to forgive for one of the following reasons. As you read them, ask yourself what Jesus would say about each one. Would he think any of them give you a good reason not to forgive?

“I won’t forgive unless the other person apologizes.”

It’s hard to forgive when someone doesn’t apologize or ask for forgiveness. It’s even harder when the other person says he or she didn’t do anything wrong.

But the Bible doesn’t say we can wait to forgive until we hear, “Please forgive me.” Look at Jesus’ example. His executioners did not apologize or ask for forgiveness, yet he forgave them as he died on the cross.

Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. (Luke 23:34)

Or look at Stephen’s example. His killers never asked his forgiveness, yet as they stoned him to death, he asked God not to hold their sin against them.

Then he [Stephen] fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep. (Acts 7:60)

Since both Jesus and Stephen forgave their executioners even though they did not ask for forgiveness, you too can do the same thing.

Discussion questions

1. Do you think we should forgive someone if that person does not apologize or says he or she didn’t do anything wrong? Explain your answer.
2. What do you think motivated Stephen to say what he did in Acts 7:60?

“I won’t forgive because the other person didn’t apologize correctly.”

If someone says, “I’m sorry if your feelings were hurt,” it can be difficult to grant forgiveness since they don’t seem to understand exactly how they hurt you. Likewise, it can be hard to forgive if the other person says, “I’m sorry you were hurt.” That can sound like a non-apology.

It’s much easier to forgive if someone confesses that what he or she did was wrong and asks forgiveness for that specific thing. However, regardless of how poorly or how well the other person apologizes, you are responsible to forgive.



Discussion question

3. If someone doesn't apologize in what seems like the "right" way, how should you respond?

"I won't forgive because the apology sounds fake."

Have you ever withheld forgiveness because someone's apology seemed insincere? That's a common response. However, it's not your job to judge the sincerity of an apology. The other person's genuineness is between him or her and God. Your only responsibility is to forgive.

Discussion questions

4. Have you ever refused to forgive someone because his or her apology seemed fake? If so, describe the situation.
5. What do you think you should do if someone's apology seems fake?

"I could forgive anything except lying."

We sometimes define our own "unpardonable sin." A common example is, "I could forgive anything except lying. If I can't trust another person, we don't have a real relationship." Living with dishonesty is both difficult and unpleasant, but God's word does not make lying an exception. We are to forgive. (However, in addition to forgiving, it would be good to talk with the other person and ask for honest communication in the future.)

Discussion question

6. Is lying an unpardonable sin? Why or why not?

"I won't keep forgiving if someone keeps doing the same thing."

You may say, "I would be willing to forgive if I saw genuine sorrow and an effort to change, but that person keeps doing the same thing over and over."

When Peter asked Jesus how to respond to someone who repeatedly sins, Jesus said to forgive up to seventy-seven times (or seventy times seven times, depending on the translation). Jesus' point wasn't to count. It was to keep forgiving.

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times" ["seventy times seven" in the King James Bible]. (Matthew 18:21-22)

Discussion questions

7. Explain in your own words what you think Jesus said in Matthew 18:21-22.
8. Have you ever found yourself repeating the same sin over and over again? If so, how can remembering this help you forgive someone else's repeated sins?

“I don't want to excuse the sin.”

Some people think forgiving means saying the other person didn't do anything wrong. That's not the case at all. Forgiving does not mean you are validating the other person's actions, or saying what he or she did was okay. You simply are forgiving.

Discussion question

9. When you forgive someone, are you excusing the sin? Why or why not?

“I want revenge.”

You may have suffered painful wounds and want the other person to suffer, but Jesus said to love your enemies (Matthew 5:44) and to forgive others (Matthew 6:12). Leave vengeance, if any, to God.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:17-21)

Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. (1 Peter 3:9)

You may think that forgiving someone is “unfair” in view of how much you or others have suffered, or that if you forgive someone you are letting him or her get off too easy. Don't worry about it. Instead, put the person into God's hands.

Discussion questions

10. What's wrong with trying to get revenge?
11. Is there someone you need to forgive? If so, how will you go about forgiving him or her?

Memory verse

Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

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Respect Others—Even When They Don't Deserve Respect

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Notes

Homework – Day Three

1. Is it okay to refuse to forgive until the other person apologizes? Why or why not?
2. Is it okay to refuse to forgive because someone did not apologize the right way? Why or why not?
3. Is it okay to refuse to forgive because someone's apology sounds fake?
4. Is it okay to refuse to forgive because the other person keeps repeating the offense? Why or why not?

Day Four: Practice Forgiveness

In today's lesson you will have the chance to practice forgiving someone. Before you read further, take a moment to think of someone you have not forgiven for hurting or disappointing you.

If you have trouble thinking of someone, ask yourself the following questions. If you answer "yes" to any of them, it's a sign you may need to forgive this person.

- Do you feel anger, resentment, or bitterness toward someone?
- Do you think a lot about what someone did to you?
- Do you talk with others about the ways someone mistreated you?
- Are you upset at what someone else gets away with?
- Do you hope bad things will happen to someone?
- Do you feel sorry for yourself?



Discussion question

1. Have you identified someone you need to forgive? Are you willing to put forgiveness into practice and forgive this person?

Decide to forgive

Remember that forgiveness is a decision. If you have trouble making this decision, prayerfully review Day 1, "Why Forgive?"

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32)

Forgive quickly

Forgive as soon as you can. When you hold on to an offense, you give it life and strength, making it harder to forgive in the long run.

However, if something terrible was done to you, don't feel guilty if you have trouble forgiving right away. God understands your pain and anger. As time goes on, ask God to help you forgive.

Discussion question

2. Why is it a good idea to forgive quickly?

Sometimes forgive silently

Many times it is gracious to forgive silently. There's no need to make a comment every time someone forgets to pick up dirty clothes, is late, or runs out of gas. If you were to point it out every time others disappoint or hurt you, you could come across as being judgmental or obnoxious.

Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs. (Proverbs 10:12)

A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult. (Proverbs 12:16)

A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense. (Proverbs 19:11)

Discussion question

3. Describe some times it might be wise to forgive silently.

Sometimes talk about your feelings or frustration

Although at times it is wise to silently forgive, sometimes it is wise to talk about your feelings. The following guidelines will help you decide whether or not to bring something up as well as help you have good conversations.

Decide whether or not to say something.

How can you know when to talk and when to be quiet? Although the Bible says there are times when we should remain silent, it also says there are times we should talk. Friends should be able to help each other as long as neither one becomes a nag.

Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses. (Proverbs 27:5-6)

It can be hard to know which principle to follow, whether to bring something up or to remain silent. The following questions will help you decide.

- Is this really my problem, not the other person's?
- How important is this issue to me?
- How important is this issue to God?
- What is my motive—to lovingly help or to wound?
- Has my overall relationship with this person been loving and respectful?
- Do I often give this person negative feedback?
- Have I recently brought up the same problem?
- Is the other person open to discussing tough topics?
- Has the other person previously said "no" to this?
- Should I give grace a chance?

Discussion questions

4. Why is it sometimes important to talk about issues in addition to forgiving?

5. Do you think you need to bring up problems more often? Less often? Explain your answer.

Prepare your heart before you talk.

Spend time in prayer to identify any poison that may be festering in your heart.

Wait to talk until you can talk courteously.

Don't start the conversation if you are too angry to talk gently. Be especially careful if you are tired or sick.

Approach the other person in humility, recognizing your own imperfections.

Remember that you have faults of your own, although they may not be the same ones as the person you are forgiving.

Realize you may be overly sensitive.

Sometimes we allow ourselves to be hurt by imagined wrongs, or we take things much too personally.

Ask yourself if you are partially responsible.

Recognize that your actions may have contributed to someone else's failures. Do not accept the blame for that person's sins, but be willing to examine any role you might have played.

Ask forgiveness for your part.

Oftentimes both persons involved in a problem are at fault. Be sure to ask forgiveness for your part.

Discussion questions

6. Do you ever take time to prepare your heart before talking about problems? Explain your answer.
7. How can you remind yourself to prepare your heart before talking?

Talk courteously.

Paul told us how to approach someone who sins. Instead of attacking the other person, approach him or her gently. For example, you could say, "I felt hurt when you made that joke about me in front of other people."

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. (Galatians 6:1)

If the other person does not respond well, it's often best to drop it, perhaps by saying something such as, "I thought you might like to know how I feel."

Discussion question

8. When you are talking about a problem and you start to get angry, how can you stop yourself, then speak respectfully and courteously instead?

Take protective actions when appropriate

Although you forgive, there are times when it is also wise to take strong actions. You can forgive someone for physical abuse, yet still call the police.

Learn from your mistakes

Sometimes we set ourselves up for problems—often without being aware of what we did. Ask God if there are lessons you can learn for the future. For example:

- Do you treat people poorly, then get offended when they are not nice to you?
- Do you ignore friends, then wonder why they do not reach out to you?
- Do you criticize others a lot, then wonder why people avoid you?

Discussion question

9. Do you sometimes set yourself up for problems? Explain your answer.

Sometimes talk together after forgiving

Once you have forgiven someone, it may be helpful to talk with him or her to better understand one another and to possibly make plans for the future. As you talk, remember that you have forgiven the other person. Talk as a friend, not as someone rubbing salt in a wound.

Discussion questions

10. Does forgiving someone mean never talking about the problem? Why or why not?
11. Imagine you just forgave someone for something. How could you talk about the problem without sounding like you are trying to make him or her feel bad?

Memory verse

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32)

Want to learn more?

Free online Bible study

Conflict Resolution

www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/conflict-resolution

Book by Doug Britton

Talking with Respect and Love (marriage book)

www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/talk-with-respect

Homework – Day Four

1. If someone's words or actions hurt you, why should you prepare your heart before talking with him or her?
2. If you think you were partially responsible for a problem, does that mean you shouldn't talk with the other person about your hurt? Why or why not?
3. Imagine that you were partially responsible for a problem, and that you would like to talk with the other person about his or her part as well your part. Write one or two sentences you could say to get the conversation started:
4. If you are driving a car and someone cuts in front of you, how should you respond? Explain your answer:

Day Five: Answer Key to Test (may be removed by leader)

Note to teachers and small group leaders

Remove this page if you do not want group members to see these answers ahead of time.

True or false

- F 1. The Bible says someone must apologize before you forgive him or her.
- F 2. If you forgive people, you are saying they didn't do anything wrong.
- T 3. Forgiving means not holding something against another person in your heart.
- T 4. Forgiveness is primarily a choice, not an emotion.
- T 5. Forgiveness does not always mean ignoring problems.
- F 6. If you remember how someone wounded you, that means you have not forgiven him or her.
- F 7. If someone's apology sounds fake, you should not forgive him or her.
- F 8. God expects you to take revenge on someone who hurt you.
- F 9. You need to forgive everything except lying.
- F 10. If you forgive someone but then find yourself getting upset about it again, that means you did not forgive in the first place.

Memory verses

- 1. Colossians 3:13

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

- 2. 1 Thessalonians 5:15

Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.



About the Author

Doug Britton, Bible-based Marriage and Family Therapist, has helped hundreds of thousands of people as a therapist, clinical director of a treatment center, seminar speaker, radio co-host, and author of over twenty books that show people how to apply God's truths in their daily lives.

He has also trained pastors, counselors, mentors, and lay leaders in biblical counseling, mentoring, and small group leadership.

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Books

Doug has written Bible-based books on many daily-living topics. Visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore.

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Seminars and retreats

Doug is the founder and president of LifeTree Institute and LifeTree Books. If you would like him or another member of the LifeTree team to speak in your church on any of the above topics, please visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com and click on the "Seminars" link.

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In addition to “The Owner’s Manual to the New You,” Doug Britton has written many more cross-cultural, Bible-based books on leadership, discipleship, and key areas of daily living.

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Living by Grace

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Breaking Free (from Drugs and Alcohol)
Conquering Depression
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Healing Life’s Hurts
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Six Keys to Successful Relationships
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Victory over Grumpiness, Irritation, & Anger
Who Do You Think You Are?

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Making Christ the Cornerstone
Encouraging Your Spouse
Extending Grace to Your Mate
Talking with Respect and Love
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