



Pastor's Note

"Forgiveness and Freedom"

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:24, ESV). To me, those are some of the most powerful words Jesus ever said – especially since He said them while hanging on a cross. Every Lent, we prepare ourselves to again give praise to God for His great work of forgiveness on Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday. And yet, we all know that if we accept Jesus' work of forgiveness, then we also must give that same forgiveness to others. We know that just as Jesus was willing to forgive those who nailed Him to a piece of rough wood and hoisted Him up in the air to die as a spectacle to the jeering crowds, then so must we be willing to forgive those who have hurt us.

But that's not something we can *just do*. Forgiveness is *hard*. Forgiveness is a process. But it is one worth struggling through, for it brings freedom and joy. Below is a twelve-step forgiveness program I have taken from Neil T. Anderson's fantastic book *Victory Over the Darkness*. I hope you will study it this month, and maybe use it in your own life as you work both to accept God's forgiveness for yourself, and to offer that same forgiveness to others.

- 1.) **Ask the Lord to reveal to your mind the people you need to forgive.** We don't always realize we are holding something against a person. Anderson counsels his readers to actually write those names down. The list may be long. It may include the names of close family members, who have the power to hurt us most. It may include yourself. It may include God – we get angry at Him, too. Be thorough.
- 2.) **Acknowledge the hurt and the hate.** Anderson counsels us to be specific about what we are forgiving, and how those things make us feel. If we keep things vague, or if we bury our feelings, we may bypass the possibility of true forgiveness and healing.
- 3.) **Understand the significance of the cross.** This is perhaps the most important step – *for the cross makes forgiveness legally and morally right*. Jesus took upon Himself the sins of the world – including our own sins, and the sins of the people who have hurt us. When we rebel against forgiveness, saying "It's not fair!" – we are right. It's not. But the cross makes it right and just, for Jesus has taken the punishment our enemy deserves – just as He has taken the punishment *we* deserve.
- 4.) **Decide you will bear the burden of each person's sin.** Forgiveness means giving up the right to unleash our anger and hurt upon the other person – that means we will have to bear those burdens ourselves, just as Jesus bore our burdens on the cross
- 5.) **Decide to forgive.** Notice all the steps that have to happen before we do this! And yet, Anderson still calls forgiveness a "crisis of the will." It is a conscious choice to let the other person off the hook, and to be free from our own past. It's not easy; we won't want to do it. But if God commands it, be assured that He enables us to do it!
- 6.) **Take our list before the Lord**, and pray through each entry. This involves being very methodical: "Heavenly Father, I forgive so-and-so for XYZ." As we pray these things, Anderson tells us to linger with each name for a while until every remembered hurt and pain has been specifically released to the Lord, and we begin to feel peace. He specifically tells us to avoid saying things like "I want to forgive so-and-so," or "Help me to forgive so-and-so." Those bypass *our* responsibility to actually forgive!
- 7.) **Destroy the list.** Now we are free in Christ! So to symbolize how we will now stop holding on to the anger and pain, get rid of the list! Shred it, burn it, destroy it!
- 8.) **Do not expect that your decision to forgive will result in major changes in those other persons.** Forgiveness is only one step in reconciliation with others. Reconciliation takes two people – and it may not happen. But even if it doesn't, we can – and must! – forgive. We cannot control what they do – only what we do. We must, however, move from hating to praying for our enemies and finding ways to love them.
- 9.) **Try to understand the people you have forgiven, but don't rationalize their behavior.** Understanding why people do the things they do can help us as we pray for them and love them – but we have to be careful never to excuse away the sins. Forgiving those things does not mean saying they are in any way right or good.
- 10.) **Expect positive results of forgiveness in you.** With time, you will be able to think of that person without anger. That doesn't mean you'll like them – but it will mean that you are free from them.
- 11.) **Thank God for the lessons you have learned, and the maturity you have gained.** We must always give thanks to God for His blessings!
- 12.) **Be sure to accept your part of the blame for the offenses you have suffered.** There may be things we have done to make the situation worse – particularly the way we have expressed our anger. We need to confess those things to God.

I hope this is helpful to you, and that you will use it this season. Please know that I will be praying for you as you seek God's help with this! May He give you strength and grace to accept His powerful mercy, and to extend it to others! To Him alone be the glory!

In Christ's Love, *Joshua*