



FORGIVENESS IS VITAL



PREVIEW

Has someone ever hurt you so deeply that you had trouble forgiving them? You've tried so hard until you think you've achieved complete forgiveness. Then something happens that brings all the hurt and resentment flooding back into your mind.

PRAISE

Does anyone want to share about a time they were forgiven for a wrong they had done? How did it make you feel when that person forgave you?

PARABLE

Have you ever wondered why we have so much trouble forgiving others? Why is it so hard to let go of hurt and bitterness? When someone wrongs us, it's easy to see the "twig" sticking out of their eye (the wrong they have done to us), but we don't notice the huge beam protruding from our own eye (the wrongs we have done to others). (See Matthew 7:3–4.)

Picture this: A child has a small stick they are swinging around. Out of carelessness (and sometimes deliberate jabs), they occasionally hit and cause injury to others. Another person walks into the room carrying a huge beam on their shoulder. This protruding beam can injure others as they turn and move if the other person doesn't see it coming and duck out of the way. Whose piece of wood (sin) do you think will do more damage?

- That "beam" may be a grudge or bitterness or gossip, just to name a few.
- The "stick" could be unkind words.
- Both can hurt, but that beam can cause far more damage than the little stick.

PRESENT

Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21–22). Jesus wasn't saying Peter had to forgive his brother only 490 times. He was reminding Peter that God has forgiven our every sin—more than we can count. These sins nailed Jesus to the cross. Some are worse than others, but all are sin. If God is willing to forgive us of every sin, we need to be willing to forgive others even if they haven't asked to be forgiven

- They may not realize they've done wrong.
- They may be so bound by sin they can't do anything else but follow what has control of them. They are slaves to sin (Romans 6:16–20).
- They may feel justified in their actions.
- They may not realize they are walking in the flesh and not in the Spirit.
- That's why the Bible says to "pray for those who spitefully use you" and "love your enemies," "do good," "bless and curse not." Your prayers can make a difference . . . if not in their life, then in yours.

PRACTICE

If someone does us wrong, we need to release it to God, forgive that person, and love them. Sometimes that's easier said than done, but anger, bitterness, and hurt will only fester in our heart and mind, making us (and others around us) miserable. Unforgiveness will block us from hearing God's voice (Psalm 66:18). If not let go of, unforgiveness can even cost us our soul. Jesus stated this plainly in Matthew 6:14–15 when He instructed the people that if they did not forgive others for the wrongs done against them, neither would He forgive them for their own sins.

Unforgiveness affects more than self; it festers and agitates like a boil. Its pain and poison cause a person to spread gossip and slander and results in a bad attitude. Attitudes are contagious!

Forgiveness releases not just the offender but it also releases you (the offended). Forgiveness displays the mercy and love of God. Forgiveness makes you more Christlike (Luke 23:34a).

PRAY

God, we ask Your forgiveness for our wrongdoing. Give us a heart like Yours so we can forgive others. We repent of any unforgiveness, bitterness, and anger that may be festering in our hearts. Help us to display mercy and love to others just as You have extended mercy and love to us. Create in us a clean heart and renew in us a right spirit (Psalm 51:10). In Jesus' name, amen.



PLUS

Extending forgiveness is not easy, but it is something Christ has commanded each of us to do. This week I want you to think of someone you are having trouble forgiving. It may be a past hurt or it may be more recent. It may be someone at school or work who makes fun of you daily. As difficult as it may be, spend time every day asking God to help you to forgive them. Next, confess with your mouth in prayer, "Lord, I forgive [fill in the name]." Finally, pray for them. (You don't know what they are going through that is causing them to behave that way.) Every time you see a tree, a lumberyard, or a piece of wood, think about the lesson of the stick versus the beam. Choose to lay down your stick, beam, or whatever weight of unforgiveness it is you are carrying. You will find your load will be much lighter as you become more Christlike.