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## Forgiveness Part VII

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### Forgiveness Pursues

**Hosea 2:14-15; Matthew 18: 21-35; Colossians 3:13**

In the last six studies, we looked at three aspects of what forgiveness looks like. We saw, from God's most precious Word, that forgiveness is challenging, because, it demands a surrender of our rights to *get even*. Forgiveness is complete, so that we, as Christians, are released from our personal desire for retribution. Forgiveness is costly, yet, there is no cost we could ever incur that could compare with what we cost Him. When we put forgiveness into practice in our relationships, whether with family, friends, church people, or our coworkers, we refocus our plans for our pain to God's plan, and God's ways. So, our pain becomes relieved, and our life can go on in a better direction. We can live better quality lives by practicing forgiveness. Our relationships can grow. We can become more useful to others, and especially to God. Forgiveness is even worth the agony we may go through, because it will heal wounds and relieve pain. We need not fear forgiveness, or its results, even if it scars us. We can take to heart and realize that scars can be badges of honor to help us grow and mature, and to redirect our wrong path onto the right direction. Now, we can see how forgiveness searches for, and actually goes in pursuit of us, and how we can put it into practical action in our relationships.

We, as Christians, must extend ourselves to other people with love, and that which flows out of love—forgiveness!

Hosea tells us,

Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt. (Hosea 2:14-15, NIV)

There is possibly nothing greater and more dramatic to us, as Christians, in regards to God's character, than His capacity to forgive! Most non-Christians cannot fathom this quality, and do not believe God can, or even should, forgive them. So, they blatantly reject His forgiveness. Other Christians only see a small facet of God's forgiveness, because they refuse to apply it in their lives, and hold onto bitterness and strife as their identity. Or, perhaps they understand it a little, but think, *If someone wants my forgiveness, they have to come to me and seek it. Or, I do not have to do anything, because I am the person who was wronged.* But, these attitudes are wrong and unbiblical. The Bible tells us that the Christian has an obligation to actually pursue forgiveness. Even if we are the ones wronged, it is our duty to go after the person who wronged us--not to retaliate, but to forgive! We have to see why this is important, and from our human point of view, how forgiveness will help end the vicious cycle of revenge and pay back. Even when we cannot or refuse to see His plan! We may think it is not worth it, but God says otherwise. We may think it is unfair, but was it fair for our Lord to go to the cross? This may go against our pride and our culture, but this is what

we are called to do. God expects us to entice forgiveness from the person we offend, or the person who offends us.

I had a run-in with an Elder at a church where I was on staff a few years ago. I took his daughter, along with twenty other youth, to a winter camp. On the way home, the daughter realized she had forgotten her gloves. This Elder was furious with me because she had forgotten her gloves at camp. I apologized to the dad—the Elder—and took responsibility for the gloves. I told him I would contact the camp the first thing in the morning, and arrange to get the gloves back. But, this just seemed to infuriate him even more, and from then on he persisted in a very condescending and mean attitude toward me. Although I took responsibility, I asked him to forgive me, even though I felt I had done nothing wrong. After all, I was responsible for twenty kids, their safety and spiritual growth, and, according to that Elder, all of their articles of clothing, too.

This Elder just would not get it when it came to forgiveness. From his perspective, I did a great wrong toward him since his daughter did not bring back the expensive pair of gloves; therefore, as the leader, I was responsible. Even though we received the gloves in the mail a few days later, he would not forget the incident, and this tarnished not only our relationship, but also my reputation with him and with several other people in the church. He made it a point to let everyone know what a bad youth Pastor I was, because his daughter's gloves were left at camp. Ten of those kids came to know the Lord, including his daughter, and this was one of the best camp experiences I have been a part of; but, the *gloves incident* is what everyone remembers.

Romans, chapter twelve, tells us:

“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.” And the Lord will reward you.” (Romans 12:19-20; Proverbs 25: 21-22 NIV)

This experience gave me the chance to realize, firsthand, what the term, *burning coals*, was all about. The more I was nice and forgiving to this Elder, the more he was insolent and belligerent. In contrast, he had an issue with another pastor at this church, and this pastor decided not to follow Scriptural principles, but rather, the ways of the world. They came to a mutual understanding and respect of one another. So, I wondered if forgiveness was worth it. Then I realized that probably neither of these men knew the Lord, or, at the very least, did not have a growing, effectual relationship with Christ. So, they did not know how to express themselves in a godly way. All they knew was Galatians 5:19-20. Verses 22-23 taught a foreign concept they did not want to pursue or acknowledge. So, I realized, that is why we are to offer forgiveness freely, (as I tried to with that Elder I offended) even when we are not in the wrong. Forgiveness models Christ. People do not like Christ, because He calls us from our complacency and comfort into conviction and growth, where few are attracted or willing to go. So, we have to chase down forgiveness, because, out of our pursuit of forgiveness, we will build better relationships and reconciliation. A few years later, that Elder came around, and actually helped me when my car broke down. (Before that, he was more likely to run me over.)

The typical response from society is, “I could care less,” or, “forget about it (in a cynical tone).” These are expressions of hurt, even though they verbally say otherwise. The *burning coals* will convict them or punish them. Because they do not see the cost that the Lord paid for them, they are unwilling to respond to the gift of Grace. Christ pursues them, and all they have to do is respond to His call. The *world’s* desire is to tell the person off and seek revenge. To observe this, watch the daytime talk shows. We, as Christians, are called to a higher standard—one that builds, edifies, and reconciles!

### **Questions**

1. Do you understand the *why* and *what* of forgiveness?
2. How do you deal with anxiety and disappointments? What can you do to look to Christ for perseverance?
3. How can you prevent sufferings and past experiences from ruling you?
4. How can deepening your walk with Christ help you understand that you can do it, He will help you to persevere?
5. Why would a Christian blatantly reject His forgiveness or refuse to forgive someone who offended them?
6. Why must we keep ourselves tuned into God constantly and continually, and allow Him to carry us through? How does this help you to forgive?
7. Why do people think that because of grace, they can get away with producing bad relationships?
8. In God’s character, His capacity to forgive is unimaginable, how does this motivate you?
9. Most non-Christians cannot fathom God’ capacity to forgive, and do not believe God can, or even should, forgive them. Why is that? What can be done to show them His love and forgiveness?
10. How does forgiveness help you be at peace even if you feel you were the one offended?
11. Jesus will never call us to do anything that we are not capable of doing with excellence, or to go anywhere we would hate to go. How does this encourage you to pursue forgiveness to please Him?
12. When God opens a door for you, the only one who can shut it is you. How have you and/or your church lost out on good opportunities to please Him and serve? Even when you may not know how, where, or even if you could please Him, remember faith! What will you do about this?