

# Moments *for* You

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Theme: Forgiveness



## WHAT IS FORGIVENESS?

In the New Testament, “forgiveness” comes from the Greek word *aphiemi*. Literally this means to send away, or to put apart. Thus the root meaning of forgiveness is to put away an offense. In secular Greek literature, this word was fundamental. It was used to indicate the sending away of an object or a person. Later it came to include the release of someone from the obligation of marriage, debt, or even a religious vow. In its final form, it came to embrace the principle of release from punishment for some wrongdoing.

The Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint, contained many of these ideas. In the Old Testament, *aphiemi* spoke of releasing a prisoner or remitting a debt, but it also came to mean pardon or forgiveness. The New Testament contains 142 references to this word. Of these, 129 are found in the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). This leaves only 13 for the remainder of the New Testament. In other words, forgiveness is tied closely to the life and teachings of Christ.

From a Christian standpoint, the most important meaning of *aphiemi* is that of pardon or forgiveness. God is the great Source of forgiveness. In the Lord’s Prayer we pray for forgiveness of our sins (Matthew 6:12). When John the Baptist came he proclaimed the necessity for such forgiveness (Mark 1:4). Jesus confirmed His deity by forgiving sins (Mark 2:5; Luke 7:47). In His final days on earth, Jesus urged His disciples to proclaim forgiveness worldwide (Luke 24:47). Peter’s Pentecost sermon ended with an invitation to forgiveness (Acts 2:38),

which was a vital part of the apostles’ preaching (Acts 5:31; 10:43). Paul also emphasized the forgiveness of sin (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14). Likewise the Apostle John placed primary emphasis on forgiveness (1 John 1:9; 2:12).

In forgiveness, one puts away all grudges. This is the majestic spiritual importance of this common Greek word. It is important for every Christian to learn the art of forgiveness, or else his or her relationship with the Lord will remain forever clouded, to say nothing of relationships with other people.

—Condensed from *New Testament Words in Today’s Language* by Wayne Detzler.

## BLESSED FORGIVENESS

He should have known better. He never should have stayed at home alone while his army was fighting in the field. He never should have lingered late at night on his rooftop. He never should have set his eyes on that beautiful lady. He never should have inquired about who she was, nor should he have sent for her, nor should he have slept with her. He should have known better. But King David sinned and Bathsheba conceived.

He should have known better. He never should have tried to force Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah, to sleep with her, hoping that he would think the child was his own. He never should have arranged for Uriah’s death. He should have known better. But King David sinned and Uriah died.

He kept quiet about his sin. He suppressed it. He shoved it deep down inside, thinking it gone for good. He ignored the tug on his heart. He denied the pain in his conscience. He

numbered his soul to the persistent pangs of conviction.

All of us can identify with David's reluctance. No one likes to admit being wrong. No one relishes the thought of confession, far less something as serious as adultery and murder. Facing our faults, whether intellectual or moral, is terribly discomfoting.

But here is the good news! In Psalm 32, David expresses the joy and blessedness of forgiving love.

"Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit ... I acknowledged my sin to You, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin" (Psalm 32:1-2,5).

#### COMPLETE FAILURE

David ransacks the dictionary to describe the full extent of his failure. He calls what he did a "transgression" (v. 1), a word that refers to the rebellious and disloyal nature of his actions. He refers to it as a "sin" (v. 1), a word that points to any act that misses the mark of God's revealed will. And he calls it "iniquity" (v. 5), that is to say, a crooked deed, a conscious intent to deviate from what is right.

#### FULL CONFESSION

David also uses three different words to describe his confession (v. 5). He "acknowledged" his sin to the Lord. He refused to "cover" his iniquity. He was determined to "confess" his transgressions.

Nothing is held back. There is no cutting of corners. No compromise. He comes totally clean. All the cupboards of his soul are emptied. All little black books are opened and read aloud. His confession is like opening the floodgates of a dam. It may

be messy at first, but the release of ever-increasing pressure is life to his burdened heart.

#### ABUNDANT FORGIVENESS

Three different words for confession. Three different words for forgiveness. But better still, three different words for forgiveness! Blessed is the man whose transgressions are "forgiven" (v. 1). The word literally means "to carry away." David's sin, my sin, your sin, is like an oppressive weight from which we long to be relieved. Forgiveness lifts the burden from our shoulders.

Blessed is he whose sin is "covered" (v. 1). It's as if David says, "Oh, dear Father, what joy to know that if I will 'uncover' (v. 5) my sin and not hide it, you will!" David doesn't mean to suggest that his sin is merely concealed from view but somehow still present to condemn and defeat him. The point is that God sees it no more because He has covered it from all view.

Blessed is that man or woman, young or old, whose sin the Lord does not "impute" or "count" against them (v. 2). No record is kept. God isn't a spiritual scorekeeper to those who seek His pardoning favor!

I don't know how all this affects you, but I agree with David when he declares, "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven ... Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity" (vv. 1-2).

What accounts for this willingness in God to forgive? To what do we attribute the peace and release and joy that flood the pardoned soul? David puts his finger on it in verse 10: "Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord." God's love is the fortress of our lives, the bodyguard of our souls, the atmosphere of immutable affection in which we move and live and breathe.

Perhaps you haven't sinned as David did. Adultery and murder may not be on your list. Perhaps your sins are more subtle and less public, whether fewer or greater in number. Whatever the case, your only hope, David's only hope, is the unfailing love of God.

—Sam Storms, condensed

## THE LIGHT OF FORGIVENESS

A person walking in the light does not deny his sin or try to cover it up. He does not blame others for it or make excuses about it. Rather, he confesses it: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). To confess means to agree with God that our sin is sin. It means to accept responsibility for it and to turn from it. God's wonderful promise is that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive and cleanse us.

Forgiveness and cleansing are somewhat overlapping, except that forgiveness relates to the guilt of sin being pardoned, whereas cleansing points to the defilement of sin being removed. The forgiven person does not need to fear God's judgment. The cleansed person is free to draw near to God in worship, because the defilement of sin has been taken away.

But this verse creates a difficulty, in that other Scriptures teach that we are forgiven totally at the point of salvation, including all future sins. For example, Romans 8:1 states, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Why, then, do we need to be forgiven again when we sin after salvation?

Some explain this as "family" forgiveness that is necessary for fellowship, not judicial forgiveness that

is required to deliver us from God's judgment. While that explanation may be okay, to me it does not take into account the terms "faithful and righteous to forgive." God's faithfulness relates to His new covenant promise to forgive all our sins through faith in Christ, which happens at salvation (Hebrews 8:12). His righteousness (or, justice) relates to His strict demand that the penalty for sin be paid. In the case of the believer, Jesus Christ paid this at the cross.

So I prefer to explain verse 9 differently. In verse 9, "confess" is in the present tense, but "forgive" and "cleanse" are the Greek aorist tense, focusing on an action as a totality or as complete. So confession points to an ongoing action, but the forgiveness and cleansing are completed actions in the past.

Let me use an analogy. John uses the word "believe" in the present tense to refer to the means of how we get saved (John 1:12; 3:16; etc.). When a person first believes, he receives all the benefits of salvation. Does he stop believing then? No, he goes on believing in what Jesus did for him on the cross. As he continues believing, he does not receive the benefits of salvation over and over, but he does experience them repeatedly. So the Christian is characterized by a lifestyle of believing in Christ. As he goes on believing, he repeatedly enjoys the benefits that he received at salvation.

In a similar way, the believer's life is marked by continual confession of sins. It begins at salvation, when he acknowledges his sin to God and asks for forgiveness and cleansing. He experiences ongoing forgiveness and cleansing as he continues confessing his sins. 1 John 1:7 says, "if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and

the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.” The Greek word for “cleanses” is in the present tense, indicating that there is an ongoing sense in which the effects of the cleansing of Jesus’ blood are applied to us. Thus when a believer sins, he does not lose the forgiveness and cleansing that took place at salvation. But he does not experience it in his walk until he confesses his sin. Ongoing confession of sin and the experience of forgiveness and cleansing characterize those who walk in the light. —Steven J. Cole

## LEARNING TO FORGIVE

*“Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?” (Matthew 18:21).*

In Matthew 18, we see our Lord teaching on the childlikeness of the believer. In verse 2, the text tells us that Jesus actually took an infant and held that infant in His arms to be used as a living illustration of the childlikeness of the believer. And then He began to teach elements of our childlikeness.

First, we are to enter the kingdom like children. Verse 3 says, “unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven.” And then we are to be protected like little children. Verse 6 says, “whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.” And then we are to be cared for like little children. Verse 10 says, “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in Heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in Heaven.”

And then, as we come to verse 21, we will note that we are to be forgiven like children. There’s a great sense of tolerance with children, because we

understand their weakness. We understand their ignorance. We understand their inabilities. Being childlike is indicating that we’re going to fail. There are going to be times when we do the wrong things. We’re still in the process of maturing, of growing up, of ordering our behavior. But when we do sin, and after discipline has been enacted, we also are to be forgiven just as children are to be forgiven.

People can rather easily hold grudges against adults, but it’s somewhat abnormal to hold them against children. We need, then, to remember the teaching of this passage, that believers are to be treated like children—for in the spiritual sense we are like children, and we need the same kind of gracious continuing forgiveness that a child does.

Now, forgiveness is a great, great virtue. I really believe that it is the key to the unity of the church. It’s the key to love. It’s the key to meaningful relationships. It’s what constantly tears down the barriers that try through sin to be built up to separate us from one another, to wall us off, to make us bitter, and angry, and vengeful.

Forgiveness is a tremendous concept. In fact, in Proverbs 19:11 (NIV) it says, “it is to one’s glory to overlook an offense.” In other words, if you want to see a person at their best, they are at their best in their ability to forgive, to overlook a transgression, to forget a sin. Ephesians 4:32 takes the thought even a step further for Christians and it says we are to be “forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

Based upon the fact that we have received the forgiveness of God in Christ, we are to offer forgiveness to others. Colossians 3:13 has the same thought: “forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” It is the glory of a person

to forgive another, and particularly for a Christian who has been forgiven so much by God through Christ. And if, in fact, the best quality of people is in relation to their ability to forgive, and if we as Christians have been forgiven everything, how eager we should be to be able to forgive others.

—John MacArthur, condensed

## FORGIVEN TO FORGIVE

*“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).*

Paul says not only “don’t be bitter,” but “be kind and forgiving to one another.” And we’re not going to do it just because we’ve decided to do it. We’re going to do it because we have realized that this is exactly what God has done to us. He has been kind to us when we have not deserved kindness. He has been forgiving of us when we did not deserve forgiveness.

And so you see, the Apostle Paul is saying “This is the key, friends.” It is only when you realize that you are the recipient of a kindness that you did not deserve, and a forgiveness that you did not earn, that you are then suddenly freed from the power of your bitterness. Only then do you realize that God has been better to you than you dared dream. In His love and kindness and goodness to you, He has set you free to be kind to those who haven’t earned it, and to forgive those who have deeply offended you.

How has God freed you to show this grace? By simply telling you to do it? No. By *showing* you His love and kindness and forgiveness first, and showing it to you in such a lavish way that it literally changes your life.

You know, Jesus tells a story of a woman just like that. In Luke chapter 7 we read the account of a woman with a terrible reputation in the community

who shows up at the house where Jesus is staying one day, and she begins to anoint His feet. And the Pharisees that are there are indignant: “If this man were a prophet, He would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching Him” (Luke 7:39). And Jesus turns to them and tells them a story, and the application about the woman is this: “her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little” (Luke 7:47, NIV).

In other words, Jesus is attacking their attitude. They didn’t think they needed forgiveness, and consequently they didn’t love Him like they ought to. But this woman knew that she needed forgiveness, and she had received the gracious forgiveness of Jesus Christ, and she loved Him with all her heart. It had radically changed her life.

And you see, the point is simply this: that those who have been forgiven much are able to love and forgive much. Those who realize that they have been forgiven much by God in Christ are thus disposed to love much and are prepared to forgive. So the secret of not living this life of bitterness and instead living this life of kindness and forgiveness, is realizing the grace of God to us in Jesus Christ.

If you haven’t realized the greatness of this grace, I can tell you, my friends, you can’t do what the Apostle Paul is asking you to do. In that area of your deepest wounding in this life, there has to be more than some preacher standing up and telling you, “Stop being bitter. Start being kind and forgiving.” There’s got to be more. There’s got to be a prevailing, supernatural, overwhelming experience of the forgiveness and love of God in your life in Christ Jesus. But when that prevailing, powerful, supernatural, experience

of the love of God, the forgiveness of God, the kindness of God in Christ comes, it sets us free to stop being turned in on ourselves and nursing our bitterness. It will empower us to deny ourselves and give ourselves away in love and forgiveness. —J. Ligon Duncan

## RADICAL FORGIVENESS

One of the most difficult things a Christian will face is offering genuine forgiveness to those who have deeply hurt us. When Jesus commands us to love our enemies and offer our forgiveness to them it's hard for us to believe that He knew what He was talking about. "Jesus didn't know my dad" or "Jesus doesn't understand the depth of my hurt."

Yet, He does understand, and He commands we forgive precisely because He understands. Jesus knows that even the deepest wounds can heal through His blood. Which is why I love the story of Corrie Ten Boom's encounter with the forgiving love of Jesus in her amazing book *The Hidden Place*.

Corrie Ten Boom worked against the Nazis in the second World War, hiding Jews in her home. When she was caught, she was sent to a concentration camp where she was stripped of her dignity, saw her father and her sister (Betsie) die, and suffered more at the hands of other people than we could possibly imagine. This is precisely why her encounter with forgiveness is so memorable:

*"It was at a church service in Munich that I saw him, the former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower door in the processing center at Ravensbruck. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there—the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsie's pain-blanché face.*

*"He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. 'How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein,' he said. 'To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!'*

*"His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who preached so often to the people in Bloemendaal the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side. Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him. I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness.*

*"As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.*

*"And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself."*

Forgiveness can be hard, but it is not in our forgiveness "that the world's healing hinges, but on His." We are given the opportunity to participate in the love that Jesus extends to the world with our forgiveness. I find this a great encouragement: that Christ gives us the love we need to forgive as we practice forgiveness.

I don't know what's going on in your life, I don't know who you are struggling to forgive, but I pray that you might find encouragement in Corrie's story to see the forgiving love of Jesus in your life.

—Matthew Crocker

## CLEARING THE LEDGER

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 13:5 (NASB) that genuine love “does not keep an account of a wrong suffered.” This is one of those word pictures in Scripture where something familiar is used as a metaphor. Here Paul uses an accounting term describing a merchant who keeps tally of what each customer owes him. He keeps these records because he fully intends to collect payment.

Many of us keep a ledger-book in our hearts. When someone hurts us, we enter their name in our ledger. We think they should not have treated us as they did (and we may be right), so we hold them accountable. “They owe me,” we reason, “and I will make them pay.” Then we set out to exact payment.

But listen to what God has to say about this practice: “Repay no one evil for evil ... never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ ... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:17-21).

### WHEN WE ARE HURT, WE HAVE TWO CHOICES:

1) We can enter the hurt in our heart’s ledger and plan to get revenge. We are amazingly creative at how we collect our debts. We might withdraw from the relationship, criticize or slander the one who hurt us, erupt in anger, plot ways to hurt them or ruin their reputation, attempt to thwart their success, question their motives, ignore them, spread rumors—our options are endless. We can even put a mask on our revenge with a closed mouth and pious smile. If our heart is angry though, we have already murdered our enemy (Matthew 5:21-22).

The irony of record-keeping and revenge-seeking is that we end up hurting ourselves more than the one we hold liable. A vengeful attitude aborts the development of Christlike character, shackles us with chains of bitterness and anger, and can ultimately destroy our lives. Furthermore, it can cause God to “stand down” from disciplining and correcting those who hurt us. When we attempt to seek our own justice, we may obstruct God’s. God does not need vigilantes.

A friend once told me, when I was tempted to seek revenge from a person who had wronged me, “Bill, God only allows two people at a time in the boxing ring. If you want to get into the ring and try to fight your own battles, God will let you. But He will get out. If you want God to fight your battles for you, then you must get out of the ring ... and stay out.”

2) We can release the debt, and transfer collection rights to God. Forgiveness is not an act of our emotions, but a choice of our will. Just as a merchant can cancel a debt from his ledger, you can erase every debt you are holding against those who have wronged you ... regardless of how you feel.

Essentially, forgiveness is an act of faith. When we choose to abandon the role of judge, jury, and executioner, we are acknowledging that God is sufficient to handle those who have hurt us. We transfer all collection rights to Him. The case is no longer in our hands, but entirely in His.

If we choose this biblical path, we will never be disappointed. God is good enough, just enough, and wise enough to deal with our offender in the proper manner. He always does it right! We seldom do.

—From “Forgiveness: Healing the Harbored Hurts of Your Heart” by Bill Elliff.