

Positive Mental Attitude

Forgiveness

“I forgive you.”

What does someone really mean when they say, “I forgive you”?

Could you forgive a murderer?

2 cases in recent history

1. Mushroom murderer, Victoria Australia, 2023

A woman who was angry with her ex-husband, retaliated by killing the husband's parents, auntie and attempted murder of the uncle.

The woman invited them to a lunch at her house, where she served a beef dish loaded with death-cap mushrooms. (Her husband was also invited but he refused the invitation.)

Result: 3 of the 4 guests died an agonizing death.

How could he say, “I forgive you”?

The fourth victim fought for his life in hospital, and after five weeks pulled through, but with ongoing health issues. This person was a pastor of a Christian church. He publicly announced that he had forgiven the murderer.



She served her own meal on a different coloured plate.



Deathcap Mushrooms

Charlie Kirk USA, 2025

Age 33, he stood for truth, debating and speaking at universities on current issues that confuse young people of today – issues like abortion, gender identity, and racism.

Charlie was shot in cold blood while speaking to an outdoor audience.



How could she say, “I forgive you”?

Charlie’s wife, Erika, said publicly, “I forgive you.”



What forgiveness is NOT

A person who forgives is NOT saying that:

- “what the other person did is okay.”
- “I have to forget (or even overlook) what the offender did.”
- “I have to go on like nothing ever happened.”
- the offender shouldn't receive any consequences for their actions.
- “I don't feel pain, anger or sadness about the situation.”

The true meaning of forgiveness

- By choosing forgiveness, you choose to set down the heavy weight you are carrying, knowing that God will fight for you.
- It's letting go of deeply held negative feelings. In that way, it empowers you to recognize the pain you suffered without letting that pain destroy you. Letting go enables you to heal and move on with your life.

Unforgiveness hurts YOU.

- Holding onto unforgiveness is like holding a burning hot rock, hoping that the other person gets burned.
- You may have the right to feel angry, but by holding onto the rock, you're also hurting yourself.

Romans 12:19 tells us, “Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.”



How unforgiveness can hold us back

- Bitterness affects your emotional health.
- Unforgiveness affects your physical health and increases stress.
- Unforgiveness holds you back from making future relationships, because your negative feelings about a past relationship make you afraid to try again.
- You are more likely to 'blame' others for things they do.
- Unforgiveness stunts your personal growth.

We forgive because Christ forgave us.

We forgive because it gives us freedom from carrying a load that we were never meant to carry.

We forgive because Christ forgave us.

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

Read the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:21-35.

How many times should we forgive?

Matthew 18:22-23 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

Discuss:

What does this mean? Do we count how many times we have forgiven or does it have a deeper meaning?

What about ongoing abuse?

- Forgiveness does NOT mean we allow others to continue to abuse us.
- We can still draw boundaries, report people to the authorities, or even remove them from our lives if the situation warrants it. But we don't have to do so out of a feeling of anger or revenge. We use wisdom.
- We can protect ourselves and our families while trusting God to work out the situation for our good (Read Romans 8:28).

Warning signs you're stuck in unforgiveness

1. Ongoing Anger or Resentment

Maybe you still feel resentment or anger toward the person, even if the incident occurred a long time ago. While anger can certainly be justified, it shouldn't continue to linger long after you've fully forgiven the person.

2. Reliving the Offense

- Maybe you frequently replay the hurtful event in your mind, reliving the pain and emotions associated with it. When this happens, you need to consciously reject the thoughts, as if there was a “stop” sign in front of you.



3. Negative Thoughts and Feelings

- Maybe you regularly have negative thoughts or feelings about the person, and these emotions affect your mood and well-being. If you constantly feel angry, bitter, upset, or anxious around a person, this could be a major sign of unforgiveness.

4. Avoidance

- Maybe you actively avoid the person or situations that remind you of the offense. If this avoidance goes on too long, it can be a red flag of unforgiveness.

Seeking Revenge

- Maybe you think about getting even or seeking revenge in some way, whether it's through gossip, spreading rumours, or worse. Perhaps you've acted out these thoughts and tried to hurt the person in some way.

6. Repeatedly Bringing Up the Past

- Maybe you frequently bring up the past wrongdoing in discussions, arguments, or conflicts, using it as a weapon against the person. Alternately, maybe you repeatedly tell the story of what happened to whoever will listen, even though they weren't involved and can't do anything to help.

7. Unwillingness to Reconnect

- Maybe you are unwilling to re-establish a relationship or connection with the person, even if they have apologized or made amends. (However, when the person has *not* made amends, reconnection might not be possible.)

8. Emotional Distance

- Maybe you keep emotional distance from the person, and only interact with them on a superficial level. It may seem as though you have a wall built up that they can't get past, no matter how hard they try. You won't let them in.

9. Holding Grudges

- Maybe you hold grudges against the person for unrelated issues or minor offenses, using the past wrongdoing as a justification. When this happens, the other person may feel like they can't do anything right. You've already decided not to trust or believe them based on past actions.

10. Negative Impact on Relationships

- Maybe your unforgiveness affects your relationships with others, as you may have difficulty trusting or forgiving people in general.

11. Inability to Let Go

- Maybe you find it hard to let go of the pain and hurt caused by the person's actions, and it continues to affect your daily life. When your unforgiveness reaches this point, it can have dramatic negative consequences on your life or your ability to care for yourself or others.

What to do

- If you have one or more of these warning signs, does it automatically mean you're stuck in unforgiveness? No.
- While some feelings of hurt or anger are normal, you may need to make a conscious effort to cut off from the event that hurt you. Forgiveness can be a process where you choose to forgive again and again as these negative feelings come up.
- Talk to a friend, or a counsellor, learn to take every thought captive. Talk to God about your feelings.

The challenge of forgiving others

- It requires laying down pride, surrendering the right to retaliation, and trusting God as the ultimate judge.
- Jesus' words in **Matthew 6:14-15**: “If you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.”
- The ability to forgive is a matter of human effort but in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- **Galatians 5:22-23** – The Fruit of the Spirit

Reconciliation

- **Reconciliation** is the process of repairing a broken relationship.
- It is a two-way street, and both parties must be willing to try to improve the relationship.

For the one who has offended

- Be honest about how you may have hurt the other person.
- Show that you are sorry through both words and changed actions.
- The goal is to repair broken relationships and systems, not just say “I’m sorry.”
- Steps should be taken to restore what was lost or stolen and make amends for damages.

For the one who has been offended

- The offended person must make a conscious choice to forgive completely.
- This does not mean playing down the seriousness of the offense, but rather letting go the resentment and not holding a grudge.

Rebuilding Trust

- For reconciliation, trust needs to be re-established over time through changed attitudes and consistent actions.
- Honesty, patience, and understanding are needed. This is an ongoing process, not a one-time event. As trust deepens, true reconciliation can flourish.
- **Proverbs 3:6** Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight

Questions to think about and discuss

What if ...

the person who has offended you does not believe they have done anything wrong?

What if ...

the offender keeps on causing you physical or emotional harm?