

# Peacefakers, Peacebreakers, and Peacemakers

## Pt. 2.3, Overcoming Unforgiveness

*“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” – Matt. 6:12*

### Introduction

Break up in pairs for group discussions. (5 min.)

1. Have each person share about a situation in which the person has found forgiving to be difficult, even after assuring the offender that he or she is forgiven.
2. Ask them to recall what seemed to create the barrier to forgiveness

### Group Discussion

We know that it’s important to forgive those who have wronged us, but a promise of forgiveness can be difficult to keep. Fortunately, God promises to help us forgive others.

- Throughout scripture, he gives us many examples of personal forgiveness.
- The Holy Spirit gives us power to forgive others.
- For times when we need extra help, God provides pastors and fellow believers to counsel and encourage.

As you draw on these resources, you can take these six steps to overcome unforgiveness.

#### ***A. Biblical Encouragement for Keeping Tough Promises***

##### 1) Confirm Repentance

- i. Forgiving someone who has failed to repent and confess clearly and specifically may be difficult. (Flippant confessions: “I’m sorry”)
- ii. In these instances, you may need to ask for an opportunity to discuss the situation further and explain specifically in what ways his or her action hurt you.
- iii. You may also need to encourage the person to take repentance more seriously. This is both a service to that person and a help to you.

*\*What are ways you could do this?*

##### 2) Renounce Sinful Attitudes and Expectations

- i. Sometimes, consciously or unconsciously, we withhold forgiveness because we want the offender to earn it, suffer for it, or because we want to ensure that they won’t hurt us again.
- ii. These attitudes and responses are inconsistent with God’s command to forgive as he has forgiven us.
  1. We can never earn or deserve God’s forgiveness – that’s why it’s a free gift
  2. **Rom. 6:23** – *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*
- iii. We shouldn’t let our fears about future conduct or outcomes keep us from granting forgiveness. If someone repents but keeps on offending, we may talk with him or her to address the present conduct and the pattern of sinful behavior. That doesn’t give us the right to withhold forgiveness, though.

### 3) Assess your Contribution to the Problem

- i. Sometimes a self-righteous attitude can hinder forgiveness. Even if you didn't start the dispute, your lack of understanding, careless words, lack of willingness to listen well, or failure to respond lovingly may have aggravated the situation.
- ii. You may act as though the other person's sins are more than cancel yours.
- iii. Overcome this tendency by prayerfully examining your role in conflict. Write down everything you have done that may have been a factor. Remembering your failure may make forgiving others easier.

### 4) Recognize that God is Working for Good

- i. When you recognize that God is actually using the person who has wronged you as an instrument to help you mature, serve others, and glorify him, you may forgive more easily.
- ii. In God's sovereignty and wisdom, he may use this conflict to expose weaknesses in you or to grow you in character to become more like him.
- iii. Such a realization may soften your heart and move you along in forgiveness.

### 5) Remember God's Forgiveness

- i. Focusing on how much God has forgiven you can help you overcome unforgiveness.
- ii. Read Matt. 18:21-35 – Like the unmerciful servant, we sometimes take God's forgiveness for granted while we stubbornly take God's forgiveness from others.
- iii. We tend to act as though others' sins against us are more serious than are our sins against God.
- iv. To overcome these sinful attitudes, think about some specific sins for which God has forgiven you:
  1. Have you ever treated others the same way this person has treated you?
  2. What do you deserve from God because of your sins?
- v. **Rom. 5:8** – *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

### 6) Draw on God's Strength

- i. Forgiving others is impossible in your own strength. But if you ask God to change your heart and continually rely on his grace, you can forgive even the most painful offenses.
- ii. **Remember Corrie ten Boom** – the Nazis imprisoned her with her family for aiding Jews during World War II. After her dad and sister died, years later, she met and was able to forgive one of her captors at a church service.

## **B. Applying the Principles Above (Which Principle(s) Apply?)**

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Juanita's dad wasn't around much while she and her siblings grew up. Years later, her dad sought to have a closer relationship with Juanita and her siblings. Because her dad's earlier neglect had hurt her deeply, she continued to resent him even after he tried to change. She knew that the Lord had used some of the aspects of her childhood situation for good: she now led a support group for children from high-stress childhoods, such as hers. Many told her they were experiencing emotional healing from this process. But Juanita found complete forgiveness of dad to be tougher than she expected.

- b. \_\_\_\_ Roger made sarcastic remarks about his co-worker, Kathy, because he thought she wasn't filling her orders quickly enough. One day his remarks were so cutting, Kathy left her work station in tears. Roger followed Kathy to the break room. He told her he knew he had a problem with sarcasm, that he was sorry, and that he would do better. As Roger walked away, Kathy fumed to herself, "Sorry, ha! Tomorrow he'll be his same old self – abusing people with his rude humor."
- c. \_\_\_\_ Alan acted hurt when his wife, Isabel, decided to go out "with the girls" on Friday night instead of going to a movie with him. Isabel apologized, saying, "Oh, sorry, hon," when she saw his hurt look. Alan replied, "That's okay; we'll go out next week." But things really weren't okay with Alan, who continued to feel sad about the situation. He did not think Isabel understood how unimportant he felt when she treated him like this.

### ***C. Replacement Principle***

One way to aid forgiveness is to practice the "replacement principle." Do this at three levels:

#### 1) In Thought

- i. Painful thoughts about what others have done to hurt you easily pop back into your mind – even after you forgive.
- ii. Instead of simply trying to stop thinking unpleasant thoughts, replace negative memories with positives ones.
  1. Pray for that person.
  2. Try to think of something good about the offender.
  3. Use thankful thoughts about God and his Work in the situation
- iii. **Phil. 4:8** – *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.*

#### 2) In Word

- i. When talking to others about the person, deliberately speak well of the person.
  1. Describe their redeeming qualities.
  2. Do the same as you talk to the offender... Praise, thank, encourage!
- ii. Kind words are especially important is the offender struggles with guilt or embarrassment.

#### 3) In Deed

- i. Act as though you think well of the person; in time your actions may prompt a more loving spirit within you.
- ii. If the person has acted untrustworthy in her or her offense against you, give that person another opportunity to demonstrate responsibility again.

### ***D. Wrapping up***

Reflect back on the six steps/encouragements for overcoming unforgiveness.

**\*Which one is the most difficult for you?**

Close in prayer. (Lord's Prayer)