

LESSON 10

How to Forgive and Move Forward

Colossians 3:12–14; Matthew 6:14–15

For if you forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well. But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your offenses, Matthew 6:14–15.

Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive. Above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity, Colossians 3:12–14.

Class Overview: Forgiveness lies at the very heart of the Christian faith. It is both a command and a calling—an imitation of the mercy God has shown us through Christ. In *Colossians 3:12–14* and *Matthew 6:14–15*, we learn that forgiveness is not optional for believers; it is the natural response of those who have experienced grace. Unforgiveness traps us in bitterness, while forgiveness releases us into freedom and peace. Through forgiveness, we reflect God's character, restore broken fellowship, and rebuild love within the body of Christ. This lesson calls believers to lay down resentment, trust God with justice, and move forward in mercy, allowing His grace to heal what has been broken.

Class Objectives:

By the end of this class, you should be able to:

1. Explain how forgiveness is rooted in God's nature and commanded for all believers (*Colossians 3:12–13*; *Matthew 6:14–15*).
2. Describe how bitterness hinders our relationship with God and robs us of peace.
3. Identify how forgiving others sets us free from resentment and opens the door to healing.

4. Understand how forgiveness and love work together to rebuild relationships and strengthen the church (Colossians 3:14).
5. Practice daily reflection, prayer, and intentional acts of release as spiritual disciplines of grace.
6. Choose one relationship or situation in need of forgiveness and take a concrete step toward reconciliation or release this week.

Introduction:

TWENTY YEARS AGO, A COUPLE WHO WERE CLOSE FRIENDS of mine suddenly stopped speaking to me. I wasn't sure why at first. I assumed they were just busy, but over time, I realized something was wrong. Eventually, I learned that a misunderstanding had occurred; something I had said in the pulpit had been misunderstood. By the time I found out, resentment had already taken hold.

For months, I prayed about it, wrestled with what to do, and tried to convince myself that time would fix it. But it didn't. The longer the silence lasted, the heavier the burden became. One day, I finally decided to reach out. We met, talked honestly, and cleared the air. They admitted their hurt. I acknowledged my frustration. Then we prayed together. That day, a friendship was restored, and peace returned to my heart.

Forgiveness is one of the hardest things God asks us to do. It feels unnatural because everything in us wants to hold onto the hurt, to make the other person pay, or at least to make sure they know how much they've wounded us. Yet Jesus calls us to a higher way, the way of mercy. He teaches us that forgiveness is not optional for the believer; it's essential.

In Colossians 3:12–13, Paul reminds us, *as God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive.* That last line stops us in our tracks: *Just as the Lord has forgiven you.*

Forgiveness is not based on what someone else deserves; it's based on what we've received. Every time we forgive, we're simply passing along what God has already given to us. And when we refuse to forgive, we cut

ourselves off from the very grace that saved us. Jesus said in Matthew 6:14–15, *if you forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well. But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your offenses.* Unforgiveness is a prison, one that keeps both hearts locked inside. But forgiveness? It's freedom. It releases us from the weight of bitterness and opens the door to healing, restoration, and renewed love.

Today, we're going to explore what forgiveness really means, not as a theory, but as a way of life. We'll see that forgiveness reflects God's character, restores our freedom, and rebuilds our relationships. And by the end of this lesson, my prayer is that you'll see forgiveness not as a painful obligation, but as a powerful opportunity to reflect the grace of God and move forward in peace.

Forgiveness Reflects God's Character

In Colossians 3:12–14, Paul writes, *therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive.*

Forgiveness begins with remembering who we are, and whose we are. Paul reminds us that we are *God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved.* Those three truths form the foundation of forgiveness:

- We forgive because we belong to God.
- We forgive because we've been set apart by His grace.
- We forgive because we are deeply loved by Him.

When we understand that, forgiveness stops being an emotional reaction and becomes an act of imitation. We forgive because it's what our Father does.

1. Forgiveness Flows from Compassion and Kindness

Paul tells us to “put on” compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. These virtues are like the clothing of Christ, what we wear as His people. Forgiveness is what happens when those virtues come

together. Compassion sees the person behind the offense. Kindness softens the words that could wound further. Humility admits that we, too, need grace. Gentleness chooses restoration over retaliation. Patience gives time for healing. Forgiveness doesn't mean pretending that wrong didn't happen; it means responding to it with the heart of Christ.

2. Forgiveness Imitates God's Grace

The phrase *just as the Lord has forgiven you* is both a reminder and a standard. God didn't forgive us because we earned it. He forgave us because of His mercy. Romans 5:8 says, *while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*. If God could forgive us at our worst, how can we withhold forgiveness from others at theirs? Forgiveness is not about keeping score; it's about keeping grace in motion. Every time you forgive, you're continuing the work God began in you. You become a living reflection of His mercy to the world.

Think of a mirror. Its only purpose is to reflect what shines upon it. When God's grace shines on a forgiven heart, it's meant to reflect that grace outward. But if the mirror is covered with dust: resentment, bitterness, pride, the reflection fades. Forgiveness wipes the surface clean so that God's love can shine through you again.

3. Forgiveness Honors Our Identity in Christ

Paul's command to forgive is not a burden; it's a privilege. It's the mark of the mature believer who knows what it means to be forgiven much. The more we grow in our awareness of God's mercy toward us, the more willing we become to extend that mercy to others.

Practically, this means that forgiveness isn't optional; it's essential to discipleship. If I belong to Christ, then I must reflect His character. That means refusing to let bitterness define me. It means choosing to forgive, even when my emotions scream otherwise. It means letting grace have the final word.

When you forgive, you are doing one of the most Godlike things a human being can do. You're showing the world what divine love looks like in human form. Forgiveness is not weakness, it's strength under control, power wrapped in mercy.

Forgiveness Restores Our Freedom

Jesus says something both beautiful and sobering in the Sermon on the Mount: *for if you forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well. But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your offenses.*

These words follow immediately after the Lord's Prayer, right after Jesus taught His disciples to say, *forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.* The connection is intentional. Jesus wants us to see that forgiveness is not only something we *receive*; it's something we *extend*. We cannot live in the freedom of God's grace while holding others captive in our bitterness.

1. Unforgiveness Is a Prison

Bitterness promises control; it tells us that if we hold onto the hurt, we'll somehow regain power over what was lost. But unforgiveness doesn't imprison the offender; it imprisons the offended. It keeps us tied to the pain of the past. Every time we replay the offense, the chain tightens a little more.

Jesus' warning in verse 15 is not about losing salvation; it's about losing intimacy with God. When we refuse to forgive, we close our hearts to the very mercy we need. We cannot ask God to pour out grace on us while we withhold it from others.

There's an old story about two monks who came to a river. A woman stood nearby, unable to cross. One monk picked her up and carried her across, setting her down on the other side. Hours later, as they walked in silence, the other monk finally said, "I can't believe you carried that woman, it was against our rules!" The first monk replied, "Brother, I put her down hours ago, but you're still carrying her." Unforgiveness works the same way. It keeps us carrying what Christ has already given us permission to set down.

2. Forgiveness Releases the Weight of the Past

When we forgive, we are not excusing sin; we are releasing ourselves from its control. Forgiveness doesn't mean saying, "It didn't hurt," it

means saying, “It no longer controls me.” It’s choosing freedom over bondage, healing over hatred.

Ephesians 4:31–32 reveals this truth: *let all bitterness, anger, and wrath, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice. And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ.* Notice that forgiveness is paired with kindness and compassion: two attitudes that create space for peace to grow again.

3. Forgiveness Renews Fellowship with God

Jesus ties our forgiveness of others directly to our fellowship with the Father. When we forgive, we reopen the channels of grace in our hearts. Prayer becomes richer. Worship becomes freer. The peace of God, which passes understanding, retakes root.

Unforgiveness, on the other hand, makes spiritual life feel dry and distant. It’s hard to draw near to God when bitterness is standing in the way. But when we release resentment, we make room for His presence to fill us again. Practically, this means forgiveness is not a one-time decision; it’s a daily commitment. Some wounds take time to heal, and forgiveness may need to be renewed again and again. But every time you choose to forgive, you loosen the grip of the past and strengthen the grip of grace. Forgiveness doesn’t erase memory; it redeems it. It turns the story of hurt into a testimony of healing. It restores freedom not only to the one who hurt you but to your own heart as well.

Forgiveness Rebuilds Relationships

Paul concludes his beautiful section on Christian character with this statement: *above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.* In other words, love is what ties everything together. Compassion, kindness, humility, patience, and forgiveness all find their completeness in love. Without love, forgiveness becomes mechanical, an obligation rather than a transformation. But when love rules the heart, forgiveness flows naturally.

1. Love Is the Glue That Holds Forgiveness Together

Paul uses the phrase *the perfect bond of unity.* The word *bond* comes from a term that means “to bind or tie together.” In ancient times, a

tailor would stitch multiple pieces of fabric with a single strong thread; that's the picture Paul paints here. Love is the thread that holds the fabric of the church together, even after it's been torn by sin or offense. Forgiveness, then, is the needle God uses to mend what's been ripped apart. It's how love repairs the tears that conflict and hurt create.

2. Forgiveness Opens the Door for Restoration

Forgiveness doesn't always mean the relationship will go back to precisely what it was before. Trust takes time to rebuild. But forgiveness makes restoration possible. It clears the debris of resentment so that love and trust can grow again. Sometimes, the relationship is restored fully. Other times, forgiveness simply means you can look at the person or situation without bitterness, and that's still healing. Either way, forgiveness paves the way for peace. Romans 12:18 reminds us, *if possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone*. Forgiveness is your part of that peace. It says, "Even if you don't change, I will no longer let your actions define my heart."

3. Forgiveness Strengthens the Church's Witness

When the world sees believers forgiving one another, it sees something supernatural. In a culture that thrives on revenge, grudges, and canceling others, forgiveness shines like light in darkness. Jesus said in John 13:35, *by this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another*. Every act of forgiveness within the body of Christ preaches the gospel louder than any sermon. It shows that grace is not just something we talk about; it's something we live.

Practically, rebuilding relationships through forgiveness might mean reaching out again to someone you've avoided. It might mean speaking words of grace instead of criticism. It might mean inviting someone back into your life slowly and prayerfully. But every step toward reconciliation reflects the love of Christ. Forgiveness is how we rebuild what sin tried to destroy. It's how the church becomes a living example of redemption. And it's how believers, once divided, can again walk together in unity and love, bound by the same grace that saved them both.

Practical Application: **How to Forgive and Move Forward**

Forgiveness is not something we drift into. It is a decision we make, often one we must make again and again. It's rarely easy, but it is always freeing. Below are practical steps to help believers move from hurt to healing through the power of God's grace:

1. Remember What God Has Done for You

Every act of forgiveness begins with reflection. Before you focus on what someone has done *to you*, remember what God has done *for you*. We are forgiven sinners, washed clean by the blood of Christ. When we recall the magnitude of our own forgiveness, it becomes harder to cling to resentment. Ephesians 4:32: *be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ*. Take a few moments in prayer to thank God for His mercy toward you. Forgiveness starts at the foot of the cross.

2. Acknowledge the Hurt Honestly

Forgiveness doesn't mean minimizing pain or pretending it didn't matter. True forgiveness looks pain in the face and chooses to release it. God never asks us to deny our wounds, only to refuse to let them define us. Name the hurt, bring it before the Lord, and then begin the work of letting it go.

3. Pray for the Person Who Hurt You

Jesus said, *love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you* (Matthew 5:44). It's hard to hate someone you're praying for. Even if your heart isn't ready to forgive fully, begin praying anyway. Pray for God's blessing, for their repentance, and for your own healing. Over time, prayer softens resentment and reshapes your heart.

4. Release the Desire for Revenge

Romans 12:19 says, *do not take revenge, dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath*. Forgiveness is an act of trust, entrusting justice to the Lord rather than trying to carry it ourselves. When you forgive, you're not saying the wrong didn't matter; you're saying *you're no longer the judge*. You're placing the situation in the hands of the One who judges righteously.

5. Choose to Forgive: Even if You Don't Feel Like It

Forgiveness is not a feeling; it's a choice of obedience. You may not "feel" forgiving, but you can still *decide* to forgive. Tell God, "I choose to forgive, and I trust You with my emotions." Feelings will follow obedience.

6. Take One Step Toward Reconciliation

Forgiveness opens the door to restored fellowship, but reconciliation takes time. Ask God what your next step should be. Maybe it's writing a note, making a phone call, or simply letting go of bitterness in your heart. Peace begins with one small act of grace.

7. Keep Forgiving: Until the Heart Is Free

Forgiveness may need to be renewed repeatedly. Some wounds resurface when memories return. Each time they do, reaffirm your decision: "I've forgiven this, and I won't pick it back up." Each time you re-release it, the chain grows weaker, and your heart grows lighter.

Challenge

Think of one person who has wronged you, perhaps someone whose name still stirs pain when you hear it. This week, pray for them by name every day. Ask God to help you forgive fully and honestly. Write out a prayer of release, giving that hurt to the Lord once and for all. Then take one small, concrete step toward peace, even if it's simply deciding to stop rehearsing the offense.

Conclusion

Forgiveness is one of the hardest commands in Scripture, but it's also one of the most liberating. It runs against our instincts, yet it aligns perfectly with the heart of God. When we forgive, we are never more like our Father in heaven, who loved us and forgave us when we least deserved it.

Unforgiveness keeps us chained to the past; forgiveness opens the door to the future. It doesn't erase the hurt, but it removes the poison. It doesn't excuse the wrong, but it releases the hold that wrong has over your heart. Through forgiveness, God invites us to trade bitterness for peace, resentment for freedom, and pain for healing.

Paul told the Colossians, *just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive*. That is the standard, and the strength, of Christian forgiveness. We forgive because we've been forgiven. We show mercy because we've been shown mercy. We release others because Christ released us.

Think of the name that still weighs heavily on your heart. Maybe it's someone who hurt you years ago. Perhaps it's a wound that still feels fresh. Today, give that person, and that pain, to God. Say their name out loud in prayer and release the debt. It's not easy, but it's holy.

Forgiveness is not forgetting; it's remembering through the lens of grace. It's choosing to see the cross between you and every wrong that's ever been done to you. And when you do, you'll find that the same grace that saved you is strong enough to set you free.

For Discussion

1. Can you recall a time when someone forgave you deeply or unexpectedly? How did that experience shape your understanding of God's grace?

2. Paul tells us to forgive "just as the Lord has forgiven you." What does this reveal about how forgiveness reflects the heart of God?

3. Why do you think Jesus ties our forgiveness of others to our own relationship with God? How does forgiving others restore freedom and peace in our hearts?

4. Paul says love is the “perfect bond of unity.” What role does love play in restoring broken relationships after forgiveness?

5. What makes forgiveness difficult: pride, pain, fear, or something else? How can prayer, perspective, and time help overcome those barriers?

6. Is there someone you need to forgive today—perhaps privately, before God? What specific step will you take this week to move toward release and peace?
