

LOVE THE LORD



Lesson Twenty-five - Forgiveness is so hard. How can I truly forgive?

August 2023

Summary of key points

- God commands us to follow Jesus' example to forgive others.
- Forgiveness makes us right before God and protects us from Satan's schemes. It even improves our overall health and well being.
- Forgiveness feels unnatural to us because it is often not modelled to us in life. In fact, we are taught just the opposite (with 7 examples).
- God's Word shows us the truths that tear down 9 typical arguments on why we can't forgive.
- Unforgiveness and bitterness hinders our prayers from being received and answered.
- We need to forgive others so that our hearts are pure before God when we pray (with sample prayer.)

Watch the lesson online

https://youtu.be/8eNjuw3K_V8

Transcript

Welcome to lesson 25 of Love the Lord where we look at the typical strongholds that keep us from forgiving others and the truth that will set us free.

We will begin by inviting God to speak to us personally through this study. Please follow along as we pray together. Click pause at any point if you need more time.

First, let's thank God for His perfect character and His perfect will for us.

Next, please tell Him about the things that have been stressful and ask for His help and guidance.

Let us put down our burdens of sin and confess the ways we have sinned against God and against others, and ask for His forgiveness.

Please confess the ways others have sinned against us, and forgive them in Jesus' name.

Next, let us ask God to purify and open our hearts to receive His teaching.

Finally, please repeat these words, “In Jesus’ name, I silence all distractions and voices that are not from God. Amen.”

Let's begin the lesson for today. Forgiveness is so hard. How can I truly forgive?

The Bible makes it very clear that forgiving others is a prerequisite if we want to receive God’s forgiveness for our sins.

Mark 11:25 But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too.” (NLT)

To truly forgive someone means that we will not retaliate, curse, gossip or seek repayment from them. We will not imagine ways to get even or imagine ways they can suffer. We will not hold on to grudges. Instead, we will wish them well and pray blessings over them.

Luke 6:27-28 “But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you. (NLT)

Humanly speaking, this is impossible to do on our own strength, but we can be comforted that those who have the Holy Spirit in them can lean on God for help and for His guidance.

Mark 10:27 Jesus looked at them intently and said, “Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God.” (NLT)

God Himself is tenderhearted and forgiving. He does not curse or condemn us when we sin, and He will help us overcome if we are willing. Therefore, if we wish to be accepted as God’s children, we need to reflect His kind and merciful nature.

Ephesians 4:31-32 Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. (NLT)

In fact, the extent to which we forgive other people is the same extent to which God will bless us. The more we forgive, the more God will reward us.

Luke 6:37-38 “Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven. Give, and you will receive... running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.” (NLT)

We will each receive whatever we have done in this earthly body. When we plant seeds of goodness, we will harvest good fruits but if we sow seeds of evil, we will harvest bad fruits.

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body. (NLT)

Therefore, when we judge and condemn others, it will eventually come back against us. This is not to dismiss or belittle our sufferings, especially at the hands of those who ought to love, cherish, and protect us. All of us have experienced some disappointment, betrayal, rejection, slander, neglect, or even outright abuse.

Luke 6:37-38 “Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven. Give, and you will receive... running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.” (NLT)

People do unkind, heartless, and cruel things because we all live in a world that is under the control of Satan, the evil one. When we allow the sins of other people to overcome us, however, we allow Satan to gain a foothold into our hearts.

1 John 5:19 We know that we are children of God and that the world around us is under the control of the evil one. (NLT)

Forgiving others, on the other hand, makes us right with God and saves us from condemnation for playing judge when only Jesus has the right to judge any human being.

Matthew 6:14-15 “If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins. (NLT)

Mark 11:25 But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too.” (NLT)

Then God will forgive us our sins and receive our prayers. Unforgiveness can block our prayers from being received and answered.

Luke 6:37 “Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven. (NLT)

Forgiving others also keeps us protected from Satan's schemes. Any hidden bitterness we hold onto in our hearts makes us easy targets for his lies and manipulation. Satan will do his best to fill our minds with many arguments about why we should not forgive and why we should take revenge. When we hold on to

bitterness and unforgiveness, we quench the Holy Spirit. Satan can then gain a deeper foothold in our hearts to destroy us spiritually.

2 Corinthians 2:10-11 ... And when I forgive whatever needs to be forgiven, I do so with Christ's authority for your benefit, so that Satan will not outsmart us. For we are familiar with his evil schemes. (NLT)

But once we forgive, we remove Satan's footholds to oppress us and we find ourselves freed from our sinful responses. We find we no longer need to struggle with the burning sensations in our hearts or the persistent thoughts in our minds that used to push us to react impulsively against people. We finally have peace in our hearts and minds.

Ephesians 4:31-32 Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. (NLT)

Forgiving others is also tremendously beneficial to our body and mind. Forgiveness has been scientifically shown to improve our physical and mental health. It reduces the risk of heart attack, chronic pain, diabetes, high cholesterol, and even cancer. It lightens our emotional burdens and keeps anxiety, bitterness, and depression away.

Proverbs 3:7-8 ... Instead, fear the Lord and turn away from evil. Then you will have healing for your body and strength for your bones. (NLT)

Most of us, however, find forgiving others very unnatural. There can be for several reasons for this.

1. Poor role models

The homes we grew up in may not have modelled forgiveness well. Our parents may have fought bitterly and withheld forgiveness from one another, or we may have been belittled and punished harshly for minor mistakes, making forgiveness a distant hope. Love at home was conditional. We learnt to not show mercy or grace, because it was not first shown to us.

When we continue to follow our family's ways, instead of God's ways, we are in essence, making our family our gods. We need to be careful to turn away from such idolatry.

2. Lack of self-love

Other times, we struggle to forgive other people because we haven't forgiven ourselves for our own mistakes. Therefore, we can't love others because we haven't first loved ourselves.

When we do this, we deeply grieve the Holy Spirit because we tell God that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross wasn't enough to show us that we are worthy of all love.

Thinking this way is a terrible trap to fall into. It is Satan's way of making a mockery of the cross and our salvation. We need to repent and not hesitate to extend God's grace and forgiveness to ourselves.

3. Fear and insecurities

Withholding forgiveness also has a lot to do with our fears and insecurities. We fear that people will see us as weak and look down on us. We fear that we will lose face. We fear that people won't appreciate our forgiveness. We fear that other people will try to take advantage of us.

Withholding forgiveness can give us a false sense of being in control, when in reality, we cannot control what others think or do. Let us instead trust God with our insecurities and forgive. The Bible tells us that God will exalt the humble. When we humble ourselves to forgive others, we can be sure that God will exalt us one day for obeying His commandments.

4. Ruled by our (sinful) hearts

This world also tells us to follow our hearts. By implication, this means that we should wait until we feel like forgiving before we do so. The truth is, no one ever feels like forgiving. God is upset about the way we sin and yet He is ever ready to forgive us because it is a deliberate choice He makes.

We need to be careful that our hearts do not overrule God's commands. Let us, therefore, repent for following our hearts rather than the Holy Spirit's guidance and God's Word.

5. Bad experiences

Some of us have had bad experiences with personal or family friends who have repeatedly sinned against us. Therefore we see little point in forgiveness, because we think that people should change if we forgive them.

The reality is that forgiving others, first and foremost, keeps our hearts right before God. Let us treasure and prioritise our relationship with Him, rather than get caught up by other people and what they have done or continue to do. God will vindicate us when we honour Him first.

6. Emotional numbness

Sometimes, we don't forgive because we have numbed our hearts or hardened our hearts so much that we don't feel anything anymore. We shut down our hearts and snuff out our emotions and desires. We become indifferent and see little point in forgiving.

This is not how God created us to live. God gave us our emotions and desires for good reason. Let us repent of hardening our own hearts and ask the Holy Spirit to revive us so that we can start feeling and knowing who we need to forgive and be freed from the hurt within us.

7. Portrayals of worldly justice

Another major influence is what we read or watch in secular stories and shows. The movies we watch, for instance, tend to portray heroes and saviours as those who go after retribution for the wrongs they have experienced. We are encouraged to idolise those who fight and take revenge.

As a result, we come to believe that "If I forgive, I will look like a loser, not a hero. Heroes always make their enemies suffer for what they have done and so must I."

If this is what we also believe, we will need to repent of following the thinking patterns from the world. This is not Jesus' attitude towards us and if we are to follow Him, we need to model Jesus' attitude towards other people.

Do you recognise any of these influences on your way of thinking about forgiveness? We all need to renew our minds about forgiveness based on God's truths. Otherwise, our sinful nature will simply follow the ways of the world and oppose our efforts to follow God.

We will now go through nine worldly ways of thinking about forgiveness.

1. "If I forgive, I will lose."
2. "They don't deserve forgiveness."
3. "No one knows my sufferings."
4. "I can't let them get away with it."
5. "They must suffer."
6. "I'll forgive if they say sorry."
7. "I can't forget."
8. "I don't want to reconcile."
9. "I am still hurting and in pain."

Please look through this list and pick out the ones you have bought into. How many would you select? Notice that the focus of our unforgiveness and grudges is on other people, rather than on God. We make people our idols when we hold onto unforgiveness towards them.

We will now go through God's Word to see what God has to say about these arguments. Are you ready? We will begin.

1. "If I forgive, I will lose."

We are afraid that we will have to give up our physical pleasures, our desires, or our pride if we forgive, but we need to realise that there is much more at stake, and that is our eternal relationship with God. Everything we hold onto on this earth will perish one day and mean nothing.

1 John 2:16 For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. (NLT)

Jesus has warned that if we don't forgive others from our heart, we will be punished and tortured until we have paid back the full debt we owe Him for our own sins. Our salvation is at stake.

Matthew 18:34-35 Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt. "That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart. (NLT)

Is anything worth more than our soul?

Matthew 16:26 And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul? (NLT)

So the reality is, if we don't forgive, we will lose our salvation. That is a stark reminder to every one of us.

2. "They don't deserve forgiveness."

Jesus didn't deserve to die for our sins. He is sinless and yet He was crucified in our place.

Luke 23:41 We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong." (NLT)

He did this for us because He is good, and not because we are good. We can never do enough to repay Jesus.

Titus 3:5 he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. (NLT)

Now Jesus calls us to follow His example. We forgive not because someone deserves it, but because we love Jesus and follow Him. We forgive others simply because we are God's children.

John 13:15 I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. (NLT)

If we wait for someone to deserve forgiveness, we remove the true meaning of forgiveness. Forgiveness is not an exchange, it is an act of grace.

Matthew 5:44-46 But I say, love your enemies! ... In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven... If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. (NLT)

The reality is that we don't deserve forgiveness from God either.

3. "No one knows my sufferings."

We might think that if we let go, people will forget how much we have suffered. But we can be assured that God remembers. He keeps track of all our sorrows. He tenderly remembers every single one of our tears and records them.

Psalms 56:8 You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book. (NLT)

Not only that, God has even chosen to enter our pain with us. Jesus has suffered as much as we have. He experienced betrayal, rejection, brutality, humiliation, and even crucifixion.

Hebrews 2:17-18 Therefore, it was necessary for him to be made in every respect like us ... Since he himself has gone through suffering and testing, he is able to help us when we are being tested. (NLT)

Jesus sees all our heartaches and enters in our pain with us. He is deeply troubled by our sorrows and weeps with us when we weep.

John 11:33,35 When Jesus saw her weeping and saw the other people wailing with her, a deep anger welled up within him, and he was deeply troubled. Then Jesus wept. (NLT)

We can be assured that God knows exactly how we feel and He will never abandon us.

Psalms 27:10 Even if my father and mother abandon me, the LORD will hold me close. (NLT)

We can rest assured that God will hold those who have trampled on us to account on Judgment Day.

Ecclesiastes 12:14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil. (NIV)

The reality is that “God knows our sufferings firsthand.”

4. “I can’t let them get away with it.”

Evil-doers can cause great harm and go on to flourish, while we suffer the consequences. The Bible corrects this thinking and reminds us that while they may “sprout like weeds now, they will be destroyed forever” later.

Psalms 92:5-7 O Lord, what great works you do! ... Only a simpleton would not know, and only a fool would not understand this: Though the wicked sprout like weeds and evildoers flourish, they will be destroyed forever. (NLT)

So we need not envy them.

Proverbs 23:17-18 Don’t envy sinners, but always continue to fear the LORD. You will be rewarded for this; your hope will not be disappointed. (NLT)

We simply need to “wait on the Lord to handle the matter.” It may not be in our perfect timing, it will be in God’s perfect eternal timing.

Proverbs 20:22 Don’t say, “I will get even for this wrong.” Wait for the LORD to handle the matter. (NLT)

We should not seek to get even or take revenge, that is best left to God. He will pay them back. As for us, we are to keep our hands clean and our hearts pure.

Romans 12:19 Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, “I will take revenge; I will pay them back,” says the LORD. (NLT)

God’s judgement and punishment will be much more terrifying than anything we can ever imagine up. When we know the fiery furnace that waits evil-doers in the lake of fire, in hell, we may even begin to feel compassion and want to share the gospel with our enemies.

Matthew 13:49-50 That is the way it will be at the end of the world. The angels will come and separate the wicked people from the righteous, throwing the wicked into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (NLT)

The reality is that “God won’t let them get away with it.”

5. “They must suffer.”

God has planted a conscience in every human being that tells us what is right or wrong.

Romans 2:14-15 Even Gentiles, who do not have God’s written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it...for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right. (NLT)

This is to keep us from sinning.

Hebrews 13:18 Pray for us, for our conscience is clear and we want to live honorably in everything we do. (NLT)

We should not misuse this sense of what is right or wrong, however, to judge and condemn other people.

Luke 6:37 “Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven. (NLT)

If we sow bitter judgements and condemnation, we will also reap the same on ourselves. This brings on spiritual decay and death.

Galatians 6:7-8 Don’t be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant. Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature... (NLT)

Bitterness and resentment will only tear us up. Being unforgiving towards someone doesn’t destroy them, it destroys us.

Psalms 73:21-22 Then I realized that my heart was bitter, and I was all torn up inside. I was so foolish and ignorant— I must have seemed like a senseless animal to you. (NLT)

The reality is that if we don’t forgive, we will suffer.

6. “I’ll forgive if they say sorry.”

Jesus chose to die for our sins while we were still sinning. He didn’t wait for us to first recognise our sins and ask for His forgiveness.

Romans 5:8 But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. (NLT)

Just because someone has done something bad to us doesn't mean we are better than they or more righteous than they are before God. We are all sinners. In God's eyes, we all fall short.

Romans 3:10,23 As the Scriptures say, "No one is righteous— not even one. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. (NLT)

Because God has freely forgiven us, God expects us to do the same for others. We cannot accept God's love on one hand and then withhold it from people on the hand. That would make us hypocritical Christians.

Matthew 10:8 ...Give as freely as you have received! (NLT)

When we still resist God's commands and find excuses not to forgive, the Bible warns us that we are storing up terrible punishment for ourselves for being so stubborn.

Romans 2:4-5 Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? ...But because you are stubborn and refuse to turn from your sin, you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself... (NLT)

So the reality is that "we forgive so that we won't be sorry."

7. "I can't forget."

Every life event is recorded in our subconscious mind. It is virtually impossible to erase any memory, no matter how hard we try. God created our brains this way so that we will never forget His Word and His goodness to us.

Deuteronomy 4:3,9 "You saw for yourself what the LORD did... "But watch out! Be careful never to forget what you yourself have seen. Do not let these memories escape from your mind as long as you live! And be sure to pass them on to your children and grandchildren. (NLT)

To try to forget something is pointless. Nowhere in the Bible does God tell us to forget our memories. Instead, God invites us to meditate on His goodness, rather than on the evil that people have done.

Psalms 77:11-12 But then I recall all you have done, O LORD; I remember your wonderful deeds of long ago. They are constantly in my thoughts. I cannot stop thinking about your mighty works. (NLT)

He even tells us that He chooses not to think about our sins for His own sake. God doesn't forget, He chooses what He meditates on.

Isaiah 43:25 "I—yes, I alone—will blot out your sins for my own sake and will never think of them again. (NLT)

If we find that painful memories keep flooding back into our minds, it might be that God is bringing to our attention areas in our hearts that need His healing and salvation.

Isaiah 51:12 “I, yes I, am the one who comforts you. So why are you afraid of mere humans, who wither like the grass and disappear? (NLT)”

The reality is that it is impossible to forget but it is possible to ask God to comfort us.

8. “I don’t want to reconcile.”

The Bible shows us that there are some people who are like wolves and that we need to be as shrewd as snakes and as harmless as doves. Wolves hunt in packs and use tactics to isolate and attack the weak and unassuming. We should be careful not to become their prey.

Matthew 10:16 Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves. (NLT)”

Therefore, reconciliation is never wise with those who simply want to divide and attack us. The Bible clearly counsels us to avoid divisive and hot-tempered people, as well as those who are wilfully unrepentant. And we should not team up with unbelievers who worship pagan gods.

- Avoid divisive people | *2 Thessalonians 3:6 And now, dear brothers and sisters, we give you this command in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ: Stay away from all believers who live idle lives and don’t follow the tradition they received from us. (NLT)”*
- Avoid hot-tempered people | *Proverbs 22:24-25 Don’t befriend angry people or associate with hot-tempered people, or you will learn to be like them and endanger your soul. (NLT)”*
- Avoid the wilfully unrepentant | *1 Corinthians 5:11 I meant that you are not to associate with anyone who claims to be a believer yet indulges in sexual sin, or is greedy, or worships idols, or is abusive, or is a drunkard, or cheats people. Don’t even eat with such people. (NLT)”*
- Don’t team up with unbelievers | *2 Corinthians 6:14 Don’t team up with those who are unbelievers. How can righteousness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness? (NLT)”*

We need to be shrewd in recognising such people and take precautions.

Proverbs 22:3 A prudent person foresees danger and takes precautions. The simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences. (NLT)”

We can maintain peace by keeping a distance from them and drawing clear boundaries.

Psalms 34:14 NLT Turn away from evil and do good. Search for peace, and work to maintain it. (NLT)

On the other hand, there will be some thorny relationships that God will want us to continue with. To know which is which requires God's wisdom and the Holy Spirit's counsel. For this, we need to pray and seek the Holy Spirit's help and guidance.

James 1:5 If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. (NLT)

The reality is that there are some people God does not want us to reconcile with.

9. "I am still hurting and in pain."

No one understands the anguish and pain of this world better than Jesus. He was subjected to every form of abuse and tribulation.

Isaiah 53:3 He was despised and rejected—a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care. (NLT)

Because He understands our pain firsthand, He also knows how to comfort us. God is the God of all comfort.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 .. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others... (NLT)

Jesus invites us to offload all our heavy emotional burdens and pain to Him. He wants to give our weary hearts a rest from carrying our emotional anguish on our own.

Matthew 11:28-29 Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (NLT)

This is something we need to intentionally learn to do, especially if we have suppressed our emotions for many years. In the book of Psalms, David leaves us many good examples of how he poured everything out to God and how God heard every one of his complaints and laments.

Psalms 69:3 I am exhausted from crying for help; my throat is parched. My eyes are swollen with weeping, waiting for my God to help me. (NLT)

We don't have to carry our pain inside us any longer, we can go to God for relief and healing. As we do so, we will find that the emotions attached to painful events will finally die down and we will receive new life through the Holy Spirit.

Psalm 147:3 He heals the brokenhearted and bandages their wounds. (NLT)

The reality is that we should ask God to heal our pain.

We hope today's lesson helps us all to renew our minds about forgiveness and the tremendous benefits we will reap when we obey God's command to forgive. God even makes it a prerequisite for prayer. He wants us to deal with the grudges and unforgiveness in our hearts before He will receive our prayers, so let us make an effort to start all our prayers by asking the Holy Spirit to show us any unforgiveness or bitterness in our hearts so that our prayers will not be hindered.

Mark 11:25 But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too." (NLT)

Here is one such prayer. Let us pray this prayer together.

"Heavenly Father, please forgive me for holding onto unforgiveness and bitterness at the expense of my relationship with You. I have dishonoured Jesus's death on the cross for my sins and quenched Your Spirit. I have made my emotions and my hunger for justice and revenge far more important than the blood that Jesus shed for my forgiveness. I repent and turn from my hardened heart. Please show me who I need to forgive and bless, so that I can draw close to You with a pure heart. In Jesus' name, amen."

Now let us use this time to sit quietly before the Holy Spirit and allow Him to show you anyone whom you need to forgive. We pray that you'll be blessed by your time with the Holy Spirit.

We have now come to the end of today's lesson. Here are the reflection questions for you to prepare answers to for your small group meeting as well as a testimony to watch. We pray that you'll be blessed. See you next time.

Time for reflection

1. Who did you have difficulty forgiving in the past?
2. How has forgiving them changed your heart?

Watch the testimony for this lesson



Personal notes