

*“Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”*

*(Colossians 3:13)*



## Understanding How Forgiveness Really Works

As Christians, we know that Jesus calls us to forgive one another as God himself has forgiven us. But anyone who has ever tried to forgive knows that this can be a difficult thing to do.

Even when we would like to do what is right, we may be unsure about what it means to forgive. Is it possible to forgive people who express no sense of guilt or desire for reconciliation? Have we really forgiven, if we still feel hurt by something someone has done to us?

To answer such questions, we need to know about three inter-related concepts found in Scripture: Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Healing. These important biblical concepts are related, but are not the same thing. Each is directed toward a different goal and works in a different way.

## Forgiveness

In the strictest sense, the concept of Forgiveness in the Bible has to do with releasing from punishment. The terms used in the Bible to describe forgiveness reflect a legal connotation — being “let loose” from condemnation for a crime.

**Jesus said: “Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 18:18)**



Forgiving others has to do with our “letting go” of the desire for vengeance and retribution. The goal of forgiveness is to address the guilt of sin with mercy.

It is important to remember that to forgive is *not* to say that what happened was okay, or that we suffered no real hurt. On the contrary, forgiveness recognizes that real sin has taken place, and that sin always has consequences. To forgive, however, means that even though we have been sinned against, we will not return evil for evil.

Forgiveness rests in the trust that God is the one who is best able to deal with the consequences of human sin. By letting God be God, we trust judgment to his hands.

**Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for 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 12:19-21)**

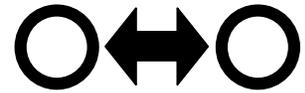
Forgiving is always easier when people come to us to admit their fault. However, even when those who hurt us do not acknowledge our pain, it is still possible to forgive. By letting go in forgiveness, we can give to God that burden, too.

## Reconciliation

Reconciliation is a concept related to forgiveness, but with a different goal. The biblical word for reconciliation means “to come back together with.” Strictly speaking, reconciliation refers to the repair and restoration of a broken relationship.

**When you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23-24)**

Where forgiveness rests with the giver, reconciliation is “a two-way street” — it must involve both parties. It implies a desire to continue a relationship, recognizing that both parties need to work together to get along.



This means that there may be times when we can forgive but be unable to reconcile, as in the case when the other person is unwilling to respond. In some cases, it may not be safe or prudent to maintain an ongoing relationship — like with a persistent abuser, for example. Yet, even without reconciliation, we may still find the faith to forgive and “let go.”

Even though forgiveness and reconciliation are not the same thing, they are related. Forgiveness is often the first step in reconciliation, especially when both parties express their faults and their willingness to work on their relationship with the other.

**All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:18)**

# Healing

Our God is a God of healing (Ps 41:3). In the aftermath of injury or conflict, God is able to comfort those in pain and restore those who have been hurt by others. Healing from the wounds of sin can be both the *source* and the *result* of forgiveness and reconciliation.

**I am going to bring recovery and healing; I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security. I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first. (Jeremiah 33:6-7)**



Just as it takes time for physical wounds to heal, emotional and psychological wounds also require time before they get better. In the case where one person has been deeply hurt by another, often some time of healing must take place before that person is ready or able to extend forgiveness.

Healing can be even more important for reconciliation. When wounds are still sore, it is difficult to take the risk of exposing oneself to further injury. Sometimes an intentional distance from a source of pain can create the time for healing to take place.

Keep in mind that forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing are all related, but not in a simple 'step by step' sequence. A person may be able to forgive but not be ready to reconcile until healing has taken place. In the same way, having a person who hurt you express their sorrow and ask for forgiveness may be the key to both healing and reconciliation.

In the end, we need to remember that God is the source of all these blessings. First and foremost, we trust in the promise that our Lord cares for us.

**Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you ... and after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. (1 Peter 5:7, 10)**

## Further Reading:

Those looking to hear a Word from God might want to consider the **Book of Psalms** for prayer and reflection. Here are some suggested Psalms addressing various themes:

- |                 |                  |
|-----------------|------------------|
| 13 – Pain       | 121 – Protection |
| 35 – Betrayal   | 131 – Peace      |
| 38 – Guilt      | 130 – Hope       |
| 51 – Confession | 139 – Assurance  |

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# Forgiveness, Reconciliation and Healing



*Sola Publishing – Educational Series:*

## What Does This Mean?

*Jesus said:*

*“Whenever you stand praying: forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.”*

*Mark 11:25 (NRSV)*