

When Offenses Occur

A Bible Study on Forgiveness



The best results will probably be realized when the “study” portion is done with a group or with someone filling the role of a counselor. The assignments that are given Lesson #5 are not intended to be done with a group, but with a mature Christian who is fulfilling the role of a counselor or mentor.



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Don't Ignore An Offense

Read Luke 17:1-3 and make notes:

Verse 3 is a warning to us. The KJV says “take heed to yourselves” and the NIV says “so watch yourselves.” There are two very good reasons why we should take great care and "so watch" ourselves. First, is the statement in 17:1, "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come." Secondly, If we are not paying attention and watching out for ourselves when an offense occurs we can be seriously wounded. The seriousness of the issue isn't the magnitude of the offense. The warning is regarding our ignoring the offense or trying to play it down.

The word "brother" indicates someone who is close to us. When someone who is in a close relationship with us sins against us we should never say, "Oh that's okay." It is important for us, and for them, that we acknowledge they have wronged us, sinned against us, and hurt us.

The rebuke of the offender and the forgiveness of the repentant offender are equal Christian responsibilities, expectations, and duties.

When an offense occurs and it is not addressed, the hurt will not get better all on it's own. In reality it will fester and grow into an ugly and potentially deadly infection within us. It is like a splinter that has made only a small puncture wound and minimal pain that can be endured.

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It can be somewhat easily removed when it is first discovered and probably will leave no scar once it is healed. If it is not removed, the skin may become callused over and around the outside of the wound in an effort to protect the body from any further pain and discomfort. In time the splinter will become an infected area. The swelling and inflammation from the infection places a great deal of pressure on that area of our body. The callus is not elastic and it doesn't give.

As the pressure increases causing pain, this may even make it impossible for us to function properly. This condition is not hopeless. The callused area can be lanced, the splinter removed, and antibiotics applied to cure the infection. The removal of the splinter at this point is not as easy as it would have been in the beginning, but it can be accomplished. At this time it will most likely be much more painful to have it removed and it probably will leave some type of lasting scar.

One of the most tragic lies perpetrated upon the modern church is the idea that every offense should be completely overlooked. It is important for us to take note that our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ is the one who instructed us to tell the other person when they have offended us. The words and instruction of Jesus need to take priority over those of everyone else. So, let's make sure that we tell the other person when their words and actions have hurt us. The primary thing to keep in mind at this point is to do so in love.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:5-8 and make notes:

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The Lord sets forth some guiding principles in handling an offense within the Church: First, in the public address of the situation, as in this letter to the Church in Corinth, the name of the offender is not identified (V5-8).

Second, Christian discipline is not only an action of retribution but is remedial as well (V6,7).

Third, we should try to understand the feelings and psychological needs of the penitent offender (V6-8).

The “majority” in the NIV is “inflicted of many” in the KJV. There really isn't enough evidence to state emphatically whether a formal meeting took place to discuss this matter or this was simply the opinion of the majority of the believers. The words "the majority" could mean the majority vote of a formal meeting, but they can also refer to the opinion held by most of those who "make up" the group.

This text would indicate any punishment given the offender should come from a decision made by the majority of the Believers (perhaps in the local church) and not from a single person, especially the offended person. The hurt and suffering of the offended person will usually prevent them from being able to render a fair decision concerning punishment. In much the same way as a parent should never punish their child while they are angry, neither should an offended person decide on the punishment for their offender.

The major point is we should be more interested in the reforming of the offender than either continuing or increasing their punishment. The Corinthians were told they could best accomplish this by forgiving the offender, encouraging them, and making a public affirmation of their love for the offender as a person. This would state quite clearly to the offender that the local fellowship of believers recognizes God has forgiven the offender.

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List #1

If you have not already done so, this is a great time to begin making a list of persons or organizations which have offended you and still cause you to feel hurt or pain when you think of them.

When The Offender Repents

Read Luke 17:3-4 and make notes:

This passage makes it extremely clear. Repentance is to be responded to with forgiveness. Regardless of how many times, even in a single day, forgiveness is the proper response to repentance. This is not to be used to establish a specific number of times to give forgiveness. This is an instruction to be generous with our forgiveness.

To our natural or fleshly nature, this can appear to be unfair and irresponsible. To our logic and reasoning, if a person continues to offend in a specific area, then it only makes sense that they aren't really repentant, so they don't deserve to be forgiven. Or maybe, we reason since their repentance is not genuine then we can't forgive them. This text doesn't give us any instructions to evaluate the quality or the sincerity of the offender's repentance. It is straightforward, if they repent, then we are to forgive them.

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List #2

Make a list of those who have apologized or have attempted to repent and you are still struggling with hurt where they are concerned:

When They Offender Doesn't Repent

Read Mark 11:25 and make notes:

This passage doesn't even mention the sinner. It doesn't address whether they are repentant or have asked for forgiveness. Neither of these is the issue. The instruction is clear; and it is directed toward the offended person. If we hold anything against another person, then we must forgive them so that our Heavenly Father will forgive us.

Effective and Powerful Prayer must be offered in a Heart and Attitude of Forgiveness!

A great deal can be said regarding the importance of praying with Faith, which is the topic of the passage from which this verse is taken. However, this verse points to another essential for effective and powerful prayer. It must be offered in a heart and attitude of Forgiveness.

Read Luke 23:34 and make notes:

This is exactly the attitude Jesus maintained toward others, right up until the moment of His excruciating death on the cross. It is apparent from the gospel accounts that Jesus didn't see or hear anyone being repentant of having beat Him, mocked Him, or nailing Him to the cross. He saw them more as people acting in ignorance or simply responding to the wishes of the crowd.

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List #3

Make a list of those who have offended you and you feel:

- (1) they probably don't realize that they hurt you or
- (2) they didn't realize before they did so that it would hurt you.

Write beside each one a (1) or (2) indicating which category you feel they are in.

How Many Times Should We Forgive Them?

Read Matthew 18:21-22 and make notes:

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The Rabbinic tradition of that day taught a person could be forgiven for a repeated sin only three times. On the fourth time of a repeated offense there was no forgiveness. Peter surely felt he was being most generous and big hearted. Peter thought forgiving someone seven times would surely be the maximum anyone would be expected to forgive another person. After all, seven is a perfect number. That makes sense to our rational mind and to our religious mind as well.

Jesus' response, however, states forgiving someone 70 times 7 wouldn't be too many times. Most of us realize that Jesus didn't give a legal answer establishing 490 times rather than 7. What Jesus was really saying here is that we are to continue to forgive someone, regardless of how many times it is needed. The parable that follows this verse indicates we will discover each of us has been forgiven by God more times than we will ever forgive others.

This lifestyle of forgiveness is a character of God that had been recognized by saints of old.

Read Micah 7:18 and make notes:

Read Jonah 4:2 and make notes:

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Try to imagine a situation where a person has forgiven someone 77 times for a repeated offense. How difficult would it be for that person to forgive the offender when they repeated that offense the 78th time? Do you think forgiveness would have become a way of life by the time they had forgiven a repeated offense 77 times?

List #4

Make a list of offenses you have committed multiple times and the person or organization your offense may have hurt:

All Offenses Are Forgivable

Read Mark 3:28-29 and make notes:

Read Luke 12:10 and make notes:

Forgiveness is available for any and all sins, even blasphemy, except one. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not forgivable. Mark 3:30 gives us a clue as to the identity of this sin. It says the reason Jesus taught this passage is because they were saying, "He has an evil spirit." Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit would mean a person is attributing to Satan the works and fruits of the Holy Spirit.

It is highly unlikely this was meant by our Heavenly Father to be a legal point. It is not in harmony with the rest of the New Testament teachings to declare a person as "unforgivable", if in a time of ignorance they attributed the work of the Holy Spirit to be the work of Satan. However, it is in harmony with the whole of the New Testament to see this as a continued lifestyle rather than an isolated event or occurrence.

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A person can reject Christ and then later, by the Grace of God, repent and accept Him. But the person who has developed an incorrigibly evil heart and continually declares God's Holy Spirit to be evil is without any hope of forgiveness. The person who is concerned or worried that they might have blasphemed the Holy Spirit is most likely innocent of this unforgivable sin (or attitude). The person who is actually guilty of this sin is most likely going to be fully aware and defiantly unrepentant. How likely is forgiveness for the unrepentant toward God?

The greater point to be seen in this passage is the simple truth that every offense against another person is forgivable, regardless of the severity, or how much hurt and harm it causes.

Read Matthew 12:31-32 and make notes:

Jesus makes a distinction between "blaspheming" the Son of Man, which is forgivable, and "blaspheming" the Holy Spirit, which is not. This should in no sense be interpreted as saying Jesus is less important than the Holy Spirit. It is speaking more to the point of who causes each offense. Non-believers, as a whole, are the ones who blaspheme Jesus. No one who has received cleansing and forgiveness from Jesus Christ would do so. Non-believers, in their ignorance, commit many offenses against the Savior, all of which are forgiven when they come with a repentant heart. For the most part, it would take a Believer to speak against the Holy Spirit in a blaspheming manner. The believer is not ignorant and certainly does know better.

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A further point to this text is in regards to offenses against us. If every sin against Jesus is forgivable, then it is not likely we will be able to convince God that any particular sin against us by another person should not be forgiven. It is a subtle kind of lie that Satan throws into our thought processes, but to think a sin against us should not be forgivable would place us in a higher place than Jesus Christ. This is a very dangerous attitude even if it is in ignorance.

List #5

Make a list of others whom you have offended in some way and you are sure they have not forgiven you.

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List #6

Make a list of those who have offended you and you feel they cannot be forgiven until they have done something about their offense.

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Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

If You Discover You Have Offended Someone

Read Matthew 5:23-24 and make notes:

Go to the person you have offended, even if it means delaying your sacrifice, your offering, or other ministry service. The key phrase in this text is “your brother has something against YOU.” This instruction does not only apply to the times when we did something wrong. This could be a situation where you did nothing dishonorable but someone took offense. Maybe they have misunderstood or misinterpreted our actions or our words. Maybe we didn’t realize this would be an offensive thing to them.

When Jesus was teaching in regard to people having done good things for those in need He said;

Read Matthew 25:40 and make notes:

The reverse of this would be true as well. When we have offended even the least of persons, we have offended our Savior. How acceptable to the Lord can our offering be when we are standing before Him as one who has offended Him? How acceptable can our service to the Lord be as long as we try to serve Him while still guilty of offending Him?

If Someone Has Offended You

Read Matthew 18:15 and make notes:

Show the person how they have offended you - just between the two of you (may include your spouse). This should be done before you tell others what has happened or how this person has hurt you. The offender should be given the opportunity to repent and make things right between you without the general public knowing they have failed or offended you.

(see “What I Want Regarding My Offender” section - before having a meeting with your offender)

Read Matthew 18:16 and make notes:

If it could not be settled in private between the two of you, discuss the matter again in the presence of appropriate witnesses. The witnesses are to observe the offender’s response as well as your words and actions. If the matter should become a public issue at a later time, the witnesses can testify to your having presented the offender with a loving and Christ like opportunity to repent.

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Another reason for taking someone else is their objective viewpoint. When we are hurt or offended, we may not see things as clearly as we should. Once we are hurt we are likely to read more into what the offender does or says than they intend. The two witnesses may be able to see something that could be said which could help convince the offender to reconcile.

Read Matthew 18:17 and make notes:

If the offender still doesn't respond properly to your plea for reconciliation, bring the matter before the entire congregation. But this should never be done until after it was given an opportunity to be resolved in private with appropriate witnesses.

If after all these attempts have been made for reconciliation, the offender still refuses to repent, then the church as a whole should decide what action should be taken. This might be left in the hands of the church leadership or might be decided by the congregation. This verse gives permission to treat the offender as though they are not a believer. This means they could be refused fellowship or participation in the local church.

The church may decide against you and your complaint and ask nothing of the offender. If this happens then you have no further appeal except to God. To talk to others regarding their offense puts you in the wrong and in need of repentance.

Read Mark 11:25 and make notes:

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Don't allow another person's offense to rob you of your blessing or your forgiveness. Regardless of how the offender responded to your pleas for repentance and reconciliation, forgive them.

List #7

Make a list of those persons you need to go to in private and allow them an opportunity to reconcile.

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List #8

Make a list of those persons you need to go to with one or two witnesses to make one more effort to reconcile with them.

What I Want Regarding My Offender

Review the following list and circle the numbers of the things you want regarding you Offender. Try to have this completed before you have your meeting with the offending party, your home group, or your counselor. By identifying exactly what you want, you will be able to deal directly with important issues and not spend a lot of time floundering on non-essential items. In other words, you will be more likely to have a productive meeting.

1. I want them to suffer.
2. I want them to be thrown out of the church.
3. I want them to be banned from serving in any position in the church.
4. I want them to be chastised before the entire congregation.
5. I want them to receive a letter of rebuke from the church leadership.
6. I want them to say I was right and they were wrong - in front of witnesses.
7. I want them to apologize in front of the congregation.
8. I want them to apologize in front of the church leadership.
9. I want to tell them all the other things they have done wrong.
10. I want to tell them how my past sins are not as bad as their past sins.
11. I want to tell others I know just how badly they have treated me.
12. I want them to stay away from me and out of my sight forever.
13. I want them to stay away from me and not talk to me at church.

(List continued on next page)

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14. I want to apologize to them for the way I have handled myself without addressing what I think they have done wrong.
15. I want them to forgive me for my actions and words and I will leave their actions and words between them and God.
16. I want our ability to fellowship to be restored.
17. I want to be able to fellowship with them even better than before.
18. I want to learn from this and be a stronger Christian in the future.
19. I want to forgive them and am asking God to help me to honestly and completely forgive them.
20. I want someone to help me work things out with them.
21. I want to be at peace in my heart, mind, and soul.

Contrasting Pictures of Forgiveness

Picture #1

Read 1 John 2:1-2 and make notes:

This text presents us with picture number one. When a person sins, Jesus Christ stands before the Heavenly Father ready to present Himself as the atoning sacrifice for their sin. When the person confesses to our Heavenly Father and repents, the cleansing and freedom can come quickly because the atoning sacrifice is already before God. The interesting picture is when we can see Jesus standing before the Heavenly Father ready and willing to present Himself as the atoning sacrifice for an Offender's sin. There is an Offended believer on earth refusing to release the Offender from their guilt. When our Heavenly Father looks at the repentant sinner, looks at the ready atoning sacrifice, and then looks at the unforgiving believer, who do you suppose is in the best standing with God at that moment? If we choose not to forgive an offender, this places us in direct opposition to God's will, God's plan, and God's purpose.

Read Romans 12:19-21 and make notes:

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God does not want us to fall into the trap of seeking revenge against those who have offended us. His wrath will bring about recompense upon those who offend His people. This is especially so when the offended person reaches out to their offender and tries to bless them. God promises to be the avenger for His people who are offended by others. He says the offended person trying to bless the offender heaps “coals of fire” upon the offender.

Picture #2

This brings us to picture number two. Jesus presents himself before the Heavenly Father ready to be the atoning sacrifice for the Offender’s sin. The Offended person forgives the Offender and asks God to bless them. The Offender refuses to repent. God looks at Jesus ready to be the atoning sacrifice, sees the Offended person forgiving and blessing the Offender, then sees the Offender refusing to repent. God avenges the offense and pours forth coals of fire upon the Offender’s head.

The first picture is of God looking upon the offended refusing to forgive the offender. The second picture is of God pouring forth His wrath upon the offender because the offended has forgiven and the offender has not repented.

Where would you rather be in these pictures?

Picture #3

There is another alternative. The third picture would be one where Jesus presents Himself before the Heavenly Father, ready and willing to be the atoning sacrifice for the Offender's sin. The Offended person releases the Offender, forgives them, and asks the Heavenly Father to bless them. The Offender repents before God for their offense. Our Heavenly Father accepts Jesus' atonement. He turns to the Offender and says, "well done good and faithful servant" for repenting. He then turns to the Offended and says, "well done good and faithful servant" for forgiving.

Again, where would you rather be in these pictures?

Some People You May Need To Forgive

Write the names of those you need to forgive and the nature of the offense against you.

List #9

1. God - are you holding something against Him
2. Spouse or ex-spouse
3. Mother or father
4. Brother or sister
5. Children
6. Other relatives
7. Neighbor
8. Someone of another race or culture
9. Supervisor, boss, or manager
10. Co-workers
11. Business partner
12. Teacher or professor
13. Doctor, lawyer, or some other professional
14. Pastor, elder, deacon, Sunday school leader
15. Denomination or religious organization
16. Yourself

When you have finished this list - transfer the names on this list (List #9) to the appropriate list (List #1 - #7) in lesson one of this study. As each name is transferred to the appropriate list, remove their name on this list (List #9).

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Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

There Is Power In Forgiveness

Read John 20:23 and make notes:

The original text of this passage is interesting. The first verb, “remit” in KJV and “forgive” in NIV, is in the aorist tense which implies an action in an instant. The second verb, “remitted” in KJV and “forgiven” in NIV, is in the perfect tense which implies an abiding state that began before the action of the first verb. Basically this is saying, the person’s sin you forgive in this instant has been in the state of being forgiven.

This simple detail from the original text will not support the concept that God forgives a person's sin because the believer decides to forgive them or God refuses to forgive a person's sin if the believer refuses to forgive them. The rendering of the original text appears to imply the believer only recognizes and announces what God has already done in another person's life. Believers do not create forgiveness.

When we forgive someone for their offense in this instant, we are aligning ourselves with what God has already been doing - the abiding state of forgiveness for that other person. When we don’t forgive the other person, this places us in opposition to God’s actions and plan.

Read James 5:15-16 and make notes:

The phrase in this text "if he has sinned" should be enough to refute the claim that every single sickness is a direct result of sin in a person's life. This text simply restates the truth that prayer can effect healing while going a little further and saying if the sickness is a result of sin, then the sin will be forgiven as well as the healing being given.

Verse 16 is basically an exhortation for each of us to confess our sins and repent "so that you may be healed." Those who confess their sins and repent are forgiven. Those who have their sins forgiven are righteous people. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

Consider the power in the prayer of a "righteous" person. The prayers of a righteous person have the power to accomplish a great deal. Are we considered a righteous person when we refuse to align ourselves with God's position concerning the forgiveness of the offender?

If we refuse to forgive our offender is it realistic to expect our prayers to accomplish much if anything?

The Power and Advantage of Forgiveness

Read Matthew 18:18-20 and make notes:

When we forgive our offender, this brings us into unity and harmony with them. When we are in harmony and unity with another person, we can bind the harmful things which come against us, our families, and community. When we are agreement with another person we can set loose the beneficial things or ourselves, our families, and our community. As long as an offense remains between us and another person, we are limited in what can be bound as well as what can be released.

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Read Mark 3:24-25 and make notes:

Our ability to remain, or to continue, depends upon our being in unity and agreement with our brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. It is also true that our destruction depends upon being in agreement or the lack of it. This principle holds true for our family, church, business, or any organization.

Read Romans 12:18 and make notes:

We cannot control the actions and attitudes of others. The NIV says “as far as it depends on you” live at peace with everyone. As long as you have done everything you can do to bring about reconciliation, you will receive the release and blessing even if the other person refuses to cooperate.

Forgiveness Produces Forgiveness

Read Matthew 6:14-15 and make notes:

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This text is for everyone who stands in need of forgiveness, not only those who request forgiveness. If I need forgiveness, then I must give forgiveness! If I withhold forgiveness, then my heavenly Father withholds forgiveness from me. The reason this is so becomes clearer when we look at Matthew 6:12 and Luke 11:4 in the next section.

Read Matthew 18:35 and make notes:

The king represents Christ Jesus. The slave represents each person who is a slave to sin. Christ issues compassion, forgiveness, and release from guilt.

The slave owed a debt he could never have paid under the best of circumstances. The slave did not pass along the compassion, the forgiveness, or the release. His fellow slave owed a debt that was possible to pay under the right circumstances, but was difficult. Verse 35 makes it abundantly clear that our Heavenly Father will withhold forgiveness from us if we withhold forgiveness from others.

Read Luke 6:37 and make notes:

The injunction "do not judge" doesn't say we are not allowed to decide what is right or wrong. If this were the proper interpretation of this text, then we would have a problem with the text which instructs us to rebuke the sinner. The "judge" is the one who determines and renders the penalty required for an offender. The "judge" is the one who "condemns" the offender to the punishment. We are instructed not to take the place of the judge and decide that we have heard enough or know enough to pronounce the correct penalty. Instead, we are to leave the judgment to the Heavenly Father and we are to forgive the offender.

If you are still feeling strongly that you want this person who has offended you to receive "justice" for what they have done, then there is another Scripture we need to consider:

Read Psalms 36:6 and make notes:

The Hebrew word translated "judgment" can mean "judgment, justice, ordinance." The NIV translates this "your justice is like the great deep." When we consider God's righteousness being so large as to resemble the great mountains, that is a pleasing thought. But when we consider God's justice and judgments to be like the great depths of the ocean, it is rather sobering.

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A person can receive great enjoyment by swimming and diving in the ocean. There is beauty to behold and physical exercise and recreation, and refreshing to experience. The ocean has even provided a certain kind of freedom for those with physical impairments that limit their movement upon ground. If a person chooses to go deeper and deeper into the depths of the ocean, there is a limit to the benefits. The depths of the ocean far exceed our ability to survive. We can reach a depth where we are crushed by the tremendous pressure and death will result. Even if we do not dive to this extreme depth, there is also the danger of coming to the surface too quickly from great depths. This too can not only cause great pain and it can cause death.

God's Word declares that we will receive the same level of justice we demand for those who have offended us. We need to take great care that we do not sink too deeply into the depths of God's justice, for no human being can survive in it's greatest depths. There is cleansing and freedom to be found in God's justice. However, those who demand to go too deeply into justice, will find themselves in unbearable pressure.

Look at the lists you have made of those who have offended you. Can you identify ways in which you can tell them they have offended and hurt you without passing "judgment" upon them?

Pray For Forgiveness

Read Matthew 6:12 and make notes:

Where the KJV says “as we forgive our debtors” the NIV says “as we also have forgiven our debtors.” A quick reading of either of these translations can leave us with the idea that we are asking for forgiveness from God on the basis of our having forgiven our offenders. It is missing the mark to use this text in a manner which implies we somehow earn our forgiveness from the Heavenly Father by forgiving others.

The original language of this text has proven difficult to interpret to the satisfaction of all Bible scholars, so there are several opinions as to the proper interpretation. It appears the best interpretation would favor the praying for forgiveness from our Heavenly Father so that we would be able to forgive those who have offended us. When we have our eyes opened to the enormous offense we have personally caused against God, the offenses of others toward us seem small in comparison. We also come to the reality of attitude that we are probably incapable of forgiving others unless we have help from the Heavenly Father.

Read Luke 11:4 and make notes:

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The phrase "Forgive us our sins", in the Greek, uses the aorist tense, which would usually refer to a single declaration of forgiveness, once all the accounts have been settled. Since the prayer began by addressing God as "Father", it is expected that this is the prayer of a Believer, or a person who is already justified and made guiltless through the death of Christ. This may be more of a daily reminder that we cannot extend forgiveness to others except we have been forgiven by the Heavenly Father.

The person who will not extend forgiveness to another may be revealing they have not experienced or known God's forgiveness. This would mean they have not repented. As disciples of our Lord Jesus, we should live our daily lives in an attitude of repentance for our personal sins and an attitude of forgiveness toward the sins of others. "Deliver us from evil" could be well applied to the request that we be delivered from the evil of carrying a grudge or holding unforgiveness toward others.

List #10

Make a list of those who have offended you and you will need God's help to be able to forgive them. These are the people for whom you will need to pray for God to give you forgiveness so that you will have forgiveness to give to them, because it simply isn't in you to do so at this time.

Reward Of Repentance

Read 1 John 1:9 and make notes:

Read Hebrews 10:17-18 and make notes:

God promises to forgive every sin we confess. He states forthrightly that He will not remember the sins and lawless acts He has forgiven. There is no further sacrifice to be made for the sins which the Heavenly Father has forgiven.

Read Romans 4:7-8 and make notes:

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Blessed is the person “to whom the Lord will not impute sin” (KJV) or “whose sin the Lord will never count against him”(NIV). Once a sin has been forgiven, there is no more penance to be done. The offender has become an "ex-offender." We are no longer guilty once we have been forgiven. And God will never count that sin against us.

List #11

Make a list of sins and/or lawless acts for which you are still guilty.

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Which of these would you like our Heavenly Father to no longer hold against you?

Begin by confessing your actions and/or words as sin to God and ask Him to forgive you. As you experience personal forgiveness for a item on your list, erase it from the list.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Forgiveness is God's Way

Read Psalms 103:10-12 and make notes:

Read Isaiah 43:25 and make notes:

There is ample evidence in the Bible that God punished His people because of the rebellion and sinful lifestyles. However, God established a pattern and a “normal way of doing things” throughout the Old Testament by repeatedly dealing with His people with mercy and grace rather than an unswerving adherence to the law.

Read Hebrews 8:12 and make notes:

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God has already declared His promise to be merciful to sinners and will not remember the sins of those who repent. Will we follow after God in this matter or will we hold those who sin in a continuous station of guilt? Will we continuously call to our remembrance the offenses and sins of those who have offended us?

Do I want God to deal with me only upon the basis of the law and always give what is right according to your actions and words?

Would I rather have God's help to allow me to become more like Him in dealing with the offenses of others? This doesn't mean ignoring them and pretending they never happened. It would be dispensing mercy and grace toward your offender while dealing with their offense.

Look at some of the people on the lists you have made. Brainstorm, ask God for help, and write some possible ways you could deal with their offense with mercy and grace.

God's Expectations of Our Forgiveness

Read Hebrews 12:14-15 and make notes:

Read Ephesians 4:31-32 and make notes:

Read Romans 12:14-18 and make notes:

We are first warned to “follow after peace with all men”; first, to prevent us from falling short of the grace of God, secondly to prevent us from having any “root of bitterness” to spring up within us. The root of bitterness would not be something you would see right away. As a “root of bitterness” it could grow under the surface in an unnoticed direction. Then at some point in time and perhaps in the most inopportune place, the substance of bitterness would shoot through to the surface and cause us and others great harm. While we might wish to remind ourselves that God has given us the authority to choose who we will forgive, He calls out for us to forgive “each other” even as “God also in Christ forgave you.”

When Offenses Occur – 04

We are to put away from us all bitterness wrath, and anger. To “put away” something speaks of our having taken action and exerting force to make it happen. God knew it would not always be easy to forgive and to let go of an offense. He is asking us to use whatever effort it might take to forgive another person and to keep unforgiveness from placing any root of bitterness within us. God is asking us to do this not so much because He doesn’t want to see the other person held as guilty but so that we will be healthy, free, and joyous.

If it is possible to live at peace, as much as it “depends on us” we are to live at peace with everyone. There may be someone who will refuse to allow peace between you. God’s Word is so realistic. His instruction for us to live at peace with others was given only in the context of as much as it depends on us. God doesn’t hold us accountable for the lack of peace between us another person as long as we have done all that we can do to bring about peace.

When Offenses Occur – 04

Look at the lists you have made. Identify those persons with whom you have been unable to have peace - but you are sure you have done all that you can do toward attaining peace with them.

List #12

Make a list of those names here:

Forgiveness Through Jesus Name

Read 1 John 2:12 and make notes:

The reason our sins are forgiven is "on account" of the name of Jesus. The Greek word translated "forbearing" in the KJV and "bear with" in the NIV speaks specifically of a willingness to put up with unpleasant traits which are irritating to us and those things we dislike in others. We are encouraged, or at least reminded, to forgive any person who has a "quarrel" with us in the KJV and "whatever grievance" in the NIV, we may have against another person. Remember, God has forgiven us. Remembering the things for which the Lord has forgiven us helps to keep things in perspective when we are tempted to over expand an offense another person has caused us.

Read John 20:22-23 and make notes:

When Jesus was instructing the disciples to "receive the Holy Spirit" what He told them next should not be passed over quickly. It was God's wish that the followers of Jesus Christ exercise forgiveness. It also points out the awesome responsibility God has entrusted to those who are following after Jesus. He has given to us the "power" and the "authority" to forgive. "Whose soever" sins we forgive, "they are forgiven" and "whose soever" we don't forgive, their sins "are retained."

When Offenses Occur – 04

FORGIVENESS IS NOT	FORGIVENESS IS
an attitude	response out of obedience
a feeling	willful and purposeful intent
natural to the flesh	a promise
an apology	the heart of God
an occasion	part of the character of God
fruit of the Spirit	an established habit
a faith gift	natural to the spirit
	sincere response to an apology

If we attempt to wait until we are in an attitude to forgive or we feel like giving, then we may never forgive because this is not a natural thing to our fleshly man. If we wait to hear an appropriate apology from the offender or for the right occasion to come, then we may walk in ever increasing bitterness concerning the offense. If we wait for God to endue us with a Spiritual gift of forgiveness or until our faith grows strong enough we may walk many days without the joy of the Lord as our strength.

When we choose to be obedient to God, set our will to forgive and set our purpose toward that end, we have a promise from God to help us accomplish this. It is the very heart of God to impart to us a portion of His character so that we can forgive our brothers and sisters. This will become an established habit and completely natural to our spiritual man. We will be able to give a sincere response to an apology even if it doesn't appear to be the most sincere apology.

Jesus Desires That We Have Nothing Between Us

That all believers would be in unity was the focus of Jesus' last prayer for His followers as He closed His earthly ministry.

Read John 10:30 and make notes:

Read John 13:34-35 and make notes:

Read John 17:11 and make notes:

Read John 17:18-23 and make notes:

When Offenses Occur – 04

Jesus prayed that every Believer would be one with Him and one with the Heavenly Father, by being in unity with each other. One of the reasons Jesus wanted us to be in unity was so “the world may know” that God sent Jesus. When believers walk in unity and agreement, it helps the evangelistic arm and efforts of the church. When believers walk in discord and unforgiveness there is a direct and noticeable negative affect upon the evangelistic efforts of the church.

How does the way Jesus prayed at the end of His earthly ministry compare with the way we pray concerning our offender?

Truth Concerning Offenses

Read John 8:32 and make notes:

Read Luke 23:34 and make notes:

Read Romans 5:6 and make notes:

Read Romans 14:15 and make notes:

When Offenses Occur – 04

Regardless of the fact they appear to be a villain because of their offending you:

- A. They have worth - Christ died for them
- B. They may also be a victim -
has some previous offense against them driven them to offend others (you)
- C. The offending person is worth no less than you

Read Romans 3:23 and make notes:

I am either presently also guilty of sin or have been guilty of sin because everyone has sinned. I can become guilty of any sin if I allow myself to get out of a right relationship with my Heavenly Father, in the wrong place at the wrong time, or with the wrong people. I could become guilty of equally offensive action or words.

Read Romans 3:10 and make notes:

I have probably offended and hurt God at least as badly as this person has hurt me. I need at least as much forgiveness as this person.

When Offenses Occur – 04

Read Romans 5:8 and make notes:

God forgave me when I did not deserve it; while I was still a sinner. Forgiveness from God is not based upon deserving it, but upon repentance, mercy, and grace. How will God judge me if I only forgive when I think someone deserves it?

We need God's forgiveness. First in regards to our salvation. That would not be a possibility without God's forgiveness. Secondly in regards to our being in his favor. As long as we remain guilty of sin we are not in God's favor. We need to forgive our fellow man; first for our own emotional and spiritual health, and secondly so that they can be released and walk in God's favor. We need to forgive ourselves for our emotional and spiritual health and ultimately for our physical health.

Read Matthew 22:37 and make notes:

Read Mark 12:30 and make notes:

Read Luke 10:27 and make notes:

Jesus pointed out the necessity for us to Love our Heavenly Father with all our ability and resources. Matthew recorded we are to Love God with our heart, soul, and mind. Mark and Luke recorded this teaching and in addition to heart, soul, and mind they included the instruction to love God with all of our strength. Jesus wanted us to understand we are to love God with all we have. Matthew and Luke both recorded an interesting follow up to loving God with all of our being: we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. In order to be able to love the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves, it is necessary for us to have experienced forgiveness.

If we have not personally experienced (or personally received) forgiveness, then we will find ourselves unable to love God with all we have because that part of which is controlled by guilt, unforgiveness, or bitterness will resist loving God. Probably no explanation is needed in stating that we can not love our neighbors as we love ourselves as long as we are controlled by guilt, unforgiveness, or bitterness.

The summary statement might go something like this: In order for it to be possible for the Believer to live the life Jesus has saved us to live, we must not only receive forgiveness but we must give forgiveness to all who need it.

When Offenses Occur – 04

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

When Offenses Occur – Assignments

Assignment Number One: (Offenses I have committed multiple times.)

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Look at **List #4** you made on page 11.

If there are any offenses you have committed multiple times for which you no longer are guilty; is this because you have already confessed them to God? If so, then draw a line through these on **List #4** on page 11.

If it is because you think so much time has gone by that it no longer matters, think again. Our subconscious mind never forgets that we owe a debt. We will always feel guilty in our inner man until we confess this offense and ask God to forgive us. Confess each offense to God as sin and ask His forgiveness and draw a line through each offense as you experience release concerning that offense. If you need help with this, review the material in this study again before continuing.

If there are any offenses you have confessed but still feel you are not completely forgiven or you have difficulty forgiving yourself, then add them to **List #11** on page 39 and draw line through them on **List #4** on page 11.

When Offenses Occur – Assignments

Assignment Number Two: (Offenses for which I still have guilt.)

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Review **List #11** you made on page 39.

Do with the items on this list as you did with those in assignment One above until there is nothing left on the list. If you are unable to find complete forgiveness or release, then seek the help of a mature believer and consider asking your prayer support group to pray specifically for you in these matters. Pray, confess if necessary, and ask for God to help you to accept and receive forgiveness.

Draw a line through each item on **List #11** on page 39 as you find release until there is nothing left.

When Offenses Occur – Assignments

Assignment Number Three:

(People I have offended who have not forgiven me.)

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Review **List #5** you made on page 14.

If you can't think of anything else to do to try to make amends with the person you offended, seek the counsel of a mature believer.

When you are sure every possible effort has been made and they still will not forgive you, then add their name to **List #12** on page 45 and draw line through their name on **List #5** on page 14.

When Offenses Occur – Assignments

Assignment Number Four: (People I need to forgive.)

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Review **List #9** you made on page 21.

Can you remove any of these because you have forgiven them since they were placed on the list? If so, then draw a line through their name on **List #9** on page 21.

Do you need to add anyone else you have remembered since originally making the list? Ask God to give you forgiveness to be able to give forgiveness to each one. Call each name before God and ask His help in forgiving them individually.

When you are sure you can and have forgiven them, draw a line through their name to **List #9** on page 21.

If there are any you are having difficulty forgiving and releasing, then add their name to **List #1** on page 3 or **List #2** on page 6 and remove them from **List #9** on page 21.

When Offenses Occur – Assignments

Assignment Number Five:

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(People who still cause me pain when I think of them.)

Look at **List #1** you made on page 3.

Acknowledge to God that these people and their offense still cause you pain and discomfort you when think of them or think of what they have done. Admit that you have difficulty forgiving when the pain is so real and current. Ask God to heal the hurt within you and to give you some of His forgiveness to be able to offer it to them.

As you experience forgiveness toward each one, draw a line through their name on **List #1** on page 3.

If there are any names left on this list after you have prayed for each one, then add them to **List #2** on page 6 and remove them from **List #1** on page 3.

When Offenses Occur – Assignments

Assignment Number Six:

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(People who probably don't know they have offended me.)

Review **List #3** you made on page 8.

Do you need to go to any of these people to inform them that they offended you? If so, can you do this in a loving manner? If you can, then add their name to **List #7** you made on page 20 and remove them from **List #3** on page 8.

If you do not feel you can do this, share your thoughts and feelings with a mature believer and ask your prayer support group to lift you up in prayer about this.

When Offenses Occur – Assignments

Assignment Number Seven:
(People I need to get to in private.)

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Review **List #7** you made on page 20.

When you are spiritually and emotionally ready, make appointments with each one and share with them their offense. Be sure to do so with mercy and grace. In some cases, a gentle and loving letter can be used, but it is sometimes better to do this in person.

If you aren't sure you can do this with gentleness, -
or if you aren't sure you have the strength to do it at all, -
add their name to **List #8** on page 21 and remove them from **List #7** on page 20.

Assignment Number Eight:

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(People I need to “go to” but I need someone to go with me.)

Look at **List #8** you made on page 21.

Find someone who can keep things in confidence, is mature spiritually, and is willing to go with you. Share with them your need for someone to go with you to meet with a person or persons who have offended you. Be sure and point out any persons on this list whom you have not met with privately so that your witness is not caught off guard. Be sure the two of you pray over each one before making an appointment to meet with the offender. Continue to pray about this person and their offense until you feel a leading from God that it is time to meet with them. As you meet with each one draw a line through their name on **List #8** on page 21.

If the offense has been reconciled give God glory and praise. If the offense has not been reconciled then consider whether the issue should be brought before the church leaders or placed on **List #12** on page 45.

When this offense is resolved or their name has been added to **List #12** on page 45, remove their name from **List #8** on page 21.

When Offenses Occur – Assignments

Assignment Number Nine:

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(People I have felt could not be forgiven until they have done something.)

Review **List #6** you made on page 15.

Is there anyone you can now forgive. If so, please do so and draw a line through their name.

If there are any names left on **List #6** of page 15, add them to **List #10** on page 37 and draw a line through their name on **List #6** on page 15.

When Offenses Occur – Assignments

Assignment Number Ten:

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(People I know I will need God's help to be able to forgive.)

Are there any names on **List #10** you made on page 37?

If so, take your list to a mature believer and ask them to help you find healing and release from these offenses. As the two of you pray for God's help to be able to forgive, be sensitive to any instructions or suggestions given by the Holy Spirit. When the Lord leads you to do so, take your witness and go to each person to allow them to make things right. If things are reconciled then draw a line through their name on **List #10**.

If your offender was unwilling to reconcile, then consider whether they should be brought before the church leaders or placed on **List #12** on page 45 and draw a line through their name on **List #10** of page 37.

If your offender does apologize but you are still struggling with hurt feelings and a negative attitude toward them, then add their name to **List #2** on page 6 and draw a line through their name on **List #10** on page 37.

When Offenses Occur – Assignments

Assignment Number Eleven:

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(People who have apologized but I am still struggling with my feelings regarding them.)

Are there any names on **List #2** you made on page 6?

If so, take your list to a mature believer and ask them to help you find release from these offenses. You may wish to review together the material of this study series again. When you arrive at this list, any problem with releasing an offender is not with the offender but is with the offended (you). Pray and ask God to help you to have a forgiving heart. Ask God to forgive you for having an attitude of unforgiveness. Ask God to deliver you from this evil attitude and approach. Don't stop praying for help with each one until God gives you a release from the hurt and the bitterness.

As you can honestly do so, draw a line through each name on **List #2** on page 6 until there are none left. Even if this takes many months to complete, please don't give up until it is accomplished. Continue to meet with a mature believer for encouragement and prayer agreement on these issues and offenses.

Assignment Number Twelve:

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(People with whom I have done all I can do but am unable to reconcile with them.)

Look carefully at **List #12** you made on page 45.

Share this list with a mature believer and share with them what you have done and why you believe you have done everything you can to reconcile with these individuals. Pray together and seek God's counsel concerning each one. If God should give you any additional ideas about what you could try in an effort to reconcile, then take your witness and do so. Remember, God may ask you to try something knowing full well that the person isn't going to respond in a positive way. If this should happen, don't get discouraged. God will always give each of us every opportunity to make things right. Be encouraged that you have done all you can do and don't dwell on the offender's response.

If you are able to reconcile with your offender, then praise God and give Him glory. If not, then realize that in God's eyes you personally are reconciled because you have fulfilled Romans 12:18; "as much as it depends on you" you are living in peace with your fellow man. Leave the offender in God's hands and do not pick up this torch of bitterness or unforgiveness again. Satan will most likely try to get you to take up this battle again from time to time.

Keep **List #12** someplace you can get to it. When Satan attempts to get you into this evil again, take out this list and remember you have done all you can and now this battle belongs to the Lord.