

Prayer Exercise forgiving family members.
Adapted from Step 3 in the steps to freedom in Christ,
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Forgiveness is one of the most important skills to practice in order to enjoy physical and emotional and relational health. No marriage can thrive if unforgiveness, resentment, and bitterness are not resolved on a regular basis. If you're honest, you'll admit that there are things which you and your family members do and say which make each other angry. In fact, it's *impossible* to live under the same roof with each other 24-7 and avoid irritating and angering each other. The ancient meaning of "Forgive" is: *to cease to be angry*, and *to cancel a debt*. This outline will show you **why**, **how**, and **when** to forgive each other.

Why should I frequently forgive my family member(s)? Because forgiving is the holy, healthy thing to do when others offend us. God expects us to extend mercy to others, particularly our loved ones, because our heavenly Father has shown mercy to us, and His nature is to be merciful. [Luke 6:36 (NIV) *Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*] here's a definition of some biblical terms that you need to wrap your head around, as a professed Christian:

- **Justice** is giving people what they deserve (good or bad; blessing or punishment).
- **Mercy** is **not** giving people the bad/punishment that they deserve.
- **Grace** is giving them the good that they **do not** deserve.

Through yielding our lives to Jesus Christ, we become recipients of both God's grace and His mercy, as noted in the book of Hebrews: *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.* (4:14-16, NIV)

God's grace towards us is inexhaustible: *John 1:16 (NIV) From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.*

God expects us to forgive as we have been forgiven: *Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.* -Ephesians 4:31-32 (NIV)

In his most famous message, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught: *"This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.* Matthew 6:9-15 (NIV) Jesus teaches that there are negative consequences for failing to forgive others.

We need to forgive others in order to be free from our pasts and to prevent Satan (and his army of fallen angels) from taking advantage of us. *If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.* 2 Cor 2:10-11 (NIV)

How can unforgiveness enable Jesus' spiritual enemies (demons) to take advantage of us? Unforgiveness is contagious and can influence our perspective, attitudes, speech and/or conduct towards others, and –in turn- theirs to us... which is why the bible says: *See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.* Hebrews 12:15.

Harboring chronic unforgiveness can open us up to tormenting impressions and thoughts communicated from evil spirits as “mental pop-ups” which may be what Jesus is referring to in his “Parable of the Unmerciful Servant” found in Matthew 18:32-35. The punchline goes... *Then his master, after he had called him, said to him (The unforgiving servant), 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 'Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' "And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."* Failing to forgive can leave you with a reservoir of angry feelings and thoughts which evil spirits can remind you of in order to provoke you to anger, or perpetuate bitterness and resentment.

How many times are we to forgive people? Jesus says: continually: *Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.* Matthew 18:21-24 (NIV)

Before you begin this Forgiveness Prayer exercise, Begin by inviting God's presence by praying *out loud*: **Dear Heavenly Father,**

I acknowledge Your presence in this room and in my life. You are the only all-knowing, all-powerful and ever-present God. I am dependent upon You, for apart from You I can do nothing. As a Christ-follower, I declare the bible's truth that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to the resurrected Christ, and because I am "in Christ," I share that authority in order to make disciples and set captives free. I ask You to fill me with Your Holy Spirit and lead me into all truth. I pray for Your complete protection and ask for Your guidance. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Follow up with an oral declaration of your spiritual authority:

In the name and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the power of the shed blood of Jesus Christ, I command Satan and all evil spirits to release me in order that I can be free to know and choose to do the will of God. As a child of God, seated with Christ in the heavenlies, I order every spiritual enemy of the Lord Jesus Christ be silent. I say to Satan and all your evil workers that –in Jesus' name- I cancel all orders and assignments against me, my spouse, marriage, and family -and forbid you from inflicting any pain or in any way prevent God's will from being accomplished in my life and our marriage and/or family.

Next, invite God's guidance in identifying any unforgiven offenses from your family member

Dear Heavenly Father,

I thank You for Your great kindness, and patience, which has led me to repent & turn from my sins (Rom. 2:4). I confess that I have not always been completely kind, patient, and loving toward (insert name) who's hurt me. I have rehearsed my spouse's offenses and entertained bad thoughts in my mind. I have nurtured angry feelings and fed bitterness in my heart towards (insert name). Holy Spirit, I ask that you to bring to the

forgive those who've hurt you; 2) God's job is to free you from any spiritual entrapment; and 3) the Holy Spirit's job is to heal your damaged emotions and painful memories; and lastly 4) Your job is to then remain forgiving in the future (2 Cor. 10:3-5), which will be discussed later**.

Forgiveness is not a feeling. Don't wait to forgive until you feel like forgiving; you will never get there. Feelings take time to heal after the choice to forgive is made and Satan has lost his place (see Eph. 4:26-27). Freedom is what will be gained, not a feeling.

Forgiveness is a choice, a decision of the will. Since God requires you to forgive, it is something you can do. However, forgiveness seems hard because it pulls against our sense of what is right and fair. We naturally want revenge for the things we have suffered. But, we are told by God never to take our own revenge (Rom. 12:19). You may think, "Why should I let them off the hook?" That is exactly the problem: as long as you do not forgive, you are still "hooked" to those that hurt you; chained to your past. By forgiving, you let them off your hook, but they are never off God's hook! You must trust God to deal with the other person justly, fairly, and mercifully --something you cannot do.

You say, "You don't understand how much this person hurt me!" But, until you let go of your hate and anger, they will continue to be able to hurt you. You can only stop the pain and start to heal by forgiving them. **You don't forgive someone for their sake; you do it for your own sake so you can be free.** Forgiveness is mainly an issue of your obedience to God: He commands it. God wants you to be free; it is the only way.

Forgiveness is agreeing to live with the consequences of another person's sin without demanding repayment. Forgiveness costs you something. Unforgiveness says, "you owe me." an apology, an explanation, etc... Forgiveness is "*canceling* the debt" of sin, & *releasing* the offender to God. Forgiveness is "taking the loss" by "writing off" others moral debt to you. You're going to live with those consequences whether you want to or not; your only choice is whether you will remain bound to them through bitterness & unforgiveness or the freed from them through forgiveness. Jesus took the consequences of your sin upon Himself, suffering the pain of your sin. God the Father "made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). Where is the justice? Its the cross that makes forgiveness legally and morally right (Rom. 6:10, Colossians 3:13).

HOW do you forgive from your heart? You allow the Holy Spirit to "search" your mind and memories (Psalm 139:23-24) in order to make you conscious of those you need to forgive, and their particular offenses. When you bury the pain of others' offenses inside of you, instead of forgiving them, it hinders your ability to heal. Unless your forgiveness involves allowing the Holy Spirit to visit the emotional core of your life, it will be incomplete. Though you may not know how to, nor want to, bring your feelings to the surface, God does. Let the Holy Spirit bring the pain to the surface so that He can deal with it. This is where God's gentle healing process begins. As you pray God may bring to mind offending people and experiences you have totally forgotten. Let Him do it even if it is painful. Remember; you are doing this for your sake. God wants you to be free. Don't rationalize or explain the offender's behavior. Forgiveness is dealing with your pain and leaving the other person to God. Positive feelings will follow in time; freeing yourself from the past is the critical issue right now.

****Decide that you will live with the consequences of their offenses by not using that information against them in the future.** It is not unusual for a painful memory to resurface, and along with it: angry feelings, especially when you have developed a habit of mentally

rehearsing the offenses of others. Maintaining good mental hygiene requires treating resurfaced memories as “dead issues” --having forgiven the offender-- and resting in your freedom from the injury and offender *by faith*. It involves choosing to take thoughts about revenge captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:3-5) and to maintain forgiveness towards others.

This doesn't mean that you tolerate sin --put up with the future sins of others. God does not tolerate sin and neither should you. Nor should you put yourself in the position of being continually abused and hurt by the sins of others. You must set up scriptural boundaries to prevent future abuse and take a stand against sin while continuing to forgive those who've hurt you. You may even be required to report an offense to the proper civil authorities, or even testify, for the sake of justice but not for the purpose of seeking revenge from a bitter heart.

Don't say, "*Lord, please help me to forgive,*" because He is already helping you. Don't say "*Lord, I want to forgive*" because you are bypassing the hard-core choice to forgive which is your responsibility. When recalling your spouse's offenses, stay focused until you are sure you have dealt with all the remembered pain --what they did, how they hurt you, how you felt as a result of their injury (rejected, unloved, unworthy dirty etc.). You are now ready to forgive your spouse so you can be free, with those past offenses no longer having control over you.

For each item on your list, pray aloud:

Lord,

I thank you Jesus for dying that I might be forgiven. I confess that, as a result of being hurt, I have chosen not to forgive, and have allowed myself to hold anger, resentment, and bitterness in my heart towards (insert name). By an act of my will I now choose to express the desire of my heart and forgive (insert name). **I forgive (insert name). for (verbally share every hurt and pain the Lord bring to your mind and how it made you feel). **REPEAT THIS FOR EVERY LISTED OFFENSE UNTIL YOU ARE THROUGH YOUR LIST.****

After you've verbally forgiven your spouse for every painful memory recalled, conclude by praying aloud: **Lord, I release (insert name). and each offense to you and into the freedom of my forgiveness; I ask you to bless (insert name). I release my right to seek revenge. I choose not to hold on to bitterness and anger. I pray that, by the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, all ground gained in my life and marriage by any evil spirit, due to (insert name)'s offenses and my unforgiveness, will be canceled. In the name of Jesus Christ, I command every evil spirit that has tormented me in any way due to my refusal to forgive to and leave me now! Holy Spirit, I ask you to heal my damaged emotions. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.**

Self Forgiveness

If you've harbored bitterness or entertained revengeful thoughts or actions against someone, and you haven't forgiven yourself for doing so, pray:

Dear Heavenly Father,

I confess that, as a result of being hurt, I have allowed myself to hold anger, resentment, and bitterness toward myself for past failures, mistakes, attitudes, and choices. I acknowledge this as sin and I now repent and turn from such thoughts or behaviors. I ask that you will forgive me and cleanse me. I now choose to forgive myself, I thank you in Christ that I am forgiven. In Jesus name. Thank you Father for forgiving me for those things that I have done. I now choose to forgive myself for the things that I know

you have already forgiven me for. In Jesus' name. Amen.

If you have had false expectations of God, been angry or blamed God for anything, pray:

Dear God, I confess that I have blamed you for: (list any "bad" circumstances or events you've "pinned on" God). I 'm sorry for blaming you, and entertaining bitterness towards you, and I ask you to forgive me. I know that you hate what Satan has done in my life. Thank you for loving me and promising to set me free. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Inner Vows:

An inner vow is a deliberate decision that sets the will in a certain direction --often in response to another's hurtful treatment of us. At some point in time, a decision is made that usually includes the words "I will never" or "I will always". Some examples would be things like, "I will never let my husband/any man hurt like that again", or "I will never forgive my wife for..." Vows have a have a *restrictive effect* on a person's will that needs to be released in prayer, in order for the person to be free to become all that God meant them to be. Our vows limit ourselves our family members, and rob our marriages & families of their full potential. List and name specific vows you have made with regard to your spouse, parent, or child, or perhaps with men, women, children, or parents in general (generalized attitudes):

Pray:

Lord, I renounce vowing to: state vows individually. I release (insert name/category) from each vow and repent of choosing to live in a way that is contrary to your plan and perfect will for my life. Thank you for forgiving me. I ask that now, by the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, you would release me from any bondage I have brought myself under, or demonic spirits I have invited into my life, as a result of that vow. In Christ's name I pray. Amen.

Embittered Judgments and Expectancies

****A modification based upon insights gained from John and Paula Sanford at Elijah House Ministries**

When our spouses hurt us over and over again, we can come to conclusions that they'll always behave that way. We may have formed negative conclusions regarding all people in our spouse's position (i.e.: all men/women, husbands/wives). Jesus warns us against making sweeping generalizations ("judgments"): "*Do not judge lest you be judged yourselves. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it shall be measured to you.*" (Matt. 7:1-2) Negative judgments affect our attitudes & behavior towards, and

expectations of, our spouses. Ascribing intentions, or imputing motives toward them often provokes the results we anticipated; “we reap what we sow” (Galatians 6:7) and behave in a manner which actually helps bring about our pre-existing judgment or conclusion(s). The bible warns us against forming judgments out of our bitterness: “*See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God, that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled*” (Heb. 12:15). To “defile” refers to influencing others in a contagious way. Bad attitudes & expectations can infect family members and spread throughout a household in a reciprocal way.

Pray:

Holy Spirit show me the critical judgments (1 Cor. 4:5) or general conclusions I’ve made about my spouse, parent(s) or children that have affected the way I view & treat him/her/them. LIST them below:

Heavenly Father, I am sorry that I have “judged” others, particularly my family members. I renounce these judgments (List them here) and ask that you would forgive me, and recover all ground gained by your enemies in my life, marriage, and family as a result. Holy Spirit I ask you to *reverse* my habits of judgment and negative expectations and *replace* them with positive anticipations that will cause life and my relationships to go the opposite way – to blessing rather than harm. Thank you, Jesus Christ, for forgiving me. Holy Spirit, please change my attitude and perspective towards my family members to enable me to see and love them as Jesus does.

WHEN? Jesus said: *This is how you should pray... Give us our food for **today**, and forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And don't let us yield to temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."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.* (Matthew 6:11-15, NLT).

In other words, forgiving others ought to be a regular (even daily) habit. For your own emotional, physical, and marital health, incorporate forgiveness into your daily, or at least weekly routine! Keep your heart free from the debris of unforgiven past offenses so that your love can flow freely to your spouse, parents, and/or children.