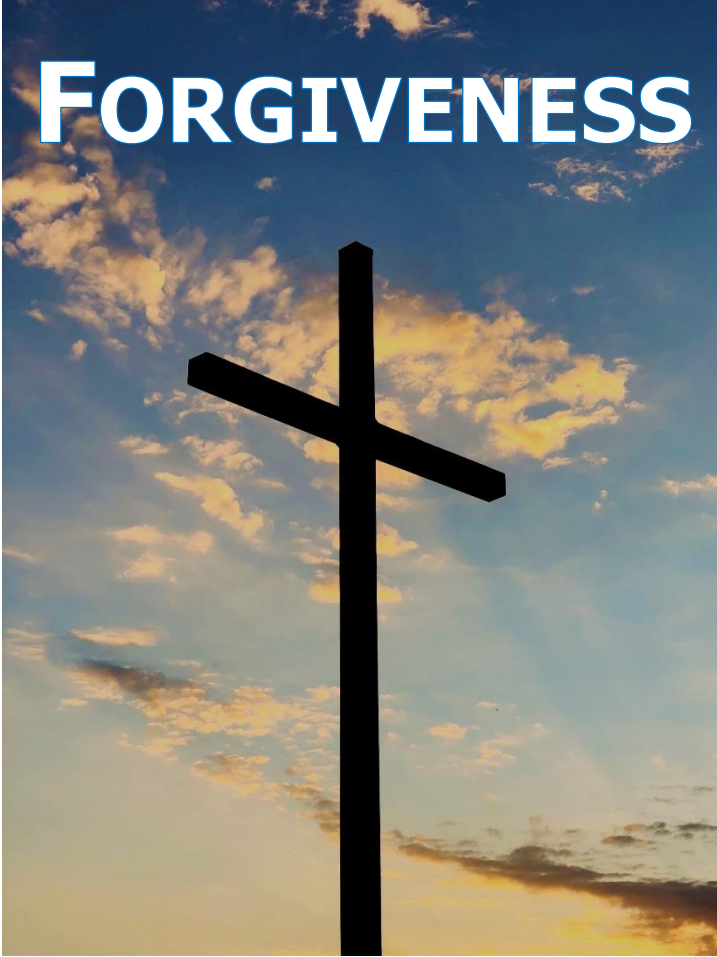


# **FORGIVENESS**



*Katherine Hilditch*

[LifeinJesus.net](http://LifeinJesus.net)

'Forgiveness'  
by  
Katherine Hilditch

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# FORGIVENESS

It's a horrible feeling when you know you've hurt someone. And it's a horrible feeling when someone hurts you. Forgiving others and receiving forgiveness can seem hard, but forgiveness is right at the centre of the Christian faith - both receiving forgiveness from God and forgiving other people who've hurt you.

## *Forgiven*

The Bible calls the wrong things people do, say and think sin. God hates sin and He can't just ignore it – He's a God of justice. But He loves people so much, He doesn't want to punish them. So He sent His own Son, Jesus, to earth to die as punishment for every sin. It was the complete sacrifice and it was once-for-all. It was for all people – past, present and future; for all sin – past, present and future; and for all time – past, present and future.

Most people know what it is to wake up in the middle of the night overwhelmed by shame at something they've done. Guilt can control or even destroy your life. That's not what God wants. But because Jesus suffered all the punishment people deserve and carried all their shame and guilt, they are completely forgiven by God. No-one has lived a perfect life – it's impossible - so everyone needs God's forgiveness. Well, it's already won – all your sins, past, present and future, are forgiven. But you have to receive that forgiveness for it to become a reality in you and start to change your life. And the only way to do that is to accept Jesus as your Lord and Saviour - what the Bible calls being born-again. You need a Saviour and Jesus is the only true one. He said in John 14:6 – *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me."*

## *Accepting Jesus as Your Lord and Saviour*

When you acknowledge Jesus as God and decide to follow Him, you make Him your Lord. When you believe in and accept His sacrifice on the Cross for yourself personally, you make Him your Saviour. You are then born-again and have a brand-new perfect spirit. God becomes your Father and you His child, and you can start to enjoy your personal love relationship with Him.

Romans 10:9 says - *'if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.'* Tell God you are sorry for the wrong things you do, say and think. Believe that Jesus is Lord, that He died for you and that He is now alive. Accept Him as your Lord and Saviour. Say it with your voice and believe it in your heart.

If you've done that sincerely, you are now born-again. Jesus has come to live in you and your spirit has been made brand-new – believe it and thank Him. Everything you've ever done wrong or ever will do wrong is forgiven, and you will be with God for eternity.

As a child of God, you now have a whole new family of brothers and sisters. Tell a trusted Christian that you are now born-again so they can help you in your new life in Jesus. And you have the Bible to help you understand and experience more of God's love for you and all Jesus has done and won for you. It will help you to live your life in the best possible way – His way.

## *Forgiven and Forgotten*

God hasn't only forgiven your sins, He's forgotten them too! In Hebrews 8:12 He says – *'I will remember their sins ... no more.'* God is able to forgive and forget. He isn't making a list of your

sins to confront you with when you die. What is the point of forgiving you if He's still going to do that? They are punished, forgiven and forgotten. You no longer need to feel guilt or shame. If you do still feel guilty or ashamed, thank God that He's dealt with it all and turn your thoughts away from your feelings and onto Jesus. He wants you to live your life with no thought of guilt or shame. Of course, when you do something wrong there are consequences and you may still have to deal with them. You may need to ask forgiveness of someone you hurt or put something right. But you are forgiven by God whether they forgive you or not.

This is why you can experience God's love – there's no guilt or shame to get in the way. He doesn't see you as someone who sins, He sees you as you really are – His beloved child, and He delights in you. You really are free!

### *Is it OK to Sin Then?*

The Bible asks this question and gives the answer - an emphatic "No!" You might think that if you're already forgiven, why not go ahead and do the wrong things which you're tempted to do. When you sin you bring problems into your life which will mess you up and probably other people too. But the amazing thing is that when you're born-again you have a brand-new perfect nature or spirit. Your old spirit used to draw you towards sinning, but your new spirit draws you towards doing things God's way. You still have your free will and can choose to sin or not, but as you grow as a Christian you will find you are less inclined to sin. Choose to say 'no' to sin and it will get easier. Think of all that Jesus suffered so you could be forgiven and think of the damage you could do to yourself and the people around you. Choose God's way and protect yourself.

Of course you won't be able to be perfect, so when you do sin, tell God you know it's wrong, turn away from it, receive God's forgiveness and walk on in freedom.

## *Forgiven and Forgiving – the Connection*

The Bible makes it clear that there is a real connection between being forgiven and forgiving others. In Matthew 6:15 Jesus said – *'if you don't forgive men their trespasses (sins), neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.'* This can sound quite worrying and you need to look at it along with other Bible verses to understand exactly what it means. It can't mean that if you don't forgive every single person every single hurt you won't be saved, because you will have forgotten some! You can't be perfect.

God knows what your heart is like. If you have a heart that refuses to forgive it's a hard heart. If you have a hard heart and aren't willing to forgive, you aren't going to be able to receive His forgiveness. God wants your heart to be soft. If you have a soft heart that seeks to forgive rather than bear grudges and harbour revenge, God's forgiveness can become reality in you.

Jesus told a story to illustrate in Matthew 18:23-34. It is called the parable of the unforgiving servant. A servant owes a king a very large amount of money. When the king asks for it to be paid, the servant begs for extra time and the king forgives him and wipes out his debt. The servant then goes out and demands full repayment from another servant who owes him a very small amount of money. When that servant begs for extra time, the first servant refuses and has him thrown into prison. When the king hears about this he was very angry and handed him over to the tormentors until he paid the whole debt he originally owed

the king. And Jesus then said in Matthew 18:35 – “*So my heavenly Father will also do to you, if you don’t each forgive your brother from your hearts for his misdeeds.*”

Not forgiving someone when they have hurt you can seem fair enough, but the truth is that by not forgiving them, it isn’t them that is suffering so much as you. Holding a grudge and nursing hurt affects your life for the worse. It fills your thoughts and colours the decisions you make and your whole attitude to living. It can destroy you - you are in the hands of the tormentors.

There is only one way out and it is to forgive the person who has hurt you. It sets you free from all the torment, and your softened heart is then able to receive the forgiveness Jesus has won for you.

## *Forgiving God?*

This is a strange idea that I’ve come across – forgiving God. It is really a deception. It keeps you hooked into the idea that God causes all the hurts and bad stuff to happen and so needs to be forgiven. It’s not true. God is not to blame for the bad stuff and all your hurt. You need to realise this and instead of forgiving Him, thank Him that He loves you and will never do anything to harm you. Instead He wants to help you and heal your hurts if you will let Him.

## *Forgiving*

If you hold onto your hurts and grudges they’re going to torment you. If you refuse to forgive someone in your heart, the person you are actually hurting most is yourself. The only positive way forward is to forgive. Jesus made it so clear that you need to

forgive because He knows it is the only way you can get your life back on track, walk free and be at peace. I heard someone say once, “Be selfish and forgive.” Forgiving does you so much good in many different ways. You’ve probably heard the phrase, “Why should I let him or her off the hook?” But the person is hooked onto you, and you need to be free of the weight of dragging them around everywhere you go. Forgive them before God and let them off the hook so you can be free.

Of course, when you forgive someone it can also make a huge difference in their lives too. Forgiving isn’t totally one-sided by any means. It can work for good for everyone, but that does include you.

Forgiveness isn’t tolerance. It doesn’t mean thinking that sin doesn’t matter. And it doesn’t mean that there shouldn’t be a justice system. What you need to do is forgive a person for the hurt they have caused you. It’s not your place to forgive someone for the hurt they have caused someone else, but it is your place to forgive them for the hurt they have caused you.

Forgiveness doesn’t automatically mean that you have to put things right with the other person. Ask God to show you what He wants you to do. It may be right that you go to them and say sorry and try to make amends. But remember, whether the person accepts your apology or not isn’t the most important issue – the fact that you’ve forgiven them in your heart is what God is looking for.

There may be a situation where it would be very unwise to ever make contact with the person again. Let God lead you. The person who caused the hurt may not be willing to be reconciled or they may have died, but the command is still to forgive them in your heart before God so you can be free.



## *Forgiveness is a Decision*

Don't wait until you feel like forgiving, because you probably never will. Forgiving is a decision, not a feeling. Jesus said to just get on and do it. It's always possible to do the things that God asks you to do, so forgiving is possible. Just do it. You are then free from the person. They no longer have to fill your thoughts and affect your life. The bitter and hurting thoughts may come back – if they do, just forgive again. Keep doing it – your feelings will change eventually.

In Matthew 18:21-22 Peter, one of Jesus's followers asked Him – *“Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Until seven times?”* Jesus said to him, *“I don't tell you until seven times, but, until seventy times seven.”* Seven symbolised perfection in the Bible, so when Peter suggested he should forgive someone seven times, he probably thought that was pretty good. But Jesus topped it by multiplying seven by seven and again by ten! In other words, just keep forgiving and forgiving however long it takes and however many times someone hurts you.

If you're thinking this is so unfair, remember you're the one who is going to benefit most. And also, remember that God has forgiven all your sins. Don't dwell on them, but just remind yourself. Colossians 3:13 says your attitude to others should be one of – *‘forgiving each other, if any man has a complaint against any; even as Christ forgave you, so you also do.’*

When you obey God and forgive others, He will help you not to think about your hurts, but you do have to play your part. You have to make a definite choice to stop thinking about how you feel and turn your thoughts onto what God has done for you. If it's difficult, don't worry. Just keep forgiving and turning your

thoughts to Jesus and it will get easier the more you do it. Singing praise songs to God really helps.

You may be suffering with deep hurt which is really difficult to deal with. God wants to heal your hurt, but the first step is to forgive the person. If you're struggling, talk to a trusted Christian friend and ask them to pray for you and help you receive the healing God has for you. Alternatively your church may have a ministry team you can go to, or if not, they should be able to arrange for someone to pray with you and guide you into healing.

## *Justice*

God is a God of justice. This means that He will eventually punish the people who have hurt you if they're not born-again. If they are, they have received their forgiveness just as you have. But if they are not, they will eventually receive the punishment they deserve. Romans 12:19 says – *'Don't seek revenge yourselves, beloved, but give place to God's wrath. For it is written, "Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord."*' Don't dwell on this – that isn't forgiveness. But peacefully know that God is fair and one day justice will be done.

## *Joy, Peace and Freedom*

Receiving and giving forgiveness is the only way you can find real joy and peace. And it leads to freedom – your freedom. Receive God's forgiveness today – Jesus paid the ultimate sacrifice so you could be forgiven and live your life free of guilt and shame. And decide to start forgiving others and see what a difference it makes. God loves you so much and He is with you every step of the way as you live your life in freedom with Him.

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So many people are hurting  
and do not know what to do about it.  
And others are feeling guilt and shame  
at things they have done.  
Jesus has made it possible to forgive and be forgiven  
and start to walk free of hurt, shame and guilt.

This booklet will help you find  
the freedom of forgiveness in your life.



**Katherine Hilditch** has been teaching in local churches for many years. In 2013 she wrote her first booklet and since then has written many more. She created her website to make all the booklets freely available to everyone. They can be read online or printed out. Katherine's threefold purpose is to help people understand more about Jesus and all He has done and won for them, to encourage them to go deeper in their relationship with God and to provide material to help them share their faith with others. To read her story and find all the booklets go to –

Website: [LifeinJesus.net](http://LifeinJesus.net)

Email: [contact@lifeinjesus.net](mailto:contact@lifeinjesus.net)