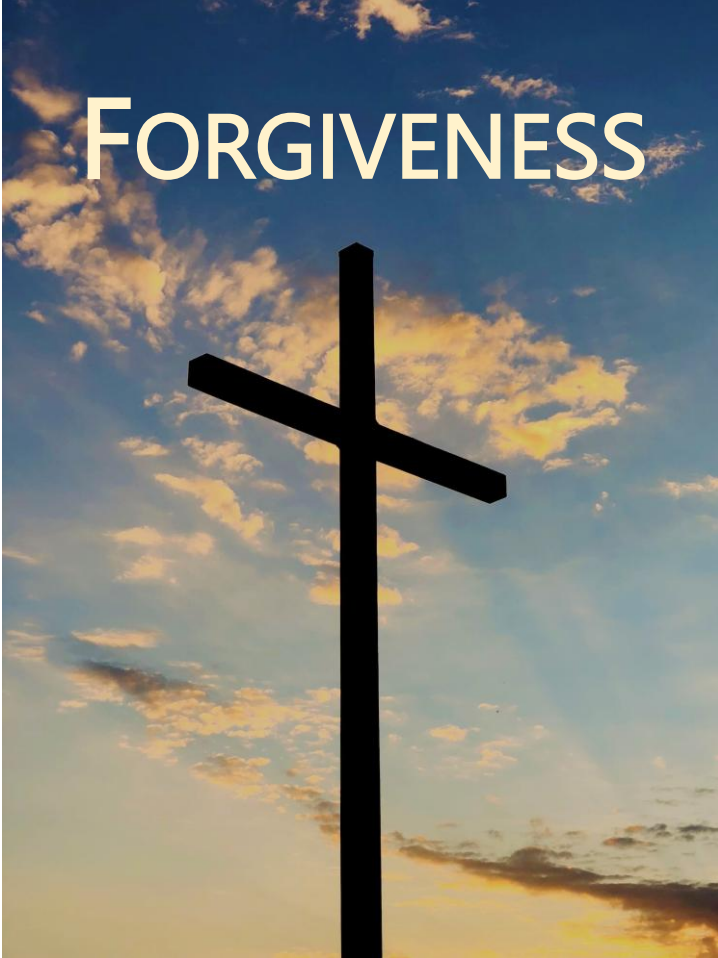


# FORGIVENESS



*Katherine Hilditch*

LifeinJesus.net

‘Forgiveness’  
by  
Katherine Hilditch

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## *Preface*

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.

# FORGIVENESS

It's a horrible feeling when you know you've hurt someone. And it's a horrible feeling when someone hurts you. We all have different personalities and different experiences so some people find it easier to forgive than others. But forgiveness isn't about emotions. It's not about how we feel, but about making a choice. Jesus commands us to forgive others when they hurt us, so it is possible, even though it might seem difficult. Forgiveness is right at the centre of the Christian faith – both receiving forgiveness from God and forgiving other people.

# Forgiven

God hates sin and He can't just ignore it – He's a God of justice. But He loves us so much, He doesn't want to punish us. So He sent His own Son, Jesus, to earth to suffer the punishment for every sin. It was the once-for-all sacrifice. It was for all people; for all sin – past, present and future; and for all time.

No-one has lived a perfect life so everyone needs God's forgiveness. Most people know what it is like 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. When Jesus suffered all the punishment we deserve, He took all our shame and guilt on Himself so we could be completely forgiven by God. Our forgiveness

is already won for every single sin – past, present and future. But we do have a part to play. Ephesians 2:8 says – ‘*by grace you have been saved through faith.*’ Grace is God’s part which He has already done and faith is ours which we need to do. Forgiveness only becomes reality in our life when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour and believe we’re forgiven.

## **Accepting Jesus as Your Lord and Saviour**

When you accept Jesus as your Lord and Saviour you become born-again. God becomes your Father and you His beloved child, and you can start to enjoy your personal 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.’* Say this prayer out loud and believe it in your heart – “Jesus, I declare that You are Lord and that God raised You from the dead to live forevermore. Thank You for dying for me personally. I receive my forgiveness and my salvation now. Thank You Jesus, my Lord and Saviour.”

You are now born-again and Jesus has come to live in you. All your sins are forgiven, past, present and future, and you have a new perfect spirit. And after this life is over, you’ll live in love, peace and joy with your Father God for ever.

# Forgiven and Not Remembered

God hasn't only forgiven your sins – He's chosen not to remember them too! In Hebrews 8:12 He says – *'I will remember their sins ... no more.'* God isn't keeping a record of your sins. What is the point of forgiving you if He's going to confront you with your sins when you die? They are already punished, forgiven. And He's chosen never to remember them again.

If you repeat a sin and go to God saying, "Oh Lord, I did it again," He replies, "What do you mean, again?" let that sink in. You no longer need to feel guilt or shame. Instead, thank God that He's dealt with all your sin and turn your thoughts away from your negative feelings and onto Jesus. He wants you to live your life free of guilt and shame, knowing you are set free.

God doesn't see you as someone who sins; He sees you as you really are – His beloved, forgiven child, and He delights in you. You're not a sinner saved by grace. You were a sinner and then you were saved by grace and now you are a saint. That's what the Bible calls all who are born-again. 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. But when you sin you bring problems into your life and probably into the lives of other people. And you may well open a door to allow Satan an inroad into your life too.

When you're born-again God gives you a brand-new perfect 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 do so. Choose to say 'no' to sin. The more you do it, the easier it will get. 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 and those you love.

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, thank Him for forgiving you and receive the forgiveness Jesus has won for you and walk forward in freedom.

# Forgiven and Forgiving — the Connection

Jesus makes it clear that there is a connection between forgiving others and being forgiven. In Matthew 6:15 He says – *‘if you don’t forgive men their trespasses (sins), neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.’* This can sound quite worrying but 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 lose your salvation. No-one can be perfect. Our new spirit is perfect though and in our spirit we have forgiven everyone everything. And it’s in our spirit that we are born-again, so our salvation is assured. But our soul, our thoughts and emotions and will, aren’t made perfect. That’s why

Romans 12:2 tells us – *‘Don’t be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.’* It’s our responsibility to bring our thoughts and emotions into line with our spirit. God doesn’t release the reality of our forgiveness into our minds if we refuse to forgive others.

Jesus told a story to illustrate this 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 it, he is very angry and hands the first servant over to the tormentors until he has paid the whole debt he originally owed the king. And Jesus then says 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.”*

There is a difference between someone who refuses to forgive and someone who is struggling to forgive. God looks on our heart and He knows what it is like. If you have a heart that refuses to forgive, it’s a hard heart. If you have a hard heart, you aren’t going to be able to experience God’s forgiveness in your thoughts and emotions. 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. When we refuse to forgive, we end up in the hands of the 'tormentors'. Bitterness develops inside us like a hard rock. Our thoughts go round and round dragging us down and down. Refusing to forgive is torment.

In this story, Jesus described forgiving someone as releasing them from debt. It's saying that the person doesn't owe you anything — an apology, an explanation, reparation etc. You set them free unconditionally and in so doing, you set yourself free.

Not forgiving someone when they have hurt you can seem fair enough, but the truth is that when you don't forgive them, it isn't them that suffers — it's you. Holding a grudge and nursing hurt affects your life

negatively. It fills your thoughts with negative emotions and impacts the decisions you make and your whole attitude to living, for the worse. 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. Forgiving sets you free from all the torment so you are able to receive the reality of your own forgiveness which Jesus has already won for you on the Cross.

When we receive God's forgiveness for ourselves, our hearts are softened. With a soft heart we are more able to then forgive others. As we forgive them, the reality of our own forgiveness goes deeper and our hearts soften even more. We are then even more able to forgive others. And so it continues – the life-giving circle of forgiveness.

# Forgiving God?

This is a strange idea that I've sometimes heard mentioned. It is really a deception. It comes from the idea that God causes the bad stuff to happen and so we need to forgive Him. It's not true. God is not to blame for troubles and hurts. It is Satan who does bad. God only does good. Jesus says in John 10:10 – *“The thief (Satan) only comes to steal, kill, and destroy. I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly.”* It's really important to realise this. So instead of forgiving God, thank Him that He loves you and will never do anything to harm you. He's on your side and wants to help you if you will let Him.

# Forgiving Ourselves

This can sometimes feel more difficult than forgiving other people. But remember, forgiveness is not an emotion – it's a choice. Think about it. God has forgiven you, so if you don't forgive yourself, you are setting yourself up as a higher judge than Him. That's not what we want to do and realising this will help you choose to forgive yourself.

I once heard a Bible teacher say "I don't do guilt." He didn't mean that he never sinned or that he didn't repent when he sinned. But once he had repented and received his forgiveness, he chose to leave the sin behind. He refused to allow guilt to drag him down and impact his life. This is such a good attitude.

Hebrews 4:16 says – *‘Let’s therefore draw near with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace for help in time of need.’* We need mercy when we’ve done something wrong and that’s when we’re told to come boldly to God, not to cower in shame and guilt. God has already forgiven you and has chosen not to remember your sins. And He has already given you all the mercy you need through Jesus dying for you. So choose to come before Him boldly and receive your forgiveness that He’s already won for you, and then determine not to “do guilt.” Romans 8:1 says – *‘There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.’*

Of course, when you do something wrong, there are usually consequences and you

may still have to deal with them. You may need to ask forgiveness of someone you hurt or put something right. Do so humbly, rather than trying to justify yourself. If you say sorry to the person you hurt and they reject your apology, choose to let it go. You are not responsible for their attitude. We all stand before God for ourselves, not others, and you stand forgiven by God, regardless of what the person you've hurt does or says.

God wants to see you living in the freedom Jesus won for you, knowing you are His beloved child, not weighed down by guilt and shame. Know you are forgiven by God whether people forgive you or not.

# Forgiving Others

First of all, let's look at what forgiveness isn't.

## **Forgiveness isn't the same as tolerance**

Forgiving doesn't mean that sin doesn't matter. And it doesn't mean that there shouldn't be a justice system. There are times when justice needs to run its course to protect others and hopefully make the guilty person have a change of heart.

## **Forgiveness isn't the same as Trust**

If someone has broken our trust, we are called to forgive them but not necessarily trust them. We offer forgiveness freely, but the person has to earn our trust. For instance, if you share something very personal with someone and they then tell

other people, then we need to forgive them, but it would be unwise to share anything personal with them again unless they can prove they are now trustworthy and that takes time.

## **Forgiveness isn't the same as Reconciliation**

Forgiving someone doesn't automatically mean that you have to be reconciled to them. There may be a situation where it would be very unwise to ever make contact with the person again. Ask God to show you what the wise thing to do is. It may be right that you go to them and lovingly forgive them. But sometimes that makes things worse because they hadn't even realised that they had hurt you. The fact that you've forgiven them in your heart is what God is looking for.

When you forgive someone, it can also make a huge difference in their lives if they will let it. Forgiving isn't totally one-sided by any means. It can work for good for everyone. However, if the other person rejects what you're saying, you have done what God asked you to do and you can walk free. They may not want your forgiveness. They may not want to regret the hurt they've caused you. Remember, you're not responsible for the other person's attitude, but it will help dictate whether reconciliation is advisable or not. Let God lead you.

It may be that the person who hurt you has since died, but the command is still to forgive them in your heart before God so you can be free.

# Called to Forgive

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?”* <sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, *“I don't tell you until seven times, but, until seventy times seven.”* Seven symbolises perfection in the Bible, so when Peter suggested he should forgive someone seven times, he probably thought he was being very generous. 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. Jesus wants us to forgive because He wants the best for us and a life of bitterness is certainly not that.

Sometimes we are hurt because someone we love has been hurt. We can't forgive for our loved one. We can only forgive the hurt the person caused us. We are each responsible for our own attitude. But we can encourage the loved one to forgive for themselves and so walk free.

Be aware that Satan wants us to be full of guilt and shame, feeling hurt, bitter, holding grudges etc because all these make us weak and ineffective. In John 10:10 Jesus says – *“The thief only comes to steal, kill, and destroy. I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly.”* Jesus came that we might live an abundant life, free from anything and everything that would keep us down or hold us back. Realise that when you refuse to forgive, you are playing into Satan's hands. Choose instead to forgive,

however hard it seems, so Satan has no hold over you and you can step into the freedom Jesus has won for you.

If you take offence and hold onto 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 people when they hurt you. 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. Forgiving does you good in many different ways. You've probably heard the phrase, "Why should I let him or her off the hook?" But the hook is attached to you which means that the person is hooked onto you, and you drag their weight of offence and bitterness around with you everywhere you go. Forgive the person before God and

let them off the hook so you can live free of their weight.

Jesus tells us in Luke 6:27-28 – *“love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you.”* It’s a decision — shall we follow our emotions and suffer the negative consequences or shall we do what Jesus tells us to do and experience freedom?

## God’s 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 God's vengeance – that isn't forgiveness. But peacefully know that one day justice will be done.

## **Forgiving is a Decision, Not a Feeling**

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

Colossians 3:13 says our 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.’* We have to make a definite choice to stop thinking about how we feel and turn our thoughts onto what God’s Word says. 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.

Forgive out loud because the words of forgiveness you speak aloud will settle deeper in your heart than if you just think them. Declare verses from Gods Word about His love and mercy. Feed on His love for you and all He has done for you. Sing songs of praise and worship Him.

# Healing of Hurts

You may be suffering with deep hurt which is really difficult to deal with. God has won your healing on the Cross, but the first step to receiving it is to forgive the person. You cannot heal until you have forgiven. The act of forgiving is what opens the door to the healing of your broken heart.

In Luke 4:18-19 Jesus declared – *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim release to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, to deliver those who are crushed, <sup>19</sup>and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”* Jesus has won healing for your broken heart and deliverance for your crushed life. Choose to forgive and allow His healing to work in you

and restore you. The emotions will then come into line with the forgiveness you have freely given.

## **Joy, Peace and Freedom**

Receiving and giving forgiveness is the only way we can experience real joy and peace. And it leads to freedom – your freedom. Receive God's forgiveness for your sins today. Jesus paid the ultimate sacrifice so you could be forgiven and live your life free of guilt and shame. Make a decision to forgive others and make it a way of life 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 a life of forgiveness with Him in peace and freedom.

# *Life in Jesus*

To find out more about Jesus  
and all He has done and won for us  
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*Be kind to one another,  
tender hearted,  
forgiving each other,  
just as God also in Christ forgave you.*

*(Ephesians 4:32)*



**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)