

LESSON 7

ANCHOR 7

Close my accounts with other people by forgiving them and be willing to make amends by becoming a peacemaker.

Colossians 3:13-15 – “Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.”

PRAY

Ask God to speak to you as you read His Word. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a revelation of God’s truth and love and give you understanding of what you are about to read. Pray that you will have an Encounter with God as you earnestly seek Him. Don’t rush through reading everything and don’t rush through praying. Take some time to stop and listen so you may hear anything God wants to say to you.

After you read the scriptures, ask:

- “God, what are You saying in these scriptures?”
- “God, what are You saying to me in these scriptures?”
- “God, how do You want me to apply this to my life?”

Write in your journal as you spend this time with God.

The more you get to know God and His love, mercy and truth, the more you will realize that His ways are starkly counter-cultural. His ways are always higher and better than your own ways and the ways of the world. One such area where His ways are above those of the world He loves and the people He died to save is that of forgiveness. When you place your trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, He forgives your sins. Jesus instructs His followers to likewise forgive those who have sinned against them. We tend to be okay with being forgiven, but forgiving others is a bit more difficult to embrace.

We have discovered in previous Anchor lessons that God has shown us incredible mercy by forgiving us of our sins. We learned that, *in view* of God’s mercy, we are to live our lives in a manner that reflects our gratitude towards Him for all He has done for us. **John 3:16-17** talks about what love God has for us in that He gave His one and only Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. It says that God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. No matter what depraved sins we have committed – Jesus came to save and forgive us.

Read **Psalm 103** as a reminder of how good God is and all He has done for you. The psalmist gives you a great passage for being thankful and praising the Lord for all He has done for you.

Read **Romans 5:6-11** – Jesus Christ died for us while we were still sinners. His sacrifice on the

cross not only paid the debt for our sins, but it is the only way we could be reconciled to God. Reconciliation with God brings us peace with Him. He also wants it to lead to peace with others, as we follow Him and His ways and become peacemakers.

The key verse in Anchor 7 is **Colossians 3:13-15** – “Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.”

Read **Matthew 6:9-13**. In this passage, Jesus is teaching His followers how to pray to the Father. This passage is commonly called *The Lord’s Prayer*. In the NIV translation, verse 12 says, “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors”.

By instructing us how to pray in this manner, Jesus was not giving us a mantra so we could recite empty words that fail to reach our heart and, ultimately, fail to reach the heart of God. Rather, He gave us a model for what our mindset should be and for what our heart and life should reflect when we pray to the Lord. Jesus had mentioned earlier, in **Matthew 6:6-8**, that we should not just babble when we pray. The KJV refers to it as using vain repetitions.

The purpose of this anchor is not focused so much on how to pray – we will focus more on prayer in Anchors 9 and 10. But there are key statements Jesus made, when telling us how to pray, that are to be lived out in our lives if we want to have peace with God and peace with others. Jesus wants us to be sincere and humble. He wants us to be real and authentic and He also wants our hearts to be right with others and with Him. Let’s dig deeper into what Jesus said about forgiveness.

In **Matthew 6:14-15** NIV, Jesus goes on to say, “For if you *forgive* other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also *forgive* you. But *if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins*”.

Jesus delivers a theme of forgiveness throughout His instruction. In this model of prayer, Jesus is saying that we should ask God to *forgive us in the same way that we have forgiven others*. Think about that. It doesn’t mean you can go halfway in forgiveness, because God doesn’t forgive you halfway. It doesn’t mean you can hold a grudge against someone and hold onto the offense, because God doesn’t hold onto all the egregious things you have done to Him when He forgives you. It doesn’t mean that the sin someone committed against you was too bad to ever forgive, because God forgives everyone who asks for His forgiveness, regardless of the depravity of the sins they have committed against Him or others.

Forgiveness is the central focus Jesus is zeroing in on as He instructs His followers that they can expect God’s grace to forgive them inasmuch as they extend that kind of grace and forgiveness to others. He emphasizes it and puts an exclamation mark on the point He is making in **Matthew 6:14-15**. Jesus came to forgive whomever would believe and follow Him as their Savior. He forgave those who did the unforgiveable to Him. If He can do that, He can certainly give you the ability to also forgive others – even those that you may consider to have done the unforgiveable to you.

Jesus says “Follow Me”. By instructing us to forgive others as He has forgiven us, Jesus is not telling us to do something He has not done Himself. Jesus was treated in the most depraved manner anyone could ever be treated. He was mocked and beat and his skin was torn from His body. He was nailed to a cross because of no sin of His own. He was even taunted as He hung upon the

cross. But even then, His love caused Him to say, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing".

Read **Isaiah 53:3-6** – Jesus has been despised and rejected. He was punished so we could be healed. He is acquainted with the deepest grief, yet He still forgave all of us for the sin that caused Him to endure such pain and suffering. God does not call you to do something that He doesn't understand. God understands the cost of forgiveness. He paid it.

There is a story about a man who went to Pastor John Wesley and said, "I never forgive", to which John Wesley replied, "Then I hope you never sin!" John Wesley knew that Jesus' instruction to follow Him included forgiving others as He had forgiven them. We all need what we don't want to give - forgiveness.

Read **Mark 11:22-25** – It is important to note that, recovering effectively from any hurt in life, from any habit, from any character defect, requires obedience in the area of receiving and offering forgiveness according to Jesus' instructions. This passage ends with Jesus saying, "If you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins".

Jesus is teaching in this passage that faith and belief in God gives you power and authority when you are dealing with difficult things in your life. But Jesus also tags forgiveness as a component of this equation. That is because He is interested in your complete healing. He wants you to be set free from the difficult things that are mountains in your life – your hurts, your habits, your sins. Forgiveness is a necessary component of overcoming these mountains and experiencing freedom.

Read **1 John 2:9-11** – Unforgiveness will keep you in the dark. It will keep you from experiencing peace. It will keep you from being in the will of God. It has the potential to destroy you.

Resentment and unforgiveness do not work if you want to have peace in your life. They keep you in a dysfunctional cycle of sin and defeat. You may think that you are paying back the person that hurt you when you don't forgive them, but you are only hurting yourself when you are angry, bitter, resentful and unforgiving towards someone. You are the one that becomes stressed and loses sleep when you hold onto unforgiveness. You create mental, spiritual, even physical anguish, as you replay the offense over and over in your mind.

Chances are high that the person you refuse to forgive is oblivious to the turmoil going on inside of you. You may be holding onto an offense toward someone who is even dead and gone, but you are allowing them to continue to hurt you by allowing them to take up so much time and so much space in your mind and heart. They are living rent-free in your mind. It's time to evict the offender and forgive them, thereby freeing your mind and heart of their damaging effect upon you and your life.

Resentment cannot change the past, the problem or the person who hurt you. It usually doesn't even hurt the person who hurt you. It certainly doesn't make you feel any better. Have you ever known anyone to say, "I feel so much better carrying around this bitterness"? Of course not!

As mentioned above, resentment can even cause serious health issues. Your stomach can feel the ill effects of chewing on and swallowing the bitterness that results from your obsession with what someone did to you. It can become like a cancer that eats you alive. The mind, the body and the soul have related diseases. Resentment is an emotional poison with spiritual and physical consequences. It leaks into your soul and your body and can lead to depression, stress, fatigue,

joint pain, back pain, stomach problems, and other potentially serious diseases.

Proverbs 17:22 says, "A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones". Resentment can make you bitter. It can make you divisive, negative, poisonous, and toxic to be around. It can make you gossip. It can make you skeptical. It can give you a critical spirit and an entitled mindset. It can destroy relationships. It can destroy families. It can destroy businesses. It can even destroy ministries and churches. Resentment is a trick and tool of Satan to destroy and distort.

Jesus knew the potential that unforgiveness has to wreck your life. That is why He taught that you must forgive others as He has forgiven you. It is a freeing principle. When you forgive others the way Jesus commands you to forgive, you choose the freedom of forgiveness so you can move out of the bondage of bitterness. It may be a difficult path to go down, but it is ultimately freeing and it honors God and keeps you in His will. Jesus is intent upon reconciling you to God. One of the amazing benefits of that is that He reconciles you to others when you obey His commands and live according to His Word and ways.

So, what is forgiveness and what is it not? You have probably heard lots of things over the years on this subject. Some may be true and some may be false. Let's visit some appropriate views of what forgiveness is or is not:

- **Forgiveness is not forgetting.** Forgiving someone doesn't mean that what they did to you was no big deal. It was a big deal to you and it hurt. To shrug it away and deny it is a less than honest approach to true forgiveness. Your hurts leave scars. You may never forget the hurt, but you don't have to be paralyzed by it any longer. When God says that He does not remember your sins when He forgives you, He is not saying that He gets amnesia or has memory loss. He is God and He knows everything forever and always. When He says He does not remember your sins, He is simply reminding you that you are indeed forgiven and that He does not use your past and forgiven sins against you. He doesn't hold it over you or cause you to feel guilt and shame for something that has already been forgiven. God releases the debt of your sin. So, in order to forgive, you don't necessarily have to forget the hurt, but you do have to release the debt.
- **Forgiveness is a choice.** Some people hold onto their anger as a human attempt to protect themselves against further abuse. Others may want revenge for what was done to them, so they hold onto their unforgiveness and hope the other person that hurt them will somehow feel as much pain as they caused. These people are only bringing themselves more pain by holding onto it. Allow God to work out anything He needs to do in the other person's life. That is His job; not yours. Let that person off your hook because, as long as you refuse to forgive them, you are still hooked, or connected, to them. You are still chained to your past, bound up in your bitterness. By forgiving, you let the other person off your hook and you trust that God will deal with the person justly and fairly, which is something you simply cannot do. You may say, "You don't know how much this person hurt me!". True, but Jesus knows and He has instructed you to forgive others *for your own good*. Until you let go of your bitterness and hatred, that person is still hurting you. You cannot change or fix your past, but you can be free from its negative effects upon you. When you choose to forgive, you choose freedom from your past and freedom from those who have hurt or abused you. You've probably heard the phrase, "To forgive is to set a captive free and realize that you were the captive". You must choose to obey God and leave the consequences to Him.

- **Forgiving someone is giving up your right to get even with them.** When you forgive someone, you release them and choose not to hold their sin against them any longer. To be free yourself, you have to let go of the past and choose to reject any thought or act of revenge. This doesn't mean you continue to put up with present or future abusive behavior. God does not tolerate sin and neither should you. If anyone treats you in an abusive manner, whether physically or verbally, you need to set up scriptural boundaries to protect yourself and put a stop to further abuse. You are instructed to forgive, but you are not instructed to stay in abusive situations. Allow God to handle what was done to you and the person who did it by saying, "***In view*** of what God has done for me by forgiving me of my sin, I have no right to hold on to this offense, so I'm releasing this person to God. I'm giving up my right to get even".
- **Forgiveness is not excusing away behavior that was improper.** Forgive others, but make sure you keep yourself safe from further harm. You cannot just pretend that it did not happen. To forgive is to move on; it is not to meditate or obsess about the offense anymore. You don't excuse them, endorse them, or embrace them. You simply route thoughts about them through God. Revenge is not your job. Only God is qualified to enact proper judgements against wrongdoing. Let God do His job and try not to tell Him how to do it.

Read **Matthew 18:21-35** – the parable of the unmerciful servant. This passage begins with Peter asking Jesus how many times he should forgive his brother when he sins? Peter asked, "Up to seven times?". Jesus' reply was, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy seven times". This doesn't mean you should keep count of offenses against you or stop forgiving when someone has reached what you consider to be their maximum capacity of offenses. It means just the opposite. It means you are to keep on forgiving, even when the offenses against you measure far more than can ever be counted. Forgiveness is an infinite principle. When you forgive, as Jesus has commanded, you will be blessed far more than you may even realize or be able to see through human eyes or understanding. Your blessings will be reflected infinitely from now throughout eternity.

In this passage, Jesus goes on to talk about the unmerciful servant. A servant owed 10,000 talents to a king. It was a ridiculously large amount to repay (it's been said that one talent was equivalent to 17 years of wages). The king wanted to settle all outstanding accounts, so he ordered that the man, the man's wife and the man's children – and everything they owned – be sold to pay the debt. The servant fell on his knees and asked his master for mercy. The king forgave him and all his debt.

You would think that, ***in view*** of his master's mercy for forgiving him of such a large debt, this man would be grateful and show that same mercy and forgiveness to others. But, he went out and found a fellow servant who owed him 100 denarii (reportedly equivalent to only 3 months of wages) and roughly demanded payment from him. The debt his fellow servant owed him did not even compare to the massive debt from which the king had forgiven him. The fellow servant fell to his knees and begged for mercy, but the servant that had been forgiven refused to show him any mercy. He had the fellow servant thrown in jail until he could pay off the debt. Other servants saw this injustice and told the king. The king was angry with the servant he had forgiven. He turned him over to the jailers to be tortured until he could repay the debt he owed. The moral of the story is that Jesus wants you to extend the same grace and forgiveness to others that has been extended to you.

In the last verse of the parable, **Matthew 18:35**, Jesus said, "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart". That may seem harsh, but it puts forth the principle Jesus is teaching. Forgiveness is necessary – if you are not willing to extend

it, don't expect that it should be extended to you.

When you forgive, you still have to accept the consequences of another person's sin. We are all living with the consequences of someone else's sin. You only have to look at the sin of Adam and Eve and this fallen world to know that we suffer consequences from other people's choices and sins. That doesn't seem fair, but, nonetheless, you can't change the past or the consequences that occur because of someone's behavior. It happened. The only choice **now** is to choose the freedom of forgiveness and move out of the bondage of bitterness. Consequences will occur, but God is with you and He will give you the grace to live through them.

We live in a broken world and issues like reconciliation and trust need time to be rebuilt, if they can be rebuilt at all. Forgiving someone is necessary. Trusting them again is optional and requires wisdom and discernment. Trust can only be rebuilt by trustworthy actions; not merely words. When two people submit and surrender to God, and offer and receive forgiveness, it is absolutely possible to rebuild and restore trust in time. In a perfect world, reconciliation would always be the end result of forgiveness. But, forgiveness and reconciliation are two different things. It is possible to completely forgive someone and not be reconciled to that person.

Some people are not safe to be in relationship with, whether it is by their actions, their words or their motives. These situations are to be forgiven and turned over to God. If both people can surrender their hurtful or selfish motives over to God, He can use it for eventual reconciliation, but we cannot do His job and we cannot change that other person or excuse what may amount to toxicity in a relationship with them. We have to release them to God and be open to whatever He does with our act of obedience and surrender.

You may forgive people that have done unspeakable things to you, but you are not required to be in relationship with them, especially if they are still dangerous or toxic to your life or your peace of mind. Some people in your life have bankrupted your trust account. If you are ever to be in relationship with them again, they have to earn your trust and make deposits in the relationship account that suffered the bankruptcy. It requires right motives and trustworthy behavior. You must forgive them, but your trust can only be rebuilt with consistent and worthy deposits of love and grace. It often takes time and patience. If both parties are willing, it can be done. But if one party does not have right motives, it is best to just leave it in the hands of God and not allow them to take up physical or mental space in your life. Forgive them, love them, but release them to God.

Colossians 3:12 in the NLT tells us: Since God chose you to be the holy people He loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Such behaviors lead to a mindset of forgiveness – a mindset that makes you more like Jesus. He doesn't want you having unsettled accounts with people. He doesn't want unforgiveness to stand between you and them or you and Him. Settling your accounts means you cancel the debts you owe others and the debts they owe you. You readily offer and accept forgiveness.

There are times when forgiveness is not just a matter that is between you and others. Forgiveness can be something you need to offer to yourself. People often can't forgive themselves for something in the past, whether it be wrong choices or mistakes - they feel like they don't deserve to be forgiven. Whether they are aware of it or not, they continually punish themselves for their past by allowing it to hold them hostage. Forgiving yourself is accepting the truth that God has already forgiven you as a believer and follower of Christ. If God has forgiven you, you can forgive yourself. If you have repented of your past and your sins and asked God to forgive you, He has forgiven you - period. Not forgiving yourself and still feeling guilty about your past is a self-induced mindset

that is not based on God's truth. It can be a lie, a faulty perception or simply a lack of belief that God can or will forgive you and take away your guilt and shame.

Again, you have to choose to believe what God has done for you is true, and because it is true, you can extend that same forgiveness to yourself and you can allow your misplaced shame and guilt to be lifted away by God. When you follow the principles of God in every area of your life, God takes full responsibility for the outcome of your actions. You can trust Him to be faithful.

In some instances, people can also be mad at God for things that have happened to them in their life. That may even be the case for you. God already knows if you have been disappointed or if you are mad at Him. He is a big enough God to handle your grievances against Him. No matter how misplaced your perceptions or expectations of Him may have been, or may still be, God has never sinned against you. He does not need your forgiveness, but, *in view* of His mercy towards you, you need to let go of your disappointments for what God did or did not do in your life.

In order to be completely free from your resentments, anger, fear, shame and guilt you need to offer and accept forgiveness in every area of your life. If you do not, your spiritual growth and recovery from any hurt, addiction or character default will come to a screeching halt and you will not be able to move forward to a life of freedom. Forgiveness is key to your relationship being restored to God and it is key to any of your other relationships being restored. Forgiveness is the key to your peace.

God extended the first and most important act of *forgiveness* to you. *In view* of God's mercy towards you in forgiving you of your sins, you should forgive anyone you have been unwilling or unable to forgive. When you decide to forgive someone, you should also acknowledge any hurt they caused you. Don't try to suppress the hurt or make excuses for the person who hurt you. But recognize that it is time to stop letting them continue to hurt you.

If you suppress your feelings regarding something or someone who hurt you, it just surfaces in some form of compulsion in your life and your behaviors. Telling yourself that what they did to you really wasn't a big deal, that it didn't hurt that much, that the person is not really a bad person, that you will be okay if you just don't think about it – are all forms of denying your hurt. This kind of denial makes you prone to co-dependent thinking that somehow justifies the wrong that was done to you. Marriage relationships can often display this type of co-dependent behavior and it keeps the relationship in a cycle of disappointment, resentment and denial.

Revealing the truth that you have been hurt or are being hurt by another person is critical to healing. You can't get over the hurt until you admit your pain. In order to close the door on your past and get closure, you have to admit what happened, reveal that it was wrong and that it hurt you. And, finally, you have to decide to forgive the person who hurt you. You can't forgive a hurt you won't admit.

Don't make the mistake of waiting for the other person to ask for your forgiveness. That may never happen. They may be clueless that they hurt you or may be callous to the extent of the pain they caused you. They may have even died and passed on. But remember, Jesus did not wait for those who were crucifying Him to apologize to Him before He forgave them. While they were crucifying Him, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing."

This is really not about the other person anyway. It's about you and your freedom from the bitterness that not forgiving them has caused you.

Don't wait until you feel like forgiving. You will never get there and Satan will make sure of it. Make the hard choice to forgive, even if you don't feel like it. Once you choose to forgive, Satan will lose his hold on you and God can begin to heal your damaged emotions.

And when you forgive, forgive from your heart. This process won't work if it is not a heart decision. If it isn't from a sincere place deep within your heart, the bitterness will lock you up in your own jail of unforgiveness. It must be a sincere choice and not just to check-off-the-box-on-the-road-to-recovery-to-do-list.

For many of you who have been a victim of sexual abuse, physical abuse, childhood abuse, neglect or abandonment or any other major wrong that someone has inflicted on you – what was done to you was so wrong and it hurts the very heart of God. It's difficult to comprehend that kind of pain.

Nothing will ever make what was done to you right or okay, but you will not find peace and freedom from your offenders until you are able to forgive them. Forgiving them in no way excuses them for the harm they caused you, but it will release you from the power they have over you! And after you release your offender, let it go and leave it at the foot of the cross. Give it to God.

If bitterness has had you locked up in prison, then forgiveness is God's get out of jail free card. It's a plea bargain, if you will. And, anyone in their right mind can tell you – it's a really good deal!

So, how can you close all your accounts with other people and how can you become a peacemaker?

THERE ARE NO QUESTIONS FOR THIS LESSON. INSTEAD, PLEASE DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Ask God to forgive me first for any unforgiveness towards any person and then ask Him to reveal to me every person I need to forgive.
- Make a list of people God brings to my mind that I need to forgive. Don't forget to include God and myself on that list, if I need to do so.
- Say, "Lord, I choose to forgive _____ and what he/she did to me.
- For each name on the list, write out what they did to hurt me – name the offense.
- Reveal the hurt and acknowledge the pain, think about what God has done with my sin and let Him touch the emotional core of my being, so I can let it go from my heart.
- Release the offender – I will know I have fully released an offender when I can pray for God's blessing on their lives. I might not be able to forget, but I can release the offender and let go of the pain they caused me.
- Say an honest prayer, "God, I release (name of my offender) to you and I humbly ask you to bless their life.
- Lastly, being thankful and being a peacemaker compels me to close all accounts with other people in my life. Whom have I hurt? Do I need to offer an apology to anyone and ask for their forgiveness? Name those people and pray for God to guide me if it is possible, or even beneficial, to ask for their forgiveness. Sometimes, those people may not be around or it may not be beneficial to have a conversation with them if it could cause further harm to them, me or others. In such a case, I can place an empty chair in 55

front of me and act as if they are in that chair. Say my apologies and ask God to give me peace in the situation. Ask Him to cleanse my heart and bless the person that I hurt.

When you meet with your Encounter Study Group, each person may take up to 5 minutes to share as much of this exercise as possible with the others. Once everyone has had an opportunity to share, a second round of sharing may be allowed if there is ample time to do so. If further time is required to share what God revealed to you in this exercise, please reach out to a fellow member of your Encounter Study or to one of your group leaders and schedule a time to further share how you responded to the above exercise.