

B. Relationships

In Section C of this manual, we cover receiving forgiveness for our own sins. Here we want to deal with extending forgiveness to others—specifically in family and church relationships—as we consider the importance of family and church, and of good relationships in both areas of life.

Extending Forgiveness to Others

Jesus offers forgiveness to all. While on the cross He said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Through Jesus' desiring that we be forgiven, God extends forgiveness to us. God will work situations in our lives to bring us to a realization of our sins, so that we confess them and receive His forgiveness.

However, Jesus desires that *all* be forgiven. He calls us to *forgive others* as we have been forgiven. Only as we extend forgiveness to others can we experience complete forgiveness ourselves. Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgive us in the same way we forgive others" (Matthew 6:12). Jesus said that if we do not forgive others, we will not be forgiven (Matthew 6:14).

God wants the best for us. He knows that if we let unforgiveness, bitterness, resentment, etc., remain in us, we will become filled with anger, rage, and anxieties, which will eat away at us. He calls us to let *Him* deal with those who hurt us, knowing that they will one day have to answer to God for what they have done, if they do not confess their sin.

The fact that we forgive those who hurt us does not release them from their sin in their relationship with God.

God will judge the sins of all men, even those we have forgiven. Only those who have brought their sins under the cross of Christ through confession will escape the righteous wrath of God's judgment.

By our forgiveness, we are extending the love of Christ to those who have hurt us. We are saying that we will not retaliate with vengeance, but rather with love. God may at times ask us to confront those who have hurt us, expressing our love for them, but also warning them of God's day of judgment. We are to follow the admonition of Jesus:

"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44 KJV)

As Spirit-filled and Spirit-led Christians, we have the authority of Jesus to forgive others. Jesus said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." (John 20:22-23 KJV). The Greek word translated "forgive" in this text has the sense of "letting go" or "leaving." The same word is used in Matthew 4:11 when the devil "left" Jesus. The word is used again in Matthew 4:20 when the disciples "left" their nets and followed Jesus, and in verse 22 when the disciples "left" the boat. The idea is that we can pray that those who sin against us will leave their sinful ways, that they will know their sin, and that they will know the power and grace God has to free them and to enable them to change their ways. We can "see" them forgiven, changed and cleansed by God.

Our forgiving them does not change them; we are not using

witchcraft; they must, through their own will, personally come to Christ and receive His forgiveness and His life. What we are changing is *our attitude* toward them. We are seeing them forgiven as God wants them to be. We are simply receiving and acting upon the mind and will of Christ Who said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

The Bible says, "If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death" (1 John 5:16 KJV). When we see a brother sin, assuming it is not a sin unto death, we can pray not only for his forgiveness, but also that God will replace the sinful way with His life, including His ability to do right. Since a "brother" is one who has the same "Father"-- one who also has committed himself to Christ-- we know that within him is the desire of Christ to be cleansed from all sin. When we see him sin, therefore, we can pray for God to restore and cleanse him, knowing that God will do this because this is what our brother wants and what God wants for him. We in our flesh too often criticize our brothers when they sin, rather than exercising the authority we have to pray for forgiveness and life for them.

We can release to Jesus the hurt, disappointment, grief, etc., that we have experienced because of the sin of others. We no longer have to be forever affected by abuse from others. God can heal us, replacing the woundedness we have taken into our spirit through the sinfulness of others, with His compassion, healing love, and grace. He can use us to bring His love, correction, and forgiveness to others, especially to those who have hurt us. We have personally experienced this and

have seen God heal hundreds as they forgive those who have hurt them, release the pain and the hurt to Jesus, and receive His healing.

Scriptures for Meditation:

Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.
(Luke 23:34 KJV)

"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."
(Matthew 6:14-15 KJV)

But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible."
(Matthew 19:26 KJV)

Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.
(Acts 5:31 KJV)

"Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."
(Acts 3:26 KJV)

Saying, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered."
(Romans 4:7 KJV)

If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.
(1 John 5:16 KJV)

Steps in Extending Forgiveness for Hurts You're Aware of

1. Spend some time focusing on the Lord, worshiping and praising Him for Who He is and for His great love.
2. Receive the desire and the command of Jesus to forgive those who have hurt you. (Luke 23:34; Matthew 6:14-15; Acts 5:31)
3. Ask God to forgive the person (Luke 23:34)
4. Release to Jesus the hurt they have caused you, asking Him to heal your wounds. (Luke 4:18; 1 Peter 5:7)
5. Receive His healing (Luke 4:18). See Him enfolding you in His love, pouring His comfort into the areas of woundedness.
6. Forgive the person; in your heart, extend words of forgiveness to them, praying that they would repent. (If this is impossible, ask Jesus to give you the *willingness* to forgive them--or even the willingness to *want* to forgive them!)
7. Ask God to bless them in turning them to Himself and leading them to repent. Focus on positive things about them. (Romans 2:4; Acts 3:26; Matthew 5:44)
8. Repent of any anger or bitterness you are carrying, releasing it to Jesus, and receiving His compassion for them. (Often the Holy Spirit may show you the hurt of the offender, helping you to see him as one who has also been hurt)
9. Thank God that He has let this situation occur so that you may know more of His healing power for you, and more of His mercy to others.

Steps in Extending Forgiveness to Others, for Buried Hurts

1. Spend some time in worship, focusing on the character and love of the Lord.
2. Ask God to show you a particular person who has hurt or offended you.
3. Follow steps 2-9 above.
4. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you particular things that brothers in Christ have done that have bothered you. After following steps 2-9 above, pray for them. Pray that their sinful or wrong ways or attitudes would be released to Christ, and that the life of Christ would fill that area of their heart. Repent of any wrong or critical attitudes you have harbored toward them.
5. Thank God for the privilege, authority, and duty you have to forgive those who have hurt you, and to pray for your brothers and sisters in Christ.

1. Family Relationships

God promises to bless not only individuals, but also the families of the world. He told Abraham, "...in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed." God not only treats people as individuals but also as part of a family unit. We are born into families and are to be raised in them. We are to operate in families. We need our parents and our siblings. God promises in Leviticus 25:10 to restore families.

Jesus lived in a family, and as a child He honored His parents (Luke 3:51). He remembered His mother's needs even while on the cross (John

19:26). Even though His brothers did not understand Jesus' ministry initially, they later came to believe, according to Acts 1:14.

Because family relationships are so basic, important, and foundational, it is here that forgiveness should begin.

In examining family relationships, it is helpful to deal with the tendency toward self-protection. As we focus on God as our Healer, we can CHOOSE to be vulnerable to others.

Relationships with Parents

As we pray with people, one of the key relationships to examine is the relationship with parents--particularly with the father. God promises to bless those who honor their parents, and many lives are in disarray because of anger or bitterness toward parents.

We did not choose our parents. God did. Because He chose our family for us, He wants to give us the grace to go through any difficulties we face in our family. He is able to carry the hurt, provide for what was not given, and be what our parents should have been. The Bible says:

Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

(Deuteronomy 5:16 KJV)

Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp [spirit] shall be put out in obscure darkness.

(Proverbs 20:20 KJV, brackets added)

When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up.

(Psalm 27:10 KJV)

Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness

springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; (Hebrews 12:15 KJV)

Relationships with Siblings

We should thank God for our brothers and sisters as well as our parents. We should recognize that there is an abundance of grace so that love and comfort are available for all our family members. Sometimes the second or third child is not accepted by the older child. Sibling rivalry can scar the spirits of children. God can heal these wounds.

Thank God for your family--parents, brothers and sisters. Forgive them for any hurt they have inflicted upon you.. Receive from them. Give to them. Ask God to forgive you for any hurt you have inflicted upon them. You might be moved to write a letter or to express in another way to each of your family members, your gratitude that God gave them to you. (Your family includes your in-laws.)

Relationships with Children

Many of us of European ancestry were made to feel that children are a burden. Statements like, "The kids are finally asleep; now my day can begin," or "Life begins when the kids are grown and out of the house" typify this mindset.

Contrary to these attitudes, the Bible states that children are a blessing from God. They are to bring enjoyment to husbands and wives, and glory to the Lord. Furthermore, we are called to be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth. We cannot obey the command of God to replenish the earth, without children. We need to know that God will bless us as we bless the children He has

given us and raise them to fulfill His calling and purposes for them.

We live in a world that is overly concerned with the so-called “population explosion.” In this scenario, children are seen as a burden. The latest discovery is that now the population might start decreasing because many women are giving up their God-given privilege of child-rearing. According to some experts, a major problem of the next century might be the diminishing population.

If your children are having problems, ask the Holy Spirit to show you if any generational roots or patterns are involved. If so, deal with them as outlined in Section D, pages D-10 through D-13.

Ask Him also for revelation of any curses placed on your family or your children, by people inside or outside the family. If you have placed curses on your children (i.e. “You’re such a klutz!” or, “Why can’t you ever do what I tell you to do?!” etc., etc.), repent of placing these things on your children, renounce them, ask your children’s forgiveness, and ask for the Lord’s grace to see your children as He sees them and to speak things that will help to correct their behavior and will build them up in the Lord. [For more detailed help, refer to Section D, especially pages D-3 through D-6.]

Children may be behaving inappropriately because of having been wounded by people involved in their daily life--siblings, classmates, teachers, neighbors, etc. Jesus wants to enable the child to forgive those who have hurt him, to heal these wounds, and to give the child grace to behave in godly ways. Ask the Holy Spirit to give discernment as to the root causes of the problem; then

see the applicable parts of Sections B & C for suggested ways to proceed.

Rebellion is often a result of rejection--either real or imagined. Therefore if a child is behaving rebelliously, ask the Lord to reveal why the child is feeling rejected, and see Section C, pages 18-20 for more help. Remember that children need order and boundaries in their lives; the child *could* be feeling rejection because his parents don’t care enough to establish and enforce reasonable boundaries!

It is important to avoid legalism by helping the child learn to come to Jesus for forgiveness and the ability to live righteously.

Thank God for your children. Bless them. Ask the Lord to give to you His perception of them. Pray that they will see themselves as a gift from God to you. Pray that you will be able to impart into them the gifts and ministries of the Holy Spirit that God has given to you.

2. Church Relationships

We in the body of Christ need each other. We need what God has given to each member of His body (Ephesians 4:16; 1 Corinthians 12:28). We will never be all we can be until we learn to draw upon what God has given to each member of His body. We need to repent of our denominational independence. We need to be willing to minister with and to all members of Christ’s body. This does not imply that we should ignore our differences in doctrinal understandings, but rather that we should be willing to live “in Christ” with one another. Paul says to maintain the unity of Spirit until we come into the

unity of faith (Ephesians 4:3,13). We are not called to judge another's servant, but to encourage him in being faithful to his master (Romans 14:4). We are called to pray for our brothers and sisters who are in sin or in error (1 John 5:16). God will bless us as we do these things.

Similarly, if we curse another Christian, we will bring a curse upon ourselves (Genesis 12:2). In Christ we are all members of Abraham's seed. As such we are subject to the blessings and curses that come upon those who bless and curse the seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:29). [This topic is further developed in Section D, "Blessings and Curses."] We need to repent of our divisive ways and of the ways in which we have put down other groups in the body of Christ.

Some people have been wounded by brothers and sisters in Christ. They may have been rejected by a group, or put down because of their beliefs. They may have been oppressed by legalistic interpretations of Scripture. Some may have been subjected to fear or guilt as ways to manipulate them to obey God. God can heal all these wounds. Jesus came to free the oppressed; that includes freedom from the spiritual oppressions that church leaders may have put upon us.

Some people are unable to commit to a group because of previous wounds or because they have been estranged from their own family. Our relationships with our spiritual family--those in the body of Christ--are often a reflection of relationships with our natural family. People who have bitterness toward their father are often unable to relate to and receive from their own pastor. Some who are estranged from their natural brothers and sisters have difficulty relating to peers in the

body of Christ. As we let God heal the relationships in our natural families, our ability to relate and participate in the activities of the church family will often be enhanced.

Some people are unable to welcome new converts into their body because of their previous attitudes relating to children. If I feel that children in the family are a burden rather than a blessing, I will have difficulty relating to new converts until they are mature Christians. There is a joy in winning souls to Christ. There is a joy in discipling and mentoring new converts. It might be messy at times, but the joy of seeing new converts mature and then bring others into the kingdom far outweighs the "momentary" labor pains or time required to mentor them.

Some Prayer Suggestions

Thank God for the whole body of Christ. Pray that we will work together in fulfilling God's call to bring the Gospel to all.

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any prejudices you have toward other Christian groups. Pray that any walls of hostility be removed. Thank God for His *whole* body. Thank Him that there are some Christians in each group of His body. Pray for them.

Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal any wounds you carry because of previous church experiences. Release the hurt and pain to Jesus, and pray that the Holy Spirit will heal those wounds in your spirit.

Thank God for the “new children” He is bringing into your local body. Pray that He will train and equip them so that they will come into their full calling in Christ. Pray that you might be part of the discipleship and mentoring process.