

I Declare War on Unforgiveness
Message 6 of 6 in the series: "I Declare War"

A. Jesus said forgiving people who sin against us is NOT optional.

"Then Peter came to him and asked, 'Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?' 'No, not seven times,' Jesus replied, 'but seventy times seven! Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. He couldn't pay, so his master ordered that he be sold—along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned—to pay the debt. But the man fell down before his master and begged him, 'Please, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.' Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt. But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment. His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it,' he pleaded. But his creditor wouldn't wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full. When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?' Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt. That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart.'" Matthew 18:21-25 (NLT)

"...Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as *it is* in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. **And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.** And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Matthew 6:9-15 (NJKV)

B. Five things we can do to declare war on unforgiveness:

1. We can ask God to show us any unforgiveness in our hearts.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life." Psalm 139:23-24 (NLT)

"Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many." Hebrews 12:15 (NLT)

Note: It is often helpful to write down our thoughts as well as what God reveals to us in a journal.

2. We can repent of our unwillingness to forgive and surrender all of our pain/sorrow/anger to God.

"Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you." Ephesians 4:31-32 (NLT)

"Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you." 1 Peter 5:7 (NLT)

"Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, 'I will take revenge; I will pay them back,' says the Lord. Instead, 'If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads.'" Romans 12:19-20 (NLT)

Note: The Holy Spirit will give us the desire and the power to surrender and forgive.

"So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires." Galatians 5:16-17a (NLT)

3. We can talk to a trusted Christian friend, pastor, or professional counselor.

"Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself. Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ."

Galatians 6:1-2 (NLT)

“The purposes of a person’s heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out.”

Proverbs 20:5 (NIV)

Note: In some circumstances we may need to talk to legal authorities.

“The authorities are God’s servants, sent for your good. But if you are doing wrong, of course you should be afraid, for they have the power to punish you. They are God’s servants, sent for the very purpose of punishing those who do what is wrong.” Romans 13:4 (NLT)

4. We can keep short accounts on new offenses.

“And ‘don’t sin by letting anger control you.’ Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil.” Ephesians 4:26-27 (NLT)

Note: We can choose to forgive people who may never apologize.

“When they came to a place called The Skull, they nailed him to the cross... Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.’” Luke 23:33-34a (NLT)

5. We can pray.

“One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up. ‘There was a judge in a certain city,’ he said, ‘who neither feared God nor cared about people. A widow of that city came to him repeatedly, saying, “Give me justice in this dispute with my enemy.” The judge ignored her for a while, but finally he said to himself, “I don’t fear God or care about people, but this woman is driving me crazy. I’m going to see that she gets justice, because she is wearing me out with her constant requests!” Then the Lord said, ‘Learn a lesson from this unjust judge. Even he rendered a just decision in the end. So don’t you think God will surely give justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will grant justice to them quickly! But when the Son of Man returns, how many will he find on the earth who have faith?’” Luke 18:1-8 (NLT)

****IMPORTANT**** Forgiveness is a choice, NOT a feeling.

“But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, offer the other cheek also... Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked. You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate.”

Luke 6:27-29a, 35b-36 (NLT)

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Questions for Self-Examination:

Read Matthew 18:21-25 and then answer the following questions:

1. How much has God forgiven me? What does this mean to me?
2. Is there anyone who has hurt/betrayed/disappointed me so deeply that I am unwilling to forgive him/her?
3. What purpose does it serve to hold on to past offenses?
4. How is holding on to past offenses affecting me on an emotional, physical, and spiritual level?
5. How is holding on to past offenses affecting important relationships in my life?
6. How is holding on to past offenses affecting my outlook on life and my future?
7. Who am I willing to talk to about past hurts/anger/disappointments so they can help me deal with them appropriately?
8. Am I willing to pray that God will help me forgive the people who have offended me? If not, why not? If so, when will I start?