Dealing with Bitterness and Unforgiveness

The purpose of this exercise is to begin to remove some ground that Satan has taken from you due to bitterness and unforgiveness in your life.

Record on a sheet of paper all the names you can think of and that God brings to your mind. Even if you have forgiven some or all of these people, include them in your list anyway.

The list should include everyone you can think of going all the back to childhood. If you cannot remember names, refer to the person by any attribute you can remember (e.g., “the boy in the red hat in 6th grade who stole my pencil”). Do not be afraid to recall the circumstances, but do not dwell on the whole story; the purpose of this exercise is to “let go”. For your list, merely write down a one line statement as to what they did to hurt or disappoint you.

After writing down the names and brief notes about these people and incidents ask God to bring to your mind anyone you have forgotten. It is not unusual to forget, or to push aside from our conscious mind, incidents and even the names of people whom have hurt us. These hidden hurts and wounds need to be healed as well. Thus, ask God to bring to your mind any person you have forgotten for whom you need to forgive, for whom you hold a grudge against, for whom you are bitter, for those who have hurt you, with the following prayer:

Father in heaven, please bring to my mind the names of any people for whom I have held bitterness towards, grudges against, or have not forgiven for the hurts they have caused me. Help me to remember all these hurts so that they may be offered to You, O Lord, and healed from my soul so that I may live the truly victorious Christ-life. Amen.

God may bring the names of people to your mind but you cannot recall why. As you go through this process the Lord will usually reveal to you the reason why you need to forgive this person.

What does forgiveness mean? Most people do not really know the meaning of forgiveness or how to forgive from the heart. Here are some important points to remember about forgiveness:
1) Forgiveness is not forgetting:

People who try to forget find that cannot. It is an unfortunate quirk of the English language with the phrase, “Forgive and forget”. In actuality this phrase does not mean to “forget” in the sense of not remembering what happened; of course we will remember.

God says He will “remember our sins no more” (Heb. 10: 17), but God, being omniscient, obviously cannot literally forget. "Remember no more" means that God will never use the past against us (Ps. 103:12).

To forget is really “to let go”. We need to “let go and let God”. We let go of the past, but more importantly we let go of the hurt. As long as we do not forgive, as long as we do not let go, we allow the offender of our wounds continue to hurt us.

We must remember that “forgetting” may be the result of forgiveness, but it is never the means of forgiveness. When we bring up the past against others, we are saying we haven’t forgiven them; when we continue to allow ourselves to hurt without attempting to heal we are saying that we have not forgiven them.

2) Forgiveness is a choice not a feeling:

Since God requires us to forgive, it is something we can do. God will NEVER ask us to do something that is impossible for us to do; that would be cruel and God is a loving God.

Forgiveness, however, is difficult for us because it pulls against our feelings and emotional hurts. Forgiveness is not about forgetting our feelings or our emotional hurts. We often will not “feel” like forgiving, but we must forgive anyway. As the Lord Prayer teaches us, God forgives us “as we forgive others”. But how can God require this of us when we have been hurt so badly?

God does not expect your feelings and emotional hurts to be healed overnight. He knows and understands our feelings and our hurts. He is a compassionate God and will help us to heal over time, as we are able.

What God expects of us is not an immediate emotional healing, but a decision of will to forgive, a decision of will to trust Him to take care of the offender and to heal us, a decision of will to ask God for, and to commit to, being healed of our wounds.

3) Forgiveness is not letting the person off the hook:

Forgiving is about you letting go, but it is not letting the offender off the hook. He will still pay for what he did, either before the Law or before God or both.

Forgiving is surely difficult for us because it pulls against our concept of justice. We want revenge for offenses suffered. But we are told never to take our own
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revenge (Rom. 12:9). Revenge does more damage to us than it punishes the offender. God’s justice will prevail, no one can escape it. Never fear, those who hurt us will be held accountable, but we must let God deal with it. In order for God to deal with it, we need to let Him by letting go.

"Why should I let them off the hook?" That is precisely the problem — we are still hooked to them, still bound by our past when we do not forgive.

**To forgive does not mean letting the person off the hook; it means letting yourself off the hook.**

4) **But you don't understand how much this person hurt me:**
You may say, “But I am still hurting from what this person did. How do I stop the pain?” We don’t forgive someone for their sake; we do it for our sake so we can be free. Our need to forgive isn’t an issue between the offender and us; it’s between us and God. As we let go and forgive, and offer the pain up to God, that pain will begin to lose its bite.

5) **Forgiveness is agreeing to live with the consequences of another’s sin:**
Forgiveness is costly. We pay the price of the evil we forgive. We're going to live with those consequences whether we want to or not; our only choice is whether we will do so in the bitterness of unforgiveness or the freedom of forgiveness. For example, if a drunk driver crashes into our car and you are left a paraplegic, that “consequence” you must live with, yet you can forgive the drunk driver.

Jesus took the consequences of our sin upon Himself. All true forgiveness is substitutional because no one really forgives without bearing the consequences of the other person's sin. God the Father "made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

Where is the justice? It’s the Cross that makes forgiveness legally and morally right: "For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all" (Rom. 6:10). This doesn’t mean that we tolerate sin. We must always stand against sin, but we must give the offender to God and get on with our life.

6) **How do we forgive from our heart?**
First we must acknowledge the hurt and the hate. If our forgiveness doesn't visit the emotional core of our life, it will be incomplete. Many feel the pain of interpersonal offenses, but they won't acknowledge it. Let God bring the pain to the surface so He can deal with it. This is where the healing takes place.

Don't wait to forgive until we feel like forgiving; we will never get there. Feelings take time to heal after the choice to forgive is made and Satan has lost his place (Eph. 4:26, 27). **Freedom is what will be gained, not a feeling.**
7) **Summary of Points on Forgiveness:**

Forgiveness is necessary to have fellowship with God.
It is not forgetting.
It is a choice.
Letting the offender off our hook is what frees us.
The offender is not off God's hook.
God says, "Revenge is mine."
Forgiveness means we are agreeing to live with the consequences of another's sin — which we have to do anyway.
He justice is in the cross.
Choice is between bitterness and freedom of forgiveness.
Forgiveness means not using the past against the offender.
Forgiveness does not mean tolerating the sin.
Why forgive? To stop the pain! As we live in unforgiveness the offender still hurts us!
The issue of forgiveness is between you and God only.
The act of forgiveness is for the your sake, and for your freedom.
You must acknowledge the hurt and the hate.

**Beginning the Prayers:**

Bless yourself wherever you see ∗
We begin by renewal baptismal promise:

**RENEWAL OF BAPTISMAL PROMISES**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, ∗ and of the Holy Spirit.

Ⓡ. Amen.

V. Do you reject Satan?

Ⓡ. I do.

V. And all his works?

Ⓡ. I do.

V. And all his empty promises?

Ⓡ. I do.

V. Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth?

Ⓡ. I do.

V. Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary was crucified, died, and was buried, rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father?

Ⓡ. I do.
Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?

℟. I do.

V. God, the all-powerful Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has given us a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and forgiven all our sins. May he also keep us faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ for ever and ever.

℟. Amen. *

**PRAYER OF FORGIVENESS**

**Preparing to Pray:**

The following prayer needs to be said for each person on the list for whom you need to forgive. Do not go to the next person on the list until you are sure you have dealt with all the remembered pain.

As you pray, God may bring to your mind various offending people and experiences that has been totally forgotten. Allow God to do this even if it is painful. Remember this process of forgiveness is for your sake because God wants you to be free.

Remember also that by forgiving the offender we are not rationalizing or trying to explain the offender's behavior. Forgiveness deals with the victim's pain, your pain, not another's excuses. Positive feelings will follow in time; freeing you from the past is the critical issue.

You need to be willing to forgive for your sake, so that you can walk away from this exercise free in Christ with the past and person no longer controlling you.

If you are willing, then take each person on the list, one by one, and pray aloud the following prayer (remembering to allow God to bring to your mind any painful memories). Do not move on to the next person on the list until all issues of forgiveness are resolved with each person.

**The Prayer to Forgive:**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Lord, I forgive ______________________________**

for __(specifically identify the hurt or disappointment__)

After all have been forgiven, end with...

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.