

**FREEDOM
FROM
UNFOR-
GIVENESS**

DIRECTIONS FOR HOW TO USE THIS MATERIAL:

The Unforgiveness, Rejection, and Anger worksheets are to be used together in the following ways:

1. Read and study the material on the stronghold of rejection.
2. Then read and study the material on the stronghold of unforgiveness.

3. Once both of these studies are complete, use the anger worksheet to actually work through the process of granting and receiving forgiveness. The anger worksheet is designed to walk you through the practical steps of addressing those issues you have uncovered by reading and studying the material on rejection and unforgiveness. Do this as your homework assignment for this week.

THE OPPOSITE OF UNFORGIVENESS IS FORGIVENESS. **FORGIVENESS IS THE VERY FOUNDATION OF GOD'S KINGDOM AND THE VERY NATURE OF GOD HIMSELF.** LOOSED FROM THE BONDAGE THAT UNFORGIVENESS BRINGS, WE CAN BEGIN TO HEAL AND THE VERY LOVE OF GOD CAN BEGIN TO FLOW THROUGH US TO OTHERS.

AND BE KIND TO ONE ANOTHER, TENDERHEARTED, FORGIVING EACH OTHER, JUST AS GOD IN CHRIST ALSO HAS FORGIVEN YOU. *_EPHESIANS 4:32 (NASB)*

One of the most powerful weapons of the enemy against mankind is unforgiveness. We live with unhealed wounds as a result of unforgiveness. It produces fruits of bitterness, anger, and rage, and can even lead to murder. It is also an easy way for us to allow the enemy to build strongholds. Unforgiveness lays the foundation for such destructive behavioral patterns as self-protection and self-preservation.

DIAGNOSING UNFORGIVENESS

- I find myself holding grudges.
- I retreat into isolation from others.
- I erupt in anger, or I boil inside.
- I think of ways to get even with others who have hurt me.
- I bury the wrongs done to me without really addressing them.
- I pity myself.
- I carry bitterness and anger against those who have offended me or willfully wronged me.
- Instead of stating the truth, I make excuses for those who have hurt or wronged me.
- I often feel sorry for myself.

- On occasion, I think I'm some kind of martyr.
- I feel like nobody has had it as bad as me.
- When I get around someone who has hurt me I want to completely ignore them.
- I insulate and protect myself behind a wall of defensiveness.
- I do not trust others.
- I just cannot forgive (usually means I will not forgive).
- I am angry with God for allowing bad things to happen to me.
- I act like nothing happened instead of confronting issues that have hurt me.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE A GRUDGE WITH A PERSON?

- I cannot get over my past. I have fake conversations with them in my head.
- I avoid them at all costs, or when I do see them I wish I could hide.
- I compare myself to them. I dismiss them.
- I am constantly looking for ammunition to gossip about this person's life. They did it to me; now I get to do it to them!

THE KEY TO FORGIVENESS: RELEASING A DEBT

Forgiveness is necessary when we have been violated in one way or another. There is a debt to pay before reconciliation or restoration can take place. The debt might be emotional, relational, financial, or physical; it might be the result of a betrayal, or related to our reputation. Regardless of the situation, a debt is owed to us.

In order to forgive, we must determine that we will pay the debt, and thereby release the offender (or the offending situation) from their obligation to us. We will not expect the offender (or the offending situation) to settle the debt: We are willing to pay the cost. This is exactly what Jesus did when He released us from having to pay the debt for the sins and violations we commit against Him.

Imagine living with one of your hands tied by a strong cord (the debt against you) to a big wheelbarrow full of sand (violation against you). You have to push that thing around with you everywhere you go. How easy would that be? Yet this is a reasonable picture of the spiritual burden unforgiveness imposes. Forgiving means taking a sword (our willingness to forgive because of the love, grace, mercy, and shed blood of Jesus Christ) and severing that cord, dropping the load of debt, and leaving it behind. What a relief! Entrust yourself, and the offender/offending situation, to God, while you literally cut loose the load of unforgiveness toward the debt and debtor you have been carrying. You are free!

SUMMARIZING THE GRACE OF FORGIVENESS

Unforgiveness destroys the person who carries it, and eventually destroys others. Unforgiveness is one of the cornerstones of Satan's kingdom, and it opens the door to a host of other evils.

Forgiveness, on the other hand, streams from God's own heart. The ability to forgive is based on a love that is not from the world. Jesus often talked about forgiveness with His disciples; He knew it was essential for them, and us, to learn and put into practice. Jesus is our supreme example: He had every right and reason to withhold forgiveness, yet instead, He chose to offer it freely. The Lord's Prayer teaches us to forgive. In Matthew 6:14-15, Jesus said that if we will not forgive others, God will not forgive us. Read that again. The Lord uses some strong language, and there does not appear to be any way around it. Either we forgive others and the Lord forgives us, or we do not forgive others and the Lord does not forgive us! This is a good reason for us to examine our own hearts with great care.

Forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling. Forgiveness does not condone the wrong or hurtful action. Forgiveness grows out of love and flows out of humility (knowing that we have hurt others and we need forgiveness as well). We are to forgive and release the offender(s) and the offense(s) to God, who alone is the ultimate judge for all of us.

WALKING IN THE TRUST OF FORGIVENESS

Affirm these truth statements out loud in the class:

- ☑ I will forgive others, just as God has forgiven me.
- ☑ I will choose to confront issues with forgiveness instead of holding resentment in my heart.
- ☑ I will offer forgiveness to the perpetrator(s), and leave the rest to God.
- ☑ I will grow more and more in understanding that the hurts of my past never escaped the eyes of the Lord.
- ☑ I will not let Satan keep me in the bondage of unforgiveness.
- ☑ I will forgive others regardless of their response to me.
- ☑ I will allow others to see God's grace, mercy, and forgiveness at work in me!
- ☑ I know and understand that forgiveness brings freedom and release from my past and present hurts.

SCRIPTURE TO REFLECT UPON

FORGIVE THE REBELLIOUS SINS OF MY YOUTH; LOOK INSTEAD THROUGH THE EYES OF YOUR UNFAILING LOVE, FOR YOU ARE MERCIFUL, O LORD.

_PSALM 25:7 (NLT)

FOR THE HONOR OF YOUR NAME, O LORD, FORGIVE MY MANY, MANY SINS.

_PSALM 25:11 (NLT)

THOUGH OUR HEARTS ARE FILLED WITH SINS, YOU FORGIVE THEM ALL.

_PSALM 65:3 (NLT)

HELP US, O GOD OF OUR SALVATION! HELP US FOR THE HONOR OF YOUR NAME. OH, SAVE US AND FORGIVE OUR SINS FOR THE SAKE OF YOUR NAME.

_PSALM 79:9 (NLT)

HE FORGIVES ALL MY SINS AND HEALS ALL MY DISEASES. *_PSALM 103:3 (NLT)*

BUT YOU OFFER FORGIVENESS, THAT WE MIGHT LEARN TO FEAR YOU.

_PSALM 130:4 (NLT)

THEN PETER CAME TO HIM AND ASKED, "LORD, HOW OFTEN SHOULD I FORGIVE SOMEONE WHO SINS AGAINST ME? SEVEN TIMES SEVEN?" "NO!" JESUS REPLIED. "SEVENTY TIMES SEVEN! FOR THIS REASON, 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 THE KING ORDERED THAT HE, HIS WIFE, HIS CHILDREN, AND EVERYTHING HE HAD BE SOLD TO PAY THE DEBT. BUT THE MAN FELL DOWN BEFORE THE KING AND BEGGED HIM, 'OH, SIR, BE PATIENT WITH ME, AND I WILL PAY IT ALL.' THEN THE KING 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 AND I WILL PAY IT,' HE PLEADED. BUT HIS CREDITOR WOULDN'T WAIT. HE HAD THE MAN ARRESTED AND JAILED 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 WHAT 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 UNTIL HE HAD PAID EVERY PENNY. THAT'S WHAT MY HEAVENLY FATHER WILL DO TO YOU IF YOU REFUSE TO FORGIVE YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN YOUR HEART."

_MATTHEW 18:21-35 (NLT)

"AND WHEN YOU STAND PRAYING, IF YOU HOLD ANYTHING AGAINST ANYONE, FORGIVE HIM, SO THAT YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN MAY FORGIVE YOU YOUR SINS."

_MARK 11:25-26 (NLT)

TWO OTHER MEN, BOTH CRIMINALS, WERE ALSO LED OUT WITH HIM TO BE EXECUTED. WHEN THEY CAME TO THE PLACE CALLED THE SKULL, THERE THEY CRUCIFIED HIM, ALONG WITH THE CRIMINALS—ONE ON HIS RIGHT, THE OTHER ON HIS LEFT. JESUS SAID, "FATHER, FORGIVE THEM, FOR THEY DO NOT KNOW WHAT THEY ARE DOING." AND THEY DIVIDED UP HIS CLOTHES BY CASTING LOTS.

_LUKE 23:32-34 (NLT)

IN HIM WE HAVE REDEMPTION THROUGH HIS BLOOD, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE RICHES OF GOD'S GRACE. *_EPHESIANS 1:7 (NLT)*

BUT GOD IS SO RICH IN MERCY, AND HE LOVED US SO VERY MUCH, THAT EVEN WHILE WE WERE DEAD BECAUSE OF OUR SINS, HE GAVE US LIFE WHEN HE RAISED CHRIST FROM THE DEAD. (IT IS ONLY BY GOD'S SPECIAL FAVOR THAT YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED!) *_EPHESIANS 2:4-5 (NLT)*

BE KIND AND COMPASSIONATE TO ONE ANOTHER, FORGIVING EACH OTHER, JUST AS IN CHRIST GOD FORGAVE YOU.

_EPHESIANS 4:32 (NLT)

YOU MUST MAKE ALLOWANCE FOR EACH OTHER'S FAULTS AND FORGIVE THE PERSON WHO OFFENDS YOU. REMEMBER, THE LORD FORGAVE YOU, SO YOU MUST FORGIVE OTHERS.

_COLOSSIANS 3:13 (NLT)

FOR THERE WILL BE NO MERCY FOR YOU IF YOU HAVE NOT BEEN MERCIFUL TO OTHERS. BUT IF YOU HAVE BEEN MERCIFUL, THEN GOD'S MERCY TOWARD YOU WILL WIN OUT OVER HIS JUDGMENT AGAINST YOU. *_JAMES 2:13 (NLT)*

IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS, HE IS FAITHFUL AND JUST AND WILL FORGIVE US OUR SINS AND PURIFY US FROM ALL UN-RIGHTEOUSNESS. *_1 JOHN 1:9 (NLT)*

DO NOT FORGET THESE:

We must conduct a serious campaign against unforgiveness. The following "4-R's" will help guide you. You must:

REPENT of the sin of unforgiveness. Confess (be specific) any and all attitudes and actions of living with unforgiveness and unhealed wounds.

RECEIVE the Lord's forgiveness for this sin. Receive the infilling and empowering work of the Holy Spirit to walk as Christ did. We must at all times depend on and receive that work in faith.

REBUKE the enemy's influence surrounding unhealed wounds and renounce his lies causing you to hang onto unforgiveness. Grant forgiveness and blessing wherever necessary.

REPLACE unforgiveness with a spirit of forgiveness by continually renewing your mind in Christ's law.

CORRIE TEN BOOM ON FORGIVENESS

Corrie Ten Boom and her beloved sister were prisoners in Ravensbruck, where they saw, and were subjected to, the atrocities of the Holocaust. The following episode occurred shortly after the end of World War II and Corrie's release from the concentration camp. It is a courageous account of forgiveness!

It was in a church in Munich that I saw him—a balding, heavy-set man in a gray overcoat, a brown felt hat clutched between his hands. People were filing out of the basement room where I had just spoken, moving along the rows of wooden chairs to the door at the rear. It was 1947, and I had come from Holland to defeated Germany with the message that God forgives.

The solemn faces stared back at me, not quite daring to believe. There were never questions after a talk in Germany in 1947. People stood up in silence, in silence collected their wraps, in silence left the room.

And that's when I saw him working his way forward against the others. One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat; the next, a blue uniform and a visored cap with its skull and crossbones. It came back with a rush: that huge room with its hard overhead lights; the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor; the shame of walking naked past this man. I could see my sister's frail form ahead of me, ribs sharp beneath the parchment of skin. Betsie, how thin you were!

The place was Ravensbruck, and the man who was making his way forward had been a guard—one of the most cruel guards. I would recognize him anywhere.

Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out: "A fine message, Fraulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!"

Now I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook, rather than take that hand. He could not remember me of course—how could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women? But I remembered him, and the leather crop swinging from his belt. I was face to face with one of my captors, and my blood seemed to freeze.

"You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk," he was saying. "I was a guard there." No, he did not remember me. "But since that time I became a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fraulein"—again the hand came out—"will you forgive me?"

I stood there—I, whose sins had again and again needed to be forgiven—and I could not forgive. Betsie had died in that place—could he erase her slow, terrible death simply for the asking?

It could not have been many seconds that he stood there—hand held out—but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do.

For I had to do it—I knew that. The message was that God forgives those who have injured us. I knew it not only as a commandment of God, but as a daily experience.

Since the end of the war I had a home in Holland for the victims of Nazi brutality. Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able also to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and as horrible as that.

And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion—I knew that too.

Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. "Jesus, help me!" I prayed silently. "I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling."

And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm and sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

"I forgive you, brother!" I cried. "With all my heart."

For a moment we grasped each others' hands—the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then. But even so, I real

ized it was not my love. I had tried, and did not have the power. It was the power of the Holy Spirit transforming me in God's love.

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UNDERSTANDING JOSEPH'S LIFE AND THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

Joseph's life is a classic example of the power of forgiveness and unforgiveness. The story begins with the birth of Joseph, son of Jacob and his wife Rachel. Joseph had a big problem: Even though he was the youngest of eleven brothers, he was his father's favorite, "because he was the son of his old age" (Genesis 37:3).

Unfortunately for Joseph, his father Jacob did not conceal the fact that Joseph was his favorite. Jacob made a very beautiful and special coat for Joseph. It was a garment of honor, something usually given only to the firstborn son. When the coat was presented to Joseph, his half-brothers began to hate him.

Joseph also had dreams. In his youthful indiscretion and pride, he readily shared the dreams with his brothers. There was only one problem: the dreams portrayed the brothers being subordinate to Joseph, and bowing down before him! The brothers' hearts were filled with unforgiveness and hatred, not only toward Joseph, but also toward their father Jacob, and they began to think of ways to get rid of the younger and favored brother. Jacob sent the brothers to find new pasture for the family flocks. After they had been away for some time, he sent Joseph with provisions for them. Unforgiveness and bitterness had now had several years to develop and were about to produce their evil fruit.

WHEN JOSEPH'S BROTHERS SAW HIM COMING, THEY RECOGNIZED HIM IN THE DISTANCE AND MADE PLANS TO KILL HIM. "HERE COMES THAT DREAMER!" THEY EXCLAIMED. "COME ON, LET'S KILL HIM AND THROW HIM INTO A DEEP PIT. WE CAN TELL OUR FATHER THAT A

WILD ANIMAL HAS EATEN HIM. THEN WE'LL SEE WHAT BECOMES OF ALL HIS DREAMS!" *_GENESIS 37:18-20 (NIV)*

Joseph arrived in their camp with provisions from home. He was happy and excited to see his brothers, and he could not expect that they would take action against him in a way that would change his life forever. Joseph's brothers threw him into the pit, but his brother Reuben convinced them to spare Joseph's life, which they did. When they spotted a band of Ishmaelite traders, they pulled Joseph out of the pit, removed his robe, and sold him to the traders for twenty pieces of silver. Off to Egypt went Joseph, as a slave.

The story gets uglier. The brothers took Joseph's coat, soaked it in blood, and tore it to shreds to make it appear that a wild animal had attacked Joseph. The brothers took the coat back to their father and lied to him, saying that Joseph had been killed. Imagine Jacob's grief! Worse yet, and more to the point, imagine the unforgiveness and bitterness which caused Joseph's own brothers to even contemplate killing him. Even when they saw the grief of their father, the brothers showed no remorse, nor did they express any concern for their little brother.

So what about Joseph? He was torn from his family, his land, and everything familiar to him. He was bound and tied behind the camels, wondering what he had done to deserve this treatment, thinking of his father's sorrow, and not knowing if he would live or die.

Joseph was sold on the slave block to Potiphar, Pharaoh's officer (as a house slave). Joseph found favor in Potiphar's house and eventually became head slave over his household. However, Potiphar's wife unjustly accused Joseph of rape so he was thrown into prison even though he was innocent.

If anyone had reasons for unforgiveness, it was Joseph. He had every "right" to be bitter and angry, filled with rage, self-pity, resentment, etc.

BUT THE LORD WAS WITH JOSEPH THERE, TOO, AND HE GRANTED JOSEPH FAVOR WITH THE CHIEF JAILER. BEFORE LONG, THE JAILER PUT JOSEPH IN CHARGE OF ALL THE OTHER PRISONERS, AND OVER

EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED IN THE PRISON. THE CHIEF JAILER HAD NO MORE WORRIES AFTER THAT, BECAUSE JOSEPH TOOK CARE OF EVERYTHING. THE LORD WAS WITH HIM, MAKING EVERYTHING RUN SMOOTHLY AND SUCCESSFULLY. *_GENESIS 39:21-23 (NIV)*

The Lord was there all along; He had not abandoned Joseph. But why did God let all those things happen to Joseph? God had a plan to build a man and save a nation. The things committed against Joseph were real; they hurt, they pierced his heart. Yet Joseph's story ends with him as second in command in Egypt, and with his brothers bowing down before him.

Joseph may have been in prison, but he was not in the self-imposed prison of unforgiveness! Because of a famine in the land, his brothers and family were in need, and came to Egypt seeking assistance. They came to the governor of the land, Joseph. His brothers did not recognize him, but he provided them with a great dinner and treated them kindly—not once, but twice. When he could stand it no longer, he told them who he was:

THEN JOSEPH COULD NOT CONTROL HIMSELF BEFORE ALL THOSE WHO STOOD BY HIM, AND HE CRIED, "HAVE EVERYONE GO OUT FROM ME." SO THERE WAS NO MAN WITH HIM WHEN JOSEPH MADE HIMSELF KNOWN TO HIS BROTHERS. HE WEPT SO LOUDLY THAT THE EGYPTIANS HEARD IT, AND THE HOUSEHOLD OF PHARAOH HEARD OF IT. THEN JOSEPH SAID TO HIS BROTHERS, "I AM JOSEPH! IS MY FATHER STILL ALIVE?" BUT HIS BROTHERS COULD NOT ANSWER HIM, FOR THEY WERE DISMAYED AT HIS PRESENCE. THEN JOSEPH SAID TO HIS BROTHERS, "PLEASE COME CLOSER TO ME." AND THEY CAME CLOSER. AND HE SAID, "I AM YOUR BROTHER JOSEPH, WHOM YOU SOLD INTO EGYPT. NOW DO NOT BE GRIEVED OR ANGRY WITH YOURSELVES, BECAUSE YOU SOLD ME HERE, FOR GOD SENT ME BEFORE YOU TO PRE-

SERVE LIFE. FOR THE FAMINE HAS BEEN IN THE LAND THESE TWO YEARS, AND THERE ARE STILL FIVE YEARS IN WHICH THERE WILL BE NEITHER PLOWING NOR HARVESTING. GOD SENT ME BEFORE YOU TO PRESERVE FOR YOU A REMNANT IN THE EARTH, AND TO KEEP YOU ALIVE BY A GREAT DELIVERANCE. NOW, THEREFORE, IT WAS NOT YOU WHO SENT ME HERE, BUT GOD; AND HE HAS MADE ME A FATHER TO PHARAOH AND LORD OF ALL HIS HOUSEHOLD AND RULER OVER ALL THE LAND OF EGYPT."

_GENESIS 45:1-8 (NIV)

Joseph had come to understand that God was aware of his trials, had a purpose for them, and would use all that he had gone through. How about you? Do you see and understand that God is aware of and understands all you go through? That understanding was an essential ingredient in Joseph's ability to choose to forgive!

APPLICATION:

Immediate prayer time within the class:

Declare as a class who you are in Christ! Come against every lie that you are rejected, abandoned, and forgotten. Give to the Lord every false comfort that comes to mind. Begin the process of releasing every bit of unforgiveness that has come from being rejected by others.

Take time this week to sincerely forgive every person who has rejected you or who you feel unforgiveness toward because of what they have done. Be released! Release them! Be free! If you need to ask forgiveness because of your actions, step out and do it with the Lord's leading.