

Module Six

The Gift of Forgiveness

To err is human, to forgive divine.

Alexander Pope

How did last week go for you? Were you able to integrate the language that creates peace into your conversations? Did you notice more insights arising? Did you notice a difference in the way you communicated?

Last week we just brushed over an important strategy for creating peace, so now we will take an in-depth look at this crucial aspect of having less stress—forgiveness.

Grace=Forgiveness

In my book *Overtaken by Grace* I dive deeply into the topic of forgiveness. I felt it was so important that I wanted to share the whole chapter here.

As Christians we are given the greatest, most precious gift—grace, the forgiveness of our sins through the sacrifice and love of Jesus Christ. When Jesus died on the cross, the divine exchange occurred where He took on all our sin, shame, pain, and wounds. In that moment on Calvary 2,000 years ago, I was forgiven—each of you was forgiven, and (this is hard to hear), every person who betrayed us, angered us, hurt us, or abused us was also forgiven.

Jesus already paid the price for us to be free. Our part is to focus on the renewal of our mind and the walking out of our faith to step into the forgiveness God already provided so we can live free. Still, in our humanness, many of us do not live free. We carry resentments, pain, hurt, and unforgiveness.

If God has forgiven us and every other person, why do we hold on to the pain?

Some of our pain is front and center; other parts are buried deep. As you embark on this forgiveness adventure, know the Lord is with you. The journey of forgiveness is between you and God. I am only here to share what the Lord taught me in my own walk and how he blessed me in the process, so you'll know it is right for you.

As we enter this living relationship with the God, we are called to forgive others as we have been forgiven (see Ephesians 4:32). Yet the process of forgiveness is painful because it involves our human frailty and wounds.

The word “forgive” in the Greek translation means “to release a burden,” in Hebrew it means “to be carried by the wind.” To forgive is to *let go*.

Forgiveness is like an onion—as you peel away the layers it is uncomfortable. There are tears, but when put together with additional ingredients, including faith and compassion, it becomes a delicious recipe for our lives. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could forgive once and be done? Yet God's Word reminds us that we must forgive repeatedly:

Peter: Lord, when someone has sinned against me, how many times ought I forgive him? Once? Twice? As many as seven times?

Jesus: You must forgive not seven times, but seventy times seven.

Matthew 18:21–22, VOICE

Each time we forgive, a deeper level of truth, peace, and compassion is revealed. Each layer emerges when we are ready—when we feel safe enough to explore. Forgiveness is not something you do for another. Forgiveness is only between you and God. Through forgiveness you experience the freedom Christ died for so that you can live free and experience his love.

There are two aspects of forgiveness: forgiving ourselves and forgiving others. You may wonder why you should forgive yourself. Because you are so precious to God that he wants you to be free from the burden of any resentment. God's Word gives us many truths about what God thinks about us:

- "I have loved you with an everlasting love;
- I have drawn you with unfailing kindness." Jeremiah 31:3
- For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. Deuteronomy 7:6
- For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. Ephesians 2:10, NLT
- You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it. Psalm 139:13–14, NLT

God created us as amazing masterpieces, and although we fall short, sin, and need a savior, we are His precious children, and He offers us the magnificent gift of forgiveness, just as Jesus did in Luke 7:47–48: Jesus, speaking to the accusers of the sinful woman who wet Jesus' feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, and anointed them with perfume: "Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." (ESV)

How can we love anyone else if we don't love the precious creations he called us to be?

Now let's take it a step further. Why do we need to forgive others? Take a moment to read the same truths in these scriptures again. As you do, think of those who have hurt or angered you, and how God feels about them:

- "I have loved you with an everlasting love;
- I have drawn you with unfailing kindness." Jeremiah 31:3

- For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. Deuteronomy 7:6
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Astonishing when we remember who we are and who others truly are. Yet there are deeper reasons to forgive. Ephesians 4:26–27 gives us another insight: “Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil” (NLT). Do you really want to give the enemy any foothold in your life?

Matthew 6:9–13 clearly shows in the Sermon on the Mount that forgiveness precedes deliverance from temptation and the evil one:

Our Father in heaven,
 Reveal who you are.
 Set the world right;
 Do what’s best—
 as above, so below.
 Keep us alive with three square meals.
 Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.
 Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.
 You’re in charge!
 You can do anything you want!
 You’re ablaze in beauty! (MSG)

Finally, 2 Corinthians 2:5–8 is a life-changing call to action. “Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. For such

a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So, I beg you to reaffirm your love for him” (ESV).

So how in our humanness and our hurt do we experience grace? How do we forgive? After a series of tragic events I cried out to the Lord, asking him how to forgive. In his sweet mercy he overtook my pain with this process of forgiveness. Here is the pathway he gifted me to teach me to forgive, using the acrostic for GRACE:

G—Go to God

For many of us, the process of forgiveness is so hard, yet our heavenly Father is there to help us. God’s Word says this so sweetly: “So let us step boldly to the throne of grace, where we can find mercy and grace to help when we need it most” (Hebrews 4:16, VOICE).

Forgiveness is one of those areas in my life that I cannot do alone. What stops you from asking for God’s help? What lies does the enemy, or your thinking, tell you about yourself and why you can’t ask for God’s help? He has a message for you in these times. “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly” (Matthew 11:28–30, MSG). The times when we are most burdened yet bring those burdens to God are the times we most feel his presence and his power.

R—Release

Anger, fear, sadness, and resentment are all human emotions. Jesus experienced all of these when he was human. Even the Bible validates our angry feelings, as Ephesians 4:26 reminds us, “Be angry and do not sin” (ESV).

When we simply feel our feelings in the presence of the Lord the healing happens. The release of these feelings can occur by pouring your heart out to God either aloud in prayer or on paper. God

created us with feelings. The trouble comes not from feeling emotions but letting them guide our actions and control us.

Psalm 55:22 reminds us of the power our Lord provides when we bring our emotions to him. “Cast your cares on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken.” Even when we feel shaky in our feelings, when we feel them in the presence of God we are not shaken.

Sometimes we are angry with the other person—other times with ourselves. At some moments we are angry with God. Often, several factors play into our anger and hurt. Yet when you are in an alive, intimate relationship with the Lord, he loves and accepts all of you. When we honestly share our hurt, we receive his grace. For as Romans 8:1 so eloquently expresses, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

A—Awareness/Acceptance

Once our feelings are shared with the Lord of all grace, he opens us up with compassion. We accept and become aware that those we have anger toward did their best at the level of thinking they had in the moment. Luke 23:34 illustrates this perfectly. As Jesus hangs on the cross facing the greatest pain of his life, he prays, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing” (NLT).

Once we accept the humanness of others, we move to the acceptance of God’s will. If he allowed a circumstance in our lives, he can use it to grow us through it.

One word of caution: if you are in an abusive situation, seek professional advice and help. Forgiveness and acceptance do not mean putting yourself in harm’s way. Ever!

C—Change in Perception

After the Lord blesses us with acceptance and awareness, he will renew our minds through a change in our perception. When we ask God, “Why did this happen *for* me? What is your purpose in this and how can I glorify you in this?” rather than “Why did this happen *to* me?” we

are moved into a position of power—from victim to victorious. The Holy Spirit empowers us to see our circumstances through eyes of grace.

Philippians 1:19 echoes this promise: “For I know that through your prayers and God’s provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.” This verse reminds us that our pain serves a purpose, and that it is not punishment but preparation, and perhaps even a part of our calling.

E—Even Though It Hurts, Give Thanks

Knowing the power of the Lord to orchestrate everything to work together for our good, we give thanks for true forgiveness when we say, “Lord, thank you for giving me the experience.” Even in the most painful of circumstances, God births within us the gifts of courage, strength, endurance, and patience. For all these things we express gratefulness. First Thessalonians 5:18 reminds us, “Give thanks to God no matter what circumstances you find yourself in. (This is God’s will for all of you in Jesus the Anointed)” (VOICE).

After exercising this forgiveness process around some areas of pain in my own life, I rededicated myself to Christ in the same pool in which I was baptized. As I emerged from the water, a skywriter drew an enormous cross above my house. The same breed of butterflies we released in our yard to celebrate my baptism danced by my nose. Later that day I received a delivery of flowers from a friend just because she loved me, and I also opened several awesome emails. A coincidence—no. A God incident—yes.

Once we forgive and release our shame, blame, guilt, hurt, sadness, and anger, we make space for greater gifts. And the richest gift of all is the freedom and love we find in the Lord Christ Jesus.

Thank you, Lord, that I am forgiven and loved, and so is everyone else.

Letting Go of Judgment

First take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Matthew 7:5

If we are to truly experience less stress in our relationships it is essential to start letting go of judgments. For the rest of today I want you to write down how many times you judge something or someone. This can be gossip about your family or friend. It can be calling the people you love names like lazy, slow, or obnoxious. When you sit in judgment of another, it weakens you.

Dr. David Hawkins in his groundbreaking book *Power vs. Force* talks in great length about the power of words. After 25 years of research using applied kinesiology, he found that positive words strengthen our bodies, while negative words and judgments weaken us.

The Bible talks about this too in Proverbs 18:2, “The tongue has the power of life and death.”

Here is a simple exercise you can do on yourself to test Hawkins' findings. For this activity you will need yourself and another person. Stand straight and hold your arm out in front of you at shoulder level. Then think about those who love you, think about a happy memory, and think about being peaceful. Then have the other person try to push your arm down with two fingers while you maintain the strength in your arm. For most people the arm will remain strong. Now begin to think judgmental thoughts of anger, hatred, and resentment; think about people who have hurt you. Again, try to have your partner push your arm down with two fingers. Did you become weak? For most people, when they are in an attitude of judgment, the arm falls easily.

Do you want to be strong or weak? We live in a world where each of us is interconnected. Every bit of anger, resentment, and judgment you send out into the world multiplies into more judgment and negativity.

Judgment can also be a great teacher. When you sit in judgment of another, many times you are reflecting a part of yourself, a part you can ask the Lord to remove. I grew up with a loving family member who also had strong opinions. When I began my walk with the Lord, her behavior became difficult for me to deal with, so I made it my mission to change her. Every time she judged something, I would say, “You are being so judgmental. Why don’t you see the good in the situation?” Did this cure her judgmental behavior? Absolutely not. It made her more resistant, angry, and judgmental. Several years ago, while in prayer, I asked the Holy Spirit why I could not help her become less judgmental. The answer astonished me: because I was judging her. In my desire to help her change her behavior, I was doing the same thing. I learned to express my feelings rather than judging her. Our relationship is much healthier now. Luke 6:37 perfectly illustrates this: “Do not judge and you will not be judged. Do not condemn and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”

Granting forgiveness is one of the most powerful vehicles to create peaceful, loving relationships. Forgiveness is not a momentary event; it is a lifelong practice filled with endless possibilities.

Let’s Review

To fully experience peace in your relationships, it is essential that you use the tools in this chapter to:

- Honor the perspectives of others by letting go of judgments.
- Use the GRACE process to forgive.
- Forgive those you hold in grievance as you have been forgiven.