

HOW TO FORGIVE FOR MEN

LEARNING THE BIBLICAL PRINCIPLE OF
RELEASE



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Guys and Forgiveness

Ok, we are going to talk about something most guys try to avoid like the plague - forgiveness. Most guys I know look at a discussion on forgiveness the same as a discussion with their wife on what bed spread you should get - "Honey, do you like autumn leaves or spring flowers?" He is thinking, "What?"

It is not a topic that immediately jumps on your radar. However, if you take a moment to think about it, and figure out the true nature of it, it can be the one skill that determines success or failure in your life.

Guys tend not to think about forgiveness for a few basic reasons. First, forgiveness seems like a female concept. Why? When guys hear phrases like, "Forgiveness is the glue that keeps a relationship together." They get the impression that forgiveness only has to do with being married or keeping a girlfriend happy. It is a relationship principle and relationship principles are the exclusive domain of women. Consequently, it doesn't really apply to other areas of life like work, business, or sports.

Second, if a guy does think about forgiveness, his initial impression is that it is like giving up. Some guys think if you are a "forgiving" person, then you are going to be giving people permission to take advantage of you. Instead of being tough, like Dirty "Make my day" Harry, it feels more like, "Go ahead, take advantage of me." Guys are not into weakness. Intentionally being taken advantage of is not a guy virtue. It goes completely against everything he was taught growing up about how he must stick up for himself. So doing something that seems to encourage being weak is not something that really appeals to guys. If forgiveness makes a man weak, then there is not much appeal for a guy to develop it as a skill.

Third reason guys don't forgive is they simply chooses not to do it. Even if they buy into all the "reasons", they choose not to do it. I often hear guys say things like, "I know I am supposed to, but I just can't." Or, "I know it would be better, but I just can't get out of my mind what that guy did to my family." Comments like these are not connected to a man's immaturity, but to a man's sense of justice.

Men are motivated by justice. Men may be convinced forgiveness is the right thing to do, but they won't be able to do it if it "feels" unjust on some level.

The principle of justice must be addressed in the act of forgiveness, or men simply won't buy in. Why? If someone wrongs you in the worst sort of way, there is something wrong about letting them off the hook. If a guy "forgives" someone, aren't they just letting that person "get away with it"? Guys choose not to forgive because it seems to bail on the whole justice deal, and that just doesn't sit well with guys who believe there is a right and wrong.

Conclusion:

So there it is in a nutshell. If a man perceives forgiveness as a female concept that results in breeding weakness, then you can see why guys don't spend a lot of time thinking about it, let alone trying to develop it as a mental skill. Until a man is completely convinced that forgiveness is not the chickification of men, or bailing on justice, or developing your "sensitive" side. He will not be able to train himself to practice it in his everyday life.

So why should men learn to forgive?

Most men realize they only have one life to live and they want to make the best of it. When it comes to forgiveness, successful men have learned how developing the skill of forgiveness gives them a mental and spiritual edge in life. Forgiveness is not a response of the weak but a skill necessary for success. It is designed by God to influence your mental and spiritual focus in life. Successful men have learned the skill of forgiveness because it strengthens their spiritual life and keeps their mind focused on where they are going, not because it makes them feel weak.

You need to know up front, forgiveness is not an easy skill to develop. However, the ramifications of not working on adding this skill to your everyday life is overwhelming. Some of the side effects of not being a forgiver are:

1. You will be stunting your spiritual growth.
2. You will be frustrated with your level of maturity.

3. You will find that instead of learning from life experiences and gaining wisdom, you get stuck in cycles where you repeat the same unpleasant experiences over and over again.

In the end, forgiveness is a principle that has nothing to do with weakness, but has everything to do with strength. Forgiveness is a key mental skill that successful men have learned to develop and the truth is you can't live the good life, or be successful, without it. Therefore, if you want to experience everything life has to offer, then forgiveness should be a tool in your toolbox of life and you should know how to practice it everyday.

The Point of Life

Every man knows, deep within his soul, that his life is supposed to have a point. The sad truth is that many men don't know what it is. When a man is unable to discover, even at a rudimentary level, that his life has a point to it, he is a lost man, an un-man, a boy living in a man's body. C.S. Lewis calls a man like this, "A man without a chest." When a man has no idea about the point of his life, he is in the game of life without knowing what position he is to play. Can a man play on a football team and not have a position?

"I play for the Packers!"

"Oh yeah? What position?"

"Well, I don't have a position."

"Well, what are you? The towel boy?"

A man must know that his life has a point. It may take a lifetime to discover it, but he must live as if he knows it is there, somewhere. When a man lives without a mission in life, he is a desperate man. This is what Henry David Thoreau meant when he wrote, "Most men live lives of quiet desperation", almost 200 years ago. A life without a purpose is a life of desperation. You live only to survive, not thrive.

In the movie Braveheart, Mel Gibson plays the role of William Wallace, a historical figure who fought for Scottish independence. In a great scene proclaiming every man's longing to be free, he said, "Every man dies, so few men really live." If your life has no point to it, then are you really living? Are you really free?

When a man lives with a purpose in life, he is living forward. He has a goal, he grows and matures, he overcomes challenges and navigates through obstacles. On the other side, when a man forgets why he is here, he has no idea where he is going. When you lose your sense of direction then you stop growing and when you face obstacles in life, the energy to face them and overcome is lost. When a man loses the capacity to overcome challenges in life, he loses his passion for living. The adventure is gone and the most important things: God, his wife, his children, his friends and his positive impact on the world no longer bring meaning to each day.

Here's the bottom line: Every man knows his life has a point, a mission. When he lives for this mission, life is an adventure, full of meaning and purpose. When he loses his sense of mission, life loses its passion. You see guys like this everyday: wandering aimlessly through life, trying everything, committing to nothing. They are expending a lot of energy, but their lives seem to be going nowhere. If there ever was a conspiracy, it is a conspiracy designed to cause men to lose their sense of purpose.

The Really BIG Question for Guys

If life is about living on purpose, then what could possibly get a guy off track to the point he loses his passion for life? What could get a guy so off base that he forgets his life has a point to it? There are not that many issues that can get a guy completely off track, but one major issue is bitterness. When bitterness takes root in the heart of a man, it has the capacity to stop him from living on purpose. Like smoke in the eyes, bitterness clouds a man's vision of where he is going in life. His sense of purpose gets murky. If he remains bitter, his vision of his life will become a complete fog. He will lose not only a vision for his life, but his sense of direction as well. The end result, if he is unable to clear his head and see where he should be going, then he will live without any purpose at all.

The trap of bitterness is not hard to fall into. Guys who are passionate about life, who love to compete, who live life with gusto, are passionate about who they are and what they do. Living life with passion is a great adventure, but one of the passions that come with living a passionate life is anger. Passionate people get mad. This is a normal experience in life and getting angry is not the issue when it comes to bitterness.

Bitterness is about holding onto anger. Ephesians 4:26 says, *"In your anger, do not sin, do not let the sun go down on your anger."* We often think this verse only means we shouldn't get angry and take it out on others. Have you ever considered that holding onto anger might be a sin against yourself? When a guy holds onto anger for a long period of time, it will turn into bitterness. Once bitterness enters into your life it tends to grow like a virus- penetrating healthy cells, finding a home, and taking over. Then it reproduces many other cells just like it. Bitterness can ultimately infect every healthy attitude in a man. This infection is a process that results in the undermining of a man's sense of purpose in life. It does this by re-orientating his perspective. Instead of looking forward, he spends his mental energy focused on the event that caused his anger. Over time, he may even forget the actual event that caused him to become angry, but bitterness has taken root in his heart and is a great defense mechanism for every slight he experiences in life. Everyone knows a guy who has become bitter- it's not pretty. This is why holding onto anger and allowing it to develop into bitterness is a sin against yourself.

The Cure

The only thing that has the power to kill off bitterness is forgiveness. It is a mental skill a man develops that becomes an attitude in his heart. When this attitude takes root in a man's heart, then he will inoculate himself from bitterness taking root and spreading in his life.

Please note! The attitude of forgiveness does not mean you never get angry, it simply means you know how to deal with your anger so it does not affect you negatively. Forgiveness begins as a mental choice.

Ultimately, when developed to maturity it becomes a reflexive attitude that will stop bitterness from taking root. This skill is crucial, because there is no other known cure for the infection of bitterness. The only way to stop it is through forgiveness.

I love sports and football is one of my favorites. One statement you hear often, comes from football- "the best defense is a good offense." Forgiveness is the offensive strategy that provides the best defense against bitterness.

It is a pro-active approach to life that is intentional. Know your game plan before you hit the field. Like an offensive coordinator for a football team, the play must already be in the playbook, it must have been practice prior to game day, and you must know in which situation you will call the play. Unlike football, when all of those conditions align and you call the play of forgiveness, you don't have to pray it works. It works every single time.

How Forgiveness impacts your life

Focus

Focus and achievement are synonymous for a man. Men admire other men who have honed their ability to focus.

Mike Singletary was widely respected as the greatest linebacker during his time with the Chicago Bears. His greatest quality? Focus.

Kobe Bryant's greatest skill? Focus.

In business, focus is critical for a successful investment strategy, closing a deal, bringing a product to market or making a new discovery. When a man is growing, and making progress in life, he is focused. He knows where he wants to go and is working towards that end. Focus does more than allow a man to achieve certain things, focus brings a dimension of enjoyment to the process. It allows a man to enjoy the journey he is on. He is able to see the meaning his life has and the impact he is making on the world around him. If he is unable to focus, then he is unable to see the impact of his life.

Forgiveness is the most important skill you can develop in order to keep your focus. Why? First of all, forgiveness actually "cures" bitterness, it is the antidote. Every day life is filled with aches and pains. Not a day will pass where someone won't assault your sense of right and wrong or offend you. This is a fact of life. When the aches, pains and offenses become center stage, it is easy to forget why you are here.

Casey was an active, outdoors guy in his mid 30's. He broke his back in an mountain biking accident.

After surgery, spine fusing, and lots of physical therapy he was able to return to his active lifestyle. When I asked him about what was the toughest part of recovery he said without hesitation: "The pain. I had to learn all over again how to push through the pain. It made me want to give up and constantly distracted me from my goal of full recovery."

Pains sucks, but it is a fact of life. Forgiveness is about how to deal with emotional pain and heart pain. It allows you to push through the pain and not be distracted by it. When a man becomes unforgiving, he loses the ability to push through his emotional pain. Forgiveness is the key to unlocking your endurance to push through the heart pain men suffer when wronged and keeps you focused on your mission.

Second, forgiveness keeps you focused by directly removing grudges. When a man carries a grudge, he is constantly looking at new experiences as an opportunity to correct the wrong that he suffered from the past. You have certainly heard the phrase, "Nice guy, but has a chip on his shoulder." What does that mean? It means "Stay clear, you never know when that chip is going to fly off and hit you." When a man has a chip on his shoulder, he is not focusing on where he is going, he is looking for a chance to fix the past. Each new circumstance becomes an opportunity for him to get what he wants. However, what he wants has nothing to do with his mission in life, it has everything to do with his wounded pride. Carrying a grudge blinds a man to the possibility of what he can do and become in the future. Therefore, if a man wants to live for his mission in life, he has to find a way to throw off grudges. The Bible says it this way, *"Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off every thing that hinders, and the sin which so easily entangles, and run with perseverance the race marked out before us."* (Hebrews 12:1)

Finally, forgiveness keeps a man focused by controlling his anger. Anger is an emotion every guy experiences to some degree or another. It is not the experiencing of anger that causes a man to lose focus, it is the lack of control that anger brings about in a man. You find this point made in the Bible: the Bible does not condemn anger itself, only the actions that come from anger. Ephesians 4:26-27 says,

Why Men Get Stuck

If a guy has not learned to develop the skill of forgiveness, then he is carrying a certain amount of bitterness- whether he knows it or not. Steve was married, had 2 boys , and seemed to be doing well in life. When he got to his mid thirties he seemed to be tired all the time. He stopped pursuing some of his favorite past times; fishing and motorcycle riding. On Saturdays he found himself wanting to get his yard work done so he could sit and watch sports on TV. His wife saw him slowly retreating from life. Less time with friends, less time playing, less time enjoying. On Sunday's he wanted to sleep late. Church was boring, even though he went with his family, it didn't resonate with him anymore and he turned down offers to get involved or serve. One day, a guest speaker was invited to speak on the importance of forgiveness. He challenged the men to consider how real men have learned to forgive in order to live. His message hit a nerve and Steve grabbed the book the guy wrote. He read the book and went through the steps on forgiving. Steve didn't realize how much bitterness he was carrying. As he was growing up, his father just checked out on him. As he went through the steps of forgiveness he said, "I felt this huge weight being lifted off my shoulders. I didn't realize how heavy it had become until it started to be taken away." His wife says it was at that point that Steve started to reengage and live life to the fullest.

Bitterness is a weight men carry that saps their energy from living their mission in life. Remember, when a guy lives for his mission his life is filled with adventure. He has things to do, mountains to climb, things to experience. Bitterness does not just slow you down, it actually stops you from living your mission. Have you ever run into another guy who had swallowed the bitterness pill and said, "Wow, that guy is really living!" It just doesn't happen. It is more likely to be like this, "He had such talent and promise (as an athlete, businessman, politician) but he got bitter and that was the end of that."

If bitterness is so negative, then why do so many men still fall into it's trap? What could possibly be so attractive about it that men will throw out what they know about it and swallow the bitter pill? When you think about it, bitterness comes from unresolved anger. No one wakes up one day and becomes bitter.

It is a long process and that process has anger written all over it.

So by focusing on anger, the trap becomes more clear. Every effective trap has good bait and the bait for men in the bitterness trap is the perceived strength anger gives men in the midst of wrongs suffered. When someone takes advantage of you, or intentionally insults you, the last thing you want to do is feel weak about it. Most guys want to do something and the thing they do is get mad. Anger seems to be the right thing to do because it gives you the upper hand. Psychologists have started calling anger the second emotion. This means that anger always follows a primary emotion, one that usually makes a person feel weak. Men don't like feeling weak and so they employ anger to overcome those emotions that make them feel weak. Anger is very effective about overcoming a sense of weakness. You see it all the time in movies. The hero is getting his butt kicked all over the place and then the bad guy makes a crack about his woman, then he gets mad and the hero starts dishin' in out - because the hero got angry, the bad guy never had a chance. Most guys don't think about anger in this way, but it certainly is true. Guys are programmed to believe anger is the pill that gives you superhuman strength. When you swallow it, you can do anything. Unfortunately, it is like a massive steroid- you can take it and feel strong for a moment but in the end it shrinks your manhood.

Once a man gets used to the feeling of strength that anger gives, they start using it for everything. Don't get a raise you think you deserve, get mad. Your wife points out one of your glaring weaknesses- get mad. Get caught by the red light so you lose another 30 seconds out of your life- become a raging volcano! If you think about it closely, using anger to feel strong is not strength, it is weakness. It is taking the easy road out. How hard is it to get mad? Not very. Besides, it just doesn't work. I knew a guy who wanted six pack abs. So instead of working out, or dropping his caloric intake, he spent \$300 on a machine that hooked little electrodes up to your stomach and shocked you! Guess what, it didn't work (but his hair turned curly). Anger is the same way, it is only an illusion of strength, not real strength. Men who use it to feel strong, end up looking like immature children.

When a guy falls into this trap, it is hard to get out. Here is why:

First, every guy gets angry, but allowing it to settled into bitterness or a grudge is sin. The definition of sin in the Bible is missing the mark. It comes from a word used by soldiers who fired the long bow. When the arrow did not hit the bulls-eye of the target, they would say you sinned. The bitterness trap keeps a man from hitting the bulls eye in life. When a man continues to miss the mark in life, he experiences a deep sense of weakness, like somehow he is not a real man because he can't hit the mark like other men. As a man feels weaker, the need to feel stronger can be over powering and so he uses the easy path to feeling strong - anger. And then it starts all over again, a downward spiral into the trap of bitterness.

The bottom line is all men get angry. What causes men to miss the mark (sin) is what they do in their anger. The two most common things that happen when a man gets angry is rage (expression of his anger) and bitterness. Rage is when a man no longer has control over his thoughts, mouth, and actions. Bitterness is when a man refuses to let his anger pass over him. He holds onto it and feeds it. It is impossible to hit any mark if you have no control over yourself or can only look backwards. No one is ever going to be perfect, but the key to breaking out of the trap is to develop the skill of forgiveness.

Second, the Bible goes on to say, "Do not give the Devil a foothold." The imagery is of an advancing army using ships to cross a river. If the advancing army could get enough ships across the river, they would be able to establish a beach head - a place where they could gather their forces for a full scale attack. If a man does not develop a skill that gives him the power over his anger and the ability to let it go he is giving the Devil a beach head in his life. Once a beach head is established, a man will never look forward in his life and attempt to live out his mission. He will be in the trap of bitterness, looking at each new circumstance in life as an opportunity to overcome the past.

Most men know bitterness is not a good thing but men fall into its grip all the time. The bait in the trap of bitterness is very powerful and if a man goes after the bait, he ends up in a trap that ultimately robs him of his mission in life. It is to be avoided at all costs. Unfortunately, this is a tough thing to do because every man, on some level, has experienced the temptation of this trap.

Over coming the temptation of the bait is one of the most significant steps in growing from a boy to a man. In order to become a man, a boy must think about how to overcome this trap of the mind. Maturity, growing into a man, is learning to recognize the trap of bitterness and how to avoid it. He will see that it is not possible to walk around the trap, but he is able to pass through it safely using the skill of forgiveness. When a man learns this skill, he is no longer a boy, but is maturing into a man.

First step in developing the skill.

In order to develop a new skill, a guy has to be motivated and guys are motivated by quality tools. If he sees the benefit of adopting a certain skill, then it is easier to work on adding it to his mental framework. The first benefit of learning the forgiveness skill is courage. Hard to believe, but true. It takes courage to develop the skill and the result of having this skill is you will live life with greater courage.

When it comes to being skilled at forgiveness, cowards need not apply. When I was backpacking with my father as a boy, we came across a swollen river. My dad found a giant log crossing the river. He jumped on the log and started across. He motioned for me to follow. Carrying a heavy backpack, my confidence was not high. Out on the log I froze. My dad yelled at me to look up, not at the river raging below. "Keep your eye on me, look at where you want to go." he yelled. Summoning all my courage I started to move again. As I continued to move forward, my focus on my dad grew stronger and my confidence that I would make it increased.

It takes courage to look up from the raging waters and focus on where you want to go. Forgiveness is the act of looking up.

Forgiveness not only requires a courageous step forward, it also build a man's courage. Men who learn the skill of forgiveness grow more courageous in life. The opposite is true as well- guys who don't forgive, or can't forgive, end up being wusses. Instead of living life, life is knocking them around. Instead of going somewhere, they aren't really going anywhere. Instead of setting goals and hitting them, they are constantly focusing on the past. Ultimately, they become a flincher.

A flincher is a guy who flinches anytime something happens in life. It's a reflexive "Oh no, not again" feeling when life occurs. A flincher tends to see new experiences as negative so they seek out routine. Flinchers can also get real sensitive. Instead of dealing with an offense and moving on, they over react. They get mad. This over reaction turns them into boiling cauldron waiting to explode. They fall into a constant reaction mode. A reaction mode is not where a guy wants to live when he is trying to focus on where he wants to go in life.

When trap shooters train, the primary goal is to train the muscles not to flinch during the shooting movement. It is difficult to do because the body naturally prepares itself for the coming explosion when the gun is fired. Breathing is a critical focus in training trap shooters because controlled breathing causes the body to relax. Controlled relaxation overcomes the tendency to flinch.

In the same way, forgiveness trains the mind not to flinch when offenses occur. It is not prone to over-reaction. The spiritual and mental reflexes are not dulled, but sharpened in the process. Men who develop this skill have greater success because they are not reacting to situations, but are able to control themselves and make solid decision in any situation. They are quick thinkers and decisive when the need arises. The skill of forgiveness does increase the speed of your decisions, it simply removes any fog that slows the brain down. It clears the mind and calms the reflexive instinct of the mind when it is offended.

When the mind is not foggy you have what is known as moral clarity. Moral clarity gives a man the capacity to know what is a true offense, when to take a stand against an injustice and when to let things go in order to stay focused on his life mission. Forgiveness is the key to developing moral clarity in your life.

Second Step

The second step for a guy in developing the skill of forgiveness is to believe it is a challenge worthy of a man. Men tend to see the skill of forgiveness as a more feminine trait. The impact of this view point is that the skill does not seem like much of a challenge to develop or possess. Guys need a good challenge. If a guy thinks developing the skill of forgiveness is like developing the skill of knitting, he won't be motivated. By re-enforcing how challenging it is to develop and how important it is to success in life, a man can easily make a commitment to developing

the skill of forgiveness. Here is the truth: forgiveness is not an easy skill to develop and it is definitely not a feminine skill.

The capacity to forgive and move forward unhindered is a quality of all successful men. If a man thinks this quality is weak, or feminine, he needs to change his frame of reference. The truth is if a guy is worried about chickification, he should focus on the trap of bitterness. The bitterness trap is the real wussy way out. It is the easy road. It doesn't really require a man to do anything but act like a boy. In reality, when a person offends you or wrongs you it is easier to just get pissed and say, "I hate that person."

On the other hand, forgiveness requires a man to step up. Why? because forgiveness is all about courage. If forgiveness requires a man to confront his offenses immediately and make a decision on what to do about them. Then he must possess the courage to confront these issues immediately. The skill of forgiveness is not about a simple dismissing of an offense, or bad behavior of another person. It is much more.

First, the skill requires a man to make a decision or judgement. Everyday you will interact with people and those interactions have the potential to create friction. Friction includes irritations, disagreements, disappointments, offenses and outright betrayals. All of these can easily become distractions to a guy, especially if they pile up over time. The skill of forgiveness requires a man to deal with each of these frictions as they arise.

Next, forgiveness pushes a man to make a judgement concerning those issues. He has to determine if it is truly an offense or nothing at all. If he concludes it is an offense, he then makes the decision to let it go and move on. If it is more than a simple offense and an issue of justice, then he must let go of the emotional negativity and pursue justice through righteous means.

The key here is that things are dealt with as they happen. There is no procrastination, no building up of small offenses, no development of grudges. When life is approached this way, spiritual and emotional strength goes up exponentially. The mind and heart is cleared of moral confusion and the fog of indecision.

Third Step

There is no better way for a man to strengthen his sense of who he is and where he is going than by pursuing honor. Paul says in Philippians 4:8 says, *“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”* Paul, the author of these words, obviously believes that pursuing honor is the right thing for a man to do. The deeper question then becomes, why is it right for a man? What good comes out of it? Is a man supposed to do this simply because it is his duty or is there a link between what he is to be doing and what he will become?

The answer lies in the very words of Jesus. He said,

“Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness.”
Luke 11:34-35

Jesus is not making a pitch for LASIK surgery. He is speaking about the concept of focus. What a man focuses on in life is where he ends up. The Baja 500 is one of the most dangerous off road races in the world. Covering 500 miles of the most rugged desert in Baja, Mexico, the attrition rate is close to 50%- meaning half of all racers who start are unable to finish the race. The race attracts all kinds of racers and all types of machines. Therefore, every racer and every machine races according to class. The top class of racers is the specialized class. These are seasoned, full time drivers driving half a million dollar off road machines. These machines are awesome with over 500 horse power and they can fly! These drivers have trained themselves extensively to react to obstacles and booby traps on the course. They have to keep moving at a high rate of speed and avoid these hazards at the same time. How do they do it? By training themselves to focus on where they want the machine to go, not where they are at. Researchers discover that by using this technique, drivers cut their reaction time to hazards by up to 65% and had greater control over the machine. When a driver focuses on the immediate hazard, they tend to over correct and lose what is commonly known in driving as “the line”- the path the vehicle must travel to get where it needs to get as quickly as possible.

This is exactly what Jesus meant when He said,

Your eye is the lamp of the body.” What you have set the “eye of your heart” upon, is where you will end up. What can a man set the “eye of his heart” upon so that his whole life is filled with light? The answer is honor.

Honor is a transformational concept at its core. We are not born honorable, you can't buy honor and people don't become honorable by accident. Honor is a goal only achieved when a man chooses it as the focus of his mind's eye. Honor is transformational because it requires a person to submit their decision making process to a higher standard. It requires a man, when he makes a decision, to look beyond his feelings and think through the implications of his decision making. He is not merely responding to his “feelings”, which is a self centered approach to decision making, he is thinking through the long term impact of his choices on those around him. Philippians 2:3-4 says,

“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”

The Bible states that you must make a decision motivated by humility that you will raise the level of importance the needs of the people around you. When a man chooses to focus his minds eye on honor, this is the result-elevating the value of his wife, children, friends, church, and workplace.

In the film Rob Roy, the lead character tells his son that honor is a gift a man gives to himself. I believe all men long for honor and that they long to give it to themselves as a gift. So how does a man give himself this gift? By developing the skill of forgiveness. When a man masters the skill of forgiveness, he has given himself the gift of honor. A case in point: every man knows that self centered decision making is not honorable. However, most men do not understand the connection between unforgiveness and self centered decision making. Self centered decision making is obviously decision making based solely on a single perspective- his own. How come men become self-centered in their decision making? Because they harbor bitterness and resentment. They don't let things go, so they start to make decisions solely on what they want. Unforgiveness is a mental virus that makes it impossible for a man to look beyond himself. On the other hand, a man who has developed the skill of forgiveness is able to focus on the kind of man he wants to be an honorable man, a man who makes decisions on what is best for everyone, not just himself.

The Nuts and Bolts of Forgiveness

I hope you are now convinced that you need this skill in your everyday life. In order for you to develop this skill to the point where it just happens naturally you will do two things. First, work on the process of how it is done and then practice the process as much as possible.

The mechanics of forgiveness is a process very similar to a great basketball shot. Here is what the steps look like:

Choosing. First step in shooting a basketball is to decide when to shoot. This requires knowing where the hoop is, confidence you are in your range, and a decision to go. Forgiveness requires a similar action. You get a sense that you are in the range of needing to forgive. i.e.: things aren't going well, you are around people you don't like or click with, you hear bad news, your reservation got cancelled, someone confronts you with blame, etc. Things go wrong in life, people will let you down, disappoint you or even betray you. In that moment you have a choice to make. Will I choose to forgive or get caught in a trap. If you want to forgive (take the shot) you must train yourself to choose to do it.

Identification. Once a basketball player decides to take the shot, he begins his shot by focusing on the hoop. Great shooters call this "getting a good look". If he gets a good look at the hoop, he is confident he can make the shot. In order to be an effective forgiver, you need to be able to "get a good look" at what is going on inside your head. Only then, will you be able to complete the process of forgiveness.

Kevin got in his car to leave for work and he was mad. He started the day with another argument with his wife. As he was leaving she remarked how he was always mad at everything. Since he was late for work, he didn't have time to respond. Flipping on the radio, Springsteen was belting out "Everybody has a Hungry Heart". he thought about how easy it would be to just go out for a drive and never come back. Realizing Springsteen wasn't helping, he flipped the dial. As he calmed down a little bit, he began thinking about what his wife said. He was irritable lately, no that wasn't accurate- he has been down right mad lately. And then something remarkable happened, he asked himself why he was so mad all the time.

A simple question, but one so few men learn to ask. Men get so busy being mad they never get to the point where they actually think about why they are mad.

When a man grows to the point where he can evaluate what it is that is creating the anger process within him, he is truly maturing. He is learning to master himself. Successful men are men who are in control of themselves, they are able to channel their emotions in the right direction and expend their emotional energy on the right things.

This self evaluation brings maturity. He is able, for the very first time, to begin to see how he can influence the events around him and not be controlled by the circumstances he finds himself in. When a man looks at his life from this perspective, he is developing a whole new level of maturity in his life. One common trait of all successful men- whether they be athlete or business men- is their capacity influence the circumstances they find themselves in each day.

Identification is the willingness to admit you are mad and then ask the question: why am I mad? What is the reason for my anger?

Decision: A player makes a choice to take a shot and tries to get a good look at the rim in order to make the shot. What happens next? He makes a decision on the exact point to take the shot. He quickly makes a move to separate himself from a defender, squares up to the rim, and begins the jump motion in order to elevate himself.

The next step in forgiveness is similar. You have to make a conscience decision to go through the specific steps (motions) in order to make it happen.

Separate from the defense. You have to take a step back and realize something bigger is happening here. It isn't about what has just happened to me, it is about what I allow to happen to me in the process. I am in control of myself and the situation.

Square up to the rim is about setting your mind on the specific goal.

Elevating yourself is the step when you believe this is what I need to do, can do it, and will do it.

Release. Once a shooter chooses to take a shot, gets a "good look", separates and elevates, he will release the ball by snapping the wrist and then visualize placing his hand in the basket.

Here is how you complete the process of forgiveness: confession. If anger is the mental state that causes men to hold onto things and not release them, then confession is the point where a man can “release” the hold anger has on him. Men have been taught to release their anger, but not in healthy ways. Is there a way to release anger in a healthy way that doesn’t cause damage in the process? Yes! When a man confesses his anger to God, he is releasing it to Him. In one manner, God could be considered the basket and the ball is anger. When a man confesses to God he simply says, “God, here is my anger, take it.” The Bible says in 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Notice what happens if we make confession: God purifies us from all unrighteousness. In the act of confession to God, you are letting go of your anger. You and God can’t both have it at the same time. The Bible promises that God takes it and “purifies” you from the unrighteous direction it can lead- unforgiveness.

Confession can be either half- hearted and ineffective, or it can be powerful. The way to strengthen your confession and make it powerful is similar to the final step in shooting the ball when the shooter “snaps” the wrist. The final “snap” occurs when you say to yourself, “I’ve decided to forgive. I did it, I just let it go.” It is only after you make your confession and release it to God when you will see the impact of what you have just accomplished. You will experience complete release. Your blood pressure goes down, a sense of freedom arises and you intuitively know that you are going in the right direction.

Your goal should be to make forgiveness a reflex in your our daily life. When it is reflexive it is at the point where it happens without you thinking about it. Where you want to go in life is clear in your mind and distractions are immediately resolved. Developing this skill into a reflex requires practice. Early on in the development process, affirm what you are doing verbally. You can make statements to yourself that affirm the point and purpose of what you are doing. You can say things like, “This is good for me, letting go keeps me in charge.” or “By letting go, I am not letting this person or situation gain any control over me.” or “I am keeping my focus on where I want to go, not were they want me to go. It’s my life, not theirs.” A very good statement is, “God has a plan for me and I want to live it out completely. I won’t be derailed from God’s best.”

By strengthening your confession you not only achieve your goal, but you are building a more powerful mental frame of mind in your approach to life.

Conclusion

The process is simple: choose to become a forgiver, identify when you need to forgive, once you identify the situation in which to forgive then make the actual decision to do it. Finally, make the release complete by giving it completely to God.

If you follow these steps, you will discover freedom through a deeper connection to God, a stronger faith, and a renewed passion for living. The skill of forgiveness frees the conscience and allows your soul to focus on the point of life. This is what your life was meant to be: connected to God, focused and significant.

Now practice! Do it again and again. The best way to practice is to run through these steps with a situation long past that still gives you heartache and grief now and then. Review the steps above. This is the best way to practice. It will also give you the opportunity to experience first hand how forgiveness impacts your attitude.

Living Life!

Once a man starts to practice the skill of forgiveness life comes into focus. He sees who he is, why he is here and what he is able to do with greater clarity. Life becomes an adventure, a challenge of his particular abilities.

I had an old tube TV for years, it eventually wore out. We had been saving for a new TV over the years and when I checked the fund, I saw we had saved enough to buy one of those 52" 1080i LCD's from a box store. Watching football became a whole new experience! It was awesome! After I got the new TV, I tried to watch a game on the old TV in the workout room one day. It was frustrating! You couldn't see anything with clarity. A friend told me, "Once you watch sports in high def., you can't go back." He was so right!

This is what happens when you develop the skill of forgiveness in your life. You can't go back because it brings such clarity and focus. You not only experience a sense of authentic freedom, you're not distracted by all the insignificancies of life. You begin looking forward to what each day has to offer.

The whole point of this book is to let you see the connection between living out your mission in life and forgiveness. There are very few men who discover their mission at a young age and then pursue it with single minded focus. The vast majority of men discover their mission in life over time, through multiple experiences. Everything experienced in life either helps or hurts you in this process. Is life tearing you down or are you growing stronger and more mature? If you don't practice forgiving as you live through different experiences in life, then you won't become better, only bitter. Bitter men are lost men.

The final point is that without a solid faith in Jesus Christ you may discover mental freedom through forgiveness, but you will never discover spiritual freedom. Spiritual freedom is the source for all other freedoms in life and spiritual freedom is only possible through Jesus Christ. The Bible quotes Jesus saying,

"I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me." (John 14:6)

So how do you find spiritual freedom in Jesus Christ? The bible says by knowing Him. If you have yet to establish a relationship with Jesus Christ, then now might be the right time for you to do so.

I wrote another little booklet titled: How to Come to Jesus Christ. It is shorter than this one and walks you through the basic steps of getting connected to God. I suggest you pick up a copy and get started.