FORGIVENESS EXERCISE

One of the most common ways we get stuck in life is by holding onto unforgiveness—whether toward someone who hurt us, or toward ourselves. Over time, carrying that weight creates deep emotional roadblocks. It leaves the door open for bitterness, chronic anger, and resentment to take root, which inevitably spills over into our health, our peace of mind, and our other relationships.

To understand how to move forward, it helps to be clear about what forgiveness actually is. Forgiveness is simply the willful choice to release anger and resentment toward someone for an offense or mistake. It does **not** mean you like, agree with, or excuse what they did. It also doesn't mean you have to pretend it didn't hurt, or even reconcile with an unsafe person.

However, if you wait to forgive until the other person apologizes or changes, you are essentially handing them the remote control to your emotional well-being. Forgiveness is a gift you give yourself so you can stop carrying the pain.

Rather than trying to get even or repay harm with more harm, we are encouraged to refuse to let someone else's worst actions turn us into bitter people. Part of doing that is recognizing that people who hurt others are often acting out of their own deep, unhealed pain and brokenness. Understanding this doesn't make their behavior okay, and it doesn't remove their accountability for their actions. It simply helps you see them clearly so you can stop taking their brokenness personally.

Ultimately, holding onto unforgiveness keeps the original wound alive. It keeps you tethered to the very person who harmed you the most, trapping you in a cycle of replay, shame, and frustration.

Take a moment to consider what that weight is costing you right now. You don't have to stay chained to past offenses. Forgiveness is the key that allows you to unlock that chain, release the need for vengeance or justice into God's hands, and finally walk away free.

True forgiveness requires more than just deciding to "get over it" in your head. To actually let go of the weight, you have to be willing to be honest with yourself—and with God, if faith is part of your life—about how deeply you were hurt. Healing begins when you bring buried pain to the surface so it can finally be processed and released.

Below is a practical exercise to help you work through unforgiveness at your own pace. Feel free to adapt these steps in whatever way feels most meaningful to you.

1. Create a quiet space for reflection
Find a calm, private place where you won't be interrupted. Take a few deep breaths, quiet your mind, and—if you pray—ask God for clarity and honesty. Pay attention to the names or memories that naturally surface when you think about unresolved hurt.

2. Make an honest inventory
Write down the names of the people who come to mind. Don't filter the list based on whether the offense seems "big enough." It could be a childhood bully, a harsh teacher, a parent, a friend, or a partner. Next to each name, write down what happened, how it made you feel, and how deeply it affected you.

> *Example:* "Mrs. Smith, my fifth-grade teacher, humiliated me in front of the class. I felt powerless, small, and furious. At the time, I hated her and wished something bad would happen to her just to make the embarrassment go away."

3. Write a release letter
Write a short, uncensored letter to each person on your list. Tell them exactly what they did and the pain it caused you. Don't worry about being polite—this letter is strictly for you. When you are ready, end the letter with the words: *"I choose to release this anger and forgive you."* Afterward, safely burn or shred the letter as a physical symbol of letting that burden go, and to ensure your private thoughts stay private.

4. Voice your decision to let go
Speaking your intention out loud helps solidify the choice to move forward. If you are a person of faith, you might turn this into a simple, honest prayer—such as: *"God, I admit that I have been holding onto resentment and pain. Today, I choose to release [Name] and let go of my desire for them to pay for what they did."* If prayer isn't part of your practice, simply speak that commitment out loud to yourself in the quiet of the room.

5. Practice self-compassion and release
This step is often the hardest, yet the most freeing. Go somewhere private with a mirror, look yourself in the eyes, and acknowledge the mistakes, regrets, or shame you've been carrying. Give yourself permission to stop punishing yourself for past failures. Speak grace over yourself, and choose to let go of the guilt you were never meant to carry forever.

6. Consider making amends (only when safe and appropriate)
In many cases, forgiveness is strictly an internal process; it is not necessary, healthy, or safe to reach out to the person who hurt you. However, as you reflect, you may realize there is someone *you* have wronged and need to apologize to. If you feel led to make amends, keep these boundaries in mind:

> **Own your part clearly:** Be specific about what you did or failed to do, and acknowledge that it was wrong.
>
> **Drop the defenses:** Offer no excuses, justifications, or "I'm sorry, *but*..." statements.
>
> **Keep the focus on your actions:** Do not bring up what they did to you or shift blame.
>
> **Release the outcome:** End with a simple, direct question like, *"Will you forgive me?"*—and give them total freedom to say no or take time. Your peace comes from doing your part, not from controlling their response.
>
> **Prioritize wisdom and safety:** Whenever possible, have this conversation face-to-face at a calm, appropriate time, as written messages are easily misunderstood and can be shared with others. **Never** initiate contact if doing so puts your physical or emotional safety at risk.

Once you sincerely choose to release someone, you are free—regardless of whether they ever apologize, change, or forgive you in return.

12 R's LEADING TO SELF-FORGIVENESS

Are you weighed down by regret, guilt, or shame over choices you have made in the past? Do you find yourself stuck in a loop of "If only...", "I should have...", or "How could I be so stupid or insensitive?" It helps to remember a fundamental truth about the human experience: **none of us get it right all the time.** In ancient texts, the word often translated as "sin" actually comes from an archery term meaning "to miss the mark." Every single person misses the mark. Nobody always acts or reacts in the right way.

Instead of staying trapped in self-condemnation, you can take practical steps to release that weight and move toward genuine peace, patience, kindness, and inner stability. Consider working through the following steps:

REGRET: Feeling regret when you hurt someone or make a mistake is actually a good sign—it shows you have a conscience and care about others. The problem happens when healthy regret turns into chronic self-punishment. When we refuse to let go of past mistakes, that heavy thinking invites a host of secondary struggles: persistent shame, anxiety, depression, low self-worth, and even numbing behaviors or addictions.

REFLECT: Ask yourself honestly what holding onto this guilt is costing you—and what it might be doing for you. Are you using self-punishment to feel like you're "paying" for what you did? On the flip side, what would change in your life if you gave yourself permission to let it go?

RESPONSIBILITY: Own your part clearly without letting it define your entire worth as a person. Accept what happened as a fact of the past, rather than a life sentence.

RESPECT: Think of someone you care about who made a serious mistake, owned up to it, and grew from it. Did their mistake make you write them off forever, or did their humility actually earn your respect? Offer yourself that same baseline of human dignity and compassion.

REMORSE: Allow yourself to feel genuine sorrow for the harm done, without tipping over into toxic shame. Healthy remorse says, "I made a bad choice." Shame says, "I am a bad person." Let yourself grieve the mistake without condemning yourself.

REPAIR: When it is safe and appropriate, extend a sincere, no-excuses apology to anyone you hurt. Making amends clears your side of the street, regardless of how they choose to respond.

REFRAME: Pay attention to the internal tape playing in your head. When spirals of self-hatred or harsh inner criticism pop up, interrupt them. Don't treat every destructive thought or fear of what others think of you as the absolute truth.

REVIEW: Look back at the situation objectively. Identify what triggered your reaction and consider how you would handle a similar moment differently today.

ROLE-PLAY: Mentally rehearse your preferred response. Picture yourself navigating a similar situation with wisdom and restraint. Just like an archer who misses the target, you don't throw away the bow—you adjust your aim and keep practicing until hitting the mark becomes second nature.

RELEASE (or REPENT): You were never meant to carry the weight of your failures alone. If faith is part of your life, bring your regrets honestly to God—Christian scripture reminds us that God does not come to condemn us, but to offer grace, lift our burdens, and help us start fresh. If you aren't religious, find a quiet moment to consciously surrender the weight of the past, acknowledging that you have learned what you can and are choosing to leave it behind.

RENEW: Give yourself permission to write a new chapter. If you want to explore spiritual grounding, reading through the life and teachings of Jesus in the Gospels can be a deeply encouraging look at how grace, second chances, and unconditional love work in real life. Otherwise, focus on daily habits and relationships that reinforce who you are becoming, rather than who you used to be.

REMEMBER: Your worst moments do not cancel out your inherent value. From a Christian perspective, you are deeply known, created with purpose, and unconditionally loved by God—not because you are flawless, but simply because you are His. Even if you approach life from a different worldview, hold onto this truth: you are worthy of healing, growth, and a peaceful future.

STEPPING INTO FREEDOM

Speaking your intentions out loud helps solidify a shift in both your mind and body. Below are two ways to close out your forgiveness work. Choose the option that best aligns with your beliefs, and feel free to adjust the wording to fit your personal story.

OPTION A:
A PRAYER OF RELEASE

"Heavenly Father, I come before You honestly and humbly. Nothing in my life is hidden from You, yet You still invite me to bring my pain to You. I admit that I have fallen short in my thoughts, words, and actions, and that holding onto bitterness and resentment has hurt both me and others.

Today, I make a deliberate choice to forgive everyone who has hurt, betrayed, lied to, or disappointed me. I also release the anger I have carried toward institutions, systems, or authorities that caused undue hardship in my life. I choose to step out of the judge's seat and place justice into Your hands. I admit that I am still struggling to forgive [Name], and I ask for Your strength and clarity to help me let that go, too.

Where I have wounded others, give me the courage to make amends. Where I have believed destructive lies about myself, replace them with truth. Where fear and shame have ruled me, fill me with peace and trust. Help me walk forward free from guilt, blame, and heaviness. Thank You for Your patience, grace, and steadfast love. Amen."

OPTION B:
A PERSONAL DECLARATION OF RELEASE

"I am choosing to be completely honest with myself about the pain I have been carrying. Holding onto anger, bitterness, and resentment has cost me my peace, and I am ready to put that weight down.

Today, I make a deliberate decision to release the resentment I hold toward those who have hurt, betrayed, or disappointed me, as well as the frustration I carry toward systems or situations that treated me unfairly. I am letting go of the need to make them pay or to keep replaying the past. I admit that letting go of what [Name] did is still hard, and I commit to taking this one step at a time.

Where I have hurt others, I commit to owning my part and making amends where I can. Where I have beaten myself up with shame and harsh self-judgment, I choose self-compassion and truth. Today, I release guilt, blame, and heaviness so I can move forward into a healthier, freer future."

WHAT TO EXPECT AFTER YOU LET GO

Forgiveness is not about excusing what happened, minimizing your pain, or pretending an offense didn't matter. It is a deliberate decision to release resentment, surrender the desire for repayment, and hand the burden of ultimate justice over to God—or simply out of your own hands. When you forgive, you are not declaring the offense acceptable; you are declaring that your freedom is more important than the offense. As the saying goes, *"Forgiveness doesn't change the past, but it changes the future."*

As you step out of this exercise, pay gentle attention to how your mind and body respond:

Emotional and Mental Shifts: You may immediately feel lighter, calmer, or more at peace. Conversely, you might feel unexpectedly emotional—allow those feelings to move through you without judging them. Over the next few days, you may notice less mental clutter, fewer intrusive replays, and a greater capacity for patience and connection.

Physical Stress Release: Carrying chronic anger and unforgiveness keeps your nervous system locked in a prolonged state of "fight-or-flight." When you finally decide to let go, it is very common to notice physical signs of your body downshifting—such as deep sighs, yawning, muscle tension releasing, sudden fatigue, or even temporary headaches or stomach fluttering. Don't be alarmed by resistance or discomfort before or after this work; your body and brain are simply adjusting to dropping a heavy armor they have worn for a long time. Some people feel a burst of energy, while others need extra rest as their nervous system recovers.

Protecting Your Peace Moving Forward

Today marks a turning point. You have chosen peace over turmoil, growth over bitterness, and freedom over control.

Guard the space you have just cleared. Because forgiveness is a decision rather than a one-time feeling, old memories or flashes of anger will likely resurface from time to time. When they do, it doesn't mean your forgiveness "didn't work"—it simply means you are human. Acknowledge the memory, reaffirm your decision to let it go, and refuse to pick the burden back up.

Healing deepens as forgiveness is practiced day by day.