

5 Steps to Forgive When You're Still Hurting

By System Import | Sermon | March 13, 2026

5 Steps to Forgive When You're Still Hurting

One of the most agonizing, terrifying, and seemingly impossible commands in the entire Christian faith is the mandate to forgive someone who has shattered your heart. It is one thing to forgive a minor offense, a careless word, or a slight misunderstanding after time has passed and the dust has settled. But what do you do when the knife is still in your back? What do you do when the betrayal is fresh, the wound is actively bleeding, and the person who destroyed your trust has offered absolutely no apology and shown zero remorse? In these moments of acute trauma, our primal human instinct is to build an impenetrable fortress. We take the jagged stones of our shattered reality and construct massive walls of emotional distance, believing that if we can just isolate ourselves from the source of the pain, we can survive. We retreat into the darkest corners of our minds, engaging in brutal, silent struggles as we replay the offense over and over again, keeping a meticulous ledger of the debt we are owed. We nurse our bitterness like a protective shield, convinced that our anger is the only thing keeping us safe from further destruction. But this self-preservation tactic is a devastating, psychological illusion. The fortress of resentment does not protect you from your abuser; it traps you in a cell with them. It forces you to carry their ghost into every new relationship, every quiet moment, and every sleepless night. The walls you build to keep the pain out are the exact same walls that lock you into a profound, suffocating loneliness, separating you from the very intimacy and peace you desperately crave.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ hung on a Roman cross, His flesh torn open, His lungs suffocating, and His body bearing the full, catastrophic weight of human betrayal. He was actively being murdered by the people He created. And in the very climax of His agony, while the blood was still flowing and the crowd was still mocking, He did not wait for the pain to stop before He offered grace. He did not wait for an apology. He gasped for air and declared, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Jesus demonstrated that forgiveness is not the finish line of the healing process; it is the starting line. He proved that you do not have to wait until you stop hurting to let the offense go. In fact, true biblical forgiveness is often executed in the very epicenter of the storm. If you are waiting for the pain to disappear before you forgive, you will be waiting in a prison cell for the rest of your life. And before we dive in, if this message is already stirring something in you, hit the subscribe button and stay connected to God's Word daily, because we believe that truth sets us free. Today, we are going to look closely at the gritty, agonizing, and beautiful mechanics of the cross. We are going to explore five definitive, biblical steps to forgive someone when you are still hurting, tearing down the fortress of your ego so you can finally step into the blinding light of radical freedom.

Number 1: Acknowledge the Exact Debt (You Cannot Forgive a Ghost)

5 Steps to Forgive When You're Still Hurting

By System Import | Sermon | March 13, 2026

The very first step to forgiving someone while you are still in pain is to brutally and honestly acknowledge exactly what was stolen from you. In Christian circles, we often make the fatal mistake of confusing forgiveness with minimization. We try to sweep the trauma under the rug. We use polite, religious language to soften the blow, saying things like, "It wasn't that bad," or "They didn't really mean it," or "I just need to get over it." We create a false, spiritualized emotional distance from our own wounds. But you cannot cancel a debt if you refuse to look at the ledger. If you do not define the offense, you are trying to forgive a ghost, and the silent struggle will continue to haunt you in the dark.

Forgiveness is a legal transaction in the courtroom of your soul. To forgive a debt, you must first calculate it. You must look the reality of the betrayal in the eye and say, "You stole my innocence. You broke my family. You destroyed my financial security. You shattered my trust." You must give yourself permission to grieve the massive loss that was inflicted upon you. Jesus did not minimize the cross. He sweat drops of blood in Gethsemane because He fully understood the catastrophic cost of the sin He was about to absorb. He felt the full weight of the trauma, and He chose to forgive anyway.

When you finally stop pretending that it didn't hurt, you strip the enemy of his power to manipulate your confusion. You drag the dark, festering reality of the offense into the holy light of God's presence. You lay the exact, calculated debt on the altar. Only when you admit how much it cost you can you genuinely make the decision to write "Paid in Full" across the ledger in the blood of Jesus Christ. Acknowledging the depth of the wound is the prerequisite for experiencing the depth of the healing.

Number 2: Surrender the Gavel (Resigning as the Judge)

When we are deeply hurt, our flesh screams for vindication. We want to see the offender suffer. We want them to feel the exact same profound loneliness and agonizing pain that they caused us. We climb onto the judge's bench in our minds, grab the gavel, and begin plotting our revenge—whether that is active retaliation, destroying their reputation with gossip, or simply punishing them with the icy, weaponized silence of emotional distance. We believe that if we let the offense go, we are letting them get away with it. We believe that our unforgiveness is the only thing ensuring that justice will be served.

But the Bible systematically dismantles this illusion. Romans 12:19 delivers a command that requires the absolute crucifixion of our human pride: "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'" When you refuse to forgive, you are looking Almighty God in the eye and telling Him that you do not trust His justice system. You are attempting to usurp His throne. You are taking on the exhausting, soul-

5 Steps to Forgive When You're Still Hurting

By System Import | Sermon | March 13, 2026

crushing burden of being the prosecutor, the judge, and the executioner in a universe you did not create.

Forgiving while you are still hurting requires you to physically and spiritually step down from the bench. It is the terrifying, beautiful surrender of handing the files of your case over to the Supreme Court of Heaven. It is saying, "Lord, this person destroyed me, but they are Your creation. I trust that You are a God of absolute, terrifying justice. You will deal with them perfectly—either through the cross of Jesus Christ if they repent, or through Your righteous wrath if they do not. But I am resigning from the case." When you drop the gavel, you release the agonizing weight of the world from your shoulders. You stop being a debt collector and you return to being a child of God.

Number 3: Make the Choice Before the Feeling Arrives (The Act of the Will)

One of the greatest, most paralyzing lies the enemy tells believers is that forgiveness is an emotion. We sit in our silent struggles, waiting for a warm, fuzzy feeling of peace to wash over us before we offer grace. We think, "I still feel so much anger and grief when I hear their name; therefore, I must not have forgiven them yet." But if you wait until your emotions align with the command of Christ, you will wait until you are in the grave. Your flesh will never *feel* like forgiving a fresh wound. Your biology is wired to protect you, and your nervous system will violently protest the idea of letting your guard down.

Jesus does not command you to feel good about your enemies; He commands you to forgive them. Forgiveness is an act of the will. It is a gritty, white-knuckled decision made in the trenches of your trauma. It is looking at the bloody cross of Jesus Christ, recognizing the ten-thousand-talent debt of cosmic treason that was canceled on your behalf, and choosing to release the ten-dollar debt that is owed to you. You make the choice with tears streaming down your face. You make the choice while your hands are shaking. You make the choice while the pain is still piercing your chest.

The profound spiritual reality is that the feeling of peace eventually follows the obedience of faith. You must step into the raging waters of the Jordan River before the current will part. When you wake up every single morning and make the conscious, deliberate choice to declare, "I release them in the name of Jesus," you give the Holy Spirit the legal right to begin performing surgery on your shattered emotions. The sting will eventually fade. The anger will eventually dissipate. But the miraculous healing only begins after the agonizing choice is made.

Number 4: Pray for Their Blessing (The Surgical Strike on Bitterness)

If there is a secret weapon in the arsenal of the Kingdom for destroying a fortress of bitterness, it is

5 Steps to Forgive When You're Still Hurting

By System Import | Sermon | March 13, 2026

found in Matthew 5:44: "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." This is where the rubber of the Gospel meets the road of our reality. It is not enough to simply tolerate the person who hurt you; Jesus demands that you actively intercede for their highest good. This is the ultimate test of Agape love, and it is the most uncomfortable, offensive instruction to the human ego ever given.

When you are nursing a fresh wound, the very last thing you want to do is ask God to bless the person holding the knife. But Jesus commands this because He understands the adhesive nature of resentment. When you hate someone, you are connected to them by an invisible, psychological chain. You are tethered to their darkness. The only way to sever that chain and escape the profound loneliness of your bitterness is to drag that person into the throne room of grace through prayer.

Tomorrow morning, get on your knees and speak the name of your betrayer out loud. Do not pray that God will smite them or teach them a lesson. Pray that God will heal the deep, broken places in their soul that caused them to be abusive. Pray that He will bless their family. Pray that they will have a radical, life-altering encounter with the Holy Spirit. The first few times you do this, you will feel like you are choking on the words. It will feel fake and forced. Do it anyway. You cannot consistently pray for the redemption of a human soul without the Holy Spirit eventually softening your heart toward them. Praying for your enemy is a surgical strike on your own pride; it destroys the emotional distance and sets the prisoner free, only for you to realize that the prisoner was you.

Number 5: Establish Holy Boundaries (Forgiveness Does Not Mean Access)

The final step is perhaps the most misunderstood aspect of the entire forgiveness process. Many Christians remain trapped in cycles of abuse, tolerating horrific behavior because they falsely believe that forgiving someone means they must immediately restore the relationship to how it was before. They confuse forgiveness with reconciliation. They believe that if they put up a wall to protect themselves, they are violating the command of Christ. Let us be absolutely, biblically clear: Jesus commands you to forgive the debt, but He does not command you to trust the debtor.

Forgiveness is a unilateral, vertical transaction between you and God. It only takes one person to forgive. You can forgive someone who is completely unrepentant, highly toxic, or even dead. You release the bitterness from your own heart so that you can survive. Reconciliation, however, is a horizontal transaction that requires two people. It requires the offender to demonstrate genuine, sustained repentance, behavioral change, and accountability. Trust is a currency that must be earned over time through observable fruit.

If this message inspires you, don't forget to subscribe for more Bible insights every week. You can

5 Steps to Forgive When You're Still Hurting

By System Import | Sermon | March 13, 2026

look at a toxic family member or an abusive ex-spouse and say, "I forgive you in the name of Jesus. I release you to the Lord. I harbor no hatred toward you." And in the exact same breath, you can say, "But you are no longer allowed in my inner circle. You have lost the privilege of access to my life." You can forgive the offender and still change the locks on your door. You can practice radical grace while enforcing an iron-clad biblical boundary. Forgiveness is mandatory for your spiritual survival; access to your heart is a privilege that must be guarded with profound wisdom.

Conclusion

We have stared into the blinding, agonizing light of what it truly means to forgive in the midst of the fire. We have seen that you must acknowledge the exact debt to avoid forgiving a ghost. You must surrender the gavel and step off the judge's bench. You must make the gritty choice of the will before the warm feelings arrive. You must launch a surgical strike on your bitterness by praying for their blessing. And you must understand that holy boundaries are completely compatible with radical grace.

If you are reading this and your heart is pounding because the wound is still so incredibly fresh, hear the voice of the Holy Spirit today. The stone you are carrying is too heavy. The fortress you built to protect yourself is suffocating you. The silent struggles and the emotional distance are destroying the destiny God has placed inside of you. It is time to let it go.

Look to the cross. Look to the Savior who bled for your cosmic treason, and ask Him for the supernatural strength to release the one who hurt you. Do not wait for an apology. Do not wait for the pain to stop. Drop the ledger today, step out of the prison of your own resentment, and walk into the brilliant, unshakeable peace of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Before you go, make sure to follow and subscribe, like this video, and share it with someone who needs encouragement today. And join us next time as we uncover another powerful truth from God's Word.