

A Prayer to Release Unforgiveness and Bitterness

Forgiveness is the starting point of biblical healing and deliverance. Jesus made it clear that unforgiveness is not just a personal struggle but a spiritual barrier that can keep us bound. In Matthew 6:14–15 He said, *“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”* Holding on to resentment may feel like protecting ourselves from pain, but in reality, it keeps us chained to the hurt while limiting our spiritual growth and personal abundance.

Bitterness is one of the enemy’s most effective traps. Hebrews 12:15 warns, *“looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.”* Bitterness does not just poison our own hearts; it spills over into our relationships, shaping the way we see God, ourselves, and others. Left unchecked, it becomes a doorway for torment, weighing us down with anger, suspicion, and hardness of heart.

Forgiveness, however, is not saying what happened was right or excusing the wrong that was done. Forgiveness is choosing to release someone from your judgment and placing them into God’s hands. It is removing them from your “hook” and putting them onto God’s. When Jesus forgave from the cross, saying, *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do”* (Luke 23:34), He showed us that forgiveness is an act of surrender that opens the way for healing and restoration.

Here is the key truth: forgiveness is not about whether the other person deserves it; it is about your freedom. When we forgive, we shut the door to the enemy’s accusations and open our hearts to God’s healing power for transformation. Choosing to forgive breaks the power of bitterness and makes room for peace, freedom, and restoration in our lives.

As you begin this key, allow the Holy Spirit to bring to mind anyone you still hold resentment toward, including yourself or even God, so that you can release them and step into freedom through forgiveness.

ONE IDENTITY MOVEMENT

Dear Heavenly Father, I bring to You the pain, hurt, and resentment I have carried in my heart. You know the wounds I have experienced and the bitterness that has taken root within me. Today, I choose to surrender these burdens to You. I confess that I cannot forgive in my own strength, but I thank You that Your Spirit empowers me to release others just as You have forgiven me. Lord, soften my heart, heal my wounds, and help me to walk in the freedom that comes through forgiveness. I place every offense into Your hands and invite You to restore peace to my soul.

THE THREE PATHWAYS OF FORGIVENESS:

Forgiveness is not one-dimensional. Scripture shows us that forgiveness has multiple layers, and each pathway is vital if we are to live in true freedom. These pathways are vertical, horizontal, and circular.



1. Vertical Forgiveness — Receiving God’s Forgiveness and Releasing Him from Disappointment or Blame

The first pathway is between us and God. Many believers carry quiet disappointment, unanswered questions, or even unspoken blame toward God for the pain in their lives. Though He has never sinned against us, our hearts sometimes accuse Him in moments of grief or loss. To live free, we must release God from our judgments and choose to trust His goodness. At the same time, this pathway is about receiving His forgiveness. 1 John 1:9 reminds us, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* Walking in His grace frees us from guilt and restores intimacy with Him.

2. Horizontal Forgiveness — Forgiving Others

The second pathway is between us and other people. Jesus taught His disciples to pray, *“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”* (Matthew 6:12). This reminds us that forgiveness is not optional but essential. Holding on to offenses keeps us chained to the pain others have caused, while releasing those offenses places them in God’s hands. Forgiveness does not mean excusing the wrong or denying the hurt, but it does mean choosing to let go of the debt and refusing to let bitterness take root. Genuine forgiveness toward others, at times, means living with the consequences of another’s sin.

3. Circular Forgiveness — Forgiving Ourselves

The final pathway is internal. Many believers have received God's forgiveness but struggle to extend it to themselves. Shame whispers, *"You should have known better,"* while regret keeps us tied to the past. But the truth is, if God has forgiven us, we are not above Him by refusing to forgive ourselves. Romans 8:1 declares, *"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."* Forgiving ourselves is not about minimizing sin but about fully receiving Christ's finished work and allowing His mercy to wash over even the parts of our story we most regret.

Key Truth: Forgiveness is a threefold path: upward to God, outward to others, and inward to ourselves. When all three are embraced, the cycle of bitterness is broken, and the fullness of God's healing and freedom can flow.

These are common areas where unforgiveness and bitterness may still be affecting your heart, relationships, and walk with God. (Check any that apply to you.)

1. Toward Others

- ☐ I carry resentment toward a parent, sibling, or family member.
- ☐ I have not forgiven a spouse, ex-spouse, or romantic partner.
- ☐ I struggle to forgive a friend who betrayed me or let me down.
- ☐ I hold grudges against coworkers, leaders, or people in authority.
- ☐ I replay past offenses in my mind and feel bitterness rise again.

2. Toward Myself

- ☐ I feel unable to forgive myself for past mistakes or failures.
- ☐ I live under regret, shame, or condemnation for choices I have made.
- ☐ I constantly remind myself of my shortcomings instead of receiving God's grace.
- ☐ I believe I deserve punishment more than forgiveness.

3. Toward God

- ☐ I feel angry or disappointed with God for unanswered prayers.
- ☐ I struggle to trust God because of suffering, loss, or pain in my life.
- ☐ I secretly blame God for allowing difficult circumstances.
- ☐ I feel distant from God because of bitterness in my heart.

ONE IDENTITY MOVEMENT

As you reflect on these areas, invite the Holy Spirit to show you specific people, situations, or even places in your own heart where forgiveness is needed. Take a moment to be still and listen. On the lines below, or on a separate sheet of paper, write down every name or situation that comes to mind. Even if you are unsure why a name comes up, or whether that person truly wronged you, write it down anyway, trust that the Holy Spirit is leading you.

Once you have your list, use the prayers below to pray through forgiveness for each pathway. Bring each name before God one by one, asking Him to release your heart and heal the wound. As you do, remember, forgiveness is not about excusing what happened, but about opening the door for your own freedom, healing, and peace in Christ.

1. Forgiving Others

Dear Heavenly Father, I choose to forgive [name the person] **for** [what they did or failed to do]. **It made me feel** [share every area you checked from “toward others” above. Also, share any additional painful feelings, for example, unsafe, unworthy, unloved.] **Today, in obedience to You, I release them into Your hands. I let go of bitterness, anger, and judgment, and I ask You to heal my heart with Your peace. In the name of Jesus, I pray, Amen.**

2. Forgiving Myself

Dear Heavenly Father, I confess that I have not forgiven myself for [name every area you checked from “toward myself” above]. **I repent for holding on to shame when You have already forgiven me. Today, I choose to release myself from condemnation and receive Your mercy and grace. Thank You that in Christ I am forgiven and free. In the name of Jesus, I pray, Amen.**

3. Releasing God from Disappointment

Dear Heavenly Father, I confess that I have carried disappointment, blame, or anger toward You because [name every painful situation, loss, or unanswered prayer you selected from “toward God” above]. I repent for judging You in my pain, and I release these feelings into Your hands. Today, I choose to trust Your goodness, even when I don’t understand. Fill me with Your love and restore my confidence in You. In the name of Jesus, I pray, Amen.

As you have prayed and released these names to the Lord, know that something powerful has taken place in your spirit. Forgiveness is not a feeling but a choice, and each time you choose to forgive, you are shutting the door to bitterness and opening your heart to God’s healing love. The work of forgiveness may be ongoing, but the foundation has been laid: you are free from the weight of resentment. Walk forward in the peace of Christ, remembering His words: *“Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”* (John 8:36).