# THE PRACTICE OF FORGIVENESS

A Practical Guide to Releasing Hurt and Walking in Freedom



Ardency Academy & Matchmaking

## INTRODUCTION

Forgiveness is one of those words we hear often, especially as Christians, but understanding what it actually requires can be much harder.

We know we are supposed to forgive. We know Jesus taught about it repeatedly. We may even tell other people they need to forgive. Yet when the offence is ours, when the betrayal affected our life, when the apology never came, or when the person who hurt us seems completely unaffected by what they did, forgiveness can feel far more complicated.

Part of the difficulty is that many people have never been taught what forgiveness actually is.

Forgiveness does not require you to pretend you were not hurt. It does not make wrongdoing acceptable. It does not automatically restore trust, remove consequences, or require you to continue a relationship with someone who has demonstrated that they are not safe or trustworthy.

Forgiveness is a decision about what you will continue to carry.



When someone hurts us, we can become emotionally attached to the debt created by the offence. We want acknowledgement. We want an apology. We want them to understand what they did. Sometimes we want them to experience enough pain to finally comprehend ours.



Those desires are understandable. The problem begins when our ability to move forward becomes dependent on receiving something from the person who hurt us. Forgiveness interrupts that dependency. It allows us to acknowledge the wrong honestly while releasing our personal claim to repayment. We place justice in God's hands and begin separating our future from what someone else did in our past. That does not mean the pain disappears immediately.

Forgiveness and healing are connected, but they are not identical. You can make a genuine decision to forgive while still grieving what happened. Your emotions may need time to catch up with the decision you have made.

This guide is designed to help you understand what forgiveness is, why God calls us to practise it, how unforgiveness can affect us, and what forgiveness looks like in practice.

Most importantly, you will learn how to begin.

Before You Continue

**Take a moment and consider:**

When you hear the word forgiveness, what do you believe it requires of you?

1.

## WHAT FORGIVENESS ACTUALLY IS

Forgiveness is often misunderstood because people attach requirements to it that God never did.

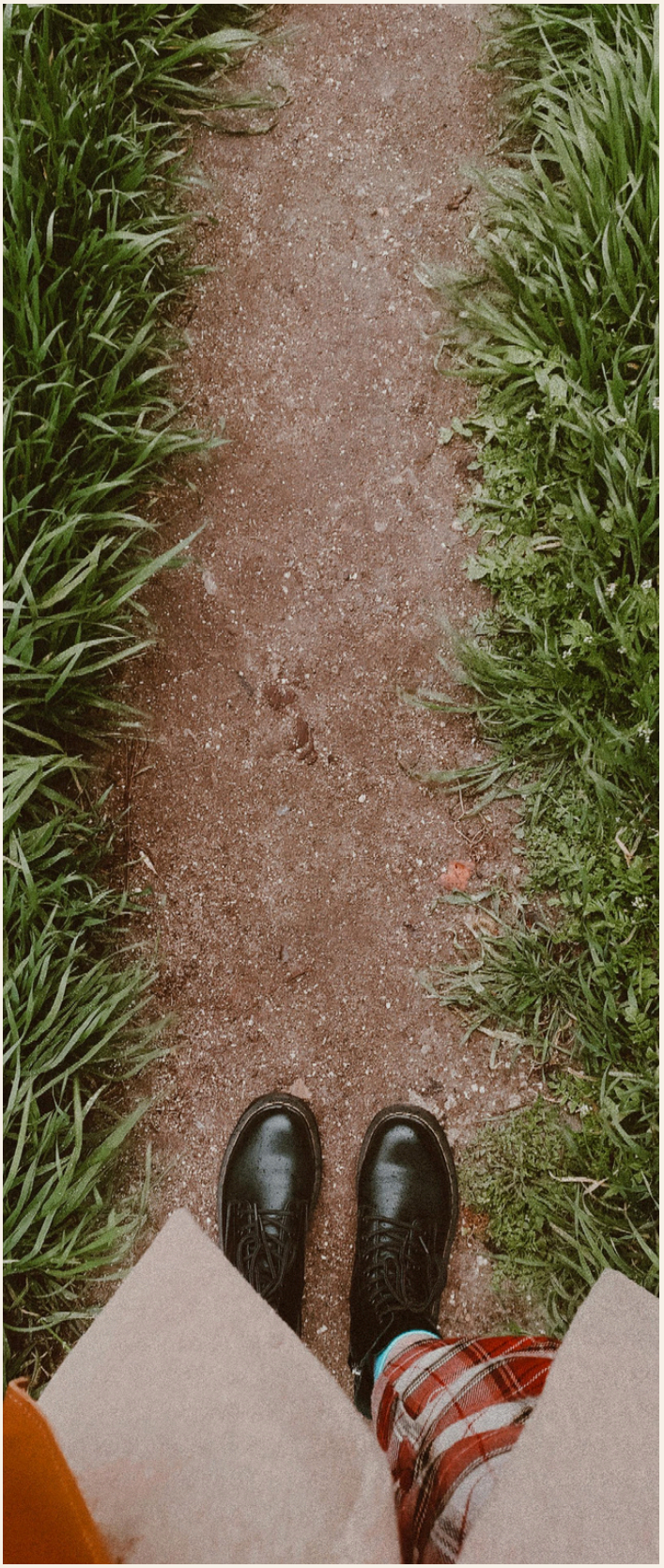
Some believe forgiveness means acting as though the offence did not matter. Others believe it means restoring the relationship, trusting the person again, or giving them the same access they had before. For some, forgiveness feels like letting the other person off the hook.

Forgiveness does not require any of those things.

Forgiveness begins with truth. Something happened. It hurt you. It may have changed the way you see the person, the relationship, yourself, or even the world. Forgiveness does not ask you to deny any of that.

What forgiveness asks you to release is your personal claim to repayment. When someone wounds us, it can feel as though they owe us something. An apology. An explanation. Remorse. Changed behaviour. Restitution. Sometimes we want them to feel the weight of what they caused because it seems unfair for us to carry the pain while they move on.

Forgiveness is the decision to stop making your freedom dependent on whether they ever give you what you believe they owe.



You are not declaring the offence acceptable. You are deciding that the offence will no longer have unlimited access to your heart, your thoughts, or your future.

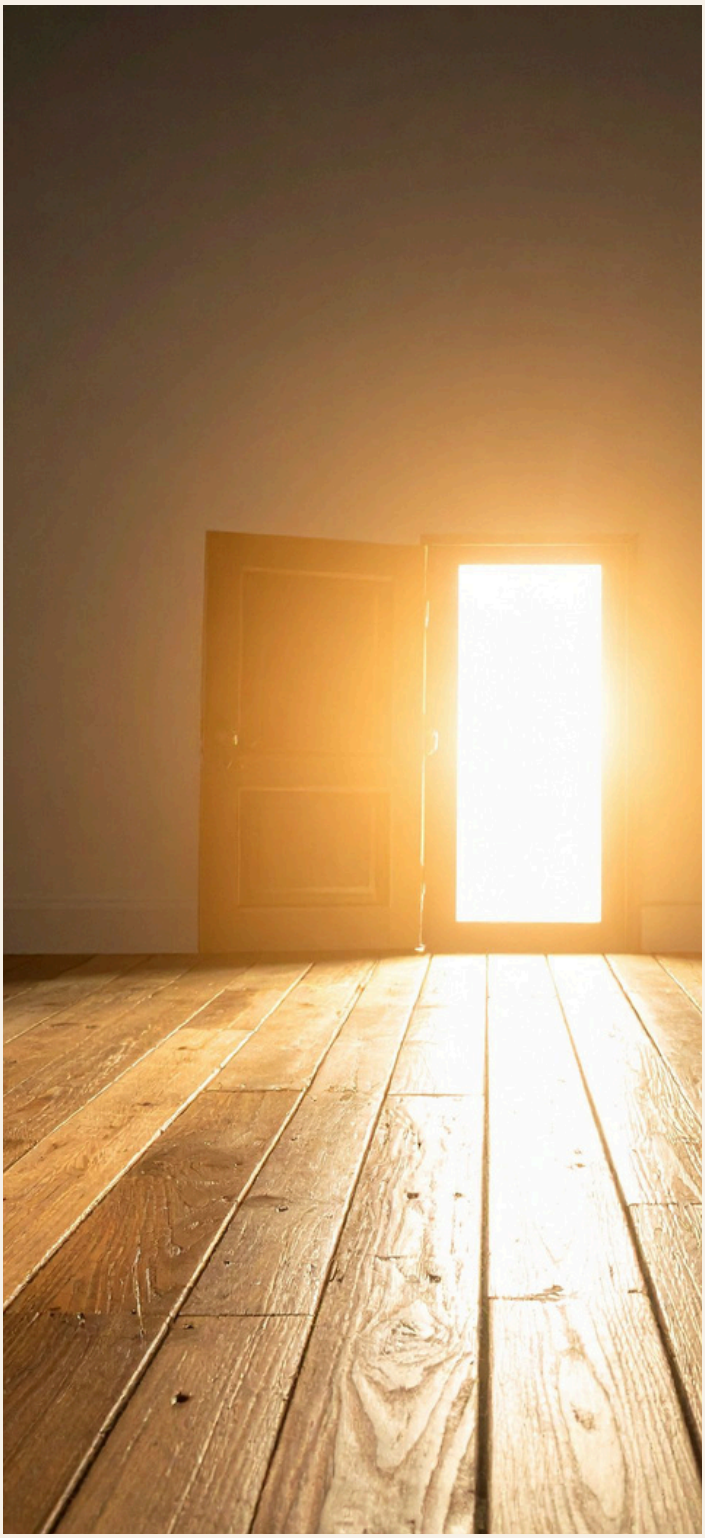
Forgiveness also does not automatically restore trust.
Trust is built through consistency, honesty, accountability, and changed behaviour. Forgiveness can be given even when trust has been damaged beyond repair.

Reconciliation is also separate. Forgiveness involves your heart before God. Reconciliation requires participation from both people. A relationship cannot be restored simply because one person has chosen to forgive.

Forgiveness does not erase consequences either. Someone can be forgiven and still be held accountable for what they did. Boundaries may still be necessary. Distance may still be wise.

The goal of forgiveness is not to pretend nothing happened.

The goal is to stop allowing what happened to determine what you carry forward.



Forgiveness is the decision to stop making your freedom dependent on whether they ever give you what you believe they owe.

# Reflection

Take a moment to reflect honestly.

What have you believed forgiveness would require from you that may not actually be required?

## 2
## WHY FORGIVENESS MATTERS TO GOD



Forgiveness matters to God because mercy is central to the life He calls us to live.

As believers, we are not being asked to forgive from an empty place. We forgive because we have first received forgiveness.

God's mercy toward us becomes the standard for how we learn to respond to the failures of others. That does not make the offence smaller. It changes the posture of our heart.

Scripture repeatedly connects forgiveness with spiritual maturity.

In Matthew 6:14–15, Jesus makes forgiveness a serious matter. He teaches that our willingness to forgive others is connected to our own relationship with God.

Colossians 3:13 gives the same instruction from another angle: forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Ephesians 4:31–32 also connects forgiveness with the way we carry anger, bitterness, and compassion. The call is not simply to release resentment. It is to become the kind of person whose heart reflects the mercy we ourselves have received.

Forgiveness is also an act of trust.

When we refuse to release an offence, we often remain emotionally committed to seeing justice happen on our terms. We want acknowledgment. We want accountability. We want the person to understand exactly what they did.

God does not ask us to pretend justice does not matter.

He asks us to trust Him with what belongs in His hands.

> "Forgive as the Lord forgave you."
> Colossians 3:13

Forgiveness allows us to step out of the role of judge and return to the role of disciple. That is part of why forgiveness can feel so difficult. It requires humility. It asks us to surrender the outcome, even when we still believe we were wronged.

Jesus modelled this kind of mercy even in suffering. On the cross,

He prayed for those who were responsible for His death.
That does not minimize wrongdoing.

It shows us what it looks like to remain submitted to God even when we have every reason to feel wounded.



# Reflection

Take a moment to reflect honestly.

Where do you find it hardest to trust God with justice?

## 3.
## WHAT UNFORGIVENESS CAN DO

Unforgiveness has a way of staying active long after the original offence has passed.

Sometimes it looks obvious. You still feel angry when you think about the person. You replay conversations. You imagine what you wish you had said. You hope they eventually understand the damage they caused.

Other times it is quieter.
It can show up as distrust.

You may become suspicious of people who have never hurt you.

You may expect disappointment before there is evidence of it.

You may keep emotional distance because closeness now feels risky.

You may find yourself punishing a new person for something an old person did. Unforgiveness can also affect the way we see ourselves.

Some people carry resentment toward themselves for staying too long, ignoring warning signs, trusting the wrong person, or making decisions they now regret. Over time, regret can become self-punishment.



That can quietly influence future relationships.

You may overthink.

You may become guarded.

You may struggle to receive love because part of you is still trying to make sure you never feel that kind of pain again.

Bitterness can also change the way we interpret people.

Once the heart becomes accustomed to expecting harm, even neutral behaviour can begin to feel threatening. That does not mean your instincts are wrong. It means old pain can sometimes become part of the lens through which new experiences are interpreted.

Forgiveness helps clear that lens.

It gives you the opportunity to respond to what is actually happening now instead of constantly reacting to what happened before.

This does not mean becoming naive.

Wisdom remembers.

Forgiveness releases.



# Reflection

Take a moment to reflect honestly.

Where do you notice an old hurt still influencing the way you respond in the present?

## 4.
## WHAT FORGIVENESS GIVES YOU

Forgiveness does not erase what happened, but it changes what the offence is allowed to keep taking from you.

One of the greatest benefits of forgiveness is freedom.

When you stop carrying the debt, you create space for peace to return. You are no longer waiting for an apology, explanation, or consequence before you allow yourself to move forward.

Forgiveness can also quiet the constant mental replay.

You may still remember what happened, but the memory no longer has to control your mood, your decisions, or the way you enter new relationships.

It can restore tenderness.

Unforgiveness often makes people harder in places where they once felt open.

Forgiveness allows the heart to become soft without becoming foolish.



"Forgiveness does not erase what happened, but it changes what the offence is allowed to keep taking from you."

It can also improve your ability to trust wisely.

You are no longer forcing every new person to pay for someone else's behaviour. You can observe what is actually in front of you and respond to it with greater clarity.

Forgiveness also creates room for grief to move.

Sometimes we hold on because anger feels stronger than sadness. Anger can make us feel protected. Forgiveness does not remove grief, but it can help us stop using resentment to avoid it.

Most importantly, forgiveness gives you the ability to move forward without pretending the past did not matter.

You can remember.

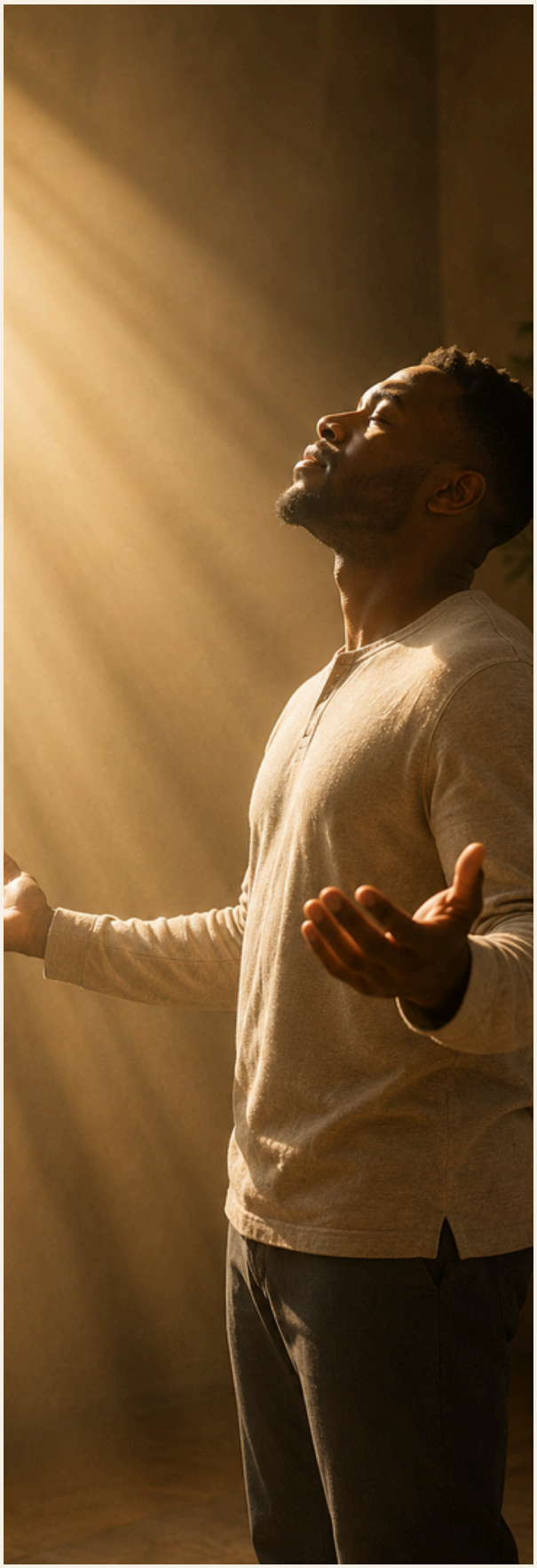
You can learn.

You can keep appropriate boundaries.

You can carry wisdom without carrying bitterness.

Forgiveness does not return you to who you were before the hurt.

It gives you the opportunity to become someone who is no longer controlled by it.



# Reflection

Take a moment to reflect honestly.

What has unforgiveness been costing you personally?

## 5.
## FORGIVENESS IS A DECISION BEFORE IT IS A FEELING



One of the reasons forgiveness can feel so difficult is because we often wait for our emotions to agree with the decision.

We tell ourselves we will forgive when the anger settles.

When the hurt fades.

When the apology comes.

When we finally understand why it happened. But forgiveness does not begin with a feeling. It begins with a decision.

You can choose to forgive while still feeling disappointed, angry, confused, or intensely hurt.

Those emotions do not automatically mean you have failed to forgive.

The decision and the emotional healing process do not always happen at the same pace.

You may decide today that you are no longer going to hold the offence over someone's head, but still feel the pain of what happened tomorrow.

That is not hypocrisy.

That is healing.

Sometimes forgiveness has to be reaffirmed more than once.

A memory resurfaces.
A new detail comes to light.
A familiar trigger catches you off guard.

In those moments, you may need to remind yourself of the decision you already made.
I chose to forgive.

I chose to release the debt.

I chose not to build my future around what happened.

Forgiveness becomes a practice when we keep returning to that decision instead of reopening the case every time the pain resurfaces.

This is especially important when the person who hurt you has not changed.

Your obedience does not have to wait for their growth.

Your peace does not have to wait for their apology.

Your healing does not have to wait for their understanding.

Forgiveness gives you permission to stop waiting.



# Reflection

Take a moment to reflect honestly.

What feeling have you been waiting to experience before allowing yourself to forgive?

## 6.
## HOW DO I ACTUALLY FORGIVE?



Forgiveness becomes much easier to understand when you stop treating it like a feeling and start treating it like a process.

The first step is to ***tell the truth about what happened.***

Do not minimize the offence just because you want to move on. Do not rush yourself into saying, “It’s fine,” when it was not fine.

Name the hurt honestly.

What happened?
What did it cost you?
What changed because of it?

Forgiveness is not built on denial. It is built on truth.

The next step is to ***identify the debt you believe the person owes you.***

Maybe you want an apology.
Maybe you want them to understand the damage they caused.
Maybe you want changed behaviour.
Maybe you want restitution.
Maybe you want them to hurt enough to understand your pain.

This part matters because unforgiveness often stays attached to an unpaid emotional debt.

Once you can name the debt, you can decide what you are going to do with it.

Forgiveness is the choice to release your personal claim to repayment.

You are saying, in effect, “I am no longer going to make my peace dependent on whether you ever give me what I believe you owe.”

That does not mean justice no longer matters.

It means you stop carrying the responsibility for making justice happen.

***You give that part to God.***

Then you determine what wisdom requires next.

Forgiveness may be followed by reconciliation.

It may be followed by distance.
It may require stronger boundaries.
It may require a difficult conversation.
It may require no further contact at all.



Forgiveness answers the question of what you will carry in your heart.

Wisdom answers the question of what access the person should have to your life.

***After that, allow yourself to grieve.***

***Forgiveness does not cancel sadness.***

You may still mourn what was lost, what should have happened, or what the relationship could have been.

Grief is not evidence that you have failed to forgive.

Finally, be prepared to return to the decision. Some offences lose their emotional weight quickly.

Others do not.

When the pain resurfaces, you may need to remind yourself:

I have already decided what I am going to do with this.

I have already released the debt.
I am not reopening the case.

That is the practice of forgiveness.



## 7.
## WHAT ABOUT FORGIVING YOURSELF?

For many people, forgiving others is difficult. Extending grace to themselves can be even harder.

You may still be carrying regret over what you allowed, what you ignored, what you said, what you did, or what you failed to do. Sometimes the deepest resentment we carry is directed inward.

But there is an important distinction here. Scripture consistently calls us to confess, repent, receive God's forgiveness, and walk free from condemnation.

It does not ask us to keep punishing ourselves after God has already extended mercy.

If you were wrong, own it.
If you need to apologize, apologize.
If restitution is appropriate, make it.
If a pattern needs to change, change it.

But once you have brought the matter before God and responded with genuine repentance, continuing to condemn yourself does not make you more righteous.



Grace invites a different posture.

You acknowledge what happened.

You learn from it.

You accept responsibility where responsibility belongs.

Then you allow God’s forgiveness to become more authoritative than your shame.

That does not mean you stop caring about what you did.

It means you stop using guilt as a lifelong sentence.

You are allowed to become wiser without remaining imprisoned by who you were when you made the mistake.

You are allowed to grow.

You are allowed to receive mercy.

You are allowed to move forward.



# Reflection

Take a moment to reflect honestly.

What are you still punishing yourself for, even after you have acknowledged it and brought it before God?

## 8.
## WHAT FORGIVENESS DOES NOT REQUIRE

Forgiveness can become confusing when we attach obligations to it that do not actually belong there.

Forgiving someone does not mean you must trust them again.

Trust is rebuilt through consistent behaviour, honesty, accountability, and time.

Forgiveness can happen even when trust has been permanently damaged.

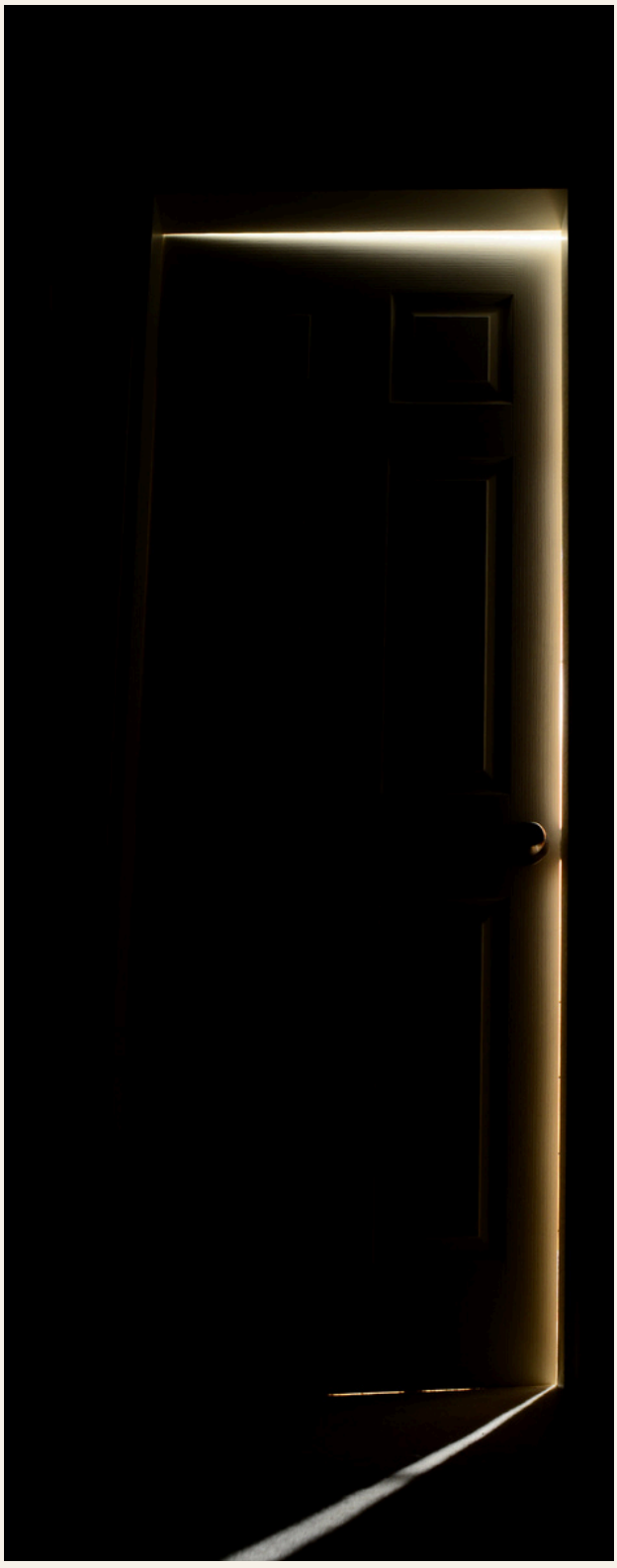
Forgiveness does not mean you have to restore the relationship.

Reconciliation requires willingness and participation from both people. One person can forgive. Two people are needed to rebuild.

Forgiveness does not mean the person should avoid consequences.

Someone can be forgiven and still be held accountable for what they did. Consequences are not the opposite of grace.

Forgiveness does not mean you have to keep giving someone access to you.



You can release resentment and still decide that distance is necessary.

You can forgive and still establish boundaries.

You can forgive and still say no.

Forgiveness does not require silence.

If something harmful happened, you are allowed to speak truthfully about it.

Forgiveness does not require protecting someone from the consequences of their own behaviour.

Forgiveness also does not require you to pretend that you are no longer hurt.

Pain can remain after forgiveness.

Grief can remain after forgiveness.

Disappointment can remain after forgiveness.

The presence of those emotions does not automatically mean you are holding a grudge.

Forgiveness is about what you choose to do with the offence.

It is not permission for someone to repeat it.



# Reflection

Take a moment to reflect honestly.

Is there a boundary you have been afraid to set because you thought forgiveness required continued access?

# Application: Applying Forgiveness

Understanding forgiveness matters, but eventually the teaching has to become personal.

This is where you take what you have learned and apply it to one specific hurt.

Choose one offence that still carries emotional weight. You do not have to begin with the deepest wound of your life. Start with something you are ready to bring honestly before God.

Name the Offence

What happened?

## Name the Impact

How did this affect you emotionally, relationally, spiritually, financially or practically?

## Name the Debt

What do you still feel this person owes you?

An apology?

Acknowledgement?

Changed behaviour?

Restitution?

Remorse?

Something else?

## Make the Decision

What are you choosing to release?

## Give Justice to God

What part of this situation are you still trying to control, resolve, or make right on your own?

## Decide What Wisdom Requires

Is there a boundary, conversation, consequence, or change in access that still needs to happen?

**Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

If yes, what needs to happen next?

# A PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS

Heavenly Father,

You know what happened, what it cost me, and what I have carried because of it. I do not want this offence to continue shaping my heart or directing my future.

Today, I choose to forgive.

I release my personal claim to repayment, and I place justice in Your hands. Help me surrender the anger, resentment, disappointment, and desire for what I cannot force another person to give me.

Give me wisdom for the boundaries I need, courage for any conversations I must have, and grace for the healing that may still take time.

Where my heart is still tender, meet me there. Where I am tempted to reopen what I have already released, remind me of the decision I made before You. Teach me to walk in mercy without abandoning wisdom. Teach me to remember without becoming bitter. Teach me to move forward in freedom.

In the mighty name of Jesus, I pray,

Amen.

# Before You Close This Guide

Forgiveness does not change the past.

It changes what the past is allowed to keep taking from you. You may still have healing ahead of you. You may still need boundaries, accountability, grief, or time.

But you do not have to keep carrying the debt.
You can release what belongs in God's hands and move forward with greater peace, wisdom, and freedom.

**Next Steps**

If this guide helped you recognize that forgiveness is still affecting the way you relate, trust, or move forward, do not stop at awareness.

Give yourself time to work through what surfaced here. Return to the reflection questions. Pray honestly. Revisit the boundaries or conversations you identified. Forgiveness may begin with a decision, but healing often requires continued attention.

If you would like support applying what you have learned to your own relationship history or current situation, you are welcome to book a complimentary Discovery Call with me. We can talk briefly about where you are, what kind of support you may need, and whether one of my services would be a good fit for your next step.

BOOK A COMPLIMENTARY DISCOVERY CALL

With love,
Nicole Melissa💋