

Is it possible to Achieve Unconditional Forgiveness?

Objective:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread, and **forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us**; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Amen

The familiar sound of the Lord's prayer. When you recite it, it almost sounds like we should be forgiven our mistakes, sins, and trespasses based on how we do forgiving other people – conditional forgiveness. God, through the intercessions of Jesus and his Mother Mary, are always able to forgive you. Can you do the same?

Do you have the capacity to forgive people who wrong you unconditionally? Can you forgive yourself unconditionally? Read the story about St. Maria Goretti for an incredible example of unconditional forgiveness.

Song Suggestion: COME BACK TO ME – This song includes the verse “Long have I waited for you coming home to me and living deeply our new life.”

Bible and Catechism Readings:

Matthew 6:14-15

Immediately after teaching the Our Father Jesus then said “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses”

Matthew 18:21-22

Then Peter approaching asked him, ‘Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?’ Jesus answered, ‘I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times.’

Catechism 1443

During his public life Jesus not only forgave sins, but also made plain the effect of this forgiveness: he reintegrated forgiven sinners into the community of the People of God from which sin had alienated or even excluded them. A remarkable sign of this is the fact that Jesus receives sinners at his table, a gesture that expresses in an astonishing way both God's forgiveness and the return to the bosom of the People of God.

Saint: St. Maria Goretti is the patron saint of many things including forgiveness. You can read of her story at: <https://catholicsaintmedals.com/saints/st-maria-goretti/> along with many other places. See how St Maria Goretti is able to forgive, and how that forgiveness helps her murderer be reintegrated into society, just as Jesus strived to do according to the catechism paragraph above.

Vignette: – Jeff is watching the 6 o'clock news which covering the story of trial of a young man, found guilty of raping and then stabbing to death a young girl. At the conclusion of the trial, the mother of the deceased girl confronted the young man as he was led from the courtroom in handcuffs and leg chains – the mother said “I forgive you for your sin, and I know that my daughter would as well; I will pray for you”. Jeff, himself the father of two young girls and one boy, sat in stunned silence trying to process what he had just watched. Jeff can't imagine the faith and strength of a person who has lost something so dear, could still have the capacity to forgive. He can't imagine that he would ever be able to forgive someone for taking something so precious to him.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:

Perhaps this vignette of a child who is taken from us is too much of a stretch for any father preparing for this week's fathers team topic to reach? Regardless of how far you need to stretch to forgive, think of some lessons of how we need to forgive and forget in order to free ourselves and be in God's grace. Also, be aware of when the person who needs forgiveness is YOU. Can you be forgiven if you are indeed repentant?

When you have been wronged, can you think of a time where you felt it impossible to forgive if the offender didn't repent the way you thought they should have?

How should you deal with someone who won't forgive you even though you have told them that you are truly sorry?

Have you ever used confession to help you to forgive someone who has said they were sorry? Have you used confession to forgive yourself?

Do you know anyone who can't forgive God for something that has happened to them or a loved one? If so, can you pray for them? Can you pray that they can accept that they will never know everything in God's plan? Pray that they understand that sometimes it's not that God didn't intercede, but he interceded in a way that they did not expect?

Action Plan:

- 1) If you haven't been to confession in a while, go and release the burdens you carry against others or for yourself.
- 2) When you forgive a child for something they have done wrong, or asked forgiveness of something you have done (perhaps you lost your temper), take the time to discuss the way that forgiveness is what we are called to do by our faith, and how God forgives us.
- 3) Do you have a grudge that you've been carrying? Pray on it and find a way to release it.

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