

Day 1

Follow the Leader

14 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Matt 6:14-15)

If we are serious about following our Leader, we must forgive like Jesus forgave. In Luke 23 we see Jesus on the Cross:

32 Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. 35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.” 36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar 37 and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”

Roman crucifixion typically placed the person being crucified only a few feet off the ground, so the people who came and mocked Jesus and spit in His face would have been almost eye level with Him. Notice that Jesus didn't delay in forgiving those that were doing these things to Him. Instead He prays for their forgiveness while it is still happening.

We may think to ourselves that we would never treat Jesus in such a way, but every time we refuse to forgive like Jesus did, we stand at the cross and spit in His face. How can we, who have been forgiven so much, refuse to forgive those who have hurt us?

Day 2

Follow the Leader

27 "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. (Luke 6:27-28)

How can we follow Jesus's example of forgiveness?

1) Pray for those who hurt you

The Romans worshiped a goddess of revenge (Nemesis). The Jews taught an "Eye for an Eye". But Jesus said:

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matt 5:43-48)

Satan knows the power of bitterness in our lives. Bitterness can become a foothold that keeps us from being effective witnesses for Jesus.

14 Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. (Heb 12:14-15)

When we seek revenge or hold on to bitterness we are allowing it to take root in our life. In time the bitterness will grow and produce a crop of trouble and separate us from the power of God in our life.

Are you holding a grudge against anyone? Do you dream about exacting revenge on someone? Are you bitter toward a former friend, loved one, coworker, etc? Ask God to help you lay aside your bitterness and replace it with love.

Day 3

Follow the Leader

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. 20 On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom 12:17-21)

Jesus tells us to pray for those who hurt us, but what should we pray? Pray a blessing. Don't pray for God to judge them or for his wrath to come down upon them. Instead pray prayers of love and blessing. Pray that they may draw near to Him and that He might bless them with His blessings. Pray for restoration and reconciliation.

Why does Jesus tell us to pray and not just to forgive? It is hard to pray for someone with a wrong attitude. Before you can have a right action, you must have a right attitude. Prayer changes us. Then we can be the hands of Christ and give them "food to eat and something to drink".

Your prayer might not change them, but it will change you. God can use the hurt that you feel to change you to be more like Him. Spend some time praying a blessing over those who have wronged you. When you feel the bitterness starting to take root, prayer will kill the root and leave the ground ready for God to plant His seeds of righteousness.

Day 4

Follow the Leader

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Col 3:12-14)

2) We forgive as we have been forgiven

We have been forgiven a lot. Therefore we should forgive others a lot.

31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Eph 4:31-32)

How can we forgive the unforgivable? By the same measure we were forgiven. How can we forgive those who have hurt us? By the same measure we were forgiven. Until we realize how much we've been forgiven, we may have a hard time forgiving those who have wronged us, but once we truly see how much God has forgiven us, the sins of others won't seem as great.

"Come now, let us settle the matter," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. (Isa 1:18)

Do you find forgiving others difficult? How about those who continually hurt your feelings? Spend time meditating on how God has forgiven you. Have you been forgiven for the same sin more than once?

Day 5

Follow the Leader

14 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Matt 6:14-15)

Forgiveness is a choice. There comes a time when we have to choose to forgive. It's not about feelings, but a choice. Feelings can be deceptive. But when we choose to forgive, God will bless that choice and bring our feelings into His will.

*May your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen your precepts.
(Psalm 119:173)*

When we choose to do things God's way, He stands ready to help us accomplish His will. When we choose to forgive those who have hurt us, God stands ready to help us forgive that person. We don't have to try to forgive someone on our own, God enables us and empowers us to forgive those around us and to live the Christian life. We just have to choose to live God's way.

Have you made a choice to forgive those who have hurt you? If not, do so today. God can empower you to forgive, but you must choose to be obedient first.

Follow the Leader

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. 14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. (James 3:13-16)

Some people choose bitterness over forgiveness because it feels better at the time, but bitterness will never satisfy. Bitterness will only grow and lead to other sins such as hatred and malice. Bitterness is like drinking poison and hoping the other person dies. The great lie from Satan is that Bitterness is harmless and that it's your right to refuse to forgive someone who has hurt you. But bitterness is not harmless. Bitterness harms you.

32 "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' 34 In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. 35 "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart." (Matt 18:32-35)

Matthew 18:21-35 tells the parable of the unforgiving servant. In this parable the master forgave his servant a large debt, but that servant was unwilling to forgive a fellow servant a small debt. In the parable we are the ones who have been forgiven the large debt. Do we forgive as we've been forgiven?

Have you been holding on to bitterness? Choose forgiveness and seek to follow our leader's example to forgive.