

# BIBLE STUDY



## CHURCH HURT, IS HEALING POSSIBLE?

### Healing Can Occur: There is a Balm in Gilead

The phrase “balm of Gilead” is used three times in the Bible, all in the Old Testament. It is an expression that has come to signify something with healing or soothing powers. The actual balm of Gilead was made from the resin of a tree that grew in Gilead, a mountainous region east of the Jordan River. Let’s explore the biblical mentions of balm of Gilead and what meaning can be drawn from them.

#### Jeremiah’s Questions

The first reference to balm of Gilead is in Jeremiah chapter 8 verse 22, where the prophet asks rhetorically, “Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of the daughter of my people not been restored?” (ESV). Jeremiah was lamenting the spiritual state of Israel, which at that time had turned away from God. Even though Gilead was known for producing a healing balm, Jeremiah declared that his people’s true illness was spiritual, beyond the power of any physical medicine to cure.

Jeremiah’s point was that because of their sin, God had withdrawn His protection and provision from His people. If they failed to repent, no earthly balm would restore their health and well-being. What they needed was to turn back to God and seek His spiritual healing and forgiveness. So in this passage, “balm of Gilead” represents the ineffectiveness of trusting in earthly remedies (yourself) rather than repenting and returning to God.

#### Jeremiah’s Prophecy

The second reference is Jeremiah 46:11, where the prophet pronounces judgment on Egypt: “Go up to Gilead, and take balm, O virgin daughter of Egypt! In vain you have used many medicines; there is no healing for you.” Again, though Gilead was famed for its healing balm, Jeremiah declared that Egypt would find no cure, no restoration for the judgment God was about to bring. When God decrees judgment, no earthly medicine can thwart His will.

## The Merchant's Merchandise

The final mention of balm of Gilead is in **Genesis 37:25**, where a caravan of Ishmaelites is described carrying spices, balm and myrrh to Egypt. The balm mentioned here is literal, an important trade item harvested from the balsam trees in Gilead and highly prized across the ancient Middle East as a fragrant ointment with healing properties.

In this account of Joseph being sold into slavery by his brothers, the balm of Gilead is simply part of the merchandise, with no deeper spiritual meaning. It depicts the balm as a valuable commodity and suggests a main reason why the balm was so coveted – its medicinal value as a salve or ointment.

## Deeper Symbolic Meaning

So, in summary, the biblical references indicate that balm of Gilead

- Had substantial value as a medicinal ointment
- Was cultivated commercially in the region of Gilead
- When used symbolically, represents ineffective trusts in earthly solutions rather than God

The balm's impotence against spiritual malaise, as highlighted by Jeremiah, points to a deeper symbolic significance. More than just a physical salve, the balm of Gilead came to signify God's power to spiritually heal, restore and forgive.

## A Spiritual Symbol

As a spiritual metaphor, balm of Gilead suggests:

- God has the power to heal the deepest hurts and meet the most desperate needs of the human soul.
- Worldly remedies and resources cannot heal spiritual wounds or reconcile us to God – only He can.
- Just as the balm of Gilead was a costly, treasured ointment, so God's forgiveness cost Him much yet is a priceless gift.
- The balm was a gift of life and healing flowing from Gilead; God's spiritual balm is a gift of eternal life flowing from Jesus Christ.

So in summary, the "balm of Gilead" represents God's divine power to spiritually heal, restore and renew. Just as Gilead's balm healed skin wounds, God desires to heal wounded souls, binding up broken hearts and delivering people from sin and death – **God's forgiveness**. Trusting in His spiritual balm that brings eternal redemption is presented as far better than relying only on inadequate human remedies.

## A Poetic Phrase

Because of these poetic biblical associations, “balm of Gilead” became a popular phrase in hymns, spiritual songs and literary works. Though not always sticking closely to scriptural interpretation, these creative usages reinforce the balm’s symbolic connotations of healing, restoration, comfort and hope.

For example, in an 18th century hymn, Christians sing of Jesus as the “balm of Gilead” who can “heal the sin-sick soul.” An African American spiritual asks, “There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole; there is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.”



[https://youtu.be/8fcMxl\\_6xsk?si=jl8wGqzBBbgWy3kO](https://youtu.be/8fcMxl_6xsk?si=jl8wGqzBBbgWy3kO) So, beyond its literal uses in the Bible, the balm of Gilead became a vivid poetic symbol of God’s power **to heal both body and soul** – an emphasis inspired by, but expanding on, the passages in Jeremiah. When we read of Jesus as the compassionate Physician, or the Good Samaritan binding up the wounded traveler’s cuts and bruises, balm of Gilead imagery enriches the power of those grace-filled accounts.

## A Desert Shrub

Having discussed the symbolic meanings, what do we know about the actual balm of Gilead itself, the substance producing such rich poetic and spiritual associations? As mentioned, it was derived from the gum resin of certain shrublike trees that grew in the region of Gilead, east of the Jordan.

These small, thorny trees produced a gum resin with a pleasant aroma and healing properties. The balm was extracted by making cuts and grooves in the bark, allowing the sap to exude out and harden into droplets called “tears of balm.” These tears were scraped off and either powdered or used to make ointments and oils for medicinal purposes.

In addition to its use as a salve or perfume, the balm was thought to have preservative qualities. Hence its appeal for use in embalming among the ancient Egyptians and others obsessed with securing immortality.

But clearly the true balm of Gilead could not arrest the inevitable march of death and decay. As Jeremiah declared, **the healing God offered was something much deeper and eternal.**

## A Scarce Commodity

Once highly prized, over-harvesting reduced the trees growing wild in Gilead. Supply was surpassed by demand. By the time of the Roman empire, Pliny the Elder lamented the balm of Gilead as a disappearing treasure, “now scarce everywhere.”

Efforts were made to cultivate farmed groves of the trees elsewhere. But soil and climate differences impacted quality. With less trees yielding less gum, the once abundant balm became progressively more scarce. By the Middle Ages, it was essentially a lost treasure.

This scarcity only enhanced the balm's mystery and allure. Like other rare commodities, its rarity made it more precious in many eyes. This likely contributed to the rich symbolism its name evoked – something highly valuable, prized for its **healing effects, signifying God's ability to cure spiritual brokenness.**

**In modern times,** botanical propagation efforts have successfully grown balsam trees from seeds and cuttings, regrowing a plant identical to what once grew wild in Gilead. Extracts from the resin produce essential oils still used in perfumes and for aromatherapy healing today.

But perhaps more importantly, the words “balm of Gilead” live on in hymns, literature and everyday speech. Though the actual trees are long gone from ancient Gilead, the biblical symbolism of spiritual healing and restoration continues to resonate.

For Christians, “balm of Gilead” remains a poetic expression for God's compassion. Just as the costly, aromatic resin brought physical healing in the ancient world, Christ's sacrifice on the cross brings the healing medicine of God's forgiveness to the human soul.

### **A Spiritual Application**

Lessons Christians today can draw from balm of Gilead imagery? Here are some suggestions:

Human suffering has both physical and spiritual dimensions. Healing that focuses only on the body will always fall short.

- Worldly solutions can mask symptoms but cannot resolve the root problems of sin and separation from God.
- All the money and medicine on earth cannot buy eternal life. Only Jesus Christ's sacrifice reconciles us to God.
- If you feel far from God because of sin, come to Him for cleansing and rejuvenation. Seek the true balm found only in Christ.
- When ministering to hurting people, remember that physical healing may meet temporary needs, **but spiritual reconciliation has eternal impact!**

Like Jeremiah, we live in a time of spiritual sickness and confusion. What our world needs is not just soothing ointments but radical repentance. May the prayer of our hearts be, **“Lord, help us find in You the true balm of Gilead.”**



# **IN ORDER TO HEAL, WE MUST FORGIVE**

## **HEALING FLOWING TO FORGIVENESS**

### **Matthew 6:14-15**

**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

### **Ephesians 4:32**

**32** Be kind **and compassionate to** one another, **forgiving** each other, just as in Christ God forgave you

### **Mark 11:25**

<sup>25</sup> And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

### **The Nature of Forgiveness**

**Matthew 18: 32-35** “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.”

## **WHAT DOES FORGIVENESS REALLY LOOK LIKE?**

**Before anything comes out of your mouth, it must first happen in your heart.** Jesus didn’t have a personal conversation with each person who crucified Him, but He did declare to God the condition of His heart (**Luke 23:34**). He decided in His heart to forgive.

Decisions to forgive the *real* Jesus way have to do with understanding what forgiveness is and what it is not. The word “forgiveness” means “to pardon; to remit, as an offense or debt; to overlook an offense, and treat the offender as not guilty” (Noah Webster’s 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language*). In a court of law, the primary consideration is whether a law has been violated. If so, a penalty is due. Feelings don’t determine the outcome in court; the law does. Forgiveness too is a legal transaction, not an emotional one. A debt is owed, but forgiveness is choosing to release the debt owed to you.

That’s what forgiveness looks like. It’s a decision, choosing to let go of an obligation someone else owes you. Although the decision comes from the heart, it is not based on feelings. It is an act of your will.

In fact, this is exactly how God forgave us. He *decided* to forgive us based on the merits of Jesus’s blood on the cross. He *decided* to write at the bottom of our list of offenses, **“Paid in full by the blood of Jesus Christ.”** Check out this passage, which describes it perfectly: *“When you were*

*dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross”* (Col. 2:13-14) New American Standard Bible (NASB)

Did you know that we had a certificate of debt on file in heaven before Jesus died? Why do you think Jesus had nails driven through His hands and feet? Symbolically, His body became the list of our sins, the record of our debt. The debt was owed to God, and in one defining moment at the cross, He canceled it out forever when He was nailed to the cross. If God did this for us, we must do the same for the people we hold locked away in unforgiveness.



## **IT'S A DAILY THING!**

### **Forgiveness flows daily.**

The thing about The Lord's Prayer that most of us forget is that it's a *daily* prayer. It's no coincidence that Jesus includes forgiveness in this daily prayer, found in Matthew 6:12: "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Every day, we must circle back to this prayer and practice the flow of forgiveness. We ask for and extend forgiveness, not as one-time events, but as a daily occurrence. For as many times as is necessary, even if it's seven times in one day, we are called to keep this flow of forgiveness.

### **Family Forgiveness**

**Luke 15** tells the story of one son, who takes his share of his father's estate and squanders it, and his older brother, who becomes offended by how quickly and completely the father forgives his younger brother when he returns. The older brother feels the younger brother has received something that he not only doesn't deserve but something the older brother doesn't have for himself. When he brings this to his father's attention, his father responds by reminding him, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours" (v. 31).

It probably felt unfair to the older brother to see forgiveness, mercy, and freedom displayed in such obvious and tangible ways, but the truth is that there was forgiveness, mercy, and freedom flowing toward him on a daily basis. What he was witnessing was how the flow to his younger brother had just been restarted after having cut himself off from it.

This is the good news about forgiveness: it is always freely flowing and you are never too late to choose to step into it.

**The flow of forgiveness** runs freely to you and through you on a daily basis. Everything God has is already yours. There is freedom waiting for you on the other side when you repent and ask God for forgiveness. He is faithful to meet you where you are and create a life-changing flow of forgiveness in your life.

No one said forgiveness was the easiest thing, but pulling together a few biblical principles to create a flow of forgiveness certainly helps.

**Keep no record of wrongs.** First and foremost, we are called to love God and love one another. This can look like many different things, but one of the characteristics of love, found in 1 Corinthians 13, is that it keeps no record of wrongs. If we're not paying attention, it can be so easy for us to fall into a habit of picking up little offenses here and there and making a mental note of what's been done against us. Whether it's a big thing or a little thing, an offense from your spouse or a stranger, choose to create a regular habit of clearing the record.



**Be quick.** The Message version of **Colossians 3:13** says to forgive “quickly and completely.” In other words, don't wait or linger. Forgive and follow through, from start to finish. **Ephesians 4:26** explains that we can prevent our anger from becoming sin when we don't let the day end before working it out. The longer you wait, the more opportunity there is for an offense to take root and grow into something bigger. When you choose to let go of an offense as quickly as you pick it up, you create a flow of forgiveness that never allows it to become this big, intimidating, and painful thing.

**Action:** Where are you keeping a record of wrongs? Before you go to bed tonight, practice clearing the record and resolving your anger. Is there someone you owe an apology to, or a friend you can confess your wrongdoing to? Start creating your flow of forgiveness today.

### **Forgiveness is a flow.**

The biggest misconception people have about forgiveness is that it's this huge, one-time event that negates any wrong that was done. The truth is, forgiveness is a flow – a continuous process of extending grace that is meant to be implemented into your everyday life, like brushing your teeth. When you're brushing and flossing every day, a trip to the dentist doesn't feel as intimidating, right? The same is true with forgiveness.

**Quick summary: [Bing Videos](#) Forgive and Let go of the Past**

### **Getting Even is OUT and Forgiveness is IN**

When someone wrongs you or you become offended, whether it was a small infraction like something said during an argument or a more malicious act, it's reasonable to be hurt. By definition, an act of injustice is unfair, and our response leans toward evening the playing field. We

want the other person to receive what we think they deserve, and we want to receive what we think we deserve. However, as Christians, we are called to forgive.

Many of us are like Peter in **Matthew 18: 21-22**, wanting to know how many times we must forgive. How many isolated events until we can say enough is enough? Will seven times do it? Jesus responds by saying, “Seventy times seven.” In other words, take your one-time events and *multiply* them. Break them down into smaller pieces and you’ll be able to extend more forgiveness.

Our commitment to continuous forgiveness mirrors God’s covenant with His people. In Genesis 17, God clarifies that His “everlasting” covenant stretches beyond Abraham to “your descendants after you for the generations to come.” He promises to be the God of Abraham and the God of his descendants after him. It’s not an isolated event or a one-time declaration. We see it over and over again in scripture as God repeats Himself. Regardless of how many times we wander away or offend God, His promise and His forgiveness remain a continuous flow.

### **Forgiveness flows through you to others.**

We are called to forgive others just as we also have been forgiven. This is how the Kingdom of God operates, as described in the parable Jesus tells of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18. In this story, there was a king who began settling his accounts. After one servant who owed a great debt asked for patience in repaying his debt, the king took pity on him and canceled his debt altogether. Later, when the servant did not show the same mercy to a man who was indebted to him, the king called him back in and asked, “Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?” (v. 33). Because the man didn’t extend forgiveness, he was made to repay what he originally owed.

## **IT AIN’T EASY**

Withholding forgiveness is not an option in the Kingdom of God, but that doesn’t mean it’s not hard or costly to the one who forgives. Jesus died an excruciating death on a cross to make way for our forgiveness. His sacrifice was so great that He sweat drops of blood as He prayed in the garden the night before. It wasn’t a small or easy thing, but Jesus chose the will of the Father over His own will. We are faced with the same choice.

Thankfully, God has not left us on our own as we navigate a life of forgiveness. 2 Peter 1:3 tells us, “His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life.” We can only do what He asks of us because of His power that enables us, which means the forgiveness we give doesn’t come from us or what we can muster up. In fact, the forgiveness that flows from God to us has the power to flow through us to those around us.

Whether or not the person or offense is worthy of forgiveness isn’t for us to decide. Our job is to choose to be a vessel of forgiveness and allow the power of the Holy Spirit to flow through us to those who have hurt or offended us.



**ACTION:** Can you think of a person or offense you've been holding out on forgiving? Imagine the flow of forgiveness that comes from God moving through you to that person or offense. Consider how that forgiveness flowing through you washes away the weight you've been carrying as you've held onto that offense. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help you freely give what you've also been freely given.

**Forgiveness doesn't mean nothing happened; forgiveness means you're able to move beyond what happened. When the offense is no longer holding you back, you can live free from the bondage of the infraction.**

**PRACTICE:** Start small. Maybe a cashier was rude to you or someone cut you off on the road. Take a deep breath in and practice letting one small offense go as you breathe out. As you create a habit of regular forgiveness, work your way into the tougher areas you've deemed "unforgivable."



Creating a flow of forgiveness.

## STEPS OF THE FLOW

- 1. Keep no record of wrongs.** First and foremost, we are called to love God and love one another. This can look like many different things, but one of the characteristics of love, found in **1 Corinthians 13**, is that it keeps no record of wrongs. If we're not paying attention, it can be so easy for us to fall into a habit of picking up little offenses here and there and making a mental note of what's been done against us. Whether it's a big thing or a little thing, an offense from your spouse or a stranger, choose to create a regular habit of clearing the record.
- 2. Be quick.** The Message version of **Colossians 3:13** says to forgive "quickly and completely." In other words, don't wait or linger. Forgive and follow through, from start to finish. **Ephesians 4:26** explains that we can prevent our anger from becoming sin when we don't let the day end before working it out. The longer you wait, the more opportunity there is for an offense to take root and grow into something bigger. When you choose to let go of an offense as quickly as you pick it up, you create a flow of forgiveness that never allows it to become this big, intimidating, and painful thing.
- 3. Confess and apologize in community.** One of the best ways to create a flow of forgiveness is by confessing where you've gone wrong, apologizing, and asking for forgiveness. What better way to create an opportunity for forgiveness than by inviting it in? When we show how much we value forgiveness, we show others how to make room for it as well. Not only that, James 5:16 tells us that **gathering together and laying it all out on the table** is where we can find healing. Choose to create space for forgiveness to flow.

**ACTION:** *Where might you be keeping a record of wrongs? Before you go to bed tonight, practice clearing the record and resolving your anger. Is there someone you owe an apology to, or a friend you can confess your wrongdoing to? Start creating your flow of forgiveness today.*

## TO FORGIVE

To forgive is to turn the key, open the cell door, and let the prisoner out.

To forgive is to write in large letters across a debt, “Nothing owed.”

To forgive is to pound the gavel in a courtroom and say, “Not guilty.”

To forgive is to bundle up all the garbage and dispose of it, leaving the house clean and fresh.

To forgive is to relax a stranglehold on a wrestling opponent and give him his life.

To forgive is to sandblast a wall of graffiti, leaving it looking like new.

## THEN YOU HEAL!!!!



[https://youtu.be/5GwOrVpudXI?si=omzftgkFeW8\\_Fa8k](https://youtu.be/5GwOrVpudXI?si=omzftgkFeW8_Fa8k)

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### Resources:

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- Youtube, The Adventist Vocal Ensemble
- Youtube, Joyce Meyer
- Bible.com
- Youtube, Healing, Richard Smallwood