



Learning to Forgive Others

Dr. Dave Currie

1. Why Forgiving is a Gift to Yourself

Relational wounds come in many shapes and sizes. Why is it, or so it seems, that those who love us the most can hurt us the most? The situations causing the pain are limitless. Some more trivial...some more traumatic. He's always late. She is spending money we don't have. He lied to me. She belittles me in front of others. He talks down to me like I'm stupid. She flirts with men. Harsh words, dishonesty, unkind treatment or a sense of betrayal can drive a wedge between you and the one you are supposed to be close to.

All hurts require forgiveness.

Face it; we all need people. So, it is far better to learn how to resolve the issues with people than to avoid any issues by trying to live without people. Forgiveness is as important to healthy relationships as water is to our bodies. You can die of bitterness as easily as from thirst. Everybody has to learn how to forgive at some point in life to survive.

But when someone really hurts you, I mean causes a crater of pain in your heart, do they deserve to be forgiven? She cheated on me. He is into pornography again. Ouch. It feels like they don't! But do they need to be forgiven? Yes. It's as much for you as them. Yet, in some difficult cases, trust will need to be rebuilt over time and even requires professional help.

In over 4 decades of helping people with every sort of relational damage, the place of forgiveness is critical in making life work. I've seen that forgiving is a gift to yourself. So, here are a few reasons why you need to learn to forgive...frankly, the sooner the better for you.

RESTORES YOUR OWN PEACE OF MIND. You will live with far less anxiety when you decide to forgive. Brooding over your hurt keeps the pain alive longer and sadly not unlike a cancer, the impact of the fixation grows, sending out many damaging tentacles. By addressing the hurt, you choose to forgive thus releasing the offender and the hurt they have caused. In forgiving, you let go of a personal need for justice and getting the wrong righted. In some cases, the injustice carries consequences that are required and valid. But by forgiving, you let go of the need to get even. By doing this, it leads to calm waters inside.

PREVENTS BITTERNESS FROM DESTROYING YOU. Letting your heart stay focused on the hurt of the past keeps you stuck there. To hold on to the resentment doesn't punish the other person; it devastates you. It's like drinking poison and somehow thinking the other person will die. Active hostility and private animosity do the same thing. They not only rob you of

freedom but the emotional edge they bring affects all your other relationships as well. Don't go there.

FREES YOU TO MOVE ON. Your life is not on hold. If you wait until they come crawling back to you to ask for forgiveness, you could be waiting a long time. You are on hold until they apologize. If they don't take responsibility for the pain they caused, you are hinging emotional health on someone outside your control. Not wise. Do you want to wait until they are ready to move on? This leaves you at the mercy of their response. Take charge of your life and step out of the prison of resentment.

HONORS GOD WHO ASKS US TO FORGIVE. Forgiveness is God's idea in the first place. He needs to forgive us repeatedly and does it well. He is the God of second chances. He calls us to the higher way. He wrote the manual on how humankind works best and He knows that bitterness only corrodes your soul. Hebrews 12:15 says it clearly, *"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."* You likely will need to ask God for His grace and strength to help you to forgive; most of us do. But when you do choose to forgive, you honor God and that in itself brings a sense of satisfaction. But beyond that, when broken relationships are left unaddressed, the bitterness takes deep root in your soul first and then will cause trouble not only in this one relationship but goes on to defile many other people connections. Work to forgive. You are doing what is right.

When you have been wronged, the choice to harbor your hurt doesn't lead to a healthier you. Think about it...you have all these great reasons to begin to move on. I challenge you to get started on your freedom now.

Stay tuned for Part 2- What is Forgiveness and Part 3- How to Forgive? Pass this article along to someone who needs help with forgiveness and come back for more truth that challenges relationships. And remember, you'll never regret taking the steps to forgive those who have wronged you.

Don't hesitate to send me your questions on forgiveness... drdave@doingfamilyright.com God bless you in your journey.

2. What Does Forgiveness Look Like?

The hurt and disappointment was eating me alive. Maybe you have felt it too. I couldn't sleep. I couldn't eat. I didn't laugh. I seemed fixated, almost hour-by-hour, on this powerful sense of injustice. It had a stranglehold on me. A deep-seated bitterness was on the verge of suffocating me.

You see, when someone close to you – someone you trust, carelessly makes choices with no regard for you or your friendship, the sense of betrayal is numbing. You feel disrespected, tossed aside and crushed. The rejection experienced through their disregard is so very deep.

Where do you start? Forgiveness isn't even on the horizon. Just thinking the word can put a knot in your stomach.

When I have been deeply hurt, resentful thoughts flood my consciousness like an overflowing toilet. These cruddy feelings rob me of day-to-day freedom and can spill all over the place and hurt the other people I love. But these deep-seated painful emotions are not easy to flush away.

After all, it doesn't seem right or fair to let an offense go especially when the offender doesn't seem to want to apologize for it. What's the deal? Don't we teach little kids to "say you're sorry" when they have done something wrong?

It's only right. But too often in life, it's not the norm.

Honestly, true forgiveness of the other who has betrayed you or broken your trust may be the hardest thing I have ever done. The deeper the sense of wrong and pain involved, the more difficult it is to do. But don't forget why we forgive. It is to gain freedom for ourselves too. It is the mandate if we want to move on in life.

We need to move beyond the hurt for the right reasons. Don't fool yourself or try to manipulate the offender with hurtful actions or cutting words. Lashing back won't bring you freedom. Revenge is sweet ~ only if you like drinking poison yourself somehow thinking you are going to make the other person suffer. You are the one that dies. Though payback for the hurt seems justified, you need to let go of your need to punish them.

What does it mean to forgive? Here are five things to keep in mind.

Forgiveness is an attitude of the heart. Revisit your right motives for forgiving to strengthen your resolve. It means putting a stop to both the angry feelings and acts of resentment for any hurt they have caused. This is easier said than done. But there's more.

Forgiveness is without waiting for an apology. It involves cancelling a debt that we feel is owed to us. We desperately want them to admit what they did was wrong, feel remorse over the hurt caused, make a sincere apology to us, and take steps to fix things where they can. We feel we are owed these things. That's their debt.

It would feel so right if they took responsibility and paid what is due – so freeing for us– but sadly, this course of action is uncommon and unlikely. People just don't own the pain they cause others like we would like or feel we deserve.

It would be so much easier for us to forgive them if they took these steps. But the offender may never see things the way we do and we could wait indefinitely for them to get on board. What if they never get to the point of initiating an apology to you?

Then you are stuck with that overflowing toilet of poisonous waste.

Forgiveness is taking initiative to cancel the debt. It puts a stop the spill over of negative emotions. Forgiveness is our step. We are wise to choose to pardon their debt letting go our need for validation and for justice. It is releasing the offender from the hurt they have

caused and from their responsibility to make things right. This will never be easy but waiting in bitterness only sours your soul. We can't wait for them to get their heart right, ask for an apology or to make amends. We can't wait for them at all.

At the core, forgiveness is a heart change that frees both you and the one who hurt you from what you feel they owe you. You lay the offense down. It is a very hard thing to do.

Forgiveness is a process. Remember, is not a step, it is a progression – a series of steps all confirming the initial decision to release the person. In all honesty, I've had to revisit my decision to forgive many times, sometimes 2 or 3 times in a day. It is an act of the will. You choose to live out forgiveness in spite of hurtful memories returning and hard feelings resurfacing.

Forgiveness requires help. Sometimes it is wise to have someone in your corner to talk this through...support you in the journey. I have a brother that I pray tough stuff like this through with. And without a doubt, I have found that God is more than willing to help any of us work through to a forgiveness that honors Him. His way is clear... *"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you"* ~ Colossians 3:13. Ask the Lord for strength to forgive – fully and freely. He Himself forgives so well. He can bring perspective and courage to forgive. Ask Him...I did.

Stay tuned for Part 3- How to Forgive Someone? Pass this article along to those in your world who need help with forgiveness and come back for more truth that challenges relationships. And remember, you'll never regret taking the steps to forgive those who have wronged you.

3. How to Forgive Someone:

Forgiveness...when freedom is forged where fury once raged.

It is far easier to talk about forgiveness than to walk out forgiveness. The deeper our hurt, the harder it is to forgive. The closer the relationship, the greater the devastation can be. Yet, as we know, forgiveness is a gift to ourselves not just for the other person.

And does time heal? Only if we choose to forgive and let the offense go. When we do so, and with time, there will be less of that raw sting with the fading memory of the details. Pain will begin to subside and memories are far less frequent.

Beyond this, life goes on. There will be lots of other good life events that we will miss if we get stuck in our bitterness. Intrinsicly, we know we need to move on. Health wise, it is better by far to let the hurt go. Emotionally, brooding over the offense again and again exhausts us. We must decide to forgive.

Still, forgiveness is a process. It will involve repeated steps of surrender that reaffirm the initial decision to release the person. As memories and reactions jump up like spot fires, you will need to douse the flames for as long as you still smell smoke.

It is critical that you are not anticipating a Hollywood ending to your step of forgiveness. When you attempt to resolve a broken relationship, it may not work out as hoped. They may not see things like you do. They may see no need to apologize to you for their behavior. It is easier to forgive any hurtful oversight that was non-intentional or a plain mistake. It is harder when we know that the actions were premeditated, intentional and not accidental. Still, forgive and move on.

So, whether it's your spouse, your sister or brother or a friend, let's walk through what you must do to move on. Here are my recommended steps to forgiveness. Cover the whole process with prayer.

1. **GET OUTSIDE IMPUT:** Talk to an objective person to help you see from the other person's perspective. Get the backing of those who want you to do what is right and move through the forgiveness process.
2. **ACHIEVE PRE-MEETING FORGIVENESS:** Forgive them before you contact them. Work it through in your heart. Let your pardon be complete where it matters most....inside you. Then, go in the attitude of forgiveness.
3. **TAKE THE STEP:** Determine how to best communicate your desire to extend forgiveness. This will be based on the nature of the relationship, how strained things are, and their availability. Your options include a letter or card, an email, a phone call or in person. Though helpful in most cases, you don't have to do it in person. Whatever route you choose, put your thoughts on paper so you can be clear when you do talk on the phone or in person.
4. **GET HELP FROM ABOVE:** God is a great ally in your forgiveness. Seriously, trying to forgive is hard. Ask God to strengthen you to do what is right. Ask Him to help you let go of the need to get even or find retribution. Many like me have found added strength and conviction when we include God in the equation.
5. **SHARE YOUR PERSPECTIVE:** Forgive with your eyes wide open accepting and admitting that the offence really affected you. Share how their choices have hurt you. This may help them empathize with you and see the impact of their actions. They may not. Don't focus on assigning blame; simply disclose how it affected you.
6. **SURRENDER THE HURT:** Release the sense of injustice and right to payback. Don't try to downplay the pain to make it feel like no big deal. Move ahead to do what you know is right. Let go of your need to know why they did it or how they could have done it. Just let it go.
7. **DON'T SEEK AN APOLOGY:** Kill the need to get their understanding, agreement or apology. Go with an "it's a done deal" attitude on forgiveness. They may not know the extent of your hurt, not share your view on the issues or that they need to apologize at all. Be delighted if they own their mistakes.

8. **EXPRESS YOUR FORGIVENESS:** Actually tell them you forgive them. Don't wait for them to ask. Yes, it is a brave step but a critical step to verbalize it. Weigh the hurt you are letting go against the freedom that you want and choose to forgive from the heart. If they choose to apologize...bonus.
9. **GIVE THEM TIME:** Give them a chance to respond. Sometimes their explanations can feel like they are trying to justify. Be patient and hear them out. If its clear that your pain is being depreciated rather than validated, it may be time to leave. If they are trying to blame you, simply excuse yourself.
10. **RESTORE THE RELATIONSHIP:** When it is immediate family, you must work at restoring the relationship. Real love always involves forgiveness. Real love always takes work. With those you are closest to, you need to go the extra mile to be gracious and to grind through tough issues. That is life. If an impasse persists, get outside help.

For those outside your inner circle, it is possible to forgive a person and decide not continue in the relationship. This could be the case with a divorced spouse, a co-worker or a friend where after attempts to resolve things, there is not a mutual interest at restoration. Regardless, forgive and move on.

Pass this article along to those in your world who need help with forgiveness and come back for more truth that challenges relationships. And remember, you'll never regret taking the steps to forgive those who have wronged you. Let me know how the steps work for you.