

A Forgiving God

Step Eight: We made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all

One motivation for preparing our list and making amends with the people we've hurt is the hope of having a clear conscience. We have lived with self-condemnation and probably hope that making amends will help us find forgiveness. Looking for forgiveness in the wrong places, however, may bring disappointments and give others unwarranted power over us.

The Bible doesn't teach us to go to people to find forgiveness. God is the one who grants forgiveness. *"If we confess our sins, God can be depended on to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong."* (1 John 1:9) Jesus taught us to pray: *"Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us."* (Matthew 6:12) He went on to explain, *"Your Heavenly Father will forgive you if you forgive those who sin against you; but if you refuse to forgive them, he will not forgive you."* (Matthew 6:14-15)

The purpose of making amends is to take personal responsibility for our behaviour and the effect it has had on others. If those people respond by offering forgiveness, that is a nice bonus. Our forgiveness, however, is not in their hands. Forgiveness is with God in Jesus Christ. *"For God forgave all your sins, and blotted out the charges proved against you He took this list of sins and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ's cross. In this way God took away Satan's power to accuse you of sin."* (Colossians 2:13-15)

We're on intimate terms with God, whether we realize it or not. We've probably thought a lot about how our sins have hurt the people in our lives. But we may be surprised to find out how intimately acquainted God is with our sin, and the emotional impact it has on him. Paul warns us, *"Don't cause the Holy spirit sorrow by the way you live."* (Ephesians 4:30) We can actually cause God grief by our actions, because the Holy Spirit of God is always with us. When we enter into sin, we take him with us.

God is our loving Father! Even when we didn't realize it, God was involved with all of the details of our lives. He saw everything! He knows the pain in store for us when we make bad decisions. God grieves deeply when we do things that hurt us and his other loved ones. We need to ask ourselves when we may have caused God sorrow and grief.

So as we make our list of those we've harmed and become willing to make amends to them all, we need to admit our own sinfulness and our need for God's forgiveness. We need to acknowledge the effects of our actions on others around us and God within us. Then and only then can God help us understand and do what the responsible action is to genuinely make amends for wrongs done.

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. On what basis do I approach others to make amends? What should I have in my heart? What kind of expectations should I be bringing to the encounter?
2. What about this business of making amends to God for hurt caused to God. What does an amends to God act like?

(Excerpts from *The Life Recovery Devotional*, Step 8 - Days 5 and 18)