

THE PROCESS OF FORGIVENESS

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord (Romans 12:19).

Forgiveness does not mean that you must tolerate sin. Isabel, a young wife and mother attending one of my conferences, told me of her decision to forgive her mother for continually manipulating her for attention. But Isabel tearfully continued, "She is no different. Am I supposed to let her keep ruining my life?"

No, forgiving someone doesn't mean that you must be a doormat to their continual sin. I encouraged Isabel to confront her mother lovingly but firmly, and tell her that she would no longer tolerate destructive manipulation. It's okay to forgive another's past sins and, at the same time, take a stand against future sins. Forgiving is not a co-dependent activity.

Forgiveness does not demand revenge or repayment for offenses suffered. "You mean I'm just supposed to let them off the hook?" you may argue. Yes, you let them off your hook, realizing that they are not off God's hook. You may feel like exacting justice, but you are not an impartial judge. God is the just Judge who will make everything right (Romans 12:19). Your job is to extend the mercy of forgiveness and leave judgment up to God.

Forgiveness is agreeing to live with the consequences of another person's sin. Suppose that someone in your church says, "I have gossiped about you. Will you forgive me?" You can't retract gossip any easier than you can put toothpaste back into the tube. You're going to live with the gossip this person spread about you no matter how you respond to the gossiper.

We are all living with the consequences of another person's sin and others are living with the consequences of our sin. The only real choice we have in the matter is to live in the bondage of bitterness or in the freedom of forgiveness.

Heavenly Father, I give up my right to seek revenge or harbor resentment. I want to enjoy the freedom which comes from forgiving others.

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you (Luke 6:27, 28).

Here are 12 steps you can use to walk through the process of forgiving someone who hurt you in the past.

1. **Ask the Lord to reveal the names** of the persons who offended you and the specific wrongs you suffered.
2. **Face the hurt and the hate.** If you are going to forgive from your heart, you must let God search the depths of your heart.
3. **Acknowledge the significance of the cross.** It is the cross of Christ that makes forgiveness legally and morally right.
4. **Decide that you will not retaliate** by using the information about the offender's sin against them (Luke 6:27-34).
5. **Decide to forgive.** Forgiveness is a conscious choice to let the other person off the hook and free yourself from the past.
6. **Take your list of names to God and pray** the following: "I forgive ___(name)___ for ___(specifically identify every remembered pain)___."
7. **Destroy the list.** You are now free. Do not tell the offenders what you have done. Your forgiveness is between you and God unless the offenders have asked you for forgiveness.
8. **Do not expect that your decision to forgive will result in major changes in the other persons.** Instead, pray for them (Matthew 5:44).
9. **Try to understand the people** you have forgiven. They are victims also.
10. **Freedom is a result of forgiveness in you.** In time you will be able to think about the people who offended you without feeling hurt or anger.
11. **Thank God for the lessons you have learned** and the maturity you have gained.
12. **When appropriate, accept your part of the blame** for the offenses you suffered. Confess your failure to God and to others (1 John 1:9) and realize that if someone has something against you, you must go to that person (Matthew 5:23-26).

Lord, teach me how to love unconditionally and forgive quickly those who hate me, curse me or mistreat me.