

The Freedom of Forgiveness

Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4)

What is Forgiveness?

- Forgiveness is a choice and since it is something God requires us to do to live in freedom, it is something that God empowers us to do.
- Forgiveness is a gift we give ourselves as well as the offender. We forgive so we can be free.
- Forgiveness is agreeing to live with the consequences of another person's sin. Our choice is whether we do so in the resentment of unforgiveness or the freedom of forgiveness. Bearing the burden of their offenses means we will not use that information against them in the future.
- Forgiveness acknowledges the hurt and the hate. If forgiveness doesn't visit the emotional core of our lives it will be incomplete. We let God bring the pain to the surface so He can deal with it. This is where the healing takes place.
- Forgiveness invites another to live in loving relationship with us that honors and respects truth and dignity.

When you forgive this man, I forgive him, too. And when I forgive him (for whatever is to be forgiven), I do so with Christ's authority for your benefit, so that Satan will not outsmart us. For we are very familiar with his evil schemes.

(2 Corinthians 2)

"Do you think you deserve credit merely for loving those who love you? Even the sinners do that! And if you do good only to those who do good to you, is that so wonderful? Even sinners do that much! You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate. (Luke 6)

God has not punished us for all our sins, nor does he deal with us as we deserve. For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. He has removed our rebellious acts as far away from us

as the east is from the west. The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. (Psalm 103)

This is the new covenant I will make with my people on that day, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts so they will understand them, and I will write them on their minds so they will obey them. Then he adds, "I will never again remember their sins and lawless deeds." (Hebrews 10)

A Process of Forgiveness

1. Acknowledge the full extent of the wrong, including anger and hurt that you feel.
2. Admit any sinful reactions you have as a result of the wrong. Renounce all resentment and bitterness and confess it all as sin, asking for God's forgiveness.
3. In the same way that you have been forgiven, offer forgiveness to the person who has wronged you. Choose to let go of the need for revenge.
4. Invite Jesus to come and heal you and set you free from any negative effects of the incident.
5. Reestablish the relationship on healthy grounds. If the person asks for forgiveness, forgive him or her. If not, decide what kind of relationship, if any, you can have with that person.

Forgiveness works in a cycle. First God, in His grace, forgives us. Then we, in turn, forgive others. We need God's grace and healing to accomplish the task. Old resentments are hard to let go of, but they can block the flow of grace in our lives and prevent healing. Now is the time to forgive.

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. Why does God want us to forgive?
2. What does God do with our sins that He forgives?
3. How is giving forgiveness to another a gift for ourselves?
4. What is God's pattern for forgiving each other?
5. What's hard about forgiving someone?
6. What hurts exist in my heart today that need to be touched by this forgiveness/healing process?