

FORGIVING LIFE'S HURTS

What forgiveness is and is not

Forgiveness does not mean surrendering our right to justice. It does not mean condoning or minimizing a hurt or injustice.

Forgiveness is the process during which we are able with the grace of God to let go of all resentment connected to a particular hurt.

Forgiveness is the medicine God offers us to deal with life's hurts. Forgiveness allows us to become unstuck in our relationship with God, others, church/institutions or self.

Three Reasons to Forgive

1. God's word tells us to do so; Matthew 18:21-22 (70 times 7), Mark 11:25; "When you stand in prayer . . ." Sirach 27:30 "Does anyone harbor anger against another and expect healing from the Lord?"

2. Forgiveness blesses us spiritually, emotionally and physically. To choose not to forgive is a choice to give our offender ongoing power over us spiritually, emotionally, and even physically. (See attached Meditation)

3. In forgiving life's hurts, we make the world a little less violent and a little more peaceful. Forgiving life's hurts is our contribution to world peace. When we forgive, we walk hand in hand with our forgiving God.

Eight Obstacles to Forgiving Life's Hurts

Obstacle #1 – Little or no practice at forgiveness. Perhaps our mode of operation has been to ignore hurts.

Obstacle #2 – We may feel strongly that our offender does not deserve to be forgiven.

Obstacle #3 – Intellectually, we may feel consciously or unconsciously that Jesus is wrong on this issue. In truth we may feel that some things are so bad that they should never be forgiven.

Obstacle #4 – Pride. If humility helps us to say, "I forgive you" or "please forgive me." The sin of pride blocks us from uttering these words.

Obstacle #5 – Forgiveness involves dealing with emotions that most of us do not like to face: anger, hatred and a need for revenge.

Obstacle #6 – We do not want to talk to God about the issue because we are so resistant to letting go of a particular hurt or injustice.

Obstacle #7 – We may not be able to get beyond the anger and rage connected to a particular hurt.

Obstacle #8 – We may be so deep in the 'righteous victim stance' that we are unable or have no desire to move out of it.

Eleven Truths to Remember About Forgiveness and the Forgiveness Process

Truth #1 - *Forgiveness is God's way of dealing with the hurt and wrong done to us. Seeking revenge or seeking to get even is the world's way.*

Truth #2 - *Normally, people hurt us or do us wrong, not because they are evil monsters or horrible, nasty people but because they are immature, spiritually blind, weak, wounded and imperfect like us.*

Truth #3 - *Forgiveness of a hurt, especially a big hurt usually takes time, patience, humility and lots of prayer.*

Truth #4 - *Before we can forgive a hurt or wrong done to us, we usually will need to name, own and give some expression to the feelings around the hurt, e.g. anger, disappointment or sense of betrayal.*

Truth #5 - *Motivation is key to success in any area of endeavor. "How badly do we need it?" To forgive a big hurt or perhaps a small one, we must want it a lot.*

Truth #6 - *There is a difference between the forgiveness of a hurt and the healing of a hurt.*

Truth #7 - *There is a difference between the forgiveness and the reconciliation of a hurt.*

Truth #8 - *Sometimes the reason we have a difficult time forgiving others is because we have a difficult time forgiving ourselves.*

Truth #11 - *It is important to remember that forgiveness of a hurt or wrong done to us is not a wimp or weak response. "Only the strong can forgive." (Gandhi)*

Prayer Suggestions

Normally, before prayer works it is *very important* to give some expression (perhaps through a journal) to the anger or rage we may feel around a particular hurt.

Please note the following prayers are only suggestions which can be adjusted to fit one's circumstances or personality.

Prayer Suggestion #1 - Prayer of Rage

Jesus, I have absolutely no desire to forgive _____ for the hurt and injustice he did to me.

I am so angry with him. I hate his guts. I would even be happy if harm came his way.

I cannot imagine myself forgiving him - he is the scum of the earth.

I detest and despise him. I never want to see him again.

If you are a bit scandalized by the above prayer, consider these words of Jeremiah when he was mad and enraged by the actions of his enemies.

Let me put my case to you. Why does the way of the guilty prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive? Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter and set them apart for the day of slaughter.

Jeremiah 12:1, 3.

Prayer Suggestion #2 - Prayer for the Desire to Forgive

Jesus, you know the way I feel about N____. You know my lack of desire to forgive. You know that all I want to do is to get even with him. But, I also know that holding onto a hardened unforgiving heart is no good for my body, mind or spirit. It hurts me more than it hurts my offender. It also hurts my relationship with you.

Jesus, I admit my helplessness and powerlessness when it comes to even thinking about forgiving N____. But, I also know that all things are possible for those who cooperate with your grace. With St. Paul, I believe that I can do all things in you who strengthens me. Empower me Jesus to do this work of forgiveness. Place within my heart the desire to forgive N____. I find it so hard to even make that request because my heart has so much venom towards N____ but; I make the request however feebly hoping that you will give me the grace to do what I am powerless to do for myself.

Prayer Suggestion #3 – Prayer of Repentance

Jesus, forgive me for anything wrong I have said or done in this relationship. I have no problem telling others about how horrible N. is but I have a big problem admitting my own wrongdoing. I ask your forgiveness for the way I have spoken in an unchristian way about N.

Prayer Suggestion #4 - Pray for the Offender

*Lord, you created N._____ good just like you created me good.
You love N._____ just as you love me with all my faults and weaknesses.
You know I do not love N_____ very much at this time, but you do love him/her.
Share with me your love for N_____.
Also, God, I ask you to bless this scoundrel.
Sometimes, I too am a scoundrel and in need of your blessing.*

Fr. Eamon Tobin

Author of *How to Forgive Yourself and Others.*