

THE COUNSELOR

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Forgiveness

Ultimate Healing

It really hurts when someone close betrays you. The pain can be deep and the wounds long lasting. People can wound one another many ways. Spouses can be unfaithful through affairs, pornographic addictions, and lying about finances. Words are spoken that crush one another's spirit. Children can also say and do things that grieve you tremendously. The list of the ways people can hurt one another seems endless. These wounds often times turn into anger, bitterness, resentment and unforgiveness. They consume people from the inside like a cancer. Unless these hurts are addressed and resolved, the wronged person becomes enslaved by hatred and hardness of heart - victimized by their own unwillingness to forgive. This has been a human condition since the fall of mankind. Sinful actions hurt others and this hurt frequently begets more pain as the offended seeks vengeance in retaliation against the offender. Pain and torment are perpetuated by unforgiveness. We all need God's healing and forgiveness in our lives. As Christians, we know that the central aspect of our faith is forgiveness. The Good News is that we don't have to be slaves to sin daily and we can forgive - with God's help. God forgave us in Christ Jesus on the cross at Calvary over 2,000 years ago! He forgives us today. We know as Christians God requires that we forgive one another. (Mark 11:26) The topic of forgiveness has been widely preached and written on. Forgiveness is a critical component of the healing process. Still, many believe forgiveness is easier said than done. It is hard work but doable, only with Jesus Christ! What is forgiveness? How does it work, and how do we forgive? How do we walk in a constant state of forgiveness? I will address these questions and more as I examine Forgiveness and Ultimate Healing in this article.



"Father, forgive them,..."

Jesus spoke these words from the cross while the Roman soldiers divided His garments and cast lots. (Luke 23:34) This was the main reason Jesus entered into the world - to redeem it, to save us from our sins - to forgive us. (1 Tim. 1:15, John 12:47, Col. 1:14) God did this because He loves us. (John 3:16) Jesus Christ came supernaturally to do the supernatural, forgive mankind for our sins, past, present and future. This type of forgiveness makes it possible for us to forgive one another. There is no other way. It is unnatural to forgive. Christ made it possible through His Blood Atonement sacrifice for our sins and showed us how to forgive. Those three powerful words ("**Father, forgive them**") from God in Christ Jesus were followed soon afterwards with "**It is finished.**" another set of words from Jesus that would change history forever! Christ's mission was accomplished! Salvation through believing on Christ was finalized. He was crucified, dead and buried and rose on the third day, destroying the works of Satan and setting us, the captives free from eternal death. God brings us, through Christ and His power in us, the ability to forgive and be forgiven. This is the starting and ending point for Christians to understand and live a life of forgiveness. God's love compels and empowers us to forgive. We have everything we need to live in victory over sin and forgive those who trespass against us! We must always remember Jesus' Words on the cross, His Resurrection, Ascension, and Promises. Jesus is Love. He is Forgiveness.

Unforgiveness

Forgiveness is no longer holding what someone did to you against them. Unforgiveness is keeping a grudge or holding onto the ill will (bitterness and resentment) you



have toward that person who hurt you. For example, former spouses hate each other for things that they did to one another while married. They go on for years harboring unforgiveness. They stay angry at one another "forever." Unforgiveness creates many problems.

Unforgiveness imprisons the offended and does not really hurt the offender. The real loser is the offended for not letting go of the offense. The mental torment affects them because they live with the bitterness. Your emotional and spiritual growth is blocked when you live with unforgiveness. It prevents you from getting to what God has next for you. Unforgiveness grieves God and hinders our prayers. God will not forgive us unless we forgive others. (Matt. 6:14,15) Unforgiveness affects our relationships with family and friends. We are not fully available to others, mentally and emotionally, when we are consumed with resentments. Unforgiveness brings mistrust, anger, and emotional issues into our future relationships. Unforgiveness "poisons the well." The most sad and dangerous part of unforgiveness is that it blocks us from experiencing a full relationship with Christ. It hinders our growth and steals our freedom and joy in Christ. Unforgiveness (bitterness and resentments) can predispose us to all kinds of physical and emotional problems. Depression, anxiety, and anger problems, etc. can be rooted in unforgiveness. Physical manifestations like weakened immune systems, high blood pressure, heart problems ulcers, etc. may be related to unforgiveness. Doctors' offices are filled with people suffering from all kinds of disorders that are stress and emotionally related. This does not mean that every physical illness is caused by unforgiveness but that many are predisposed by it.

Common reasons we don't forgive:

- The offense was too great.
- He/she won't accept responsibility for the offense.
- He/she isn't truly sorry.
- He/she never asked to be forgiven.
- He/she will do it again.
- He/she did it again.
- I don't like him/her.
- If I forgive the offense, I'll have to treat the offender well.
- Someone has to punish him/her.
- Something keeps me from forgiving.

- I'll be a hypocrite if I forgive, because I don't feel like forgiving.
- I'll forgive, but I won't ever forget.

Why We Forgive

We forgive because Christ forgave us. (Col. 3:13, Ephes. 4:32) Jesus commands us to forgive.

He confirms this in the Lord's Prayer when He taught us to pray: "and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." (Matt. 6:9-13) We must go to God daily in prayer, confess our sins, and ask



for His forgiveness. Jesus also said, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. (Mat 6:14) "But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Mat 6:15) So we must forgive so God will forgive us when we sin. We forgive so we don't give the devil a foothold (2 Cor. 10:-11) Jesus talked about the need for Christians to forgive others and how God hates the wicked sin of unforgiveness. (Matt. 18:21-35) 1 John 3:15 says, "whoever hates his brother is a murderer." Hatred is unforgiveness. Unforgiveness is sin and sin is bondage.

We forgive so we don't get entangled by this bondage. (Gal.5:1) We forgive because it is the right thing to do. Life without forgiveness and forgiving is unbearable. We forgive because it helps bring healing and restoration to us and others. We forgive so we can be filled with joy (John 17:13) and have fullness of joy. (John 15:11) Jesus shows and tells us these things so we may have



His joy, that we can be complete in Him, that we can live this life in His power, through His love and be a living testimony of His redemption! We cannot do this unless we forgive as we have been forgiven. We (Christians) are told to be merciful, forgive, and above all love. "Therefore, as the

elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; (Col 3:12) bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do." (Col 3:13) "But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection." (Col 3:14) We are then free to "let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful." (Col.3:15)

Forgiveness is no longer holding what someone did to

you (the offense) against them. Forgiveness is choosing by an act of the will in obedience to God's Word, against your emotions to forgive. Forgiveness is giving unconditional, unmerited favor to someone who does not deserve it. We have divine forgiveness where transgressors are forgiven by God (Eph. 4:32; Col 2:13; 3:13) and human forgiveness (Luke 7:42-43 (debt); II Cor 2:7, 10;12-13; Eph. 4:32).

Forgiveness encompasses:

- Our need for forgiveness.
- Our forgiveness from God.
- Freedom from demonic torment.
- Our need to focus upon the Lord and His Faithfulness.
- Frees us from focusing on our past offenses, and allows us to live for today.
- Relinquishing wrath toward the other person, vengeance is the Lord's.
- Knowing you've done what God has asked you to do.
- Transferring what happens next to God.
- Releases God's divine healing power - the more awful the offense, the more you need this.
- Decrease of self-condemnation.
- Releasing of thankfulness so you can live with the conscious knowledge of God's protection and love.

Forgiveness should not be confused with:

- Approving others' behavior.
- Excusing others' behavior.
- Saying the offense is of no importance.
- Saying you are of no importance.
- Commitment to relate in the future.
- Ceasing to be appalled that it happened.
- Automatically forgetting.
- Saying it wasn't painful and it still hurts.
- Believing it is okay with God that it happened.
- Believing you are not justified in being very angry.
- Believing you shouldn't tell the other person how angry you are.
- Believing you'll feel better about the event.

Three great examples of forgiveness in the Bible include Esau and Jacob (Gen. 33:4), Joseph and his brothers (Gen. 45:5-15, 50:19) and Jesus on the cross (Luke 23:34) Forgiveness unlocks the anger, bitterness, and resentment. It sets you and me on the road to healing and ultimately draws us closer to God and glorifies Him. In all the Biblical examples of forgiveness, God's kingdom was



advanced. People were set free and the miraculous occurred. The benefits of forgiving always outnumber the results of unforgiveness. There is no comparison between the Godly outcome of forgiveness and sinful results of harboring unforgiveness. We forgive because we must, the alternative is bondage. We forgive because we love and obey Christ! We want to bless and not curse others.

How to Forgive

We cannot truly forgive someone without the power of Jesus Christ! We must start with Him. Forgiveness is inevitable when you rely on and involve God in the process.

Steps on Forgiving:

1. Decide to forgive.
2. Understand that forgiveness is a process.
3. Go to God and ask for His strength.
4. Forgive yourself.
5. Approach the other person first.
6. Rehearse/practice before going to the person.
7. Use I statements like "I feel . . . I felt. . .", not "You did...You made . . ."
8. Consider writing a letter. Send it or Hold onto it.
9. Allow God to heal you, grieve and let go completely of the offense and pain over time.
10. Surrender (yourself) to God daily.
11. Abide in Christ - become more like Him every day.

Forgiveness is choice. It will not happen unless you choose to forgive. You must commit to forgive even though you really would rather not. Forgiveness is not a one-time event either; it is a process with ups and downs. You may be making progress one day in letting go but find yourself taking it back the next. It's hard to drop the resentment. You may feel like the other person needs to be punished and your grudge partially accomplishes that. It doesn't. An "eye for an eye" approach will not set you free nor does it make things right. You will forgive over time. It is impossible to really forgive God's Way without doing so in His strength. Human forgiveness is not the same as Godly forgiveness. We are limited by our sin nature and complete forgiveness only comes with God's help. Forgive yourself. Sometimes you are the transgressor and wronged someone. You must let go of any unforgiveness you have toward yourself. Maybe you were wronged and need to forgive yourself for the damage you did to yourself for hurting others and disobeying God in your unforgiveness. Ask the Lord to forgive your trespasses as you forgive those who trespass against you. (Matt. 6:12)



Some situations make it difficult or impossible to physically approach the one who offended you. They may be missing, dead, incarcerated, or far away. Approach those you can first, don't let years go by harboring unforgiveness. Take the initiative, step out and contact the person who grieved you and let them know you forgive them. Do this and let Christ set you free! Don't wait for them to come to you and ask for your forgiveness, it may be long time coming, and it's not the same as you approaching them first. Pray before you do this. Practice what you will say when you tell them you forgive them. Use "I" statements when addressing them, not "you this and you that" blaming them, accusing, defaming or attacking statements. It is important to let them know the hurt and pain they caused you. You are not condoning what they did. Sometimes it helps to write a letter to the person who wronged you. This letter may be an exercise helping you order and express your feelings. The person may be deceased or unreachable. The letter will be therapeutic even though you never send it.



Let God heal you. Let His love flow over you. He knows all about pain and forgiveness. Healing will come as you let Him move you through your grief. His love is a consuming fire, it will burn up your

resentments. Surrender yourself to Him daily. This comes from abiding in Him. It's a continual process every day. We can't bear fruit unless we abide in Him. The sinful self must be crucified or it will interfere every time with forgiving and our growth as Christians. "He must become greater, I must become less." (John 3:30) This keeps us ready to forgive.

Healing

Ultimate healing comes from forgiving that person who wounded you. Your broken heart is healed by Christ as you forgive. The burden is lifted. You sleep better. Your soul finds rest in Him. Freedom and wholeness fills you as you realize you don't hold that grudge anymore. Actually, you are able to look at this person with mercy and compassion now. They need Jesus just like you and me. That kind of healing can only come from Christ moving powerfully in a person totally submitted to Him. Complete restoration! Deep healing. You are released from the prison of unforgiveness which once enslaved you. A load has been lifted, you feel much better. The memory remains without the bitterness, you know now what it means to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Matt.5:44) You know what it means to forgive. No more haunting moments of wrath towards your offender. No more restless nights wishing they could suffer like you have. No more vengeful feelings. Eventually your fears and post traumatic stress

resulting from severe emotional wounds caused by the offender will also evaporate as you heal. The more serious traumas may require Christian Counseling but it will still be Christ who helps you forgive and heals you totally. Powerful long lasting healing comes from Christ, ultimate healing poured out from Him as He forgave us from the cross. We didn't deserve it but He forgave us anyway.

Forgiveness heals us and our broken relationships. Forgiving someone does not always lead to a restored relationship with that person. You may not associate with them but you are free from your past unforgiveness toward them.

Forgiveness always results in your wholeness and restoration. God heals you. You let Him help you let go. There is a line from the Newsboys song, **Let it Go**, "You won't understand it, just let it go."¹ We really will never fully grasp the depth of Christ's forgiveness (here on earth) and how it works in us as we forgive others. Forgiveness benefits us physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Daily cleansing and renewal from God come when we confess, repent, and forgive. It's His Amazing Love! That's why we forgive.

Walking in Forgiveness

Walk in a constant state of forgiveness. Be ready to forgive before people offend you. This does not mean that the offenses are justified or don't hurt you. It simply means we are ready to forgive because Jesus Christ forgave us and commands that we forgive others. We prove our love for Jesus by obeying Him. (John 14:15) Practice walking in forgiveness. It will change your life! Move with His Passion, Love, and readiness to forgive. This should be the Christian mindset. Forgive! Don't question, just do it and the Lord will bless you for it. It's easier to forgive when those offenses come when you live like this. People will betray you. They will break your heart. Despite the pain inflicted on us, no matter how wrong the offense, you and I must forgive. It's a process made easier when we walk in that readiness to forgive. You don't have to understand it. Do it and see what happens. You will never be disappointed when you trust God. Our sovereign God's love and mercy endures forever! Abide in Christ and be ready to forgive.




1 Take Me to Your Leader CD, 1996, Star Son Communications.

All quotations are taken from the NKJV unless otherwise stated.

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