

WEISE WORDS

WORDS OF WISDOM FOR HEALTHY LIVING

RELATIONSHIPS: Forgiveness (Part 2)

Forgiveness is not a one-dimensional process. There are three dimensions to forgiveness—spiritual, intellectual and emotional. In our last article we addressed the intellectual aspect by defining what forgiveness is and is not. In this article we will address the spiritual and emotional attributes of forgiveness.

Of highest importance is the spiritual dimension because it is the key to the entire process. We forgive because we have been forgiven. There is no greater act of forgiveness than when a Holy God died on a cross giving us freedom from our sin and new life in Him.

Because of God's great forgiveness we should be just as gracious in forgiving others. To refuse to forgive shows that we have not understood how much God has forgiven us. Jesus told a parable about a man who, after receiving great forgiveness for a large debt he owed to someone, refused to forgive a person who owed him a small debt. He illustrates that we have been graciously forgiven by God and that we are being forgiven daily over and over again. Therefore, there should be no limit to the number of times we forgive others.

Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven." (Matthew 18:21-22)

The third step in the forgiveness process is emotional. You must work through both the spiritual and intellectual stages to finally be able to achieve emotional forgiveness.

PROGRESSIVE ACTION STEPS TOWARDS EMOTIONAL FORGIVENESS

1. Acknowledge the Hurt

- Don't minimize it or deny it. It happened.
- Don't make excuses for the offender. It was wrong.
- Write it down. Journaling is a great way to work through anger and hurt. It organizes your thoughts and helps you acknowledge the truth as you see it in black and white. Sometimes writing a letter to the offender is helpful. **Do not send it**, but writing it is cathartic.

2. Identify Your Emotions

- When someone hurts you, you experience hurt and anger. These emotions are not sinful, but are a normal response to an offense.
- It is important to identify how the offense made you feel and then to express it. After writing down the offense, write down how you felt when the offense happened and how you have felt since then.

FORGIVENESS—Part 2 (Continued)

3. Set Boundaries

- Decide what you need to do to protect yourself from letting this person hurt you again. This involves determining how you react to the offender. For instance, you can be polite without being a best friend. You can listen without taking advice. Write these boundaries down in your journal.
- Spend as little time as possible with unsafe people. Unsafe people are those who continue to hurt you without regard for the damage it does in your life.
- Don't continue to look for approval from a person who has hurt you. Just as you don't pay full price for damaged fruit in the grocery store, don't pay full dollar for the offender's approval. Recognize that, in a sense, they are damaged and they are never going to be able to give you what you need.
- Recognize also that you do not need their approval in order to live a free and fulfilling life. The only approval you need is God's.

4. Cancel the Debt

- Write a blank check of forgiveness. Write in your journal that this day you have released that person from the debt they owe you.
- You may want to write down the offenses they have done and then write "Canceled" or "Paid in Full" over them. You may want to burn this document you wrote expressing your grief and hurt.

5. Make "Stones of Remembrance"

- After God parted the Jordan River so the Israelites could go through on dry land, God told Joshua to have each tribe choose a stone to be piled up as a memorial to what great things God had done that day. Those stones served as a remembrance for the people and their children in times to come (Joshua 24).
- It is good to have something "concrete" to help you remember the day you set your offender free.

6. Remember to Forget

- When Corrie ten Boom was reminded of an offense someone had done to her, she responded, "I distinctly remember forgetting that."
- Though you never really forget, you can remember that you forgave.

7. Recognize God's Hand

- Ask God to show you how He can turn this offense into something good in your life and how it can become a platform to help others (Romans 8:28-29).
- Ask God to help you love the offender with His love. Praying for the offender will help your feelings for them move from not wanting harm to come to them to wanting the best for them. This change of attitude is truly miraculous and can only be done through God's power and love.

Excerpts adapted from a book by Tim Clinton and John Trent, *The Quick-Reference Guide to Marriage & Family Counseling* (Baker Books, 2009).

For more information about this article or to receive help with forgiveness, please contact me at pwcounseling.com or call 813.643.2600. I am here as a resource for you.