

Forgiveness

'Forgiveness' can be an emotionally charged word. We have all been hurt by someone, but sometimes it brings years of pain and bitterness. Fortunately, God knew that amidst pain and suffering, there is hope in forgiveness.

Undoubtedly, walking through forgiveness can be quite difficult and overwhelming. This resource is a guide that is centered on God's word and can help you begin a process of forgiveness.

Introduction:

Somebody has hurt you - maybe it was just yesterday, or maybe its been years ago. We've all been hurt by someone, but sometimes we are bound by an emotional pain that resurfaces again and again.

Thankfully, as Christians we have a God who brings such simple truth, commands, and grace. Although simple, the Bible can at times be difficult and overwhelming for us to trust and obey. Thankfully the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us, provides godly guidance, strength, and love to help us overcome our human nature.

The Forgiving God:

When we look at forgiveness according to the Bible, we must start with God. God knows all about forgiveness - His acts of grace and mercy toward undeserving people are numerous! Just look at the Israelite people in the desert complaining and turning to other idols - how many times did God forgive them when they repented? Let's look at what the Bible says about God:

- Read Exodus 34:5-7; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 86:5.
- What do these verses say about God's character?

- Why is it important that our God is a God who forgives?

The ultimate example of God's forgiveness is the restored relationship God offers us with himself through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As a sinful (or self-seeking, versus God-seeking) people, we are separated from God and our relationship is broken (Rom 3:23, 5:12, 6:23). It is completely our fault, and God had absolutely no reason to offer forgiveness. But out of His compassion and love for us He did! And He sent His only son, Jesus, to come to the world and pay the price for our sin (John 1:29-30). Jesus took our sin, died in our place, and gave us a fresh start with God (Matt 26:26-28; Eph 1:7; 2 Cor 5:17-19).

- What does God offer to us through Jesus?

- What have we done to deserve it?

Our Response:

Scripture teaches many things about our role in forgiveness and our relationships here on earth. With good reason, there are many frequently asked questions on the topic. Based on the Bible and experience, the questions below should help you on your journey.

1. Is forgiveness a conscious choice, or an emotional state?

- a. Forgiveness is a choice that we make through our free will. We do not have to wait for us to be “ready” or for our feelings to lead us. We must decide to forgive; the emotions will follow in time.
- b. See Col 3:13; Matt 6:14-15, 18:21-35). We are to forgive not when we are ready (or when the person has apologized), but rather we are instructed to forgive because God has already freely forgiven us through Jesus Christ.

2. How do we forgive when we don’t feel like it?

- a. We forgive *by faith* out of an obedience to God’s commands. Since forgiveness goes against our human, self-centered nature, we must forgive out of faith in God. We must trust that God will change our hearts *in time*, while we forgive in obedience. (See Phil 1:6)
- b. Time will not heal the wounds; only forgiveness will.

3. Does forgiveness happen over night?

- a. Forgiveness is a process, and there will be multiple layers of healing. The decision to forgive can happen in an instance (because its not dependent on emotion), but you must continue to walk out that forgiveness for a lifetime.
- b. We are called to repeatedly forgive without limits! (see Matt 18:21-22; Rom 12:14)

4. How do you know when the process of forgiveness is complete?

- a. Forgiveness is about setting someone free, and that person is you! The forgiveness process is complete when you experience the freedom from anger, bitterness, revenge, or hurt. You are freed from the power of this other person over you!

5. Is there a time to approach the person who offended me?

- a. Yes, Scripture teaches us that we are to go to those who have sinned against us (see Matt 18:15-20). However we are not to judge one another as if we are sinless, but rather we should go in love (Matt 7:1-5; Gal 6:1-2).
- b. We are also instructed to approach someone quickly if we realize we are the offender (see Matt 5:23-24).
- c. Healthy communication is good for our relationships. God wants to use us to help one another become more holy and righteous. Many times, we need to help each other realize where we fall short.

6. How do I know when to approach someone, or when to just forgive them?

- a. There should be lots of prayer and discernment! This is a gray area, but the Holy Spirit knows your situation and what’s best for you and the other party.
- b. The most important guiding factor should be love for the other person (1 Jn 4:19-21).