

How Do I Forgive?

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Two Kinds of Struggles

- Those who don't forgive (Unforgiveness)
- Those who try to forgive too soon without acknowledging what has happened (Premature Forgiveness)

Which is your struggle?

Premature Forgiveness

- Often accompanied by enabling behavior
- Does not allow for acknowledgement of loss
- Does not allow appropriate space to grieve
- Does not see that anger is not all bad
- Does not understand healthy boundaries

Appropriate Grieving

“Grief asks me to allow the sins of the world – my own included – to pierce my heart and make me shed tears, many tears, for them...When I consider the immense waywardness of God’s children, our lust, our greed, our violence, our anger, our resentment, and when I look at them through the eyes of God’s heart, I cannot but weep and cry out in grief.” (Henri Nouwen)

Forgiveness is...

- A deliberate choice
- One of many choices
- A choice to seek peace instead of ongoing internal or external war
- An act of offering yourself to God; an act of worship

Forgiveness is not...

- Forgetting
 - Saying it was okay
 - Saying you are okay with it
 - Enabling
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- Forgiveness does not mean continuing to subject yourself to abuse or mistreatment
 - Forgiveness does not mean you discard the need for boundaries and protection

Forgiveness

“To ‘for-give’ is a process of giving up. In forgiving we give up demands for perfect behavior, perfect justice, perfect resolution, perfect retribution...We put aside the view of the other as an unworthy, unacceptable, unforgiveable offender. In forgiving we lay aside the view of ourselves as righteous and the other as totally unrighteous, and we begin to experience the truth that we are both fallible humans in need of being forgiven.” (David Augsburger)

Why Forgive?

- It is a Biblical command: “And forgive us our sins, just as we forgiven those who have sinned against us...If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.” (Matthew 6: 12-15)
- To be free for God to use us
- To restore relationships

The Price of Not Forgiving

- Physical illness, depression, compulsive behavior, repetition of patterns, spiritual barriers
- “Only if you have no need of forgiveness yourself do you dare consider hesitating to forgive another.” (Augsburger)

The Price of Not Forgiving

“But you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you do these very same things...Do you think that God will judge and condemn others for doing them and not judge you when you do them, too? Don't you realize how kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Or don't you care? Can't you see how kind he has been in giving you time to turn from your sin?”
(Romans 2:1-4, NLT)

We Can't Do It On Our Own

“When we have been betrayed, we experienced an injury which no punishment of the offender can heal...No amount of punishment of the offender can repair this damage. Healing must come from another source.” (Ray Anderson)

“Forgiveness from the heart is very, very difficult. It is next to impossible...I have often said, ‘I forgive you,’ but even as I said these words my heart remained angry or resentful. I still wanted to hear the story that tells me that I was right after all; I still wanted to hear apologies and excuses; I still wanted the satisfaction of receiving some praise in return – if only the praise for being so forgiving.” (Henri Nouwen)

Desire to Forgive

- Forgiveness does not require the other person to acknowledge the wrong
- What if I have no desire to forgive?
- But I don't even want the desire!
- Ask God to help you want it

Understanding the Offender

Forgiveness is “a growing recognition that one does not need to fully understand another to be understanding of his [or her] inner pain...We cannot, we do not, we will not know all or understand all in order to forgive all. But we can be understanding, offer understanding, risk extending understanding even to those who have hurt us deeply.” (Augsburger)

Stepping Over

“It is this divine forgiveness that I have to practice in my daily life. It calls me to keep stepping over all my arguments that say forgiveness is unwise, unhealthy, and impractical. It challenges me to step over all my needs for gratitude and compliments. Finally, it demands of me that I step over that wounded part of my heart that feels hurt and wronged and that wants to stay in control and put a few conditions between me and the one whom I am asked to forgive...

Stepping Over

This 'stepping over' is the authentic discipline of forgiveness. Maybe it is more 'climbing over' than 'stepping over'. Often I have to climb over the wall of arguments and angry feelings that I have erected between myself and all those whom I love but who so often do not return that love."
(Henri Nouwen)

I want to forgive, but I don't know how...

- Don't try to do it on your own
- Make a choice to forgive...then keep choosing it daily
- Choose to stop ruminating and obsessing
- Choose to stop bringing it up

I want to forgive, but I don't know how...

- Begin to see not only the negative ways it has affected you, but how it has brought growth or depth
- Acknowledge your own shortcomings and those who have to live with them
- Stop making excuses for your unforgiveness.
- Trust God to deal with the offender
- Trust God to protect you

Trust God to protect you

“Who will protect me from the wicked? Who will stand up for me against evildoers? Unless the Lord had helped me, I would soon have died. I cried out, ‘I’m slipping!’ and your unfailing love, O Lord, supported me. When doubts filled my mind, your comfort gave me renewed hope and cheer.” (Psalm 94:5, 9, 16-19)

Stop...and Begin

- Stop wanting the offender to experience suffering
- Begin wanting the offender to experience wisdom
- Stop wanting the offender to experience hurt
- Begin wanting the offender to be able to get help
- Stop wanting the offender to “pay” for what he/she has done
- Begin wanting the offender to understand justice and grace
- Stop wanting the offender to be “punished”.
- Begin wanting the offender to have an awakening, a realization, a transformation, an experience with God.

“And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice – the kind He will accept...Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is.” (Romans 12:1, 2, NLT)

Do We Ever Need to Forgive God?

- “I can’t trust God.” “God doesn’t want good for me.” “God doesn’t protect.” “God betrayed me.”
- God doesn’t need to be forgiven, but sometimes we need to learn to trust Him again after deep disappointment and despair.

This week

- Acknowledge that there may be reasons that you don't understand for why the offense happened.
- As Nouwen said, imagine yourself "stepping over". Acknowledge what responsibilities are yours now.
- Acknowledge that you want to make the choice to forgive, or ask God to give you the desire to make the choice.

Small Group Discussion

- What is the hardest part of forgiving?
- What feelings, thoughts, or reactions are you left with after this presentation?
- Do you struggle more with unforgiveness or premature forgiveness? Or both?
- If you've had success with forgiveness, share with your group what helped you to forgive.

Resources

- Forgiveness and the Freedom of Letting Go
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3D4VMZb8wLY>
- Anderson, Ray (1995). Self-Care: A Theology of Personal Empowerment & Spiritual Healing. Wheaton, IL: Bridge Point/Victor Books.
- Augsburger, David (2000). The New Freedom of Forgiveness. Chicago: Moody Press.
- Nouwen, Henri. (1992). The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming. New York: Doubleday.