

Why Forgive?

Forgiving is never easy. When we, or those near to us, have been hurt, then it can be very hard. And this is just as true of forgiving ourselves as it is of forgiving others.

So why do it? Here are three reasons:

1. Refusing to forgive acts like an untreated cancer. The anger and hurt can grow, often unnoticed, until they affect other relationships, our work, our health.
2. We are made and designed for good relationships. Every time we refuse to forgive, we fail to live up to our full human potential.
3. As humans we all do wrong and we all need forgiveness. None of us is perfect.

What is Forgiveness?

Forgiveness is releasing the person who has injured you from the debt they owe you and choosing to accept the pain and to no longer be angry.

It is not saying 'It's OK. It doesn't matter'?

When there is hurt and injury in a relationship, this does matter! To say 'It doesn't matter' is both untrue and belittles the relationship. This is not forgiveness.

It is not saying 'You couldn't help it. It wasn't your fault'?

Where genuinely it was not the other person's fault, then acknowledging this is helpful. There is then nothing to actually forgive, although any hurt and injury still needs to be dealt with.

Surely, some people should never be forgiven.

To forgive is not to excuse or condone. In fact forgiveness recognizes right and wrong, blame and responsibility. The more pain and injury you have suffered, the harder it will be to forgive, but the arguments set out in 'Why forgive' still stand true.

Seven Steps of Forgiveness

1. Recognise what you are feeling.

The first step is to own up to how you really feel about what has happened. You may feel angry, sad, rejected or a whole mixture. Don't bury and ignore those feelings. Face them and accept them. Perhaps write them, paint them or draw them. They are a part of you, however much you may wish that they were not. It's OK to have feelings. "Forgiveness does not come by forgetting, but by remembering."

2. Find out why you feel as you do.

Who really did and said what? Are some of your feelings of anger and pain really due to your own insecurities and deeper hurts? Try writing down some statements such as: "I felt (angry/sad etc.), when you said/did because it (made me feel insignificant etc.)"

3. Take time to grieve

- for what you have lost, for what has been stolen from you by the wrong; things like family life, self respect, things that can often never be recovered.

4. Try to understand the other person's viewpoint.

Why did the other person act the way they did? Where were they coming from? What drove them? Were there things that you did or said that didn't help? (See overleaf)

5. Decide what can be excused.

Be careful not to excuse the person when they were in fact responsible, because that is not treating them like human beings. But when they were genuinely not to blame, then excuse them and continue to recognize and work through your feelings without blaming them.

6. Choose to forgive what was their fault.

Recognise that holding on to blame will never lead to wholeness and growth. Forgiving and letting go may first require expressing your feelings of blame and anger even if they're directed at God or fate.

But it then means choosing to accept the hurt and pain, the loss that you can never regain, to work it through, and to release the person from the debt they owe you for what you have lost.

7. Take steps towards reconciliation.

This step requires action on both sides and so may be impossible (see No.6 below). But where it is possible it means re-establishing trust and respect for each other. It cannot happen quickly and it does not necessarily mean going back to how things were before. Get communication going again, assess what new relationship is appropriate and work towards that.

Things That Help Us Forgive

1. Realise that forgiveness is a process that takes time and hard work.
2. Talking with someone else, who understands forgiveness, can help us work things through.
3. Realising our own self-worth can help us forgive. 'Some people are loved because they are worthy, but all of us are worthy because we are loved'. God loves and accepts each one of us as we are, whether or not we feel worthy.
4. Realising that we too have done wrong and need forgiveness.
5. When Jesus lived and died on earth he experienced rejection, hurt and injustice. He knows what it is to feel pain, anger and hurt. Yet he was able to forgive. He not only forgives us, but, if we ask him, he will help us forgive others.
6. Recognise that complete reconciliation requires action on both sides, both in apology and in forgiveness. To be complete, forgiveness must be both offered and received. Sometimes we will only be able to work through our own side of it.

*If you hold anything against anyone,
forgive him, so that your Father in
heaven may forgive you.*

Jesus

*The weak can never forgive.
Forgiveness is the attribute of the
strong.*

Mahatma Gandhi

*Forgiveness is not an occasional act.
It is a permanent attitude.*

Martin Luther King, Jr.

*Forgiveness needs to be accepted, as
well as given, before it's complete.*

C S Lewis

*Many promising reconciliations have
broken down because, while both
parties come prepared to forgive,
neither party comes prepared to be
forgiven.*

Charles Williams

When You Did Or Said Things That Didn't Help

When there are tensions in a relationship, it is rarely all on one side. You may have done and said things that you know hurt the other person. Putting that right will involve:

- acknowledging that you have caused genuine hurt and pain even if unintended
- trying to understand why the other person was hurt by what you said or did.
- recognising and owning the guilt and shame that you may feel
- taking full responsibility for your words and actions, without making excuses and without accepting responsibility for what you did not do
- making amends to the best of your ability
- accepting the forgiveness offered by others

Further Help:

www.theforgivenessproject.org.uk has a lot of helpful material, including other people's stories.

Relate is a charity offering help and counselling to those going through difficulties in marriage relationships. Tel: 987 6161