

Deborah J. Thompson

"Be gentle and ready to forgive; never hold grudges. Remember the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others"

[Colossians 3:13](#)

Forgiveness is such a simple word, but is often a difficult concept to master. Forgiveness can be defined as "the process of ceasing to feel resentment, indignation or anger for a perceived offense, difference or mistake, and ceasing to demand punishment or restitution."

If that sounds daunting to you, then consider these powerful words from St. Augustine: "Resentment is like taking poison and hoping the other person dies."

One of the foundations for a happy life is learning the art of forgiving. Holding onto anger, resentment, frustration and pain in your life hurts you more than anyone else. The misery bundled up inside of you can cause stress, depression, and even physical illness. So, aside from the fact that an unforgiving heart does not please God, it is actually in *your* best interest to figure out how to forgive!

But that person really hurt me!

This is where it gets especially tough—forgiving someone who has hurt you. It is a universal human experience to be hurt by others. But in order to truly experience joy in our lives, we must learn how to forgive those who have injured us in some way.

A good friend recently shared with me an experience in which she was struggling to forgive someone who had hurt her very deeply. And as it often happens, the offender was a person who had become very close. She was loved and trusted, which made her disloyal actions and words all the more devastating. My friend vacillated back and forth between wanting to retaliate and wanting to just put it behind her and move on. Throughout the ordeal, she noticed an alarming fact: her unforgiving spirit seemed to wield a certain power over her, *making her into someone that she did not want to be.*

Holding onto hurt only wounds your soul

This is the crux of the problem with holding onto resentment. When you refuse you to forgive, *you* are the changed party. You become a willing participant in perpetuating your own pain. You allow the negativity of your circumstances to multiply and spill over into your attitudes and actions. Think a moment and ask yourself: does the offender really suffer much under your resentment? Of course not, but you do! You take the poison. You primarily hurt yourself. Unresolved hurt festers within your soul and negatively impacts your future far beyond

the situation itself. Holding onto hurt is an ongoing, continuous wound to your soul. Failing to forgive is giving power to your offender to continue to injure you, over and over again.

See your hurt from another perspective

It might be helpful to remind yourself that forgiving does not mean condoning another person's bad behavior. It simply means that you are making allowances for his or her human imperfections. You recognize that all of us make mistakes and missteps. Just take a look back over your own life and ponder the times in which you have hurt others. You may come to realize that you generally did not have an overtly hateful motive or even mean to hurt them at all. Perhaps it was the result of some selfish choice or act of self-preservation. Try an exercise that many have found to be helpful: project a similar mindset onto the ones who have hurt you, and see if this begins to melt a bit of the cold resentment you have toward them. Seeing and identifying with the humanity and fallen-ness of your offender can often be a positive step forward in the process of forgiving him or her.

"Forgiveness does not mean ignoring what has been done, or putting a false label on an evil act. It means rather that the evil act no longer remains as a barrier to the relationship."
~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

God calls His children to live lives of forgiveness

Learning to forgive, as God forgives, helps you to grow into a mature, content, and joyful person. It glorifies God because it shows that He is more satisfying to your soul than revenge. Forgiveness empowers you to take control over your own life and stop allowing the actions of others to dictate your attitudes, actions, emotions and moods. It is one of life's most important lessons, yet it takes some people a lifetime to learn it.

If there is a circumstance in your life in which you need to forgive someone, take a deep breath, ask God for help, and release it. Some may think that forgiving makes one weak—a doormat, or a pushover. However, making the choice to forgive is not a passive act of weakness. Rather, it is an assertive activity, driven by a conscious preference to be the kind of person who strives to reflect God in everyday life. It is far easier to give in to the childish urge to hold onto anger than it is to choose the mature, loving path of forgiveness. It takes a strong person to forgive.

You cannot live in the present and create the future if you are dwelling on the past

Making the powerful choice to forgive is a liberating, defining moment in which one takes back control over one's life and emotions. You do not have to condone someone's behavior, or even agree with her point of view or choices. You can cut someone out of your life. You can divorce him, move away, and even sever all contact. But you will never be free of the pain until you find a way to forgive that person. She does not have to be present in your life in order for you to forgive her. Just realize that you will never transcend the circumstances that caused you so much pain and agony until you choose to forgive.

"To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you."

~ Lewis B. Smedes

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