

TWELVE STEPS TO FORGIVENESS

Most of the ground that Satan gains in the lives of Christians is due to unforgiveness. We are warned to forgive others so that Satan cannot take advantage of us (2 Corinthians 2:10,11). Why is forgiveness so crucial to our freedom? Because of the cross. God didn't give us what we deserve; He gave us what we needed according to His mercy. We are to be merciful (Luke 6:36). We are to forgive as we have been forgiven (Ephesians 4:31-32).

Forgiveness is not forgetting. People who try to forget find that they cannot. God says He will "remember no more" our sins (Hebrews 10:17), but God, being omniscient, cannot forget. "Remember no more" means that God will never use the past against us (Psalm 103:12). Forgetting may be a result of forgiveness, but it is never the means of forgiveness.

Forgiveness deals with your pain, not another's behavior. Remember: Positive feelings will follow in time; freeing yourself from the past is the critical issue.

One: Write on a sheet of paper the names of the persons who offended you. Describe in writing the specific wrongs you suffered:

Rejection	Verbal
Deprivation of love	Sexual or emotional abuse
Injustice	Betrayal
Unfairness	Neglect
Physical	

Remember, those close to us are the ones who have the power to hurt us the most. Your father and mother, your own spouse, your children, God and yourself. God does not need to be forgiven, but sometimes we hold false expectations of God that lead us to anger or bitterness toward Him. We need to release God from those expectations and feelings. Some of us need to forgive ourselves for weaknesses and sins which God has long since forgiven.

Two: Face the hurt and the hate.

Write down how you feel about these people and their offenses. Remember: It is not a sin to acknowledge the reality of your emotions. God knows exactly how you feel, whether you admit it or not. If you bury your feelings you will bypass the possibility of forgiveness. You must forgive from your heart.

Three: Acknowledge the significance of the cross.

It is the cross of Christ that makes forgiveness legally and morally right. Jesus took upon Himself all the sins of the world --- including yours and those of the persons who have offended you -- and He died "once for all" (Heb. 10:10). The heart cries, "It isn't fair! Where's the justice?" The justice is in the cross.

Four: Decide that you will bear the burden of each person's sin (Gal. 6:1,2). This means that you will not retaliate in the future by using the information about their sin against them (Luke 6:27-36). Forgiveness is agreeing to live with the consequences of another person's sin. Forgiveness is costly; we pay the price of the evil we forgive. Yet you are going to live with those consequences whether you want to or not; your only choice is whether you will do so in the bitterness of unforgiveness or the freedom of forgiveness.

Five: Decide to forgive. Forgiveness is a crisis of the will, a conscious choice to let the other person off the hook and free yourself from the past. Since God tells you to, you can choose to do it. The other person may truly be in the wrong and subject to church discipline or even legal actions. But that's not your primary concern. Your responsibility is to let him off your hook. Make that decision now; your feelings of forgiveness will follow in time.

Six: Take your list to God and pray the following:
Don't say, "Lord, please help me to forgive," because He is already helping you. Don't say, "Lord, I want to forgive, which is your own personal responsibility. Keep praying about each individual until you are sure that all the remembered pain has been dealt with. "I forgive _____ for *(list the offenses)*." If you have felt bitter toward this person for some time, you may want to find a Christian Counselor or trusted friend who will pray with you about it (James 5:16).

Seven: Destroy the list. You are now free. Do not tell the offenders what you have done. Your Forgiveness is between you and God only! The person you may need to forgive could be dead.

Eight: Do not expect that your decision to forgive will result in major changes in the other persons. Instead, pray for them (Matt. 5:44) so they too may find the freedom of forgiveness (Gal. 5:1, 13, 14).

Nine: Try to understand the people you have forgiven. They are victims also.

Ten: Expect positive results of forgiveness in you. In time you will be able to think about the people who offended you without feeling hurt, anger or resentment. You will be able to be with them without reacting negatively.

Eleven: Thank God for the lessons you have learned and the maturity you have gained as a result of the offenses and your decision to forgive the offenders (Rom. 8:28,29).

Twelve: Be sure to accept your part of the blame for the offenses you suffered. Confess your failure to God and to others (1 John 1:9) and realize that if someone has something against you, you may need to go to that person (Matt. 5:23-26).