

## the freedom of FORGIVENESS

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by Florence MacKenzie

**“If you don’t come to tea with Amy on Friday, I’ll never forgive you!”** Even at ten, I thought this outburst from my friend’s aunt was rather extreme. Never to be forgiven if I refused an invitation to tea? Apparently not, as Aunt Millie had decided that forgiving such an offence was not an option.

I’m guessing that most of us probably don’t find it too difficult to forgive minor upsets but we draw the line at forgiving people who’ve really hurt us. Perhaps we try to rationalize this by saying, “But he/she doesn’t deserve to be forgiven.” Well, you’re probably right. But if people are forgiven only if they deserve it, none of us would qualify!

As I grapple with this issue in my own life, I’m discovering that forgiveness is not what I thought it was. For example:

- **Forgiveness is not saying my hurts don’t matter.** Forgiving my offender doesn’t minimize the seriousness of the offence against me.
- **Forgiveness is not letting the offender “get away with it.”** If someone wrongs me, he/she is answerable to God, and He will deal with that person in the right way.
- **Forgiveness is not forgetting.** Only God has the capacity to forgive and forget and Jer.31:34 tells us that His “forgetfulness” is a deliberate choice not to remember.
- **Forgiveness is not a weapon.** Forgiving someone doesn’t give me the right to manipulate them at a later date by dredging up reminders of their “forgiven” offence.
- **Forgiveness is not reconciliation.** I can forgive, but I might never be brought into a right relationship with the person who has wronged me because he/she might not be willing to cooperate.
- **Forgiveness is not easy.** I can’t do this on my own and need God’s Spirit to see me through.

I like to think of forgiveness as giving up my right to pay back or get even with someone who has wronged me. When I see it this way, I find a freedom that I otherwise wouldn’t have. “I forgive you” no longer implies my hurts are insignificant, nor does it indicate the one who wronged me is “off the hook.” It forces me to face up to the reality that I don’t have to live in denial by pretending the offence never happened and it removes the responsibility for reconciliation from me alone. It also draws me closer to God as I seek His help in extending forgiveness.



Forgiveness is our call. We can choose to forgive or, like Aunt Millie, we can choose to address our offender by thinking, “I’ll never forgive you!” However, there’s a problem with the latter option. Refusing to forgive someone has serious consequences for our spiritual and emotional well-being because it keeps us in bondage to that person for the rest of our lives. Instead of experiencing the freedom that forgiveness brings, we’ll find ourselves increasingly bound by anger, bitterness, and resentment.

It’s not unusual to feel angry when someone has hurt us deeply. Neither is it always wrong to be angry. But, if we allow that anger to continue unresolved, we make it easy for bitterness to take root deep in our souls. This “root” of bitterness can then show itself in the “weed” of resentment where we find ourselves keeping a record of wrongs that only intensifies our hurt as we keep rehearsing our offence. Perhaps it’s time to apply the “weed-killer” of forgiveness! But how do we do this? The letters of the word FORGIVE give us some pointers.

**F**ace the fact that withholding forgiveness feeds anger, bitterness, and resentment.

**O**penly admit these feelings to God.

**R**emind yourself that God, in Christ, has forgiven you.

**G**ive up your right to pay back your offender.

**I**nvoke the Holy Spirit’s help as you begin the process of forgiveness.

**V**iew your offender as one whom God will deal with justly.

**E**mbrace the freedom that forgiving your offender brings.

When I treat weeds in my garden, one application of weed-killer is not usually sufficient and I need to repeat the process, sometimes several times. The same is true in extending forgiveness. Those bitter roots will put up a fight, but don’t give up.

Aunt Millie may not have discovered the freedom of forgiveness, but we can – by choosing to forgive. Let’s go for it!