

Equipped to forgive

Have you ever heard anyone say, “*I’ll never forgive him for what he’s done*” or “*She doesn’t deserve my forgiveness*”? Perhaps you are the one who has said words like that. I believe there’s quite a lot of confusion and misunderstanding over what it means to forgive someone who has hurt us. So, let’s start by looking at what forgiveness is not before we consider some practical steps involved in forgiveness.

Forgiveness is not... letting your offender ‘get away with it’: if someone has wronged you in some way, he/she is answerable to God, and he will deal with that person in the right way.¹

Forgiveness is not... saying your hurts don’t matter: forgiving your offender doesn’t minimize the seriousness of the offence against you.

Forgiveness is not... reconciliation: you can forgive but you might never be reconciled, or brought into a right relationship, with your offender. For this to occur you need the other person’s cooperation and there are no guarantees that this will happen.

Forgiveness is not... forgetting: only God has the capacity to forgive and forget; in fact, God’s ‘forgetfulness’ is a deliberate choice not to remember.²

Forgiveness is not... a weapon: forgiving someone doesn’t give you the right to manipulate them at a later date by dredging up reminders of their “forgiven” offence.

Forgiveness is not... easy: You need the help of the Holy Spirit to see this one through.

So, then, what *is* forgiveness? Here’s one way of looking at it: **Forgiveness is giving up your right to pay back or ‘get even’ with someone who has wronged you, whether or not that person asks for your forgiveness.**

“*But he/she doesn’t deserve to be forgiven*”, you might say. Well, think for a moment about God’s grace, where he gives us something we don’t deserve. None of us deserves to be forgiven for our sins, yet God’s grace does just that - he forgives us!³ But we miss out on extending that grace to others if we refuse to forgive those who have wronged us.

The cost of forgiveness can be very high. The Lord Jesus Christ knew this first-hand when he died on the cross to buy eternal life for those who believe, and forgiveness can also be hard for us. But, you know, the cost of not forgiving is even higher. Refusing to forgive someone will keep us in bondage to that person for the rest of our lives and it will continue to feed the resentment, bitterness and anger that stunt our Christian development. The choice is ours. To forgive or not to forgive? That is the question. If you find it difficult, or think it’s impossible, to extend forgiveness to someone, here are some practical steps you might wish to take, using the letters of the word “**FORGIVE**”.

Face the fact that withholding forgiveness feeds anger, bitterness and resentment.

Openly admit these feelings to God.

Remind yourself that God, in Christ, has forgiven you.

Give up your right to pay back your offender.

Invite the Holy Spirit’s help as you begin the process of forgiveness.

View your offender as one whom God will deal with justly.

Embrace the freedom that forgiving your offender brings.

As you go through these steps, you might find it helpful to enlist the support of someone you can trust who will be happy to pray for you and with you as you begin to walk towards the freedom of forgiveness.

¹ Romans 12:19

² Jeremiah 31:34

³ Colossians 1:13, 14