

4 Steps to Forgiving Others

“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, outbursts, and blasphemies, with all malice, be taken away from you. And be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you” (Eph. 4:31-32).

Too many of us don't really understand what forgiveness is. We struggle through all kinds of misconceptions about what it means to forgive others. I'm convinced that if more people knew what real forgiveness looked like, they'd be much more willing to forgive instead of holding onto past hurts at an unhealthy level.

The Bible clearly calls us to forgive others. Galatians 6:1 says, *“Brothers, if a man is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, watching yourselves, lest you also be tempted.”*

So if God expects us to forgive others, what does healthy, biblical forgiveness look like? Here's a four-part process that we should walk through as we're dealing with pain brought upon by others.

1. Recognize no one is perfect. When we hate somebody, we tend to lose our perspective about that person. When we're filled with resentment, bitterness and hurt, we tend to dehumanize the offender. We treat them like an animal. But we're all in the same boat. The Bible says, *“For there is not a righteous man on earth who only does good and refrains from sin.”* (Eccl. 7:20). We're all imperfect.

2. Relinquish your right to get even. This is the heart of forgiveness. The Bible says, *“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to God's wrath, for it is written: ‘Vengeance is Mine. I will repay,’ says the Lord”* (Rom. 12:19). You deserve to retaliate, but you must commit not to do so. It's not fair, but it's healthy. This

isn't a one-time decision but a daily one that may even require moment-by-moment decisions.

3. Respond to the evil with good. This is how you know you've fully released someone from the wrong that has been committed against you. Humanly speaking, it's nearly impossible to respond to evil with good. You'll need God's help. You'll need the love of Jesus to fill you up. Why? God's love doesn't keep track of wrongs (1 Cor. 13).

4. Refocus on God's plan for your life. You stop focusing on the hurt and the person who hurt you. Instead, you refocus on God's purpose for your life, which is greater than any problem or pain you might be facing currently. As long as you continue to focus on the person who has hurt you, that person controls you. In fact, you can take it a step further. If you don't release your offender, you will begin to resemble your offender.

So don't sit another day in your resentment. If you've been holding onto pain caused by someone else, go through these four steps and move on to the rest of the life you were created to live!

Talk It Over

Can you think of a time when you responded to evil with good? How did the situation turn out?

Which of the four elements to healthy, biblical forgiveness mentioned above is usually the most difficult for you to master?

Why do you think so many people would rather hold onto their hurt rather than release it? How does bitterness affect someone emotionally and physically? {eoa}

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