

How You Can Move From Forgiveness to Total Transformation

If you're human, you've been wounded. No one escapes. And when wounded, we do things and make decisions that result in more and deeper wounds. Without forgiveness healing doesn't happen and you remain stuck. The only way out is through forgiveness. Forgiveness opens the door to transformation.

Forgiveness must be both given and received. Offering forgiveness sets you free from the wrongs others have done to you, and receiving forgiveness sets you free from the things you've done yourself.

Misconceptions abound regarding forgiveness. Here are a few things forgiveness is not:

- Saying or pretending everything is OK
- Ignoring the damage the wrong behavior caused
- Easy, quick or a single event
- Based on feelings

It's not OK. And that's the reason forgiveness is the only way to be set free. Forgiveness is a process; it's a decision; and it's often hard.

Say "forgiveness," and we usually begin thinking about how we have been wronged, or how hard it is to forgive ourselves. But it's really not about you at all. None of this would be possible without the forgiveness God freely offers to us.

Receiving God's Forgiveness

Thank God for His gracious forgiveness offered to us through Jesus. No amount of good behavior on our part could ever undo the wrong things we have done or make us good enough for His

presence. He wipes our sinful acts away. (Isa.1:18, 1 John 1:9). We have a new start.

But if you've been a believer for any time at all, you've certainly faced the reality that receiving God's forgiveness is not a one-time event. Your behavior doesn't become perfect the moment you say yes to Jesus. We need the cleansing of His forgiveness every day.

And it's even deeper than that. Every human born since Adam and Eve has come into the world with faulty DNA. Even if we never do a sinful act, we are sinners. Our desires, attitudes, default ways of handling the world and so forth are broken, faulty, inconsistent with God's ways and the glorious way He created us to be. We need His forgiveness not only for the lie, sexual hookup, shady financial transaction or hateful words we say, but also for the pride, greed, lust or bitterness that underlies those acts.

And Jesus offers His forgiveness freely—for our behavior and our attitudes, for our acts and our wrong desires, for our very nature that's broken.

Have you struggled to receive God's forgiveness? Refusing to do so is actually saying you know more than God. If He says you're clean, who are you to disagree with Him? It's a miracle. It's grace. It's free. Say Thank You, and offer Him gratitude and worship in response.

Forgiving Others

Every believer serious about spiritual growth will have to face the matter of forgiveness. Forgiving those who have wronged you, that is. If we chose to, we would all have more than enough reason to live in bitterness, holding grudges and wounding the world with our spines and vinegar.

Jesus connects our decision to forgive others with God's forgiveness of us (Mark 11:25). It's not that God's

forgiveness is conditional in the way we may think, but extending forgiveness to others is the natural response to receiving God's forgiveness for our own wrongs. If we choose bitterness and refuse to offer forgiveness, it means we have not received God's forgiveness for our own brokenness.

It's been said that refusal to forgive is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. You can choose to forgive regardless of whether the other person asks for forgiveness, acknowledges the wrong or is even still alive. Forgiveness is simply giving up your right to continue to be hurt by them or to exact revenge, and letting God deal with them.

Offering forgiveness may or may not restore a broken relationship. You can forgive and still protect yourself or others from future harm if the other person is still dangerous. Choosing what to do about a given relationship is a separate decision from whether or not to forgive.

If you're stuck, spend some time with God exploring whether there are areas in which you have not yet dealt with the matter of forgiveness. Make the choice to "go there" with Him. Painful or not, it's the step that will set you free.

From Forgiveness to Transformation

Forgiveness—both accepting Christ's forgiveness of you and choosing to extend forgiveness to others who have wronged you—breaks one of the strongest chains holding you to your past. Now it's time to move forward.

While on earth, when Jesus offered forgiveness He would point the person to their future, "Go and sin no more" (John 8:11b). They were set free from the past; now, it was time to make a change.

Embracing how God has forgiven us even from our faulty DNA, from our inborn messed-up desires and instincts and attitudes,

energizes us to choose a new life and walk in it. Forgiveness deals with our past, but it calls us to our future. The only appropriate response is to move forward in the process of transformation to which God calls us.

Living a lifestyle of forgiveness means petty offenses don't weigh us down. Our relationships with others and with God become stronger. It frees us to embrace and enjoy the presence of God, where real transformation happens.

Your Turn: *Are you feeling stuck? Is there some area in which you have not embraced or chosen forgiveness? Is God calling you to deal with that now? Leave a comment below. {eoa}*

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