

Saying Goodbye to Hurt, Hello to Healing: Part 3

How to Forgive

Unforgiveness has a high cost, but how does one proceed in **forgiveness**? Allow me to suggest six steps. (Continued from part 2.)

Fourth, repeat.

Jesus told us to forgive 70 times seven (Matt. 18:22). My mother taught me this when I was a boy. She told me when other children picked on me, I was to turn the other cheek.

One little bully became my nemesis. He continually hit and insulted me and tried to pick a fight. One day, my mother noticed that I was putting marks on a piece of paper. Responding to her inquiry, I said that every time Billy bothered me I was adding a mark. When I reached 491, Jesus had given me permission to hit him back.

My mother must have begun praying harder because a few days later, Billy announced that his parents were moving. My count by then was around 250.

I had a childish view of Jesus' words. I did not realize that 70 times seven was Jesus' way of describing unlimited forgiveness.

If the Lord told us to forgive one another 70 times seven, we know He does the same and far more.

Jesus said Christians might need to repeatedly forgive someone. This does not mean we become a doormat and allow someone to abuse us.

Forgiveness does not grant someone permission to keep hurting

us. Spatial distance may be required, but our hearts can remain tender. When we forgive, we may not forget the past. To continually dredge it up, however, is not beneficial.

Fifth, remember: Grace pays the bill.

If I visit your home and break something valuable of yours and you forgive me, you release me from the obligation to pay the replacement cost. (Nevertheless, if I am a decent person, I will offer to pay.)

When a pastor forgives, he picks up the tab. This is what Jesus did for us on the cross. He paid our debt—a debt He did not owe.

A forgiving person is stronger than the one who did the wrong because it takes more strength to forgive than it does to injure.

Hard-liners often criticized **Billy Graham** because he associated with Christians who did not adhere to every element of doctrine important to his critics. He recited this poem as a response:

“He drew a circle that shut me out/Rebel, heretic, a thing to flout./But love and I had the wit to win/We drew a circle that took him in.”

To join in Christ’s work of reconciliation, we must be persons of grace.

Sixth, reach up to God for help.

To forgive is not easy.

Consider the story of David and Absalom in 2 Samuel 13-18.

Absalom’s brother, Amnon, raped Absalom’s sister, Tamar. Absalom then killed Amnon and fled. After three years, David brought his son back to Jerusalem but refused to see him for

two years.

David made the mistake of incomplete forgiveness.

Contrast David with the father of the prodigal (Luke 15:11–32). That father ran to his son, embraced him, kissed him, clothed him, killed the fatted calf, enjoyed him and defended him.

Which example will you follow with the person who wronged you?

At times, a pastor may find it impossible from a human point of view to forgive. Regardless of how much he knows it is right and biblical to forgive, he cannot do it. The hurt is too deep; the wound still festers.

This example may help. Corrie ten Boom closes *The Hiding Place* with the story of speaking at a church in Munich after World War II. A German SS man who had guarded the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbruck concentration camp was in the service. When ten Boom saw him, she suddenly remembered the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing and her sister Betsie's pain-blanching face. He came to ten Boom as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing.

"Fraulein," he said, "to think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away."

He thrust out his hand to shake hers; but ten Boom, who had spoken to others concerning the need to forgive, kept her hand at her side. As she fought with her anger, she prayed, "Lord, forgive me and help me to forgive him." She tried to smile and struggled to raise her hand but could not.

Again, she prayed, "Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness." She writes, "As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost

overwhelmed me.

“And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than our goodness that the world’s healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the power.”

For Thought

Think again of the person or persons who hurt you. Who are they? Will you be unforgiving or forgiving?

Give heart to the counsel of the apostle Paul: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Eph. 4:32).

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