

Watch Out for These Common Myths About Forgiveness

The first myth about forgiveness is that the person who has sinned against you has to be present to forgive them. Some people don't believe they can forgive someone unless they are right in front of them. I know personally that most of the many people I have forgiven in my life were not present when I forgave them, and yet I was able to forgive them anyway.

I have seen probably thousands of my clients forgive those who hurt them without their perpetrators being present. Some were able to forgive all types of abuses and abandonment by those who were supposed to love them, including their spouse.

Forgiveness is possible whether the person is present or not. Since forgiveness is a decision, this decision can be done without their presence. It's just like if the president or governor decides to pardon a prisoner who sits in a jail cell, regardless of their crimes.

The prison isn't taken to the president or governor's office and then pardoned—not at all. The prisoner is in their cell and may possibly be totally unaware that they are going to be pardoned. They might receive a letter demonstrating that they have been pardoned, but they were not present to receive the pardon.

I say this because of the exercises I will share with you shortly. Your spouse can forgive you without being present. This forgiveness can be just as complete in your heart whether he or she is present or not.

The second myth I would like to address is the myth that they must repent for you to forgive them. This is not true at all. It's great if they repent, but it's not necessary for your spouse or anyone else for that matter to repent in order for

you to forgive them.

Forgiveness is your decision alone. When you believe the myth that they must repent to be forgiven, you give your power to forgive over to the person who offended you. Now I don't think that someone who offended you is the greatest choice to give the power of forgiveness to.

You wouldn't want them to decide when you get to exercise forgiveness and free you from the impact of their sin in your life. Remember Christ died for us while we were yet sinners (Rom. 5:8). He didn't wait for humanity to ask forgiveness before He sacrificed himself for the forgiveness of our sins.

No, He exercised His right and power to forgive even though you were not present or able to ask forgiveness 2,000 years ago. So we can forgive without our spouse repenting. Hallelujah, that's great news: We can free ourselves and offer forgiveness at will.

Remember as a Christian you are not only allowed to, but also commanded to forgive. This is great that we can forgive without the other person having control of when and where.

The last myth I want to address is the myth that they must change before I forgive them. I can't tell you how many times I have heard Christian men and women say this. Although I believe it's absolutely great if we all change and become more Christlike, not all spouses will change. Even if you are the greatest, most loving spouse God ever created, that doesn't mean they will choose to change.

Your spouse changing is not a prerequisite for you to forgive or not forgive. Let's get real a minute about some of this self-righteous, moral superiority some of us have while walling ourselves off from our spouse or others. That's just wrong!

Jesus didn't say to me, "Doug, you change; then I will forgive

you.” If he did that, I would be on an endless process of trying to be good enough to be forgiven. No, what Jesus said was, “Doug, I forgive you.” He even knew I would sin again. He even knew I would sin in the same area again. He even knew some sin would be years or decades before I obtain victory over them.

What was he thinking to forgive a sinner like me before I changed? I think He was thinking His forgiveness would eventually penetrate my heart and that my will to sin would become less and less as He became more and more in me. I think this is a much better approach to forgiveness than waiting for my spouse to change.

All I need is a gentle reminder by the Holy Spirit about how much sin Christ has forgiven me of to be more forgiving of my precious but slightly flawed Lisa. You see forgiveness can flow from us by our choice whether they are present or not. What a great force forgiveness can be in your lives and your marriage. {eoa}

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