

FORGIVENESS FACTS

I. Tell-tale signs that I need to forgive someone:

- I often replay in my mind the incident(s) that hurt me
- When I think of a certain person or situation that hurt me, I still get angry
- I still want the person who hurt me to pay for what they did
- Secretly, I wouldn't mind if something bad happened to the person who hurt me
- I often tell others about what this person did to hurt me
- Whenever my offender's name comes up, I automatically think and say something negative about them
- I often find myself having imaginary conversations with the person who hurt me

From "Choosing Forgiveness: Your Journey to Freedom" Nancy Leigh DeMoss

II. False beliefs that keep me locked in unforgiveness:

- 1) **"I have a right to hold a grudge."** Actually, as a Christ-follower you do not have a right to hold a grudge! Ephesians 4:32 says, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." That's the opposite of grudge-holding.
- 2) **"I'm not ready to give up the sense of power I feel over my offender."** If you are walking in unforgiveness, you don't have the power in this situation. Your bitterness has allowed your offender to overpower you... 2 Peter 2:19 says that people are slaves to whatever has mastered them. If you have allowed yourself to be mastered by bitterness and unforgiveness, you are not empowered; you are enslaved.
- 3) **"I'm not ready to give up the moral superiority I feel toward my offender."** That's self-righteousness and pride. The truth is, we all sin. We all offend others. And we all need forgiveness. In that regard we are superior to no one! Jesus addressed that in Matthew 7 (get the log out of your own eye before you try to get the speck out of your neighbor's eye)
- 4) **"By not forgiving, I feel that I am justly punishing my offender."** That's silly. Often your offender doesn't even know you are offended! And if they do know that you are offended, you aren't punishing anyone but yourself with your unforgiveness.
- 5) **"My offender doesn't deserve forgiveness."** Neither do you when you offend someone. It's ironic: when we are the offender we want grace and forgiveness, but when someone else offends us, we want justice and vindication! If you wait on your offender to deserve forgiveness, you'll never forgive them! According to Romans 5:8 God didn't wait on us to deserve forgiveness; He forgave though we *didn't* deserve it.
- 6) **"Forgiving would make me feel vulnerable again."** Not forgiving is much more self-destructive than the vulnerability you may feel if you forgive. Hebrews 12:15 warns us about allowing a "root of bitterness" to go to seed in us; that is far worse than any temporary feeling of vulnerability you might experience in forgiving.
- 7) **"Forgiving would minimize the wrong done to me."** No! Forgiveness is not about minimizing, excusing, or denying the wrong that was done. You must acknowledge the offense in order to begin the forgiveness process...that's where the healing begins!
- 8) **"Forgiving would mean I'd have to be reconciled to my offender."** These are two separate issues. Forgiveness is required for reconciliation, but reconciliation is not required for forgiveness. Reconciliation requires two parties. Forgiveness only requires the participation of the one who was wronged. Sometimes reconciliation is not possible. Your offender might be dead; they might have disappeared and you can't find them; they might be toxic and dangerous; they might refuse to even talk to you. In cases like these you can utilize "the chair" exercise. You sit two chairs across from one another. You sit in one. You pretend that your offender is sitting in the other chair. You tell them everything you need to tell them; everything you would say to them if they were actually sitting there in order to forgive them. Then, you release the offense; you let it go. Another exercise is to write your offender a letter. Release the offense in that letter, then don't send it.
- 9) **"Forgiving would mean I'd have to forget what happened to me."** Remembering isn't the problem, it's the power that painful memory holds over you. The goal isn't to erase the memory of the offense, but rather to release the destructive power that memory has over you. You can absolutely forgive without forgetting. God is all-knowing; it is impossible for Him to forget. Yet in Isaiah 43:25 He chooses not to remember our sins with anger; He has released us from them in Christ; and those of us who are in Christ, He commands us to do the same for those who offend us...

10) ***“I can’t forgive because I don’t feel feelings of forgiveness.”*** Forgiveness isn’t about feelings, it is an act of the will and an act of faith. You choose to do it, even if your emotions haven’t caught up yet.

11) ***“I can’t forgive until my offender acknowledges wrong and apologizes.”*** That’s not what Jesus said to do. He said, “Love your enemies. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you.” They are still our enemies when we do that. They have not confessed their sin. They’ve not asked for forgiveness; they don’t think they need it. We are still to bless them. Blessing is the opposite of holding a grudge, and so blessing is a form of forgiving. When Jesus was dying on the cross, what did He say about the unrepentant people who were crucifying Him without guilt or remorse? “Father, forgive them; They don’t know what they are doing...” What if your offender refuses to acknowledge doing wrong? What if they are not sorry for what they did? What if they are not punished? What if what was wrongly taken from you is not restored? What do you do? By faith, you forgive! You forgive as the Lord forgave YOU...

III. WHAT FORGIVENESS IS NOT:

1. **A feeling** - it is a choice; an act of your will; an act of faith and obedience to God.
2. **Pretending you weren’t hurt** - walking around with a painted-on smile when you are seething inside is not forgiveness. Someone has betrayed your trust, damaged your soul or caused a loss. It is okay to recognize and feel the hurt instigated by another’s behavior.
3. **Condoning what the person did to you** - forgiving releases the wrongdoer from the debt and releases you from bitterness, but it doesn’t condone what was done.
4. **Relieving the person of responsibility** - It’s not unloving to hold someone accountable. Often, accountability is the most loving thing you can do because it could lead to repentance.
5. **Forgetting the offense** – it does not erase the memory of what happened. You will remember, but you will learn to remember without malice and resentment. When you can remember what happened without a knot coming up in your stomach, your blood pressure going up, and anger boiling, you’ll know you have forgiven.
6. **Ignoring the offense** – time does not heal all wounds. Dealing appropriately with the offense and forgiving the offender heals all wounds. Ignoring the offense delays the healing process.
7. **Trusting the offender in the future** - After a betrayal, trust is not an automatic right of the offender. Forgiveness does not mean you immediately allow the person back into your life or heart. If someone is repentant and willing to work on restoring the relationship, you might be able to trust him again eventually. However, sometimes those who wound us shouldn’t be trusted again. If they choose to continue the same negative patterns that caused the offense or hurt in the first place, you don’t have to trust them again.

IV. WHY SHOULD I FORGIVE?

1. **God has commanded it in His Word** (Ephesians 4:32)
2. **God has forgiven you in Christ** (Colossians 3:13)
3. **Forgiveness restores your fellowship with God** (Matthew 5:23-24; 1 Peter 3:7)
4. **Sometimes, forgiveness restores your relationship to that other person** (Romans 12:18 133:1)
5. **Forgiveness releases you from bondage** (2 Peter 2:19)
6. **Forgiveness allows your healing to begin** (Psalm 133)