

R.E.A.C.H

“Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.”

Ephesians 4:31-32

R - Recall The Hurt

1. Find a place that is free from distractions, where it's just you and God, and if desired, a trusted friend. Start by asking God to help you accurately recall the event.
2. Try to remember what you felt in that moment. It's important to name it. Feel what you need to feel in this place. Be as objective as you can, almost viewing the event from the outside looking in, and name what you're feeling—put language to it, in a controlled environment with you & God.
3. Journaling these things down can also be a helpful exercise if you're willing to do that.
4. Be aware of the propensity to spiral into resentment, bitterness, and anger. Negative fixation is only going to be the enemy of forgiveness. Ask the Holy Spirit to go there with you and to help you as you navigate difficult emotions.
5. If it ever feels like it's becoming too much, reach out to a trusted friend, pastor, or therapist/counselor for prayer & help.

E - Empathize With The One That Hurt You

1. Start with prayer. Ask God to help you in this process.
2. Consider creating your own “empty chair” exercise. If that feels like a little too much for you, consider writing a letter from the perspective of the person that hurt you, as you imagine what they might say back to you if you were to ask them about the situation. Invite a friend, pastor, or counselor into this process if needed.
3. If you're able & willing, consider having a conversation with the person that hurt you, asking them what prompted them to act in this way, or asking them to share their own story and experiences.

A - Offer Forgiveness As An Altruistic Gift

1. **Reflect on a time that someone forgave you.** Take time to think back on a time when you didn't deserve the gift of forgiveness, and spend time thinking about the impact that had on you. It could have been recently, or in the distant past, but reflect on it. Talk about the impact that it had on you with someone, or consider journaling about it.
2. If you're having a hard time remembering a time of human forgiveness, think about a time when you felt deeply forgiven by God after sinning against him. Think about the impact it had on you.
3. Offer this same altruistic gift of forgiveness to the person that hurt you. Offer it as a gift for their own help & benefit, not only for your own personal benefit.

C - Commit To Forgive Publicly

1. **Write a letter of forgiveness.** Write down exactly what it is that you are forgiving the individual for —what you are releasing them from. Secondly, write down that you are committing yourself to no longer bring it up to them, to anyone else, or to yourself. Then sign it, date it, and if you're able and willing, give it to the person that hurt you.
2. Make a copy of this letter to keep for yourself, and store it away somewhere. There may come a time where you're triggered back into that painful memory and you're reeling and wondering if you ever actually forgave them in the first place. Come back to the letter and remember the moment that you forgave them, and recommit yourself to forgive them again.
3. If you don't want to commit to writing a letter, bring someone into this step with you and tell them that you are making the decision to forgive, what it is that you are forgiving, and that you're choosing to no longer bring it up to the offender, to others, or to yourself. Ask this friend to hold you accountable and to remind you of this big decision when/if you feel yourself backtracking.

H - Hang On To Forgiveness

1. If ever you find yourself tempted to swing back into the cycle of unforgiveness, remember the process that you've walked through, reach out to a friend, recommit to forgive. Do it out loud. Publicize it again. This is not a one-and-done process.
2. As you continue to commit to the process of ongoing forgiveness, God will take you one layer deeper each time, and you will gradually find healing that you never thought was possible. Keep going. Keep pressing in. Keep forgiving. Don't go through this process alone.