

SCENARIO 2 **The Third Time**

They apologized. They meant it. Nothing changed. Is forgiving the same as trusting again?

THE SHORT ANSWER

No. Forgiveness and trust are two different decisions, and Scripture never collapses them into one.

Forgiveness is about what you carry. Trust is about what you risk. You can complete the first without granting the second — and doing so is not bitterness, it is wisdom.

WHERE THE SCRIPTURE LANDS

Matthew 18:21–22	Peter wants a ceiling. Jesus removes it — seventy times seven. But notice what Jesus does not say: He never says keep handing them the same thing to break.
Luke 17:3–4	Forgive seven times in a day. The repetition is not incidental — for real wounds, forgiveness is renewed, sometimes daily. That is not failure. That is faithfulness.
Proverbs 26:11	A dog returns to his vomit; a fool returns to his folly. Scripture is clear-eyed that some patterns repeat. Recognizing a pattern is not condemning a person.
Matthew 10:16	Wise as serpents, harmless as doves. Jesus expects His people to be discerning, not gullible. Forgiveness never required you to stop noticing.
Romans 12:18	“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you.” Paul acknowledges it is sometimes not possible. You can finish your side without theirs being finished.

THE THREE CHOICES

A	Forgive and tell them again	Faithful to seventy times seven — and sometimes exactly right. But ask whether you are extending grace or avoiding a hard conversation.
B	Forgive and stop telling them	Forgiveness is not access. This is the answer most people have never been given permission to choose, and for many it is the healthy one.
C	Step back from the relationship	Sometimes necessary, especially where there is real harm. Distance is not the same as unforgiveness — but check that the distance is protection, not punishment.

THE DISTINCTION THAT MATTERS

Forgiveness is unconditional. Trust must be rebuilt over time, if it can be at all. You can forgive someone and still not trust them. You can forgive and still keep appropriate distance. These are separate decisions and you do not owe both.

The church has sometimes used “forgive them” to pressure people back into unsafe relationships. That is a misuse of the word. Reconciliation takes two people. Forgiveness takes one.

TAKE IT HOME

1. Where have you been treating forgiving somebody and trusting them again as one decision?
2. Is there someone you have forgiven but are still handing the same thing to break?
3. Is there a distance in your life that started as protection and quietly became punishment?

FOLLOWING CHRIST. MOVING TOGETHER.

John Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church • Southfield, Michigan • Text Pastor anytime tonight