

Free to Forgive

Asking for forgiveness from someone close to you can be a very humbling experience. It can also open up its own set of fears and vulnerabilities. Many people have asked how to forgive without giving the impression that the offense was OK. Others have expressed the fear that if they forgive, they will be hurt again. It is common for people to feel forgiveness might somehow backfire. However, forgiveness was never designed to make us feel worse but to release us from holding grudges that hinder our relationships with others and weigh on our own hearts. Addressing some of our fears may help us to learn how to forgive and lessen our burdens.

1. "If I forgive, do I have to forget?" This question comes from the phrase "forgive and forget". and may be linked to the Biblical concept of God "forgetting" our sins. Although Scripture tells us that God no longer remembers our transgressions once we have been forgiven, this does not mean that they are erased from His memory. If He sees all things past, present and future then nothing escapes His awareness. However, if He does not remember our sins, He is choosing not to bring them up. He is choosing not to remember them and hold them against us. In a similar way, when we forgive we are choosing to not bring up the issue again or harbor resentment against the person we agreed to forgive.
2. "If I forgive someone, does that mean I am saying it wasn't a big deal?" No, you are actually saying the opposite. By forgiving someone, you are acknowledging there was something to forgive in the first place. Forgiving someone recognizes their wrong but gives them the opportunity to show remorse for their behavior and strive to handle similar situations differently the next time.
3. "I don't want to forgive because I am still too upset." Depending on the offense, this response may seem reasonable. Some transgressions are so deep and painful that it may take the offended party some time to be able to forgive. While understandable, this cannot be used as an excuse to hold onto our anger. We must always evaluate the nature of the action against us and weigh whether or not it is worth the damage to our hearts as well as the heart of the offender that bitterness and lack of forgiveness bring. For Christians, we are called to forgive in order to bring reconciliation to our relationships with each other and with God.
4. "I am afraid that if I forgive, I will be hurt again." The truth is you might. As a matter of fact, you probably will. Because we are imperfect creatures, we each are prone to hurting and receiving hurt from others. Often the hurt is unintended. Forgiveness will not necessarily stop that from happening but it may release us from the pain and help save the relationships that are important to us.
5. "Does forgiveness include accepting behavior that is abusive to me or my family?" Never. There is a vast difference between forgiveness and accepting abuse. Forgiveness is designed to free you from tormenting yourself over wrongs done to you and to give grace to the other person so that they do not carry their guilt forever. It is not meant to trap you in a situation that

risks your life. If you find yourself in a relationship that is harmful to you, you need to re-evaluate your connection to that person. If you have a friend who repeatedly speaks harshly or critically to you, then you might want to reconsider whether this is a friendship you want to maintain. However, if a spouse, child, parent or other family member harms you physically or consistently speaks to you in ways that are threatening or harmful, seek the help of someone you trust or find a professional to help you. In such cases, forgiveness does not mean staying where you are. Forgiveness means finding a place of safety first then working on issues related to yourself and your relationship with the abuser.

“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” Colossians 3:13 NIV