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## 12 Steps to Forgiveness

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Forgiving is not forgetting. Forgetting may be a long-term by-product of forgiving, but it is never a means to forgiveness. When God says he will remember our sins no more (Hebrews 10:17), he is not saying "I will forget them." God is omniscient, he cannot forget. Rather, he will never use the past against us. He will remove it as far from us as "the east is from the West" (Psalms 103:12).

Forgiveness does not mean you must tolerate sin. Forgiving someone doesn't mean you must be a doormat to the person's continual sin. It is okay to forgive another's past sins and at the same time, take a stand against future sins.

Forgiveness does not seek revenge or demand repayment for offenses suffered. "You mean I'm just supposed to let them off the hook?" you may argue. Yes, you let them off *your* hook realizing that God does not let them off *His* hook. You may feel like exacting justice, but you are not an impartial judge. God is the just judge who will make everything right in the end. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord."

The victim may say, "I can't forgive these people. You don't know how bad they hurt me." The problem is, they are still hurting you. How do you stop the pain?

**Forgiveness is what sets us free from the past.  
What is to be gained in forgiving is freedom.  
You don't heal in order to forgive. You forgive in order to heal.**

Forgiveness is to set a captive free and then to realize you were the captive. You don't forgive others for their sake, you do it for your sake. Those you need to forgive may never be aware of your choice to let them off your hook.

Following are 12 steps you can use to walk through the process of forgiving others from your heart. Following the steps will help you unchain yourself from the past and get on with your life.

1. Ask the Lord to reveal to your mind the people you need to forgive. Of the hundreds of people who have completed this list in my counseling office, 95% put father and mother as number one and two. Three out of the first four names on most lists are close relatives.
2. Acknowledge the hurt and the hate. State specifically for what you are forgiving them.
3. Understand the significance of the cross. The cross of Christ makes forgiveness legally and morally right. Jesus took upon himself all the sins of the world – including yours and those of the persons who have offended you – and he died "once for all" (Hebrews 10:10) The heart cries, "it isn't fair! Where's the justice?" It is in the cross.
4. Decide you will bear the burden of each person's sin. This means you will not retaliate in the future by using the information about their sin against them.

5. Decide to forgive. Forgiveness is a crisis of the will, a conscious choice to let the other person off the hook and to free yourself from the past. You may not feel like doing it, but it is necessary for your sake. If God tells you to forgive from your heart, be assured he will enable you to do it.
6. Take your list to God and pray the following. "I forgive 'name' for *(list all the offenses and how they made you feel)*." Stay with each person on the list until every remembered pain has been specifically addressed. That includes every sin of commission as well as omission.
7. Destroy the list. You are now free. Do not tell the offenders what you have done. Your need to forgive others is between you and God only! The person you may need to forgive could be dead.
8. Do not expect that your decision to forgive will result in a major change(s) in the other persons. Instead, pray for them so they, too, may find the freedom of forgiveness.
9. Try to understand the people you have forgiven, but don't rationalize their behavior. It could lead to incomplete forgiveness.
10. Expect positive results of forgiveness in you. In time you will be able to think about the people without triggering primary emotions. That doesn't mean you will like those who are abusive. It means you are free from them. Old feelings may try to recycle themselves. When that happens, stop and thank God for his provision and don't pick up those old offenses again. You dealt with it, now let it go.
11. Thank God for the lessons you have learned and the maturity you have gained as a result of the offenses and your decision to forgive the offenders.
12. Be sure to accept your part of the blame for the offenses you suffered. Confess your failure to God and to others and realize that if someone has something against you, you must go to that person and be reconciled. (Matthew 5:23 – 26).

**I am the only person on planet earth who can keep  
me from being the person God created me to be.**

Neil Anderson, "Victory Over the Darkness"