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# Time to Forgive

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## Holding On to Unforgiveness

We need to stop holding onto unforgiveness. Every one of us has pain in our past, and unless we do the difficult work to face it and forgive it, it will continue to fuel our anxiety and depression.

For as long as I can remember, I've either tried to forget what I went through growing up or pretended it did not affect me. But neither of those strategies work. Suppressing pain, pretending it never happened, or minimizing the effects of it will only set you up for more anxiety and depression in your life.

It turns out, my pride was the first thing that needed to come to a necessary ending. I needed to stop holding onto unforgiveness. I needed to stop pretending my past wasn't affecting my present. I needed to stop ignoring it and trying to push it down. I needed to stop trying to outrun it. It was time to admit that I needed healing.

Working through past pain is not easy, but it is possible. One of the most powerful and practical ways to start is to learn the art of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is the starting point for healing past wounds and became one of the main lessons I had to work through. Holding onto unforgiveness requires so much anxiety producing energy. We do it because we think we have the right – and we do – but it causes a lot of anxiety and depression in the process. Imagine how much precious energy we could save if we could learn to let go.

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At this point, you may feel like we've strayed from the path a bit. Isn't this a book about anxiety and depression? Why are we talking about forgiveness? But nothing could be further from the truth.

If you want peace, you have to stop pretending about your past. You have to face it and forgive it. And that's just not my opinion. Scripture says:

**"Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you." (2 Corinthians 13:11).**

According to the Bible, the forgiveness process is the starting point for peace. And although forgiveness might sound horrific right now, I bet peace sounds pretty amazing. And that's what we're after here!

**Forgiveness ushers in peace. And peace ushers out anxiety.**

Forgiveness doesn't come easy. This is something I had to work on every day. Slowly but surely, I began to separate myself from the past hurts in my life, and as I did, my anxiety and depression began losing their grip, and peace began to creep in.

As we walked through these five steps, consider this question. Who is one person who has hurt you in the past? Bring that person to mind and see if you can start to forgive.

### **Step #1: Accept What Happened**

The first thing he told me to do was realize the weight of what had happened. He told me to stop denying the pain and face it. He gave me permission to acknowledge how bad it hurt. Then he told me to think about how much that moment had affected my life since.

**If you want to forgive it, you first have to feel it.**

Do not minimize or deny the pain. Let yourself feel all the emotions that come with it and accept that the pain has negatively affected your life.

### **Step #2: Pray for Them**

Next step is to pray for the person who has wronged you. If reading that sentence makes you want to toss this book across the room, I know the feeling. When we got to step two, I almost walked out of the room. Praying for the very person who wronged you feels counterintuitive. And it is. But then again, so is forgiveness. It may not make sense, but it will change your life. That's why Jesus told us, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Matthew 5:44).

Jesus knew how prone we'd be to hold on to bitterness, so he gave us the key to letting go – prayer. Spend some time praying for them. If you're like me, even on my most spiritual days, praying for someone who's hurt me just feels overwhelming. I can hardly force myself to say anything nice or hopeful about them out loud.

And what I really feel like doing is praying that God would do something to them that, well, is probably going in the opposite direction of what Jesus meant. If you've ever felt that way, don't worry; I'll give you a forgiveness prayer near the end of the chapter to help you get started.

### **Step #3: Let Go**

Humans have an innate desire to repay evil with evil. When someone wrongs us, it's natural to want to harm them back. As we learned in kindergarten, two wrongs don't make a right. Or if you want something more concrete, the Bible says it like this:

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "it is mine to avenge; I will repay" says the Lord. (Romans 12:17 – 19).

This is a big one. The day you let go of needing to repay someone for what they did to you, something will break. Bitterness will lose its grip, and forgiveness will begin to feel possible. For me, I had to start saying it out loud to God, "okay, I'm letting go of my desire to punish them. I'm letting go of my desire to get even." They were more statements of faith than true feelings in the moment – but it was a start.

### **Step #4: Make the Conscious Decision to Forgive**

Once you acknowledge the pain, pray for them, and let go of the desire to repay evil with evil, it's time to make the conscious decision to forgive. Remember, forgiveness does not come naturally to us; we must override the system and decide that we will forgive them for all the hurt and pain they've caused.

For some of your situations, it may not be smart (or safe) to have any direct contact with that person. If that's you, don't reach out to them. You can forgive them from afar. But if it is safe to reach out, there is something powerful about telling them you forgive them, love them, and are finding healing from any pain they caused.

### **Step #5: Work to Reconcile**

This final step is only applicable if they show true repentance for the way they hurt you. Repentance doesn't mean just saying sorry – it means changing your actions. It's one thing to apologize; it's another thing to start taking actions in the right direction. If the person who hurt you is genuinely sorry in seeking to reconcile, be open to reconciling with them.

If there is true change on their part, start by slowly working to build back mutual trust, honor, respect, and understanding. If that goes well, you can gradually work on reestablishing a relationship.

Forgiveness is a complicated topic. Simply going through these five steps once may not do the trick, but if you continue to work through each of those steps each day, you'll begin to let go of bitterness and forgive. As you do, you'll notice wounds from your past starting to heal.

### **The Forgiveness Prayer**

Forgiveness takes a lot of work. It's like a muscle you have to train. One of the best ways to work that muscle is through prayer. As we discussed, God wants to talk to you about everything, so why not speak to him about the bitterness you are still holding onto?

If you've never done anything like that, let me walk you through the process. Start by owning your unforgiveness. God already knows about it anyway; you may as well come clean. Just tell God that you are now aware that you've been holding onto bitterness and that you are ready to repent. Declare that you are ready to get rid of all hurts, anger, and bitterness so that you can finally forgive in Jesus name. Thank God for holding the wounds that the original incident caused and declare that you are giving up the right to judge and punish. When I do this, it sounds like this:

"God, I'm ready to stop pretending like pain in my past is not affecting my present. Please forgive me for holding onto unforgiveness. Today, I declare I am getting rid of this unforgiveness and letting go of this hurt and anger. I completely forgive (name) in Jesus name, and I thank you that you are healing these wounds that were inflicted. I thank you that you are making me whole and setting me free. And I declare that I am giving up my right to judge or punish this person. I'm completely free. It's all in your hands now, in Jesus name, amen!

Your prayer doesn't need to sound exactly like that, but if you want to start getting rid of some anxiety and depression, stop ignoring your past pain. Talk to God about it. Take some grievances that you're holding onto (even if you've been holding on for years) and begin letting go. Start praying about your unforgiveness daily and watch the level of freedom in your life rise.

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