

Walking Through Forgiveness

By Tonya Towner

How do we know that we have truly forgiven those who hurt us and moved on?

This is not the only way to move thru the forgiveness process, but I am sharing a process that I have done that has helped me tremendously. I hope to help you find freedom from your past hurts and to learn how to walk in the freedom that God has for us if we will give those hurts over to God.

#1: Write a burn letter to the person who hurt you, and in the letter, be specific and name the pain, feelings, or hurt caused by that person. The reason we need to be specific is we can't forgive a hurt we won't admit to. Don't minimize your past, excuse away the others person behavior because they have had difficulties in their life, or dismiss your feelings because you think you are not a good Christian if you feel anger, rage or hatred. God can handle our feelings and unless we can be honest with identifying them, we won't be able to move on to healing if we can't admit to how the hurt made us feel.

#2 After you finish writing this letter read it to a safe person you trust (ie; spouse, sponsor, accountability partner, mentor, etc). If no one is available, read it out loud to God and an empty chair. **Warning: Do not mail this letter, but burn it after you are done reading it!!!** This is symbolically a way to show yourself you are letting this past hurt or resentment go.

#3: After you read the letter to your safe person, pray with them, *invite* God into this past hurt and ask him to heal it. This is big part of the healing process. It requires us to humble ourselves and to express our pain to someone else. **In James 5:16 it says "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."**

God's word makes it clear, when we confess our sins to him he forgives us, but when we confess them to others we find healing. We are messed up people saved by the grace of God and since we lack perfection to be Christ in all situations and relationships we need to realize that others will hurt us and we will hurt others until the day we die. So when we can practice steps to deal with our hurts, resentments, and pain, we will find freedom instead of living in a miserable place with our hurting emotions.

#4: This next step was really challenging for me as I started to practice forgiving the fathers I had that abused me growing up. But it is also was the most revealing step that will show us if we are truly on a path to let go and forgive. If you can't do this step, go back to step 1 and start over.

You may not have expressed your pain thoroughly enough or named it well enough if you can't do this step yet.

Next step we need to do is to; **start praying daily for the person who hurt us.** Pray for their salvation, their forgiveness, and for God to bless their lives. At first, this was difficult as it felt counter intuitive to all the resentment and anger I had for so many years, but as I did this daily the pain, the hurt I had felt began to melt away even more. Also, when I took this step I can honestly say that I don't know if two of my dads are even alive so I added praying for their children and grandchildren.

After I did this step for months, my feelings around the past hurt had pretty much disappeared, but I have found that there are times when those hurts or resentments would pop up. When they do, it was so tempting to want to go back and revisit our old grudges and resentments and hang out with those negative emotions again... Jesus knew this would happen and I believe that is why he told us in: **Matthew 18:21-22 "How often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times? No, Jesus said, seventy times seven."** This verse demonstrates how forgiveness is continually. When those old feelings or thought pop up I remind myself that I have forgiven that person and then I go back to this step and start praying blessings for them again.

#5: Prayerfully seek an act of service/love you can do as an offering. When I worked on forgiving my dad's for their emotional and physical abuse my act of service was to put together several large bags of some of clothes and took it down to the Domestic Violence Center for women and donated to help other women who are trying to get away from their abusive partners. It was a super simple and easy act, but it felt good to do something for others who are trying to escape the environment I grew up in. You can give financially or volunteer somewhere.... Whatever you want. God doesn't want to waste our hurts and this step is a great way to allow God to bring good out of our pain and to move us toward helping someone else because of what we have experience.

If you have any questions send me an email to me at tonya@theharborfl.org. If you want to work on your resentments and hurts go join in with Celebrate Recovery ministry and start opening up. You can find a CR ministry by going to the national website and typing in the town you are living in and it will direct you to which churches have the program. The hope and freedom you will find is so worth the journey. I can personally attest to the happiness I have found when I have chosen to forgive and let go and I hope you will want the same.

My last question I would like to address is: Why should we forgive?

#1: WE NEED TO REMEMBER GOD HAS FORGIVEN ME. 1 John 1:9 ***"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."*** When we mess up the first step towards restoration and healing is to go to God and ask him to forgive us

and this verse from 1 John 1:9 says he is faithful when we do this to forgive us and purify us from our mistakes. The second step to forgiving involves others.

#2: **WE NEED TO FORGIVE OTHERS**. We can't let go of our hurts or resentments if we don't extend forgiveness to others. This is what God wants us to do in our relationships with each other. God wants us to live in harmony with each other and that can only happen when we practice forgiving and letting go of our resentments. And yes, we are even to forgive even if the other person cannot or won't admit to what they have done. God makes it clear in **Matthew 6:15** *"But if you do not forgive others their sin, your father will not forgive your sins."* I always have to remind myself that FORGIVENESS IF NOT FOR THEM, IT IS FOR ME!!!! It's for our freedom, and emotional health. Then we need to develop some healthy boundaries, and to speak truth to those who have not been willing to change to hurtful, negative, and damaging ways.

#3: **WE NEED TO FORGIVE OURSELVES**. This one can be really challenging for anyone who is filled with guilt or shame. I know because I have lived with guilt and shame for years for my past and refused to believe that Christ could really forgive me. So I didn't forgive myself or let go of reminding myself regularly what a bad person I was. We really have to watch our thoughts and how they lie to us because this will keep us from believing and following Gods truth. I am so thankful that Gods truth eventually overcame the lies I believed about myself. Two verses that really helped me to understand why I could and should forgive myself were:

Romans 8:1 "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Hebrews 10:17 "Their sins and lawless acts I shall remember no more."

Lastly my quote for forgiving is: **"The first to apologize is the bravest, the first to forgive is the strongest, and the first to let go is the happiest."** (author unknown)