

The Journey of Forgiveness By Sharri Burggraaf

"God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross" (Colossians 2:13-14).

John expressed it this way in his epistle: "If we confess our sins, He who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

God faces our guilt and sin. Then He forgives our guilt and sin. Christ who knew no sin became sin for us and Jesus suffered God's wrath for us.

But then notice this third step. After having faced our guilt and forgiven our guilt, God is now willing to forget our guilt. Paul said in verse 14 that "he set this aside." He has removed our sin from his sight and has forgotten it. So must we! How differently God responds to our guilt and sin when we repent than we do. We may feel such guilt and shame for what we have done that we do not accept the gift of forgiveness. We may allow our minds to be deceived as the consequences of our actions leave lasting reminders of our sin. But if we believe the lie that we are still guilty, a stronghold can develop in our mind that gives Satan a foothold. "When we accepted Christ into our lives and asked for forgiveness of our sins we must realize that we were clothed with His righteousness. God nailed our sins to the cross and sees them no more!

What about forgiving those who have wronged us?

Matt 18:21 *"Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?"*

Peter thought he was quite generous when he offered to forgive seven times. For some it is hard to exercise this commandment which we have received from our Lord. If what the other person has done is not too bad, we may think it is acceptable to obey what Jesus told Peter to do. Yet, when Jesus replied to Peter, He did not include the option of measuring the trespass, nor of limiting our forgiveness.

Matt 18:22 *"Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven".*

One thing that makes what Jesus said seem so terrible is that He did not give the usual prerequisites we expect before we offer forgiveness. He did not say we were to forgive when they had apologized. Nor did Jesus say if they had not done something 'real'

bad we were to forgive them. Jesus said we were to forgive them 490 times in one day. Unforgiveness does not affect the person who did you wrong. Unforgiveness only affects you.

Forgiveness is not an emotion. Christians confuse how they feel with what they should do. Emotions are subjective and should not be part of the decision to forgive people who have wronged you. If you wait until you feel like forgiving someone, that time may never come.

Some people may be the source of many hurts. When is the time to forgive them? The moment we recognize unforgiveness in our heart we must institute the principals that keep God's power flowing in our lives. The greater you were hurt, the greater the necessity of God's supernatural power enabling you to forgive. Do not make the mistake of judging the status of your forgiveness with how you feel toward the person you are to forgive. Forgive by decision instead of feelings. Decision - is derived from Decide - meaning to make a choice - it comes from the Latin word *decidere* meaning to cut; the underlying idea being to cut through a problem.

The status of my decision to forgive someone is not altered by any feelings of hurt or anger I continue to feel toward the person who wronged me. Forgiveness is an action we take independent of their actions. I forgive others to stop the consequences of unforgiveness in my life and because God commands me to forgive.

Mark 11:25-26 "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses"

God declares that we are to forgive others or He will not forgive us. Even though we are justified by faith when we accept Jesus as our Savior we are still going to sin and have thoughts of unforgiveness in our hearts. That means we are to obey God's word that tells us to take our thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ and realize that when I stop forgiving others, God stops forgiving me. As long as we live in this imperfect body in this sin cursed world we are all going to make mistakes and for those mistakes we will need forgiveness and need to forgive. Forgiving is mandatory.

People are going to hurt you, do you wrong, betray you, leave you, lie to you. You may have a spouse who committed adultery in your marriage and you refuse to forgive them. Of course what they did is not fair. Neither is what Jesus sacrificed for us fair for Him. We get to Heaven because Jesus died for our sins and God gives us forgiveness through that trade. His righteousness for your unrighteousness. Yet when we refuse to forgive we stop that process. We refuse His righteousness and choose to stand before Him in our unrighteousness. Only through receiving forgiveness can

we make the exchange. Is what they did to you so important that you'd rather stand before God and face His unforgiveness? That is what you do when you refuse to forgive them. That choice ensures that God cannot forgive you for any future mistakes in your life. What is forgiveness? Forgiveness is a decision we make and an action we take. Once we have done these two things we have forgiven what has been done. We forgive others as God has forgiven us.

Ephesians 4:32 "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

God did not forgive us by feeling, He forgave us for Christ sake. His Son paid the price for our forgiveness. Jesus also paid the price for the forgiveness of the one who has wronged you. Has someone done you so wrong that the Blood of the only begotten Son of God is not precious enough to pay for their wrong?

Many people are handicapped by their lack of understanding of what forgiveness means. Without understanding what it is they cannot know how to forgive. Forgiveness is a two step process and when I do these things I have forgiven what has been done even though the feelings of anger or frustration may still be there for a while.

1. I go to God in prayer and release them for what they have done. I do not have to have the one who did me wrong apologize before I forgive them. What if they never apologize? Many times people retain anger or resentment in their hearts long after the other person has forgotten the incident. Some people no longer remember what they are angry over. Forgiving another person means I release them from owing anything for what they have done. I grant amnesty for their action. Since I do this through prayer they are no longer guilty in Gods' sight for doing me wrong. They owe nothing to me for their sin. Jesus paid for what they did. Any sin they have is then between them and God. They are no longer guilty of doing me wrong.

2. I begin to change the thought process I allow to take place in my mind. We use weapons God has given unto us to battle what satan has been trying to do by using our unforgiveness against us. Satan has been trying to get you to build a wall between you and the source of your power over him. When unforgiveness is allowed in our lives it separates us from God until we deal with it. Sin separates us from God until we repent.

To complete the process of forgiveness I take captive the thoughts that try to dominate my mind when I remember what the other person did to me.

II Corinthians 10:5 "*Casting down imaginations, and every high*

thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;"

When memories try to come back about what they did, I take the memories captive and replace them with the action I have done. I recall going before God in prayer and declaring that I forgive them for what they did. I then give God thanks for freeing me from bitterness and anger over what they did.

This is not a process I do one time. It is not a process I will complete in a day. It may take months before all the pain is gone, but I promise you the pain will leave as you continue to pray and replace the old cycle of rehearsing what they did with the new way of remembering what you chose to do, and the supernatural power of God will bring healing to your emotions and start joy flowing in your life. Your emotions will change. It takes time, but the time will come when you will realize that it no longer hurts when you remember what they did and when you look ahead toward your future with Christ you may be so busy allowing God to work through you that you don't even realize that your journey from unforgiveness to forgiveness has already been completed.