



**“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**

**“And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.”  
Matthew 6:12**

**“Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you”  
Ephesians 4:31-32**

Lisa’s husband left her twenty years ago, and she is still struggling to let go of it. I can’t tell you how many times we have been in the middle of a conversation or visit with each other and all of a sudden it goes right back to it all. It’s as if the calendar has somehow reset and it’s back at that time and she is referring to him as that “jerk” that ruined her life. The sad thing is that she is right; he wasn’t nice, and what he did and how he did it was mean, completely insensitive, and to be blunt, it was rather cruel. I know because he told me that he tried to tell her the same thing many times, to acknowledge his wrongdoing and to seek her apology, but he finally gave up because she doesn’t want to listen to him. Lisa thinks it’s just him trying to be forgiven, and she isn’t about to forgive him. The irony is she thinks that forgiveness will let him off the hook, but sadly she is the one that is still hooked. He remarried and is very happy, and she has been alone, bitter, and holding onto an overpowering grudge for twenty years now.

We often think of forgiveness as something we do for the other person, but forgiveness is really something that we do for ourselves. In so many ways a grudge is a contraction of the heart, a holding us back from positive feelings. When we hold a grudge, it can often stand in the way of love and kindness flowing in and out of our lives.

Some years ago, a thought-provoking article about forgiveness was published in **Psychology Today**. The article was entitled: **“9 Steps to Forgiveness.”** I share this authored approach as some food for thought.

1. Know exactly how you feel about what happened and be able to articulate what about the situation is not OK. Then, tell a trusted couple of people about your experience.
2. Make a commitment to yourself to do what you have to do to feel better.
3. Forgiveness is for you and not for anyone else. Forgiveness does not necessarily mean reconciliation with the person that hurt you or condoning of their action. What you are after is to find peace. Forgiveness can be defined as the “peace and understanding that come from blaming that which has hurt you less, taking the life experience less personally, and changing your grievance story.”

4. Get the right perspective on what is happening. Recognize that your primary distress is coming from the hurt feelings, thoughts and physical upset you are suffering now, not what offended you or hurt you two minutes – or ten years – ago. Forgiveness helps to heal those hurt feelings.
5. At the moment you feel upset, practice a simple stress management technique to soothe your body's flight or fight response.
6. Give up expecting things from other people, or your life, that they do not choose to give you. Recognize the "unenforceable rules" you have for your health or how you or other people must behave. Remind yourself that you can hope for health, love, peace and prosperity and work hard to get them.
7. Put your energy into looking for another way to get your positive goals met rather than through the experience that has hurt you. Instead of mentally replaying your hurt, seek out new ways to get what you want.
8. Remember that a life well-lived is your best revenge. Instead of focusing on your wounded feelings, and thereby giving the person who caused you pain power over you, learn to look for the love, beauty and kindness around you.
9. Amend your grievance story to remind you of the heroic choice to forgive.

As I read this article many years ago I thought that one very important piece was missing; and for me that was Christ; and the undeniable part that our faith in Him plays. To be blunt, in Christ is where I find the strength to take any step when it comes to letting go of the pains and the difficult situations that we sometimes seem to find ourselves in the midst of. To know that I am never alone, as well as the reality that I am a forgiven believer, is often the power that gets me through the muck of those situations where it would be easy to let myself sink. I could not do it, if it weren't for Him.

But what is it for you? Does your ability to forgive begin at the cross and how does your faith enter in the journey? Do you move forward feeling the strength of Christ?

This week I would like to encourage you to think about forgiveness in your life. Is there someone you need to forgive? It could be for a tiny misdeed or an immense hurt. Something that is recent or something that you might be holding onto for years. It could be someone close, someone you haven't talked to in years, or it could even be you. Maybe now is the right time to do the work that might be needed; in an effort to move forward and to breathe a little easier. Maybe now is the time to take it to your Savior. Maybe today is a great day to take that first step with Christ, knowing that He strengthens you for every step ahead no matter how difficult it may be.

**Prayer:**

**Gracious God help me through your love and grace to find the power to forgive. Give me the strength to let go of all ill-will as well as the strength to forgive myself of my own failings and sins; knowing that you have already forgiven me.**

**Lord, free me of all anger, bitterness, and hate; giving me the ability, as well as the patience and the strength, to let go of all that keeps me bound.**

**Lord help me to move forward in your love and peace.**

**Amen**