

The following are attempts at answers to the questions that were sent to me in response to me asking on Facebook about people's questions and struggles regarding forgiveness. I preached on this subject yesterday at True Life. It will be on our web page (thetruelifechurch.com, Listen Online section, Building Blocks of Healthy Relationships series) some time the early part of this week. Forgiveness happens when there is an injury or wrong, a debt resulting from the injury, and we choose to cancel the debt. It is deciding to not hold what was done against the person any more. I will attempt to make practical application of this principal in answering these questions. In attempting to answer them, however, I fully recognize that questions about forgiveness are generally born out of difficult situations and general answers may be insufficient for particular situations. One other thing to remember in regard to forgiveness is that one person can choose to forgive, but it takes two people working together to reconcile a relationship.

Forgiveness doesn't preclude confrontation.

1. Where does discernment factor into the relationship and what do we do when it is ongoing with someone vindictive? These are two different questions from two different people, but I think they fit together. I think that one of the tougher situations in which to forgive is when the person keeps doing the thing that is hurting us. Up front, we obviously need to be discerning before getting into various types of relationships, but we can certainly be fooled. If it is a relationship that we do not have to be in or that we can righteously depart from, at some point we may have to exit the relationship or at the least, set up some boundaries. Being a forgiving person does not mean being other people's piñata or doormat. If someone is hurting us, we need to lovingly but firmly confront that person. In some cases, a third party will be needed to help in working through the difficulties.

2. Does reconciliation always have to happen for there to be forgiveness? You cannot have reconciliation without forgiveness, but you can have forgiveness without reconciliation. It takes one to forgive but two to reconcile. We can choose to forgive the other person independent of what they do, but both parties must be willing to make things right and work on things for there to be reconciliation. Romans 12:18 says, "If it is possible, **as much as depends on you**, live peaceably with all men." We are responsible for what we do, and the other person is responsible for her actions. In most cases, the goal should be reconciliation, but if we forgive and try to reconcile the relationship, we are not guilty if the other party is unwilling to do what is necessary for healing and reconciliation to transpire. There are some cases in which reconciliation is not possible or wise. Examples would include forgiving someone who is no longer alive, forgiving someone that you no longer have any contact with and cannot locate, someone who has

committed a crime against you (in some cases, at least), someone who is not safe to be around, someone who will not be honest, and in some cases, when someone will not stop the behavior causing the problem.

3. What about offenses where another person may not realize they had caused an injury or hurt? God's command to forgive is still the same. As far as dealing with it practically, I think we have to decide if this is something we can deal with inside of ourselves, between us and the Lord, and get over it. If we cannot do that, we need to talk to the other person about it and let them know that they hurt us, we have forgiven them, but we needed to talk about it in order to move on in the relationship.

4. How do forgiveness and grief go together? They are somewhat connected and somewhat separate at the same time. They are connected in the sense that grief is a natural, and often unavoidable, response to being hurt and wronged. They are separate in the sense that forgiveness is a choice that is a willful response to a wrong while grief is the feelings and emotions related to the offense. They are also connected in the sense that the way to ultimately change our feelings is by choosing to forgive and letting go of the anger. This is a certainly a process. We may have to reiterate the choice to forgive many times. We can choose to forgive regardless of how we feel.

5. How do you ever get over the trust issue? How do you forgive completely and not be leery of the future intentions of the person? I feel that I may not be forgiving completely if I am still remembering the deed and waiting for it to happen again?

Forgiveness is unconditional while trust is conditional. Forgiveness is graciously granted while trust should be earned. You can choose in a moment to forgive someone, but it will take time, work, and counseling in some cases for trust to be restored. Forgiveness is about the past, but trust is about the future. Remember that forgiveness is not holding what the person did against them any more so we must try to put what they did behind us and not just be waiting for it to happen again. However, it is wise to evaluate how much we can trust them going forward. Some factors to consider include:

- Was the wrongdoing confessed or discovered?
- Is it a pattern or an unusual occurrence?
- Is he open and honest?
- Does she give evidence of taking steps to make changes?
- Does he seem genuinely grieved about hurting me?

6. When I forgive, then remember again at a later time, with pain, the offense, does it mean that I have not forgiven? I would say that it means you are human. When that happens, we need to repeat the steps we took when originally forgiving the person, other than there is not a need to talk to the person again. There could be cases where it means

that we have not really forgiven, but I think it is usually the process of dealing with our emotions. With some things, we may have to reaffirm our decision to leave it in the past several times.

7. When you forgive someone of a wrong, are they supposed to act like it never happened and you have no right to be upset any longer, no consequences? This is a difficult question because someone could seek to manipulate and take advantage of our graciousness in forgiving. That ends up pertaining to the trust issue instead of the forgiveness issue though. Remember that when we forgive we are taking them off of our hook and canceling the debt they owe us. We can't really be forgiving and demanding consequences at the same time.

8. Why do other people want to be forgiven but they don't want to forgive you if you do the slightest thing to them? How do you handle that situation? It is sinful human nature to act in that manner. I would refer back to question #1 for the answer to this question. This is not really an issue about us forgiving, but a situation where we will need to speak the truth in love to them. We certainly should not base whether or not we forgive or how we treat others on how they act.