

RESTORATION THROUGH FORGIVENESS

Lesson Objective:

Recognize how forgiveness can restore relationships

FORGIVENESS ADDRESSES ISSUES FROM THE PAST

When we forgive someone for hurting us, we can limit, or end, the emotional pain associated with the original injury. Healing from past pain requires a change of thinking in the present. We are not able to alter the past, however, we are able to change what we think and believe about ourselves and those in the world around us. The fact that the injury occurred remains, but the sting is gone. In this worksheet, discover the power of forgiveness and the problem with not forgiving someone.

WRITING YOUR STORY

Some people seem to have little trouble forgiving others. Whereas, others seem to harbor resentment and bitterness and look for ways to get even. Looking back at your life, examine how you have been forgiving or unforgiving. Give specific examples where you have been hurt and have been able to let it go, overlook it, or forgive it. Also list times when you struggled with forgiveness. Do you have one or two people that are more difficult to forgive than others?

REFUSING TO FORGIVE

Perhaps you have met someone who has grown old and bitter. They harbor resentment and have carried it for years. When they speak, they refer frequently to old injuries and do so with disgust. With a sour attitude, they feel very justified holding onto the grudge. They have been injured and want revenge.

RESTORATION THROUGH FORGIVENESS

STUMBLING BLOCKS TO FORGIVING OTHERS

Forgiveness is hard because it pulls against our sense of justice. Consider the following false beliefs and misperceptions that make forgiving others difficult.

1. Forgiving would lead them to believe what they did was all right!

Some believe that forgiving a person the wrong they did will be seen as condoning the behavior. When you forgive someone, you are not excusing their actions or minimizing the harm to you. Forgiveness is tearing up a debt owed to you, not pretending it was not there. The action against you was wrong, and even when you forgive, it does not suddenly become right.

2. If I forgive, they'll do it again!

Again, forgiving someone is not permission for them to continue hurting you. Holding on to resentment and continuing to be bitter and unforgiving is not a good protection plan against future harm. Forgive the past offense, then draw a boundary and set limits to keep yourself safe in the future.

3. I won't forgive until they hurt as much as I've been hurt!

Many people are reluctant to forgive because they have not seen the other person in enough agony; they want revenge for offenses suffered. They are unwilling to forgive another person until that person has experienced similar kinds of hurt, betrayal, and disappointment. When we forgive, we give up our right to seek revenge. We stop looking forward to someone else's future painful experiences to pay for our painful past experiences.

4. I just can't do it!

Forgiveness is a difficult process for many people; it often takes time and sometimes requires changes in our thinking. However, we do possess the ability to forgive. It is an act of the will. We can choose and decide to forgive. What we often lack is not the ability to forgive, but the will to do so. We do not want to, even though we can. When we walk through the forgiveness process, a big part of it is to be willing.

5. They didn't apologize, so I won't forgive them!

Our part of the equation is to forgive the other person for their actions against us. Forgiveness is not contingent on their attitude or willingness to apologize. Frequently, when we seek an apology, things go terribly wrong. It seems to lead to another argument. You can make the decision to forgive the other person without even getting them involved. Forgiveness is something you can do between you and God. You do not need to involve the other person; it is an action of your heart.

6. They didn't admit they were wrong!

Many people who have hurt you along the way are not going to take responsibility for their actions. You will not hear them admit to their side of the situation. Also, it is common to have been wounded by someone with whom we no longer have contact. They may have moved away or are no longer living. We can still forgive them and their actions, even though they have not apologized, have not admitted they were wrong, and are not available.

RESTORATION THROUGH FORGIVENESS

CONSEQUENCES LINGER

When you forgive someone, it may almost immediately decrease the emotional pain and suffering you are experiencing. It does not, however, change the circumstances of the past. Imagine someone, out of negligence and carelessness, physically injured you in the past and it caused ongoing knee problems. Even when you forgive the person for the injury and pain it has caused you, the knee pain may still continue. The past injury and lingering consequences do not suddenly go away, but the forgiveness process can change the way you think and feel about the other person. The bitterness and hatred disappear. Peace can be restored, and an ongoing relationship is again possible.

APPLYING THE LESSON

1. Write a list of those who have offended you. For each person on your list, consider what they did and how their actions made you feel. Additionally, ask yourself how it changed you, such as made you feel inferior, insecure, or socially reserved, or maybe you felt like “I was inadequate, rejected, and incompetent.” Be careful not to explain away their inappropriate actions, make excuses for them, or blame yourself. Label the hurtful offenses as wrong, then choose to forgive each person for the wrong they did.

2. Add yourself to the list. You may feel like you have been forgiven by God and other people, but you cannot forgive yourself. Consider getting in line with what God has already done. Since He found a way to forgive you, choose to forgive yourself as well. No one has a higher standard than God.

3. Positive feelings will follow in time. Freeing yourself from the past is the critical issue right now. As you forgive others for hurting you, in reality, you are releasing your right to seek revenge. You are choosing to not hold on to bitterness and anger. In addition, you may want to ask God to heal your damaged emotions.

RESTORATION THROUGH FORGIVENESS

I choose to forgive (name) for (actions or attitudes) which caused or led to (consequences, losses, feelings). Remember, when you forgive, you are forgiving the person for what they did and also for how it affected you.

RESTORING RELATIONSHIPS

Forgiveness is the single most restorative and beneficial element in relational reconciliation and personal well-being. By changing the way you think, you reduce bitterness and anger, and radically decrease your emotional distress. Toxic interactions caused by unforgiveness are eliminated. Tension, suffering, and stress are replaced by peace, growth, and hope.