



## Dealing with the Sins of Others: How to Forgive

Message Notes, February 26, 2017

Forgiveness is one of the essential aspects of wholeness. Last week we explored why we need to forgive. This week we will examine what forgiveness really is and how to forgive.

We can explore principles and tenets of forgiveness, but nothing captures it more powerfully than a real-life testimony like the one given us by the people of Mother Emanuel Church (Charleston, South Carolina), who demonstrated the power of the gospel as they extended genuine forgiveness to Dylan Roof, who murdered nine of their members in the midst of a study gathering to which he had been warmly welcomed.

It helps us grasp the true scope of forgiveness if we first discuss what it is not:

- **Forgiveness is not forgetting.** Erasing the offense and hurt from memory is not even possible. In the Bible, God's "forgetting" actually means He does not "bring the power of the past into the present." In forgiveness, He does not "hold our past sins against us."
- **It is not overlooking or excusing the offense.** This is denial
- **It is not rationalizing or justifying the offense.** This is another form of denial. There is value in understanding the brokenness in another that is behind their sin. This may be a help to us in the process of forgiving, but many times, sin just doesn't make sense at all.
- **It is not taking the blame.** There is a place, with hurtful conflicts, to examine ourselves for any part we may have played, but forgiveness does not mean we absorb the blame for offenses against us.

### How to Forgive

1. **Face the wrong.** How is Joseph an example of forgiveness that acknowledged the wrong done? See Genesis 50:19-21.
2. **Feel the pain.** We don't want to feel pain. We will often harden our hearts to avoid pain – "I am not going to let you hurt me!" But this is not forgiveness, and this does not lead to wholeness or freedom. We must bring our hurt, all of it, raw and painful, to the Lord and allow Him to heal our wounded hearts.
3. **Confess our unforgiveness and judgment.** (If we have been holding the offense and harboring resentment.)
4. **Release the offender.** The Greek word for forgive means "to set free" from a debt owed. Keith used the "chain" illustration to show how those we refuse to forgive are bound to us. They have power in our lives – our thoughts, our emotions, our relating with others. Consider these main points and discuss if you are reading this as part of a group:
  - I can't put the chain on the offender. They have no power to undo what they have done.
  - I must take the chain to myself and release the offender. I bear the cost of the offense.
  - I must take this chain – the offense, the pain, the cost, all of it to the Cross.
  - God has dealt with *all* sin at the cross. He is judge. He is Redeemer. Only here can I find freedom and healing. Also, it is here that my offender may repent and find redemption.
  - I will let God deal with the sin of my offender.



5. **Relinquish the final results.** Forgiveness does not inherently mean reconciliation.
  - Reconciliation may happen, but it may not.
  - The other person may be dead, out of “reach,” or they may not want reconciliation.
  - You may not want reconciliation. Trust and forgiveness are not the same thing. Trust is not simply given; it must be earned. Some people are toxic or destructive and are not safe. To set good boundaries is healthy sometimes. (This principle is complex in marriage. We are not suggesting divorce as a healthy way to “set boundaries.”)
  - How is David’s conflictual “relationship” with Saul a good model of forgiveness with boundaries? See 1 Samuel 24:18-22, Saul’s response to David’s mercy and forgiveness; did they get back together? And 1 Samuel 26:21-25, where Saul resumed his efforts to hunt and kill David, and David once again extended grace. How did Saul respond? Did David trust him now?

### **The Process of Forgiveness**

1. It begins with an act of the will in obedience to Christ.
2. It continues over time as I may need, on a regular basis, to die to self and release my offender to God.
3. It reaches a place of relative completion when:
  - I no longer view the offense as a debt.
  - I no longer need to tell the story.
4. It may reach a place of reconciliation with the offender (but again, not necessarily).
  - God is the God of justice – those who have wounded us will either come to the cross in repentance and be redeemed or they will never repent in this life and will thus face God’s final judgment.

### **Reflection Questions**

1. Is anything out of this message confusing to you?
2. What has most stirred your heart out of this message?
3. If you are in a struggling process to forgive, which of the five aspects of “how to forgive” is most pertinent? How does this help you?
4. Are you in a confusing forgiveness situation that involves broken trust and the need for boundaries? Maybe it would be helpful to share this in your group for input and prayer.