

Forgiveness

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Non-Christians struggle with the idea of forgiveness, but for us it is mandatory. Still, we are only human so I have some advice about forgiveness.

Forgiveness is “letting go of resentment.” This does not mean you have to like the person who hurt you or continue to let that person persecute you. Actually, you don’t even have to be around people who hurt you if you don’t want to.

For years, I attended a church where another member absolutely hated me. I loved to talk about my involvement in 12-step programs and she was so narrow-minded that she spoke up against me. “I am tired of hearing about those steps,” she used to say. One day, she berated me at a committee meeting and I quietly left. I went home and wrote a letter to the pastor tending my resignation on the committee. I ended the letter with the lines, “You know, Christ asks us to love our neighbors and our enemies alike, but some people you just have to love from a distance.”

Forgiveness is not a constant state. It ebbs and flows like the tide. Sometimes you feel at peace regarding those who hurt you, and other times you feel the anger all over again. But this doesn’t mean you have not progressed. I’ve found that, as long as I ask God for the strength to release my resentment, or announce that I am going to “turn it over to God,” the anger comes less and less often.

Differentiate between anger and resentment. We all get angry from time to time. But when we purposely revisit our anger and let it linger we are talking about resentment. It is the resentment that is the worse offender.

Please note, despite my own personal feelings about the value of forgiveness as a therapeutic and healing device, and the right moral choice for me, I feel strongly that it is a very personal choice and that no one should be told to forgive when they’re not ready. They shouldn’t be shamed by others, and they should not shame themselves. They should just push themselves gently in the right direction toward forgiveness.

How Has Forgiveness Changed My Life?

Years ago, I wrote my mother a letter offering her my forgiveness. When she received the letter she cried (since I had asked her not to call me, my sister phoned to tell me). It was almost six months later that my mother went into the hospital for emergency surgery. As I sat by her bed in the recovery room she reached out and took my hand. Tears started streaming down her face and she said, “Susie, you will never know how much your letter meant to me. I love you so much.” I started crying too and we just sat there in silence the wounds healing and the peace settling into our hearts.

This was the beginning of my life-long attempt to let go of the past and forgive all the people who had harmed me. After mom, everyone else was a piece of cake. Interestingly enough, after forgiving my mom for her shortcomings, I also found it easier to forgive myself for the mistakes I had made with my own children.

