



*Moving Toward
Forgiveness*

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Moving Toward Forgiveness: Three Gatherings for Reflection

Gathering 1: The 'Case' for Forgiveness

- What makes it important to discuss?
- Psychological perspective
- Spiritual Guidance

Gathering 2: Forgiving others

- Receiving God's forgiveness
- Reflecting on a process of forgiving
- Accounts and recollections of others

Gathering 3: Seeking forgiveness; barriers to forgiving

- How, when, should we seek forgiveness?
- Identifying possible barriers to forgiving and seeking forgiveness
- Are some things unforgiveable?
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Gathering 2: Summary

- **The process of forgiving others is linked to our accepting our own need for forgiveness from God and others, and our ability to forgive ourselves;**
- **A helpful metaphor from author Adam Hamilton describes the varying degrees of impact of hurts received from others;**
- **Pebbles are described as small hurts, irritations and perceived slights of attention that may be less complicated to forgive;**
- **Stones are described as more serious offenses that may crat a wall between the offender and the other;**
- **Boulders are wounds inflicted by others that are so deep they cannot be forgiven quickly.**



Seeking Forgiveness

- **When we have offended and are seeking forgiveness**, we go through a potentially lengthy and challenging process:
 - Effort to see the person we offended as wounded, as needing assistance to overcome the hurt;
 - We (the offender) see the worth of the offended, have empathy for them and want to reach out to make things right.
 - Such overtures may not be welcome as the offended one is not ready to forgive.

Seeking Forgiveness

- Take home message is the need to **attempt** to understand where the other person is in the process of forgiving;
- Both the offender (who is seeking forgiveness) and the offended (hurt, wounded) may be in very different developmental places in respective healing journeys.
- Attempting to identify where each of you is in the process of moving forward is highly important so that each of you can be patient with the other and with yourself.

Seeking Forgiveness

- Seeking forgiveness is intended to bring about reconciliation.
- Reconciliation, coming together in mutual trust, usually occurs when seeking forgiveness and forgiving both have first been accomplished.
- Reconciliation can be scary. Can I trust the other person again?

Barriers that Prevent Seeking Forgiveness

- Beliefs that seeking forgiveness appears self-serving
 - That the other may think that you are seeking personal gain by apologizing, seeking forgiveness.
- Beliefs that one is not culpable
 - Impossible to be moved to seek forgiveness from another if we don't perceive that we have done anything for which we need to/want to be forgiven.

Barriers that Prevent 'Victims' from Extending Forgiveness

Belief that forgiveness sacrifices justice:

-If the offended believes that forgiveness makes all things equal in terms of the offense, then forgiveness will be difficult;

Belief that forgiveness condones the transgressor's behavior;

Belief that forgiveness makes the victim appear weak;

Belief that forgiveness make the victim appear morally superior.

Forgiving and Seeking Forgiveness: Trust is Crucial

- To help you answer the trust questions when you are the seeking forgiveness or you are the one forgiving, attempt to determine the other's situation related to:
- Remorse, repentance, and repair
 - **Remorse** is inner sorrow. Do you feel genuine sorrow for the offence? Is the other sorry for what happened?
 - **Repentance** is the language used to express the remorse. As one seeking forgiveness, have you thought carefully about what the actual offense is? Has there been an apology (not necessary for forgiveness, but often necessary for deep reconciliation).
 - **Repair** is making amends within reason; for some actions there is no repair (for example, there is no recompense for a parent whose child is murdered). Often the most convincing repair involves a change in behavior/actions.

Seeking Forgiveness and Forgiving

- As we navigate these two very sensitive behaviors, seeking forgiveness and forgiving, it is essential to be mindful that seeking forgiveness, **genuine forgiving and reconciliation are between and among equals in which all have inherent worth and this is seen and acknowledged.**

Asking for Forgiveness: Some Steps

- Think about what you did to upset the person;
- Attempt to understand yourself....what may have led to what you did/said;
- Empathize with the person that you hurt;
- Remember that a mistake does not make you a bad person;
- Consider writing an apology if it would be helpful;
- Apologize to the person you have hurt/wronged;
- Show them you've changed;
- Ask for forgiveness;
- Expect little but hope for the best;
- Be understanding and patient;



Obstacles to Forgiveness

- The pain is new and deep;
- We are led by strong feelings of anger, jealousy or resentment;
- We seek revenge (openly or privately);
- Our significant others (if involved) are not inclined to forgive;
- We find it easier to cut people out of our lives;
- Our pride;
- We cannot see the humanity of the other, only how they wounded us;
- We don't know how to start a process of forgiveness;
- We do not have an awareness of having received God's forgiveness.



Obstacles to Forgiveness

- We mistakenly think that forgiveness means restoration of an unhealthy relationship;
- We have not searched for or found meaning in the injury/loss;
- We have not counted the cost of non-forgiveness;
- We have not realized the effect of non-forgiveness on others who are important to us;
- We fear that our forgiveness will be rejected or that we will be shamed;
- We fear repeated injury by the wounding person;
- We have strong memories or flashbacks of the injury.

What are the Benefits to Forgiveness?

- Work on the consequences of forgiveness overwhelmingly suggest that forgiveness yields a number of psychological and physiological benefits, and benefits both the victims and the transgressors.
 - Forgiveness is part of the **psychological healing** process following a transgression;
 - It can play an important role in reducing psychological distress, anxiety, anger, and grief that transgressions can cause.
 - Forgiveness results in enhanced levels of psychological well-being (greater life satisfaction, positive affect, and self-esteem, especially in high commitment relationships (e.g., marriage).

What are the Benefits to Forgiveness

- Forgiveness yields **physiological benefits** for the victim of a transgression;
- Adverse reactions to interpersonal transgressions may lead to poor health outcomes both to the offender and the offended by way of adding stress to the sympathetic nervous and immune systems.
- Forgiveness is associated with lowered physiological stress responses and superior health outcomes.

Sarah
Montana TEDx
Talk on her
Process of
Forgiving



https://www.ted.com/talks/sarah_montana_the_real_risk_of_forgiveness_and_why_it_s_worth_it/transcript?language=en

Reflecting on Forgiveness

- For you, is forgiveness:
 - A human necessity?
 - A spiritual requirement ('forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors')?
 - A practical means of releasing uncomfortable feelings, including guilt?
- What role does God's forgiveness of you have in your efforts to forgive?
- Is forgiveness possible without consequences?
- What role does confronting the offender have in your understanding of forgiveness?
- Thinking of a time you forgave someone for a medium size 'stone' wound, what enabled you to forgive?

Reflecting on Forgiveness

- While boulders have an unmistakable permanence about them, boulder-size wounds have a way of appearing and reappearing even after you've worked and prayed to forgive the person.
 - Are some wounds so deep that it is beyond us to forgive?
 - Is it possible that, sometimes, we forgive, in steps stages levels?

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