

# *Forgiveness*

By Karen M Gray

There will be times in all our lives when we are wounded and need to forgive. But how do we forgive those who have inflicted us with horrendous pain? Is it even possible? The answer is a resounding, "Yes!" I can personally attest to the grace of God that enabled me to supernaturally forgive unconditionally. This was a *special* grace that helped me to walk through a particularly hurtful period of time. However, there were still other hurts from other areas of hurt that I was left to work through in order to be truly free. This is where prayer, Holy Spirit teaching, Bible study, and other people's research were invaluable for me, and it would be remiss of me not to share those findings. The following are excerpts from my first book, [\*Save Your Marriage\*](#). I believe these findings will be of value to you on your own journey towards forgiveness, wholeness and freedom.

## **The Forgiveness Definition:**

- As developed by Dr. Robert Enright, the founder of the International Forgiveness Institute

*"When unjustly hurt by another, we forgive when we overcome the resentment toward the offender, not by denying our right to the resentment, but instead by trying to offer the wrongdoer compassion, benevolence, and love; as we give these, we as forgivers realise that the offender does not necessarily have a right to such gifts." <sup>1</sup>*

Forgiveness has also been described as a gift you give yourself in order to release your burden of anger and pain, and also to release yourself from living in the past. It allows both forgiver and offender the freedom to move on and live in peace.

Although these things have been found to be true for the most part, these definitions remain secular (that is, they have not been outlined in the Bible). However, if you cannot come to the place of forgiving from your heart (you sincerely want to forgive and are determined to stand in your spiritual authority to do so), I have included the following successful methods that can help you overcome the negative emotions with which you are struggling - those paralysing emotions that you feel are preventing you from giving your forgiveness freely.

Unfortunately emotions may not be the only struggle you are having while forgiving your spouse. There may be plethora of other arguments as to why you shouldn't forgive, despite the Biblical command to do so. Most of these arguments, however, revolve around common myths concerning forgiveness, and as such need to be addressed outright:

- Forgiveness is not reconciliation.
- Forgiveness does not deny responsibility, condone or excuse the behaviour of the offender, nor does stop the pursuit of justice.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Robert Enright, *"Forgiveness is a Choice: A Step-by-Step Process for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope"* Published by the American Psychology Association. 2008. ISBN: 978-1-55798-757-0

- Forgiving does not invalidate the fact that the victim has been hurt. The hurt may not even be gone when you're ready to forgive. Damage and wounds take time to repair.
- It does not mean that the victim will forget. Rather, once the negative emotions have been released, the victim is free to revisit the past without being harmed again by it.

For the person who has been wronged and who has struggled to forgive, forgiveness seems almost impossible. However, freedom from unforgiveness, or the emotional fallout (if you feel you have already forgiven), is possible especially when you know how. That doesn't mean the road to healing is an easy one, but the consequences of unforgiveness are far worse than the effort required to forgive.

### **Unforgiveness Can Make You Sick.**

The medical link between unforgiveness and disease has been well researched and documented, and these results can be found in many books and papers that have been recently published. Below I have included just a few people's conclusions to such research:

The latest research (Barbara Elliott 2011<sup>2</sup>) has yielded this conclusion:

*"Over an extended period of time, unforgiveness can be experienced as negative emotions that result in a cascade of biological and brain responses. Findings about the body's hormone response to unforgiveness reveal that unforgiveness is reflected in specific cortisol levels, adrenaline production and cytokine balance (Worthington et al 2005) with patterns that parallel those reported in people living with high stress. These hormone patterns are known to compromise the immune system (Berry and Worthington 2001; Seybold et al. 2001) with the long-term consequence of leading to several identified chronic illnesses (Danese et al 2007)."*

Dr Michael Barry - author of "The Forgiveness Project"<sup>3</sup> made this comment:

*"Harbouring these negative emotions, this anger and hatred, creates a state of chronic anxiety. Chronic anxiety very predictably produces adrenalin and cortisol, which in turn deplete the production of natural killer cells which are your body's foot-soldiers in the fight against cancer."*

Dr. David Servan-Schrieber, MD, AntiCancer stated:

*"Inwardly, the emotional wound affects deep vital processes. A psychological wound sets off mechanisms of the stress response (i.e. release of cortisol & adrenaline - including a slowdown in the immune system...) which contributes to growth and spread of cancer."*

There is no denying the facts that unforgiveness causes serious illness in the body, but more importantly, unforgiveness causes spiritual illness as well. If we do not forgive, not only is our relationship with our spouse in jeopardy, but so is our relationship with God.

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<sup>2</sup> By Barbara Elliott, "Forgiveness Therapy: A Clinical Intervention for Chronic Disease." 2011. Journal of Religion and Health, 50(2), 240-247

<sup>3</sup> Dr Michael S. Barry, "The Forgiveness Project" Published by Kregel Publications 2011

*"For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."*  
- Matthew 6:14-15 NIV

Again in Mark's gospel:

*"And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."* - Mark 11:25 NIV

Finally, as previously mentioned, in the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, we find the outcome of the wicked servant's unforgiveness.

*"In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."* - Matthew 18:34-35 NIV

Another aspect of unforgiveness is the way it changes a person's spirit. You may find yourself becoming angry and upset with your spouse at a moment's notice, and begin unloading your dissatisfaction, not just with regard to the current circumstances but other past hurtful events as well. It won't be planned - it will just happen. Angry accusatory outbursts are usually a subconscious way of trying to let your spouse know how hurtful he/she has been to you. You want your spouse to take responsibility for his/her actions, apologise, assure you that it will never happen again, and start to treat you with love and respect. Unfortunately, that's not what comes across to your spouse and, if left unchecked, you run the risk of becoming the transgressor: that is, you begin to hurt your spouse, instead! This can only become worse with time if you do not forgive.

An unforgiving person can manifest a judgemental spirit that is harsh and demanding. He/she will develop high expectations of self and others, and become critical, even bitter, when these impossible expectations are not met. Another manifestation of unforgiveness is the development of an unreasonable fear, anxiety or compulsion. These behavioural patterns are often birthed in hurtful past events, and continue to surface whenever the possibility of a recurring event arises. (For example: A person who has suffered serious or on-going rejection may either retreat within him/herself, and through mistrust and a negative outlook, find it difficult to forge new relationships, or he/she may have a tendency to "show-off" or "be larger than life" in an attempt to gain recognition and acceptance. The latter also being harshly critical of others who are more talented or whose gifts outshine his/her own. Unfortunately, this behaviour is not generally applauded, and people tend to criticise and avoid association with (i.e. reject) those displaying it, which only exacerbates the rejection problem further!)

From spiritual, psychological and physical perspectives, unforgiveness leads to poor health and may eventually lead to death. Conversely, the benefits of forgiveness far out-weigh the momentary discomfort connected with giving it. (Yes, there will be some discomfort.) Even if you choose not to remain together, you can be free from the pain of hurtful events.

If you are trying to re-forgo relationships that have seriously been damaged, then rebuilding whilst harbouring unforgiveness is like building with termites in wooden foundations. It will just keep eating away at everything you are trying so hard to build, until your house finally collapses under the strain. The burden of unforgiveness will consume your life until it changes you into someone you'd rather not be, and poisons the potential for a great relationship.

Unforgiveness also leads to bitterness, which bleeds into other relationships (with family members, friends, work associates, etc., and even your relationship with God) poisoning them as well. Any way you look at it, choosing not to forgive is a really bad choice with equally bad consequences for your body, soul and spirit.

## **Biblical Forgiveness**

There is, of course, the Biblical importance of forgiveness: for the Christian, forgiveness is not merely an option - it was commanded, and as much as seventy times seven. Further to this, at the end of the parable of the unforgiving servant, Jesus makes this statement:

*"And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."* - Matthew 18:35-35 NKJV

The reference to the "torturers" (the Greek word actually does mean "torturers", not "jailers" as a few Bible versions have translated) is not referring to hell and damnation after we die, as some would suppose. The unforgiving servant had himself, already been forgiven by God, (or if you follow the analogy through - saved by grace, washed clean and made fully righteous). Jesus's point here concerns God's sons and daughters who refuse to obey the command to forgive just as they have been forgiven. We don't like to talk about the discipline and chastisement of God but it is real none the less, for we are even told that the Father disciplines those whom He loves. (Hebrews 12:5b-6)

To what then does this term "torturer" refer? Remember what happened to King Saul when God chastised him: God left him at the mercy of tormenting spirits to send a message to King Saul to change his attitude, (1 Samuel 18:7-10.) The torturers were tormenting spirits. The meaning of the parable is, therefore, obvious: if you choose not to forgive, you will be left at the mercy of tormenting spirits until you do. God is serious about our attitudes towards each other - especially in the area of unforgiveness. God is a God of restoration, love and unity. He is motivated by His complete and utterly passionate love towards each one of us. As such, to allow any rift between His children would be incongruent to that love. Unforgiveness prevents restoration and continues to hurt each person the longer it festers.

As New Creations in Christ, it is no longer I that lives but Christ who lives in me. Likewise, Christ lives in the offending party. To exercise unforgiveness and even bitterness towards your brothers and/or sisters in Christ is to do so to Christ Himself. Jesus makes this clear when He describes the judgement of the nations in Matthew:

*"Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me."* - Matthew 25:40 NKJV

*"Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me."* - Matthew 25: 45 NKJV

No longer is the command simply to love your neighbour as yourself. Jesus gave us a new commandment: (John 13:34) that we love one another as He loves us - i.e. completely and unconditionally. The benchmark is no longer how much we can love ourselves, and therefore others, but how much Christ who lives in us, can love through us. This means that forgiveness

is given without expectation of an apology or any condition at all, just as He demonstrated at the cross. "*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.*" He did not say, "*If they are truly sorry and ask to be forgiven then I'll forgive them.*" No! He gave His forgiveness without condition to those who did not deserve it, nor were they repentant. In fact, they were still hurling abuse at Him while He hung there!!

This was not the only moment that Jesus forgave in this manner. When a bunch of people lowered the paralytic down through the hole in the roof, Jesus told him that his sins were forgiven, (Matthew 9:2-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26). The man hadn't asked for forgiveness at all. Rather, he had come seeking healing! When the religious became offended at this, Jesus reminded them that it was harder to forgive (and heal emotionally) than to heal a physical ailment, but to prove to them He was God and could do both, Jesus healed the man as well.

Jesus also forgave the woman caught in adultery, (John 8:1-11). After the crowd left on conviction of their own sinfulness, He asked the woman where all her accusers were - was there no one left to condemn her. The woman confirmed there was no one left. Jesus then responded, "***Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more!***" It's safe to say she knew she was guilty and deserved death under the laws of this people. Like most, she would, in the very least, have been sorry she had been caught and left to bear the full consequences of her sins. However, she hadn't asked Jesus for forgiveness or even mercy, nor was there recorded in John's gospel any demonstration of remorse or repentance on her part. Nevertheless, Jesus gave her forgiveness freely.

As He is, so are we in this world (1 John 4:17b). As you have been freely given these things, so freely give, (Matthew 10:8). The call to forgive is not only to forgive those who ask to be forgiven, though that is definitely the case as well, (see Matthew 18:21-22), as Christians we must love as Christ loves and forgive as He forgives. Moreover, if we do not forgive from our hearts (that is with an honest desire to forgive and let go. This does not mean we no longer have any feelings of the pain inflicted by the wrong doer, but we are giving up our legal right to demand retribution), we risk chastisement for disobedience.

So whether you want to or not, to forgive your brethren (or anyone else for that matter) for any hurt he/she has caused is the first step to your own spiritual health. It doesn't matter whether they are sorry or not. No one is suggesting this is an easy task, nor did Jesus, but it can be done because it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me, and this life I live by faith in the Son of God! (Galatians 2:20) If Jesus can forgive even unto death, that same Christ in me enables me to forgive as well. I can personally attest to the power of this in my own life. I know He is able to help you do the same.

Sure, those hurt feeling want to arise any time the memory of those hurtful actions and words come to mind, but as you forgive in the authority and name of Jesus, it is **done** in the spirit. The emotions may want to come back, but the case is closed. So when you feel those things or the enemy tries to remind you, tell him to talk to the hand - you have forgiven. It's done!

I am by no means undermining the struggles many of us have with these bruised feelings and the even harder time we have forgetting. *Legally it's finished, but emotionally you may still need healing!*

As such, I now want to describe in more depth how you can achieve forgiveness without harbouring those hurts, and reliving those painful memories. Let's start by taking a closer look at the mechanics of emotional injury and forgiveness.

## ***Stages of Forgiveness***

The stages of forgiveness are said to be like the stages of grief. These stages are Denial (sometimes called the Grief stage), Anger, Bargaining, Depression and finally Acceptance. However, though the Denial and Acceptance stages are always the first and last, depending on whose research you read, there can be some to-ing and fro-ing between the Anger, Depression and Bargaining stages.

\* **The Denial Stage.** Here the victim doesn't want to admit that he/she has been hurt. However, it is critical to recognise and admit the reality of the offence; to recognise and validate that it did, in fact, occur, and not to try to ignore the reality of the offence. Ample time may be required to face these hurts and look at the offence in a more constructive way.

\* **The Anger stage.** Having admitted to the pain and the reality of the offence, and having also taken stock of the damage it has caused, emotions become negative. At this point the victim may begin to cast blame. Because a hurtful wound of this nature can make us feel robbed in some way, the victim can feel the offender owes him/her something. The "bank account" has been emptied and there is now a debt to be paid. The desire for retribution may, for some people, rise to boiling point, especially when thoughts and images are replayed over many times, reliving the pain with each visit. Unfortunately, many people get stuck here and feel their only release is vengeance or some kind of punishment. However, that course of action only serves to damage the victim more. For those not stuck in this stage, the victim will gain a clearer perspective of the hurtful event with time.

\* **The Bargaining stage.** The victim is still dealing with negative emotions, and either consciously or subconsciously creates criteria and conditions under which he / she will offer forgiveness. (e.g. *"He'll have to come to me first and apologise before I'm going to forgive him!"*, OR *"She'll have to change drastically before I'll forgive her. She's just as likely to do the same thing again tomorrow."*) Note: this is not the same as setting boundaries in order to protect oneself from further pain. In the bargaining stage the victim is resigned to forgive the offender, but only if they meet certain conditions.

\* **The Depression stage.** During this stage, the victim tries to explain what happened by assuming that he/she was somehow responsible for the injuries and injustices suffered. The victim decimates self-esteem whilst working overtime to convince him/herself that the hurtful event would not have occurred if his/her manner, attitude, actions were somehow different. At this point guilt and shame often follow. Another permutation of this stage is when the victim recognises that he/she did not deserve or ask for the hurt received, and begins to wallow in self-pity, indulging him/herself at the expense of those around.

\* **The Acceptance stage.** Finally, the victim has fully come to terms with the grievance and now begins to grow past the hurt. This doesn't mean that the victim feels happy about the situation. Far from! It simply means that the desire to punish the transgressor has been released, and the

victim can now look back at the event without reliving the hurt afresh. He/she is now free to move on with life, free from the pull of the past.

## ***Some Hurts Are Harder to Forgive***

A person's ability to forgive will vary depending on a few different factors. The first may be the amount of investment made into the relationship. (For example, marriage is a huge emotional, financial, physical and life long investment, as opposed to a relationship with a casual friend, which may have very little invested in it. Forgiveness and reconciliation are desired above losing the larger investment.) Conversely, if the offence was intentional or malicious, rather than accidental, or seen to be serious rather than trivial, forgiveness may also be difficult to give. The victim's ability to forgive also depends on whether the victim has more tendency towards selfishness than to selflessness.

In other words, forgiveness is more likely when:

- A person is less ***Selfish Apathetic*** and more ***Selfless Empathetic***
- The relationship quality is less ***Over Benefited*** and more ***Heavily Invested***
- The nature of the transgression is not ***Discovered through 3rd Party*** but through ***Unsolicited Partner Discovery*** or when it is not a ***Serious Offence*** but a ***Trivial Offence***
- Social-Cognitive Variables are not ***Viewed as Intentional / malicious*** but when there is ***No Responsibility Attribution***<sup>4</sup>

For example, in the case of an affair, there is a heavy investment in the relationship, which in turn makes forgiveness and restoration desired. However, the nature of the transgression is serious, and even more so if the discovery was not made through the admission of the offender. If this is your plight, I won't lie to you, the road to forgiveness may be difficult, but many people have negotiated the murky waters to a place of freedom, trust and a stronger relationships today. Be assured that you are not working through this alone as God is more than willing to help you through this process into complete healing. Above all, He is your biggest help.

## ***How Do I Forgive?***

As mentioned above, Dr Robert Enright<sup>5</sup> of the International Forgiveness Institute wrote:

*"When unjustly hurt by another, we forgive when we overcome the resentment toward the offender, not by denying our right to the resentment, but instead by trying to offer the wrong-doer compassion, benevolence, and love; as we give these, we, as forgivers, realise that the offender does not necessarily have a right to such gifts."*

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<sup>4</sup> Taken from - [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Determinants\\_of\\_Forgiveness\\_Graphic.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Determinants_of_Forgiveness_Graphic.jpg), and made available for public use by Interpersonalcommo9 of Wikimedia Commons.

<sup>5</sup> Dr Robert Enright. *"Forgiveness is a Choice: A Step-by-Step Process for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope"* Published by the American Psychology Association. 2008. ISBN: 978-1-55798-757-0

## Helpful steps towards forgiveness:

For some people a simple prayer followed by some kind of gesture of reconciliation is all that will be required to mend the relationship or set the record straight. At this point life happily moves on. However, for massive wounds you may be still dealing with the shock of the event and are completely bamboozled as to how to proceed. In this case you may need to take things a step at a time.

1. The offence has just occurred. If you are "feeling nothing" or are "in neutral" after a wrong has been done to you, even if some time has now passed, this could be indicative that you are denying having been hurt. It may be honourable to say that things just "roll-off your back", but this may not necessarily be the case beneath the surface, and to pretend otherwise can be detrimental to your own long-term emotional health. Sometimes it's better to admit, we have been hurt.

A neutral stance also does not attribute responsibility to the offender and reduces the severity of behaviour, which was clearly wrong. I am by no means suggesting passing judgement on another, or that we should harbour any ill will towards the offender, but neither should we pretend that all it doesn't matter. You were wounded. It was not okay! By "brushing off" such an action, we can actually devalue the wrong committed as well as the transgressor.

A neutral stance can hardly be labelled forgiveness, and is definitely not a kindness! It may just be a form of avoidance and failure to deal correctly with the offence. Forgiveness can be administered in a loving manner and without pretending that the action was right, or "okay".

Moreover, the Bible instructs us:

*"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone." - Matthew 18:15 NKJV.*

It does not say that we should ignore the situation or the person.

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2. For those people who acknowledge that they have been hurt by an offence, the first step is to remove the confusion and frustration of what has just happened, by explaining the situation out loud without embellishing it. This will help to clarify the event and to explore how this has really hurt you.

This verbal exercise can be done on your own, or you can talk to God about it in prayer. In some secular literature it is suggested that this can be best achieved by talking to a close friend. However, in a church situation, this is definitely not recommended. Sharing negative emotions serves only to involve the listener in those emotions as well, and in turn, cause him/her to act negatively towards the offending party. In essence, you might be setting an innocent party up as a potential offence giver to the person that originally offended you!

This then becomes a form of retaliation not forgiveness. In fact, forgiveness is giving up your "right" to retaliate. More importantly, in the above verse from Matthew, Jesus says, *"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you."*



To restate plainly: talking to a third party, as secular literature suggests, is not an option for a Christian. The first human person you will need to talk to is the offender. However, for now, talking about the offence must wait until you, the victim, know exactly what it is you are feeling, and fully understand everything that has happened. The issue is how you will achieve this. Clearly, God is your best ear to listen to you. If talking to God about the offence feels odd to you, try writing things down.

As you explore your emotions surrounding this event, don't accuse, make presumptions, or label. You should only examine the facts and how these events have made you feel.

During this discourse you should acknowledge that the offence was unjust and unfair, and will always continue to be so. People never have a right to hurt us. On the contrary, as a child of God, you have the right to respect and even honour. Remember, you are in no way condoning the behaviour, just explaining how the event has affected you emotionally.

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3. Realise that your feelings are a natural reaction, but harbouring them is detrimental to your physical and spiritual well being. Ask God to help you give up your right to those feelings - particularly the anger and resentment, and even the desire for retaliation.

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4. Walk in the offender's shoes. Try and picture yourself in their life's story, and set it within his/her cultural background (ethnic and/or family). Try to imagine the hurts they may have suffered. Look for explanations such as mitigating circumstances, excuses, and your own role in the process. Realise that you too would be capable of committing such an act too, if you had lived through the offender's life and circumstances.

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5. Sit quietly and think about your love for God and conversely, just how much He loves you. You are the apple of His eye, a son/daughter of the King of kings. You were on His mind when He created the world. Think about that love. Feel the intimacy there as you sit in His presence. Imagine what God sees as He looks at you through those eyes of love. Now picture the offender at the foot of the cross, and ask the Holy Spirit to help you see them through those same eyes of love. See their brokenness, self-doubts and frailty. Remind yourself that God loves them as much as He loves you, and that He also sees the hurt and pain he/she is suffering.

While you picture the offender there at the cross, pray for him/her, asking God not to hold this offence against them, and to heal and release them from the hurts and events that have lead them to this place. Pray blessings over their life, and ask God to help them overcome any tendencies that may cause offences in the future. In order to truly forgive, you need to give up the expectation that he/she should or will be punished, and your "right" to administer some kind of retribution. To forgive means to cancel the debt of offence against you. Now yield that debt to God and ask Him for the grace to release the negative emotions this transgression has caused.

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**6.** Talk to the offending party. Let him/her know exactly how this event has made you feel, without labelling or blaming. You are trying to explain your feelings, nothing more. You're not even aiming to reason or be logical, just describe your feelings.

Although you are not playing the blame game, you are not trying to send a message that his/her behaviour was okay, that it doesn't matter, or that it is condoned in any way. You are simply looking to have your feelings acknowledged and validated, without exacting a pound of flesh.

You can ask that person to make amends for the harm he/she has caused, but if they refuse or are unable to make amends, then releasing him/her from the idea of punishment, frees you from lingering resentment. Forgiveness and freedom from those hurtful events is not dependent on whether they are sorry, but on your willingness to release them from the debt.

Be respectful in your delivery. Use "*When ..... happened it made me feel*" approach. Do not be tempted to use the word "because". (E.g. "*I felt ... because you...*" ) This is not about laying blame. If the offending party is becoming defensive, he/she is feeling attacked. Apologise immediately and explain that you were not trying to lay blame, only express how you are feeling. If they still feel threatened, then back off and soften your words, or to stop altogether until you are both in a better frame of mind.

If the offending party is not open to a conversation from the outset, you can try writing them a letter. Again, remind yourself to be respectful and limit yourself to how you feel.

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**7.** Only deliver small amounts of information at one time. It is said that we retain only about 10% of what we hear. Try not to monologue. Keep the conversation succinct – short and to the point. Now allow the offending party time to digest the information.

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**8.** See the offending party's inherent worth. I am not referring to material, physical, or even financial worth. See his/her worth as a child of God, and how important he/she is to God. Try and see them through God's eyes.

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**9.** Recall past happy memories you shared with them – as many as you can. As you remember each happy experience, dwell on it, feel its warmth and tenderness.

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**10.** Remember the kind and generous actions the offending party has done to you. Were there gifts, surprise events and celebrations, or times when your friend was just the help and encouragement you needed? Remember how these experiences made you feel.

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**11.** Extend loving thoughts, feelings, and actions towards the offending party, and respond to that person with gifts of kindness, respect and generosity.

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**12.** Continue to pray daily for the offending party. Do not pray selfish prayers. Speak well of him/her before God and others.  
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Even though you have forgiven the offending party, your pain may still be present, your relationship situation may still be in tatters, and you may still be struggling with memories and images that haunt you. You do not want to live in those past hurtful experiences, and nor do you have to do so. Reliving these negative events over and over can obscure positive memories of all the good things God and others have done in your life. They literally rob you of any joy to be had.

It has been said that first comes the action then the feelings - not necessarily the other way around, or nothing would get done! A person can forgive and still feel the grief or pain from the wound. For some, the steps outlined above are all that is required to be released from past hurts, but for others, this damage will take time to repair. The good news is that even recurring images and thoughts associated with the transgression(s) against you, can be dealt with, leaving you completely free.

While there are several proven secular methods of dealing with past hurts so that they no longer inflict pain, (e.g. reframing and reimagining techniques) there are also Christian ways to separate the hurt from the memory and thus, leave it in the past. These can include Sozo and Spirit-led healing, and even inviting God into the memory to show you what He thinks, what He was doing, and how much you mean to Him despite the hurt others are inflicting.

A pastor once shared another helpful tip given by the Holy Spirit. Picture a wall between you and the offence. Everything you place on the other side of the wall is left under the cross. As Christ followers, we were never meant to be burdened down with offences. On the contrary, His yolk is easy and His burden light. He wants us to lay those burdens down. Every time the offence raises its ugly head to try to re-wound you with the pain and hurt of that event, you can simply tell it to stop right there and return back to the other side of the wall. You've dealt with it! You've forgiven! Legally it's done! It has no right to hassle you again. You don't need to carry that thing any more.

### ***A Note on Unconditional Forgiveness***

Unconditional forgiveness is required when the offender is not sorry or apologetic in any way. Remember Stephen of Acts. When he was being stoned to death, Stephen prayed that this offence would not be counted against his attackers. It was obvious that his attackers were not in the least sorry, but still he forgave unconditionally. Jesus was able to forgive those who were not sorry, but the story of Stephen demonstrates that we too can forgive as Christ forgives, because He lives in us.

The offending party may be blaming you for everything in order to justify his/her actions, which to everyone else appears totally wrong. An apology could be furthest from their mind. Whatever the situation, forgiveness is not given to benefit their situation, whether he/she deserves it or not, as much as it is to benefit your own. As discussed earlier,

unforgiveness leads to ill health in body, mind and spirit. You simply cannot afford to hold on to offences if you want to move on with a healthy life.

Unconditional forgiveness is not automatic, though it may become easier to apply the more it is practiced. In most cases, however, you will need to ask God for a special grace to enable you to bear the pain even though you know the offence may be repeated or is still continuing. This was my case. It was God's grace that enabled me to walk through the pain, to forgive unconditionally and move on. Pray for this grace and strength as you go through the steps already outlined above. These steps are still applicable, even though you may not be able to talk to the offending party, or even if you are, he/she may not be interested in listening to how you feel. If this is this case you will need to write a letter or email explaining your feelings and most importantly, that you forgive. Whether the offending party reads your correspondence, or is willing to accept your forgiveness, is not your problem to deal with. You have done all in your power to forgive and release. You have acted in a Godly manner as befits a child of God. The matter is now closed!