

How to Forgive: Finding Your Way to Peace



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About the Authors:

Earnie and Debbie are both professional Christian coaches who have worked with hundreds of individuals and couples who were struggling. They have developed tools that will help individuals and couples remove roadblocks and hurdles in order to uncover underlying issues and work towards healthier relationships. Their goal is to guide people toward a healthier life and a more intimate relationship with God.

Earnie has a Master's Degree in Clinical Social Work and Debbie has a Master's Degree in Nursing and they currently live in the Charlotte area. They have both been through the carnage of divorce and have dealt with the damage and turmoil involved in the destruction of a marriage.

After working for several years with hurting and separated people in a divorce recovery program, they took their understanding and experiences of a failed previous marriage and created programs to offer couples ways to prevent common pitfalls and mistakes in relationships. They utilized what they learned and created tools, techniques, and mentoring processes in order to teach new skills to couples so they can rebuild their marriage foundation.

Together they work with couples and individuals to enable them to deal with the challenges of everyday life and being married; focusing on practical solutions in a safe and supportive environment.

This **How to Forgive** Workbook is just one of the tools they have developed to help their clients live fuller and more balanced lives by working through forgiveness issues. If you want more information, visit their website at www.earnieanddebbiesolutions.com

Credits

Many people have contributed to the creation of this book. Our clients have shown us what people are struggling with and have invited us to come alongside for support and guidance in their journey towards strengthening and growing themselves or their relationship with their spouse.

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Introduction

When you find yourself filled with bitterness or rage, there may be an undercurrent of unforgiveness directing your path. When something happens that causes hurt or betrayed feelings you often will hold on to that pain and not want to let it go. It seems to have a power like a force field, which draws you back to reminisce about the incident. You find yourself reliving the occurrence repeatedly in your mind, maybe with a different outcome or create different scenarios where you get revenge or express your thoughts or feelings. However, the replaying of the tape in your mind causes the pain and anger continually to stir inside of you, allowing bitterness and resentment to take hold in your mind. Your words, thoughts, and actions when driven by your bitterness can be consumed with negativity.

To forgive is a choice you make to commit to a process of changing how you react. You can alter these behaviors when you let go of the hurts and broken dreams of your past. It is through the forgiveness process that you make a choice to stop focusing on the negative and move from concentrating on the past and the pain, to being aware of the present and a fresh start. You may not forget what happened, but you can move on with your life in a healthier and more peaceful way.

The methods we discuss here will free you from the bondage of not forgiving. They can release the hold of the negativity associated with the judgments and bitterness towards other people for what happened in the past. This will allow you the freedom to engage easily with people and to work towards goals with clarity and focus.



Self-Reflections:

- Is there an area of your life where you feel weighted down due to anger toward someone or some event?
- Where do you feel held back and not able to move forward?
- Is there a situation you recall that usually stirs up negative emotions?

What Does it Mean to Forgive?

To forgive is to grant a pardon of an offense or debt; to absolve or grant a pardon to a person. It is to cease to feel resentment against an offender. You start by making a mental decision to let go of thoughts of revenge and judgment against the offender. Then the emotional healing will occur, although the speed that this happens will be different for everyone.

Forgiving is a gift you give yourself because it helps you to let go of all the negative energy associated with holding on to the anger and pain attached to the wound. It does not negate the pain or the other person's behavior, but allows for freedom from the bondage of the negativity. Forgiving someone can lead you to emotional healing, therefore allowing feelings of understanding, empathy, and compassion for the one who hurt you to surface. Letting go of the hurt brings a kind of freedom and peace that helps you go on with life.



Forgiveness requires courage and commitment. It takes courage to face the truth about yourself and the situation. Looking at what happened in an objective manner and how you have reacted takes honesty and bravery to assess how this combination has affected your life, health, and well-being. It also requires a commitment to change the old patterns of resentment and bitterness through identifying the pain and grieving the loss.

“Forgiveness is the fragrance that the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it.” ~ [Mark Twain](#)

Self-Reflections:

- What is your definition of forgiving? How is it different from the one above?
- Describe how forgiving someone else can be a gift to yourself.
- What does the Mark Twain quote say to you?

Why Forgiving is Important

When someone you care about hurts you, you have a choice in how you want to incorporate this into your life. You can hold on to the anger, resentment, or thoughts of revenge; or you can embrace forgiveness, letting go of the anger and negativity in order to move towards healthier relationships. In his book *Forgiving and Reconciling* Everette Worthington says, “Unforgiveness ripens through rumination.” Continuously pondering the situation and reminiscing about what happened will keep you focused on that past event. You can become so engrossed in the wrong that you cannot enjoy the present and what is going on around you.

Not forgiving your offender will affect your other relationships and experiences because someone or something may trigger a memory or anger and you will react from that feeling. You might find yourself swallowed up by your own bitterness or



sense of injustice that can lead to a victim mentality and your connections with others may become shallow and meaningless as a result. Always feeling like a victim can lead to a life without joy and rewards. It

can make you feel like you are always the injured party and a target for all negative situations.

When you continually focus on your wounded feelings, you give the person who caused the pain power to affect your outlook and bring you down. Feeling defeated can cause anxiety and depression, and takes away your meaning or purpose in life.

However, when you make a decision to forgive, you move away from your role of victim in order to release the control and power the offending person had in your life. It sets you free from the burdens of the past and you start over. When you learn to look for a more positive, beautiful and kinder world you can feel more in control and take responsibility for your life. As you let go of grudges you will no longer define your life by how you have been hurt and you might find compassion and understanding.

You may also feel at odds with your spiritual beliefs if you hold onto unforgiveness. There are several instances in the Bible where God commands us to forgive, because He has so mercifully forgiven us. There is nothing we can do to deserve God's forgiveness and nothing we can pay to secure it. God in His grace has paid for our offenses in full and has absolved us of our guilt forever through Jesus' death on the cross. "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you". (Colossians 3:13)



In order to avoid living a bitter and angry life you want to learn to forgive. Holding onto resentment and hurt will just tie you down, like a ball and chain around you. When you allow bitterness to rule your life, negativity takes hold; however, through the process of forgiving you can change your attitude and stop defining your life by how you have been hurt. By being free of bitterness, blame, resentment, and anger, you can have a much more positive and healthier outlook on life and stop the cycle of pain churning in your memory.

To forgive is also the release of others and the harm they have caused you. It is important to understand that if you do not plow through what has happened, the seeds of bitterness will eventually sprout and begin to choke out the joy that God intends for you to have in life. In fact, Hebrews 12:15 says “a bitter root will always grow up and cause trouble.”

Forgiving can give you:

- A sense of peace in your life
- Healthier relationships
- Greater spiritual and psychological well-being
- Less anxiety, stress and hostility
- Lower blood pressure
- Fewer symptoms of depression
- Lower risk of alcohol and substance abuse
- More feelings of compassion and kindness
- A more positive outlook



“Hating people is like burning down your own house to get rid of a rat.” ~ Harry Emerson Fosdick

Self-Reflections:

- Why is it important to forgive someone of the harm they have caused?
- Did you identify with any of the reasons to forgive?
- Have you felt like a bitter root was controlling you?

The Poison of Not Forgiving

Very often, when we do not forgive someone, you can hold onto the need for revenge and be caught up in how to repay the hurt - they have hurt me and I want to hurt them. However, if you look at what happens if you do get revenge it is often a disappointment and does not fill that need or void. For instance, if someone has been beaten and they get the opportunity to beat up the person that caused their pain - it is not going to take away the pain they feel. Their pain is still going to be there, and they may add on some guilt. The bruises and injuries are present and still the same. Revenge, no matter how just, can never bring satisfaction because it can never replace what has been injured or destroyed and it glues us to the past.

Not forgiving causes us to be imprisoned by the person you refuse to forgive. That person has control over you and your emotions. You are allowing that person to grow bitterness, anger, and revenge within you. Without forgiving them, joy will drain from your life and you may gradually become a very bitter person.



The burden of not forgiving can begin to define who you are. If you have ever seen a very bitter person, you have seen what unforgiveness can do. It can just make you angry at the world. It can cause you to have a negative outlook about people, about life in general, about other opportunities, and truly can hold you back. However, walking through the forgiveness process prevents the grudge from growing and burying you. This allows you to break free from it and be able to accomplish new things.

Self-Reflections:

- Have you felt the power of not forgiving someone?
Describe.
- Do you feel less joy in your life due to resentment?
- Are you focused on getting revenge for someone's behavior?

What Forgiving is Not

People often mistake forgiveness for a feeling but fundamentally forgiving someone is a choice. It is an act of the will, which starts in your mind by making a decision, and then moves through a process. Forgiving is about your attitude and healing. Here are some statements about what forgiveness is NOT:

- To forgive does not negate or excuse the pain or the other person's behavior. If there are consequences the person should suffer, that is still appropriate. It does not minimize or justify the wrong. What happened was wrong, but you can forgive the person without excusing the act. It does not mean that the pain did not happen or that the wound did not occur.
- Forgiving is not the same as forgetting what happened to you. In fact, the act that hurt or offended you may always remain a part of your life depending on how painful it was. Moreover, what you learn from that wound may protect you and those you love from any future harm. For instance, if you loaned money to someone who was a close friend but it was never repaid, it would be good to remember this and possibly to not do this again in the future.
- Forgiveness also does not mean that you deny the other person's responsibility for hurting you. To forgive is not to pardon – that is not yours to give since you do not have the power of absolution. We can and should still hold others accountable for their actions (or lack of



actions) and the consequences that are justified for that person are still appropriate.

- Forgiving is not an invitation to be hurt again. You do not need to tolerate or allow someone to be abusive or show lack of respect. Some people are apathetic, obnoxious, unreliable, or mean-spirited and they never will change. You need to change the way you respond to them and quit expecting them to be different. This is where healthy boundaries need to come into play.
- To forgive is different and separate from reconciliation. Reconciliation comes after forgiving and includes the decision to mend the relationship. It also depends on the attitude of the offender involved, whereas forgiving them does not depend on the offending person at all. To forgive someone is a choice that you make and it does not matter what the offender is feeling or even whether they want to be forgiven or not. Forgiving is for you, whereas reconciliation needs to be both parties making the choice to come back together, which is a completely different process. Forgiveness needs to be first and then the process of reconciliation can begin if both parties decide to take that step.
- Getting people to change their actions is not part of forgiving. You are not able to change another person's behavior or words, only they can make the decision to change their own behavior. Think of forgiving as more about how it can change your life — by bringing you peace, happiness, and emotional and spiritual healing.

Self-Reflections:

- Did any of the statements of what forgiveness is not surprise you? How so?
- Did these statements clear up any roadblocks you might have had to forgiving someone?

How do we Know we Need to Forgive?



One clue that you need to forgive is when you bring anger and bitterness into your relationships. You find yourself angry at small things or blow up when something does not go your way; or you seem to have triggers that cause you to get hurt or angry easily. These are all symptoms of having an unforgiveness issue.

It may be that you find yourself just dwelling on the situation and rehashing it over and over in your mind. I remember when someone owed me some money and they did not pay it back, I was consumed with thinking about how to get revenge and getting that money back. I plotted what I would say and reveled in the pain they would feel. These thoughts can keep you so wrapped up in the wrong that you can't look past it. You cannot enjoy the present and there is a negative energy exuding from you.

Another sign of an unforgiveness issue is when you avoid people or being around friends. This may be because of feeling depressed or overwhelmed. You start to look inward and not enjoy being with others because it triggers painful memories. This is an indication that something needs to be done or you will end up lonely and without friends.

It may also be that people start to say you seem to have a chip on your shoulder or may be noticing a change in your behavior because you are automatically looking for retribution and thinking the worst about people or situations. People may avoid

being around you. When you are consumed by a desire for revenge or punishment of the other person, it is a clue you need to let it go. At this point, you need to choose to forgive.

The main indicator you have not forgiven is when you lose the peace in your life. You become upset and worry about stuff that normally would not bother you.



This can lead to using other things like alcohol, drugs, or pills to help cope or get you through the pain. This is a red flag that there are issues you need to deal with and forgiving is often the first step.

When trust has been broken in a relationship, no matter what the cause, the first step is to forgive before you can even think about repairing that relationship. Often your pride makes you deny the pain – “Who cares? You can’t hurt me!” However, this insulates you from your feelings and allows the infestation of resentment to enter your heart and soul, growing into anger and bitterness. Such a condition gradually estranges you from others and even from God.

Identify areas in your life that you may need to work through the forgiveness process. Open your mind, memories and heart to remember the hurts and wounds; where and when you have been let down, dishonored, abused, lied to, cheated on; diminished in spirit and emotion; diminished physically and financially. There may be several instances that have affected you and need to be forgiven. It may take time to soften your heart and often this is where spiritual help may come in.

Self-Reflections:

- Do the people around you seem more distant?
- Have you found yourself daydreaming about a negative encounter from your past and you changed the outcome?
- Have you been more consumed with worry and do not feel at peace?

Asking for God's Help

Human beings have always had trouble with forgiving someone who has wronged them. It does not come naturally to us. Since forgiving goes against our nature, we must forgive by faith, whether we feel like it or not. When we trust God to do the work in us, He teaches us how to adopt new attitudes of the heart that

Feelings List

This list will provide specific words to describe in more detail how we feel.

AFRAID Scared Panicked Petrified Worried Frightened Anxious Apprehensive	ANGRY Aggravated Annoyed Irritated Furious Irate Incensed Provoked	ANXIOUS Uneasy Nervous Worried Edgy Jittery Tense Troubled	ASHAMED Embarrassed Humiliated Guilty Betrayed Grieved Disgraced Inferior
CONFUSED Perplexed Disoriented Baffled Chaotic Dazed Disorganized Bewildered	DEPRESSED Hopeless Empty Grieved Broken Discouraged Distressed Unhappy	DETACHED Disconnected Distant Withdrawn Rejected Cut-off Isolated Abandoned	GUILTY Remorseful Repentant Sorry Humbled Apologetic Disgraced Shamed
HELPLESS Insecure Vulnerable Inadequate Unprotected Exposed Weak Overwhelmed	HURT Anguished Wounded Pierced Crushed Rejected Let down Used	SAD Depressed Fatigued Disappointed Unhappy Discouraged Empty Hopeless	TIRED Fatigued Burnt out Weary Exhausted Sleepy Worn out Given up
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