

Steps To Forgiveness

These pages may be freely copied for participants on the Freedom In Christ course (registered users can download a pdf version to print out).

1. Ask God to reveal to your mind the people you need to forgive

Make a list of everyone God brings to your mind. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you and write the names on a separate piece of paper. Even if you think there is no one, just ask God to bring up all the right names. The two most overlooked names are yourself and God.

Forgiving yourself: Only God can forgive your sins — but for many people, especially perfectionists, the hardest person to forgive is themselves, for letting themselves down. You are in effect accepting God's forgiveness and refusing to listen to the devil's accusations. Some people are really helped by being able to say, "I forgive myself for (list everything you hold against yourself), and I let myself off my own hook."

Forgiving God: Forgiving God is harder to understand because God has done nothing wrong. He has always acted in your best interests.

Because you have not understood God's larger plan, or because you have blamed God for something that other people or the devil have done, you may have felt that God has let you down.

Many people feel disappointed with God, even angry with Him, because He didn't answer their prayer; He didn't seem to be there for them. They cried out for help and nothing came. Usually they are embarrassed to admit it. But God knows anyway and He's big enough to handle it.

If you feel uncomfortable telling God you forgive Him, say something like, "I release the expectations, thoughts and feelings I have had against You."

2. Acknowledge the hurt and the hate

Jesus instructed us to forgive from the heart. That's much more than simply saying "I forgive" and pretending we've dealt with it. To forgive from the heart we need to face the hurt and the hate. People try to suppress their emotional pain, but it is trying to surface so that we can let it go.

3. Understand the significance of the cross

The cross is what makes forgiveness legally and morally right. Jesus has already taken upon Himself your sins and the sins of the person who has hurt you. He died "once for all" (Hebrews 10:10). When your heart says, "It isn't fair", remember that the justice is in the cross.

4. Decide that you will bear the burden of each person's sin

You need to make a choice not to use the information you have against that person in the future. "He who covers over an offence promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends." (Proverbs 17:9) That doesn't mean that you never testify in a court of law — however, you do it not in the bitterness of unforgiveness but having first forgiven from your heart.

5. Decide to forgive

Forgiveness is a crisis of the will. If you wait until you feel like doing it, you probably never will. You may feel you can't do it — but would God really tell you to do something you couldn't do? When he says that you can do everything through Christ who gives you strength (Philippians 4:13), is that true or not? The reality is that you have a choice to make — are you going to remain in bitterness, hooked to the past, giving the enemy an entrance to your mind; or are you going to get rid of it once and for all?

You **choose** to forgive, and in making that choice you are agreeing to live with sin and its consequences. You are choosing to let God be the avenger, and trust Him to bring justice in the end. You choose to take it to the cross and leave it there.

The gates of hell can't prevail against the Kingdom of God. There is nobody out there keeping you from being the person that God created you to be. The only one that can do that is you. You need to forgive, be merciful and love as Christ has loved you. Let that person go; get on with your life; walk away free in Christ.

6. Take your list to God

To forgive from your heart, say, for example, "Lord, I choose to forgive my father" and then specify what you are forgiving him for. Stay with the same person until you have told God every pain and hurt that has surfaced and be as specific as you can. It's then helpful to take it a step further and say how it made you feel: "I choose to forgive my father for leaving us, which made me feel abandoned."

Tears will often come at this point, but this is not about trying to get somebody to cry. It's making sure that it's as thorough as possible. One lady said, "I can't forgive my mother. I hate her." Having recognised her real feelings of hatred, now for the first time she probably could forgive — if she didn't admit that she hated her mother, she wouldn't be able to forgive.

Pray as follows for each person you need to forgive: "Lord, I choose to forgive (name the person) for (what they did or failed to do), which made me feel (verbally tell God every hurt and pain He brings to your mind)".

Take careful note of what is said after the statement "which made me feel". Usually the same word (eg "abandoned", "stupid", "dirty") is repeated several times. That may well reveal a stronghold that your past experiences have led you to believe. You can tear down those strongholds by saying, for example: "I renounce the lie that I am stupid. I announce the truth that I have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16); "I renounce the lie that I am abandoned. I announce the truth that God has promised never to leave me nor forsake me" (Hebrews 13:5). Session 10 of the Freedom In Christ course teaches a specific strategy ("Stronghold-Busting") that will enable you to do this effectively.

7. Destroy the list

You are now free from those people and those events in the past.

8. Do not expect that forgiving others will result in changes in them

Forgiving others is primarily about you and your relationship with God. Pray for those you have forgiven, that they may be blessed and that they too may find the freedom of forgiveness (see Matthew 5:44; 2 Corinthians 2:7).

9. Try to understand the people you have forgiven

You may find it helpful to understand some of what the other person was going through, but don't go so far as to rationalise away the sin — this is not about saying "It didn't matter", because it did.

10. Expect positive results of forgiveness in you

Forgiveness is not about feeling good; it's about being free. However, good feelings will follow eventually. You will need to concentrate on renewing your mind so that negative ways of thinking are replaced by the truth.

11. Thank God for what you have learned and the maturity gained

You are now free to move on and grow as a Christian.

12. Accept your part of the blame for the offences you suffered

Confess your part in any sin and know that you are forgiven. If you realise that someone has something against you, go to them and be reconciled. When you do that, be careful simply to confess your own wrongdoing rather than bringing up anything they did.