

How to Forgive

Forgiveness is releasing the personal right to payback the one who has hurt me and absorbing the pain with God's help. The process of forgiving someone can be laced with deep and powerful emotions. The memory of the wound and the offender has the ability to influence our behavior – relationally, emotionally, and spiritually. One of the hopes in the journey of forgiveness is to move from anger and hatred to love and compassion.

In this practice we will dive deeper into forgiveness by walking through Dr. Everett Worthington's REACH process of forgiveness. The REACH process will be a helpful tool that has the potential to be life changing. While we can't change the hurtful memory, we can change how we think and feel when that memory comes to mind.

Practice

You may want to space this Practice out over several days this week with several different hurts, starting with something small. Try journaling each day to keep track of your thoughts and what all you are hearing from God. The goal is to simply learn the steps of the REACH process of forgiveness by starting with a smaller offense.

Take a day for each step or do multiple steps in a few days. This Practice may be one that you'll want to go through or debrief with a trusted friend, counselor, or your Community Leader. Follow the steps below this week, and remember that forgiveness is a process. (Note: If during this process, you find that you're not able to stop unwanted thoughts, you may want to seek the help of therapist.)

Reach

Recall the hurt. Get alone in a quiet place with your journal and begin with prayer. Invite the Holy Spirit then ask him to silence any voices that are not his. Next, ask God to help you recall an event that caused you pain. Try to start with a smaller offense to learn the process.

1. Picture the event in your mind's eye and identify the emotions with clear labels: How did you feel? Be mindful that don't slip into fear, sadness, or anger. It's ok to express negative emotion, but we want to avoid vengeful rumination.
2. As a memory comes observe the feelings that arise. Spend some time journaling about it. Try to be as precise as possible with regards to how it made you feel.
3. There will likely be pain in this, but keep in mind that the process is designed to move you beyond the pain and into a space of freedom. Sitting with the pain is a necessary step.

Empathize. Begin with prayer and ask God to activate empathy in you. Here are four options to work through this step with a therapist or another trusted leader:

1. If you're able and willing, sit down with your offender and ask to hear their story.
2. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal ways in which you could empathize with the offender and their brokenness.
3. Write a letter from the point of view of the offender. If this proves to be too difficult, that's okay. The idea with this exercise is to build empathy, and for a lot of people that takes time.
4. Create your own empty chair therapy room and tell the person how they hurt you. Then imagine what they would say back to you. Spend some time reflecting on how that shifted your perspective.

Altruistic gift. This is the step of releasing the person from the debt they owe you – giving them the unmerited gift of forgiveness.

1. Remember a time you were forgiven by another person. Recall how it felt: the freedom it brought and the weight that was lifted. Take a minute to thank Jesus for this experience.
2. Now give that same gift to your offender. If you are ready, speak words of forgiveness out loud as if the person were in front of you. Tell them you want to give them the gift of forgiveness. For example “_____ (offender), I forgive you for _____ and now release you from my judgments and expectations, present and future.”

Commit publicly to forgive. Public forgiveness is inviting a trusted person to bear witness to your act of forgiving.

1. Per the Teaching, this may look like creating a certificate that clearly notes when and that you chose to forgive. Sign it, date it and put it on the wall!
2. It could also include writing a letter of forgiveness to the offender. Of course, this does not have to be sent, it is more for therapeutic purposes. Invite the Holy Spirit to show you how to move ahead in relationship with the offender and how

to steward that forgiveness with yourself and others. The key is to create a time stamp to look back on for when you forgave a person or situation.

Hold on to forgiveness. Forgiveness is hardly ever a one time event. More likely, it will require forgiving over and over again. Because this is not a perfect process, it is likely that there will be times when we doubt whether we've definitively forgiven the offender. Remember that emotional pain does not mean you haven't forgiven somebody.

1. Go back to when you first forgave that person. Take time to remember and reflect on what you said and did publicly (see step 4).
2. Avoid letting your mind ruminate on negative thoughts about the person or event.
3. If needed, reach out to a friend who walked with you during that time. Ask them remind you of the forgiveness that took place.
4. Review this process again. It may seem redundant, but often there are steps we miss or further work the Spirit wants to invite us into that we may not have been ready for first time around.