

Living Well: Christian Practices for Everyday Life
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Living Well

Christian Practices for Everyday Life

6

Forgiving



6 Forgiving

Yearning



How could families ever teach life's lessons to each other without the rich and powerful intimacy of forgiveness and healing? What does it mean to be family and what does it mean to live in relationship with others? So many of our life lessons are learned from how we forgive—our efforts to resolve and repair the errors we've made along the way. Without the opportunity for healing and a second chance (or third or thirtieth chance), we would all soon be estranged from each other and doomed to repeat the same mistakes over and over again.

Mending Tears

My husband had died by the time Nick was a senior in high school. Nick had a darling girlfriend whom we all liked. But I worried about the seriousness of their relationship, so Nick and I had a talk about it. I voiced my concern about pregnancy and what that could mean in his life. He assured me it wasn't a problem. So when he came to me and told me Judy was pregnant, I was angry and hurt. I can't remember what was said, but things soon cooled down and life went on. Judy's mom made her a special dress for senior prom, we had a baby shower, and I felt everything was in place. Wrong!

One day as I was rushing off to a pre-work meeting, Nick stopped me in the doorway and said, "Judy doesn't feel welcome here; you make her feel uncomfortable." He was really angry and lashing out at me. Full of frustration because I felt I had handled the whole thing pretty well, I said, "Nick, what more do you want from me?" and stormed out the front door because I was running late.

After I had driven about ten blocks, the anger, tears, and frustration were replaced with a great sense of sadness and a longing to understand. I turned the car around and went back home. I went to him and said, "Nick, for the things I've said and done that have hurt you so much, I am so sorry." He just grabbed me and held on and cried his heart out. It wasn't that he was angry as much as he was scared and didn't know what to do next.

(Mary Jo Pedersen, Thomas Green, and Ronald Wasikowski, *More Than Meets the Eye*)



Darkness in a Relationship

She was angry, depressed and exhausted. She was tired of being taken for granted, tired of working without recognition, and tired of being ignored. She felt worse than Cinderella. Overwhelmed by it all, she threw the washcloth in the kitchen sink, ran up to the bedroom, slammed the door, and collapsed in tears on the bed.

Exhaustion and depression were her twin demons. They fueled each other, and could seemingly pull her into their grip at will. She wasn't just tired; she was exhausted to the bone. For weeks no appreciation or affirmation had recharged her batteries. She wasn't just melancholy; she was *depressed*. Never had she felt so isolated and alone.

A short while later he slipped into the room. She had her back to him, and he came up behind her and laid a gentle hand on her shoulder. With a jerk she rejected it. The message was clear. "Don't touch me!"

But after a few moments he laid his hand there again, gently, surely. Sometimes love and remorse are best expressed in silent presence. Neither one moved for long moments. In the prolonged silence he felt her shoulders relax, if only slightly.

He risked further by rubbing them gently. She was about to jerk again, but his touch was soothing. Tension was draining away, so she allowed him to rub. "I'm still mad, really mad," she thought to herself.

The silence hung for a long time. He knew her anger was justified. Indeed, he had taken her for granted and basically ignored her for weeks, all the while expecting everything to be just right at home, especially since his own job had recently been so stressful.

He also knew she would rather be alone with her anger and tears. Yet somehow he knew that, for the sake of their marriage, his presence was paramount. Something told him to remain present even though she didn't want it right now. Something told him to show her in a silent, firm way that he was finally hearing her cries. Something told him that at this moment the totality of their marriage was all rolled



up in presence. Somehow he knew that this is the only way they might find reconciliation.

After many long minutes, she finally turned to him with red eyes and tear-stained cheeks. He offered a weak, apologetic grin. Both knew that they could now reconcile; they could begin to talk through the problem and find resolution. But more importantly, both had a strong feeling they had just been guided through a potentially dangerous experience, and had somehow been saved.

(Leif Kehrwald)

Have you ever noticed that the ones we love the most are the ones we hurt the most? It's because they have given us their hearts to hold and cherish. And in spite of our good intentions, we bruise their hearts... and they ours. The one relationship that is perhaps more intimate and therefore more vulnerable to bruising than the parent-child bond is the spousal bond.

Usually, healing and reconciling require us to do just the opposite of what our basic desires would have us do. When we would just as soon take a slow boat to China than stick around with those ne'er-do-wells we live with, the practice of forgiving beckons us to hang in and remain present. It's painful, it's hard work, and the picture may get worse before it gets better, but somehow we know, for the sake of love and family and commitment, we must remain and work toward healing.

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Reflecting

Forgiveness is about healing suffering for ourselves and others. Until we develop compassion within ourselves and a concern about the welfare of others, we cannot truly forgive.

—His Holiness, The Dalai Lama

Our Need for Forgiveness

From the beginning of time, we humans have been in need of forgiveness, and from the beginning of time we have been challenged to forgive one another. Because we are human, we yearn for relationship and intimacy. Just as the Father, Son, and Spirit are One, we who are created in the image of the Triune God seek oneness with God. This yearning of the heart draws us to each other, seeking community. It's our nature.

Also, because we are human, we fail, we fall short, we wound one another. We offend each other when we think only of ourselves. We hurt one another when the circumstances of our lives get out of balance. It's our nature.

Gratefully, because we are human and created in the image of a God who never stops loving and never stops forgiving, we too seek to mend our hurts with one another, heal our wounds, and reconcile. Because we are human we hunger to forgive and be forgiven. It's our nature.

Intimacy, conflict, and reconciling are all part of human nature. And family living plays a key role in teaching us about all three components. Tap into your natural hunger to forgive and to be forgiven. Read through and reflect on the questions. Pause whenever you wish for as long as you wish. Allow your reflections to clarify and shape your hunger for forgiveness.

- What is your most vivid experience of offering forgiveness to someone?
- What is your most vivid experience of being forgiven by someone?
- Do you find it easier to forgive or to be forgiven?
- Who do you know who forgives well? In what ways does this person forgive well?
- Who has taught you the most about forgiveness?
- How is forgiveness a part of your daily life?
- How do you benefit by being a forgiving person?
- If you wanted to become better at forgiving, where would you start?





Why Should We Forgive?

According to Robert Enright, the reasons people forgive fall into the following eight categories:

1. You forgive to quiet your angry feelings.
2. Forgiveness changes destructive thoughts into quieter, more healthy thoughts.
3. As you forgive, you want to act more civilly toward the one who hurt you.
4. Forgiveness of one person helps you interact better with others. Perhaps your anger with someone at work has spilled over to your relationship with your children. Forgiving that person would be a gift to your children.
5. Forgiveness can improve your relationship with the one who hurt you.
6. Your forgiveness actually can help the one who hurt you see his or her unfairness and take steps to stop it. Your forgiving can enhance the character of the one who hurt you.
7. You forgive because God asks you to do so. You forgive as an act of love toward God.
8. Forgiveness, as an act of kindness and love toward the one who hurt you, is a moral good regardless of how the other is responding to you. Loving others while protecting yourself from harm is a morally good thing to do.

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There is no simple formula for forgiveness, rather, it is a practice that emerges directly from one's identity and character. Think of the descriptive words you might use to describe someone you admire: honest, bright, empathetic, present, balanced, open, and so on. Although it is not common practice, you might also add "forgiving." The Christian practice of forgiving contributes favorably to shaping one's character.

Forgiveness, by definition, demands change and transformation. You've been wounded, offended, hurt by another. You feel angry and resentful, and what's more you feel justified in your anger. After all, the other is to blame and you are the innocent victim. Just knowing that you are right and the other is wrong gives you vindictive pleasure; yet you are still angry and want revenge. You have no patience for excuses from the other or for apparent mitigating circumstances. You've been wronged, pure and simple.

The practice and character of forgiveness challenges you to change your thought pattern and transform your heart. How do you move from wanting to hear no excuses to an eagerness to know what mitigates the offense? How do you begin to see that nothing is more destructive to the human spirit than the desire for revenge? How do you begin to realize that forgiveness is first an act of kindness to *yourself*, and may or may not be an act of kindness to the other? How do you begin to realize that, in the words of Karyn Kedar in *God Whispers*, "we have greater things than anger to feel....When anger is replaced by forgiveness, you are free to let love guide your life."



The first step toward change and transformation is to recognize in yourself the symptoms that forgiveness can relieve:

- Feeling so wounded that you want revenge
- Brooding over petty grievances
- Feeling guilty yourself and covering it over with anger
- Worry that it will all happen again
- Bitterness and stubbornness that permeates all arenas of your life
- An ever-growing need to be right.

These are post-trauma symptoms that must be relieved if you are to regain balance and once again find happiness. Forgiveness relieves all of these symptoms.

But the cure requires extraordinary courage. As the *Bhagavad Gita* says, "If you want to see the brave, look at those who can forgive. If you want to see the heroic, look at those who can love in return for hatred."

Exploring

God's Spirit is at work forgiving, healing, and recreating us in the likeness of Christ for life in God's kingdom. Indeed, God's Spirit is at work in the ways we learn to forgive and be forgiven, to heal and be healed, to recreate and to be recreated in our lives with others. In this light, it becomes apparent that Christian forgiveness is not only a word spoken or heard, a gesture offered or received, an emotion experienced or transformed; it's a way of life to be lived in faithful response to the gracious love of God at work in our world and in our lives.

(Susan Pendleton Jones and L. Gregory Jones, *Forgiveness: Letting Go*)

Forgiving Involves Courage

From our own tradition, no biblical character shows this heroic courage more than Joseph, son of Jacob, who was betrayed by his brothers, nearly left to die in the desert, and at the last minute sold off to the Egyptians. Read Genesis, chapters 37—50. Joseph's story has one dramatic twist after another. After beating and selling him into slavery, the brothers return home to lie to their father, Jacob. But Joseph is rescued and taken to Egypt, where he eventually wins favor with Pharaoh by interpreting his dreams and accurately predicting both feast and famine throughout the land. When Jacob sends his sons to Egypt seeking grain, Joseph recognizes his brothers, but they do not recognize Joseph.

Joseph's anger and resentment return and he arrests and jails his brothers. Clearly he has the power to inflict "just" punishment upon them for their past deeds (chapter 42). He demands that the youngest brother, Benjamin, who remained with Jacob in Canaan, be brought to him. And when Joseph sees Benjamin, the one brother who is innocent of Joseph's betrayal, his heart softens. Joseph first seeks a private place to cry, wanting to hide his pain from his brothers.

Joseph was no longer about to control his feelings in front of his servants, so he ordered them all to leave the room. No one else was with him when Joseph told his brothers who he was. He cried with such loud sobs that the Egyptians heard it, and the news was taken to the king's palace. Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But when his brothers heard this, they were so terrified that they could not answer him. Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come closer." They did, and he said, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. Now do not be upset or blame yourselves because you sold me here. It was really God who sent me ahead of you to save people's lives... Now hurry back to my father and tell him that this is what his son Joseph says: 'God has made me the ruler of all Egypt; come to me without delay. You can live in the region of Goshen, where you can be near me—you, your children, your grandchildren, your sheep, your goats, your cattle, and everything else you have. If you are in Goshen, I can take care of you. There will still be five years of famine and I do not want you, your family, and your livestock to starve.'"... He threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and began to cry; Benjamin also cried as he hugged him. Then, still weeping, he embraced each of his brothers and kissed them. After that, his brothers began to talk with him.

—Genesis 45:1–5, 9–11, 14–15

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In a truly redemptive moment of forgiveness Joseph opens himself and his pain to his brothers and makes reconciliation possible. He provides a way out of the cycle of pain and dysfunction for his family, and symbolically, for God's chosen people. As Richard P. Westley writes, "Joseph transforms his pain and puts it to good use by identifying himself as both the injured party—and therefore unwilling to be hurt again—and yet still full of love for his brothers who injured him. This approach is not an easy one, but it proves transforming since it knits together Joseph's deeply torn family."

In a world and a culture that is full of wounds, anger, injustice, inequality, historical privilege, jealousy, resentment, bitterness, murder, and war, we must speak always and everywhere about forgiveness, reconciliation, and God's healing. Forgiveness lies at the center of Jesus' moral message. The litmus test for being a Christian is not whether one can say the creed and mean it, but whether one can forgive and love an enemy.

—Ronald Rolheiser

In the act of forgiveness we are declaring our faith in the future of a relationship, and in the capacity of the wrongdoer to make a new beginning on a course that will be different from the one that has caused the wrong. We are saying, here is a chance to make a new beginning. It is an act of faith that the wrongdoer can change. According to Jesus (Matthew 18:22), we should be ready to do this not just one, not just seven times, but seventy times seven, without limit—provided, it seems Jesus says, your brother or sister who has wronged you is ready to come and confess the wrong they have committed yet again.

—Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Forgiving Involves Mercy

Following immediately after Jesus' challenge to Peter to forgive, "not seven times, but seventy times seven" (v. 22), Jesus tells us the parable of the Unforgiving Servant (see Matthew 18:23–35). This story contrasts the huge debt owed by the servant, which the king forgives, with the small debt owed to the servant, which the servant refuses to forgive. Even when the lesson is delivered loud and clear some fail to make the connection.

So he called the servant in. "You worthless slave!" he said. "I forgave you the whole amount you owed me, just because you asked me to. You should have had mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you."

—Matthew 18:32–33

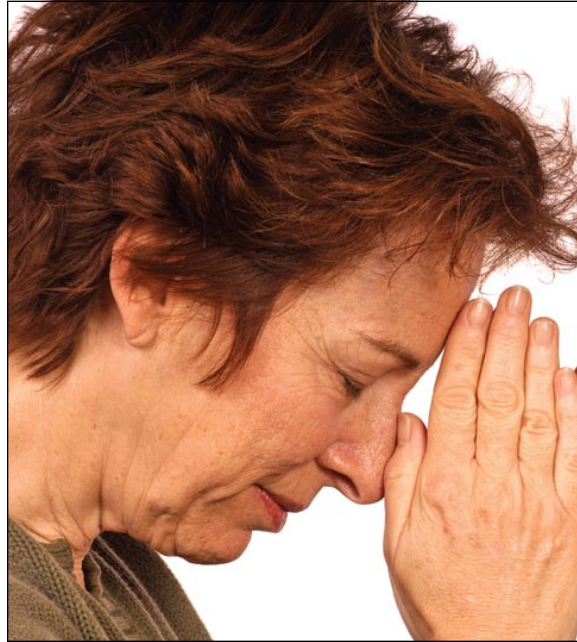
Forgiving Involves Faith and Love

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, if my brother keeps on sinning against me, how many times do I have to forgive him? Seven times?” “No not seven times,” answered Jesus, “but seventy time seven, because the Kingdom of heaven is like this.”
—Matthew 18:21–22

Consider the Pardon of the Sinful Woman in Luke 7:36–50. This is the story of a dinner party given by Simon, a Pharisee, to which Jesus was invited. Upon entering no one greeted him with a kiss or gave him water to wash his feet. Yet throughout the evening the woman whom all knew as “sinful” (you can surmise what that means), washes Jesus’ feet with her tears and dries them with her hair.

Jesus uses this public display of sensuality to teach a lesson in forgiveness. He quizzes his host Simon about two people whose debts were forgiven. One owed a large amount, while the other owed a little. “Which one then will love him [the creditor] more?” Simon responds “I suppose that it would be the one who was forgiven more.” “You are right,” said Jesus.

Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your home and you gave me no water for my feet, but she has washed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You did not welcome me with a kiss, but she has not stopped kissing my feet since I came. You provided no olive oil for my head, but she has covered my feet with perfume. I tell you, then, the great love she has shown proves that her many sins have been forgiven. But whoever has been forgiven little shows only a little love.” The Jesus said to the women, “Your sins are forgiven.”
—Luke 7:44–48



In this story, we learn about forgiveness from the side of the offender. Seemingly, Simon the Pharisee is the small offender and is granted little or no forgiveness. The “sinful” woman is the major offender—at least in the eyes of others—but because of her deep faith, her sorrow, and her adoration of Jesus, her sins are forgiven.

These then, are the necessary ingredients to receive God’s forgiveness: genuine remorse, steadfast faith, and lasting devotion. We are all sinners, regardless of our status in society, but Jesus is eager to embrace each one of us with his love and forgiveness if we but turn our gaze toward him.



Forgiving Involves Restoring Relationships

Finally, we consider the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11–32. The text of this story has four scenes, but the story itself demands a fifth. In the first scene, the younger son takes his inheritance from his father and leaves home. The second scene shows the younger son squandering away the money and, coming upon hard times, returning home with a rehearsed speech of repentance. The third scene is the touching reunion with his father, and the younger son is immediately welcomed and enveloped into the family and household.

He was still a long way from home when his father saw him; his heart was filled with pity, and he ran, threw his arms around his son, and kissed him. “Father,” the son said, “I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son.” But the father called to his servants. “Hurry!” he said. “Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. Then go and get the prize calf and kill it, and let us celebrate with a feast! For this son of mine was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found.” And so the feasting began.

—Luke 15:20–24

In the fourth scene, the father and older son argue in the yard while the party continues inside. The text ends with these words of the father to his older son, “But we had to celebrate and be happy, because your brother was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found”(v. 32). While the text ends, clearly the story is not over. Each of us is intended to determine the end. How would you conclude the story of the Prodigal Son? Would the older son accept his younger brother and be reconciled with him? Or would there be more division and heartache for all parties?

The Way of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is at the heart of the gospel and of our most important prayer, the Lord's Prayer: "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" (Matthew 6:12). In the Beatitudes Jesus teaches us that peacemakers are children of God, "Happy are those who work for peace; God will call them his children" (Matthew 5:9). But the only way to be a peacemaker is to be a forgiver.

Jesus said,

"So if you are about to offer your gift to God at the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift in front of the altar, go at once and make peace with your brother, and then come back and offer your gift to God."

—Matthew 5:23–24

Very simply, these teachings show us that forgiveness requires initiative and action. We must consciously seek to repair wounded relationships—to forgive as God has forgiven us.

Jesus' answer to the brokenness of people's lives was to embody God's forgiveness. We learn how to forgive from the God who first forgave us in Christ. Christ forgives without condition, but we can only receive that forgiveness if we're set free to forgive others.



Feasting on forgiveness—rather than on bitterness, anger, or revenge—allows us the freedom to live into a future not bound by the brokenness of the past. It gives us hope. Forgiveness is both receptive and active; it's something done to us and something done by us. We're called to forgive others, which can be very difficult. But we're also called to be forgiven for the wrongs we've done, an act that takes us out of control and places us at the mercy of the one whose forgiveness we seek. To embody forgiveness fully, we must forgive as well as be forgiven.

(Susan Pendleton Jones and L. Gregory Jones, *Forgiveness: Letting Go*)



The Path Toward Forgiveness

How do we learn to practice the way of forgiveness that Jesus taught? Susan Pendleton Jones and L. Gregory Jones offer these insights.



- *We become willing to speak truthfully and patiently about the conflicts that have arisen.* When we try to be patient and truthful, we can discern more clearly what is going on. James 1:19 reminds us, “Everyone must be quick to listen, but slow to speak and slow to become angry.”
- *We acknowledge both the existence of anger and bitterness and a desire to overcome them.* Whether those emotions are our own or belong to the other party, it does no good to deny them. We can learn to overcome and let go of anger and bitterness as we begin to live differently through practices that transform hatred into love. This is important, for otherwise, anger can destroy others and us. Ephesians 4:26 says, “If you become angry, do not let your anger lead you into sin, and do not stay angry all day.”
- *We summon up concern for the well-being of the other as a child of God.* Seeing the ones on whom our bitterness focuses as children of God challenges our tendency to perceive them simply as enemies, rivals, or threats.
- *We recognize our own complicity in conflict, remembering that we have been forgiven in the past and take the step of repentance.* This doesn’t mean ignoring differences between victims and victimizers. People need to be held accountable for their actions, and some people need to repent and ask forgiveness while those who have been victimized struggle to forgive. We need to recognize and resist our temptation to blame others while exonerating ourselves. All too often we see the specks in other people’s eyes while not noticing the log in our own (Matthew 7:1–5). This is why it’s important for us to remember our own forgiveness. Indeed, rather than “forgive and forget,” a better directive would be that we forgive and are forgiven so we can remember well.
- *We make a commitment to try and change whatever caused and continues to perpetuate our conflicts.* Forgiveness ought to usher in repentance and change.
- *We confess our yearning for the possibility of reconciliation.* Sometimes a situation is so painful that reconciliation may seem impossible. At such times, prayer and struggle may be the only imaginable options. However, continuing to maintain reconciliation as the goal—even if it is “hoping against hope” for reconciliation in this life—it is important because it reminds us that God promises to make all things new.

Living

The practice of forgiveness is not simply a one-time action or an isolated feeling or thought. Forgiveness involves us in a whole way of life that is shaped by an ever-deepening friendship with God and with other people. The central goal of this practice is to reconcile, to restore communion with God, with one another, and with the whole of creation.

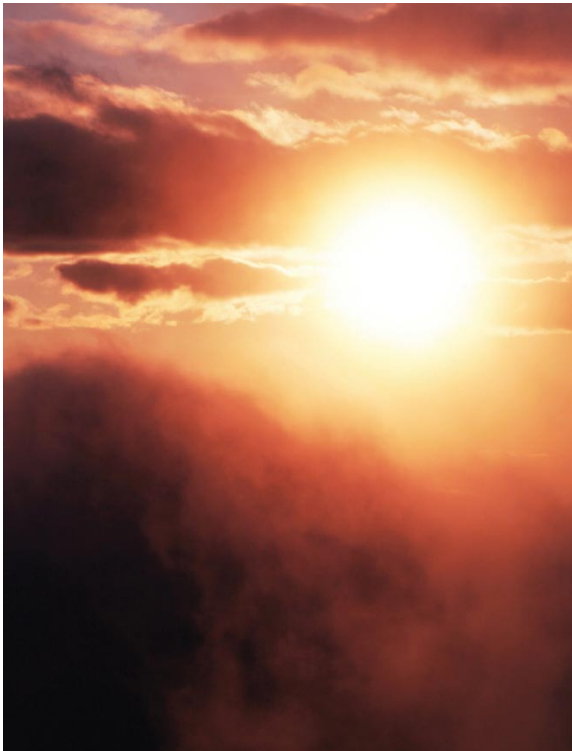
There are three kinds of forgiveness, all inter-related. There is self-forgiveness, which enables us to release our guilt and perfectionism. There is the forgiveness we extend to others and receive from them, intimates and enemies alike. And there is the forgiveness of God that assures us of our worth and strengthens us for practicing forgiveness.

How Forgiveness Can Grow and Flourish

The practice of forgiveness involves reconciliation and healing. Think about all of your important relationships: your family, your closest friends, those with whom you live, those with whom you work, perhaps all those whom you love and who love you. When you think about these love relationships, two things are certain: 1. conflict is inevitable, and 2. reconciliation is a must for the relationship to continue.

Do you forgive well? How well do you heal the wounds of conflict with those whom you love? The practice of forgiveness is reflected by our character and our faith. With this in mind, here are several suggestions for creating a home where forgiveness can grow and flourish:

- *Treat others with respect and love.* It seems obvious, but the most sure-fire way to prevent negative, unforgiving feelings from building up in relationships is to treat others with love and respect. Love involves treating people with respect regardless of how badly the person messes up or disappoints others. People are imperfect and will, in fact, make mistakes at times. Nevertheless, if people treat each other with mutual respect, those transgressions occur less frequently.
- *Recognize that conflict is inevitable.* Intimacy and conflict are two sides of a very thin coin of relationship. Part of being human and living in relationship with others means good times and bad, great days and dark days, close connection and separation. People who forgive well know this and remain honest with themselves about how all get wounded in relationship.
- *Spend your energy seeking solutions rather than laying blame.* Have you ever pondered how much time and energy is wasted on figuring out whose fault it was when an infraction has occurred? Occasionally, we can actually pin blame somewhere, but it provides only a fleeting moment of satisfaction, and has done *nothing* to solve the problem and reconcile the hurt. People who forgive well have learned that the blame game is a waste of time; regardless of who wins, all are losers. Those who forgive well go directly to problem-solving because they've learned that's where they can all begin to feel better.
- *Distinguish the person from the act.* People who forgive well know in their hearts that each person, as created in God's image and likeness, is truly good. They also know that each person will make mistakes and errors in judgment and action. While the person is always good—that will never change—the person's choice or action may be bad, even deplorable. Families who forgive well are careful with their language when confronting an offender to name the offense as bad, while honoring the person as inherently good.



- *Know the difference between excusing and forgiving.* People who forgive well simply excuse that which is excusable: a bump in the hallway, forgetting to empty the dishwasher, a distracted or annoying remark. They don't make a "federal case" out of excusable mishaps. But at the same time they recognize that in the event of an *inexcusable* act, all must participate in the hard work of healing, reconciling, and forgiving.
- *Be quicker to say "I'm sorry" than to expect the other person to apologize.* When people live in close relationships, they tend to experience as important the things that are done wrong to them more than they are bothered by the things they do wrong to the other person. Naturally, then, people tend to look for times when the other person should be apologizing for his or her actions. For harmonious relationships, people should be vigilant about the times when they themselves might have hurt another person. The offender should seek out the harmed party to apologize quickly and thoroughly. The offender should take responsibility for his or her own acts and tried to assure the offended party that the offender will try not to act hurtfully again.

- *Ritualize and celebrate their healing.* When the conflict has been resolved, when forgiveness has been granted, and when healing begins, people who forgive well will honor the moment with celebration in an appropriate way. The moment may call for a simple quiet hug, or a rousing toast, or a special meal or treat. Whatever it is, forgiving people mark their reconciliation with a gesture of remembrance.

Suggestions for Developing the Practice of Forgiveness

We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. The one who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies.

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

- *Take time to resolve the conflict.* Here's a simple process for resolving conflicts and reconciling with an individual or your family.
 1. *Set aside time.* If tempers are hot, let them cool down before trying to solve the problem. Set a time to talk.
 2. *Seek understanding of issues and feelings.* Give each other a chance to speak—to offer thoughts and feelings about the problem. No comments or judgments, just let everyone speak.
 3. *Brainstorm solutions.* Get all the possible ideas on the table. Sometimes a crazy suggestion leads to a workable solution. Prioritize the ideas and choose one solution.
 4. *Do it; practice the solution.* Implement the idea and set a date to check-in to see if the solution is working. If it's working, go to the final step. If not, go back to the previous two steps.

5. *Evaluate and celebrate.* If the solution works, choose an appropriate way to celebrate. Be sure to celebrate your healing and reconciling.

■ *Write a letter to someone you are struggling to forgive.* If you want to forgive someone or ask for forgiveness, writing down your thoughts can be a good place to start. It will give you the opportunity to thoughtfully consider what you want to say, why, and how to say it. And the recipient will have time to absorb the contents of your letter before responding. When *asking for forgiveness*, some things you might want to put in writing are:

- what your intention was (most people don't set out deliberately to hurt others)
- how you are feeling about what happened
- why you want to be forgiven
- what, if anything, you are willing to do to apologize and/or make restitution
- what you have learned from what happened, and how that might affect your future relationship with this person.

When *offering forgiveness*, consider letting the person know:

- your reason for offering forgiveness
- your feelings toward the person, as opposed to the action he or she took
- what, if anything, you would like the person to do to make restitution
- what you hope will happen (or not happen) in your future relationship with this person.



- *Before going to sleep, consciously let go of the hurts and angers of the day.* Regard each evening as the beginning of a new day. Make a simple ritual woven of silence and word and gesture.
- *Face your most recent experience of when forgiveness did not happen.* Can you find forgiveness by walking in the shoes of the other person? Are you willing to speak truthfully and patiently about your personal conflicts? Ask someone to anoint you for healing this relationship.
- *Reflect on ways forgiveness does and doesn't happen throughout the course of a week.* Keep a journal and note situations of small and large conflict and how they were resolved (or not). Share your reflections with a trusted family member or friend.
- *Pray for forgiveness.* Pray for the strength to forgive and to be forgiven.

Resources for Living the Christian Practice of Forgiving

Go to our project web site
www.lifelongfaith.com
 for exciting ideas, practical resources, and recommended books and web sites to help you live the Christian practice of forgiving.

Praying

Lord Jesus,
you opened the eyes of the blind,
healed the sick,
forgave the sinful woman,
and after Peter's denial embraced
him with love and mercy.

Lord Jesus,
Forgive all my sins,
and renew your love in my heart.
May your peace take root in my life
and strengthen me to be forgiving
and compassionate.



O Peace, O Holy One, O Comforter
we have wounded you as we have hurt one another.
Help us treat each other with love and respect.
For you are peace at our center, the holiness in our midst, the comfort we need. Amen.

(Deborah Alberswerth Payden and Laura Loving, *Celebrating at Home*)

Litany of Reconciliation

One Voice: For bitter words said in haste or anger

Others: *We are sorry, God.*

One Voice: For listening for faults instead of imagining possibilities

Others: *Forgive us, God.*

One Voice: Smooth rough places

Others: *And make us mindful of your presence*

One Voice: Heal us and hear us

Others: *Amen.*

(Deborah Alberswerth Payden and Laura Loving, *Celebrating at Home*)