
Another practical aspect of forgiveness

Steve Hyndman, in his addresses on forgiveness, drew attention to the vital importance of forgiveness associated with God and His Son our Lord Jesus Christ. He pointed out that if we are to follow the commandments of God and follow the example of Jesus, we have to ensure that we forgive others who may err against us.

In this paper we firstly focus on putting into practice **our seeking forgiveness of another person** we may have wronged (1). Secondly, we look at the way we can **forgive someone who has wronged us** (2). Thirdly, we look at **a few general principles that apply in all cases of forgiveness** being sought (3), and lastly, we look at some **practical examples** - Scriptural and in our everyday life (4).

Emphasised in this paper is the notion that forgiveness is a **two-way process**. To be meaningful and successful, both parties involved in a conflict need to consider the position of each other. And, of course, this is done with the oversight of God.

During the course of the paper, we will discuss **processes** which can be used in approaching somebody from whom we seek forgiveness. Processes are not necessarily 'steps in order'. Often, the processes overlap or take place simultaneously. In some ways, the processes for seeking forgiveness and offering forgiveness are very similar. There are just a few differences, and these are indicated below.

To a certain extent, this paper works towards the ideal. This is important, after all, our Lord Jesus showed the ideal forgiveness for us to follow. However, sometimes the ideal is not reached, but there has to be a way around the less than ideal that still enables us to do what is vital in our life – and that is to forgive others as God forgives us.

1. Seeking forgiveness of someone - Processes

- a) **Listen – first and foremost**. The most important aspect of any approach to seek forgiveness is the need to **listen** to what the other person is saying, or to listen to what problem the other person has with you. **We ask the other person** what the problem is **and then we have to listen to the explanation** of what the problem is. Both parties have to listen genuinely and sincerely to each other. Once the problem has been described, it is necessary for each to evaluate what has been spoken and then for each person to see how resolution and reconciliation can be approached. There must be a willingness on the part of both people to want to seek a successful outcome.

We should also recognise that the forgiving process may take considerable time. If the degree of hurt is deep, then it may take time for meaningful discussion to take place so that peace can be restored.

- b) Essential in any forgiveness process is to encourage **self-reflection**. We need to think about the general circumstances that surround the incident that occurred from both our own perspective and that of the other person. We need to reflect on the issues that are important for each of us, and evaluate the action taken by each to determine how to go about resolution.
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***Forgive us our debts, as we also
have forgiven our debtors.***

MATTHEW 6:12

- c) We also need to **recognise our own compassion and that of the other person**. Compassion implies that we identify with our own and the other person's suffering. It is somewhat related to 'empathy'. This is the ability for us to understand and possibly share the feelings of others. (Quite a different word to 'sympathy'.) In these circumstances, we have listened to the other person, and we are endeavouring to understand the other person's suffering because of the way we spoke or acted. **We listen for the expression of their feeling**, and this can involve estimating the **depth** of their feelings. This will help us to determine the extent of their hurt and provide a better understanding of how we might approach our asking for forgiveness.

It can also occur that we may genuinely believe that we have not wronged the other person therefore believe that we do not need to seek forgiveness. This still requires compassionate consideration in that the other person **has** been offended and hurt. There is little use stating that they shouldn't be hurt – **they have been**. Perhaps a simple statement on our part might be, "I am so sorry I have hurt you – it was not my intention. I'll try to avoid this situation again." In this response we accept personally our words or actions. This is quite different to saying "I am sorry you have been hurt..." where we have accepted no personal responsibility. A two-way compassionate response can go a long way to resolution and reconciliation.

- d) We need to **acknowledge the feelings of the other person**. They have been offended. Do they seem to feel very angry, despondent, outraged, distressed, disturbed, disappointed ... Identification of the extent of their feelings will help us determine the degree of difficulty they will have in arriving at forgiveness.
- e) We need to fully identify the **exact nature** of the other person's hurt. Has the person believed that a statement we have made against the other person, for example, been true or untrue?

Have we offended a family member? Have we been unkind in our speech or action? Have we **done** something wrong, or have we **not done** something we should have done?

- f) **Seek support.** This can be very helpful, but it has some pitfalls. Seeking the advice and perspective of another person in our perception of a wrongdoing **before** we approach a person seeking their forgiveness can be very helpful because it enables us to view our own perception in greater perspective. The pitfall here is that we can use the opportunity to seek confirmation of our already 'fixed' view, or our conversation can simply become a non-productive gossip session. A mutually acceptable friend might also be helpful as a mediator.
- g) Essential to any quest for forgiveness is to understand the **main cause** of the perceived wrongdoing. This will involve thinking of the background and circumstances of an offense and then trying to establish a way, or ways, around the hurt.
- h) **Focussing on the future rather than on the past** is an important way of overcoming wrongdoing and hurt. What are the ways forward? What can be done practically to avoid similar situations occurring again? Facing the future positively is always important otherwise we can become prone to negativity in many aspects of our life that will not help our relationship with God and others. But our loving Father will help us - The words of the Psalmist are so important: "My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:2).

2. Seeking to forgive someone – Processes - additional to the above

The above processes are equally important if we are seeking to offer forgiveness to another person who we believed has wronged us. There are, however, a few more things for us, as the 'forgivers' to address.

- i) **Choose to forgive.** We can forgive in for many reasons. We can do it because we realise it has to be done, and others expect it from us. But even then, because of this, we can do it begrudgingly – "Oh, I forgive you", said in a non-charitable tone (almost like 'If that would make you happy'). Or we can do it out of genuine remorse. 'I understand what you are saying and I forgive you" or, "I am so sorry I hurt you." The **choice** is ours. Obviously, the second path is the more meaningful. The first path, before God, would have no genuine meaning at all.
 - j) Sometimes we, or another person, can find it difficult to forgive because we believe in the need that **justice has to be done**. ('He cannot get away with that!', and we rationalise that we have to try to stop them doing it again 'for their own sake.')
- In genuine forgiveness we have to let this 'need' go.

3. Some general principles

Forgiveness doesn't mean forgetting what happened, or condoning or excusing the other person's behaviour.

Time and patience should be exerted by all participants in the conflict. It may be necessary to rebuild trust gradually so that forgiveness embraced is not short-lived. As with all elements of life, working towards the solution to the problem takes effort and time. But for our own sake in our walk before God, it is vital that we succeed in forgiving someone.

But what happens in a two-way dispute if we forgive someone, but **they do not forgive us**? We cannot do too much about this, but we should show Christlike behaviour and continue to make every effort to reconcile the situation in both word and deed.

Sometimes, the **content** of a person's criticism of an action of another person, may be appropriate but the **way** in which the person expresses their view is very inappropriate. Surely then it is a case of the person then apologising for their action if not for the substance of their concern.

There is also a distinction between **resolution** and **reconciliation**. This can be difficult. **Resolution** refers to the fact that two people have agreed to an outcome – ostensibly that the offered forgiveness can be accepted. This does not necessarily mean that they are 'best friends' again. It means that they have fulfilled their responsibility to offer and accept forgiveness. That may mean that they do not have very much to do with each other again. They may decide to continue, or not to continue a working relationship. This does not mean that they are not fulfilling their acceptance of forgiveness. If they decide to go their separate ways, it probably means that they are reducing their likelihood of further offence being given or taken. **Reconciliation** is a step further than resolution. It means that the two people can live and work together again. This is obviously desirable. But, in some circumstances, it may not be practical.

4. Scriptural and practical examples

The all-covering cloak for any of our, or our friend's, efforts to foster forgiveness must be our **constant prayer to our Heavenly Father and the earnest seeking His guidance**. We must show, or encourage, a Christlike spirit in our continued working towards forgiveness through faith that our Father will guide us in the best direction. If it is appropriate with the person we are engaging with, we might seek a private meeting with the person with whom the problem is and seek God's help together in prayer. This will demonstrate our commitments to doing what is correct in God's sight.

There are some important verses that will guide us in reflecting on the way Jesus regarded forgiveness. Jesus said,

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. Matthew 6:14-15

And Paul reiterated this:

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:32

More strategies

Conflict resolution associated with forgiveness involves addressing and resolving disputes or disagreements in a **constructive manner**. Here are some common strategies and principles.

An important element of forgiveness is **follow-up**. It is often very appropriate that once forgiveness has been accepted by both parties, we should work at following up our relationship in a constructive way, avoiding potential areas of further disagreement. At the same time, if continued disagreement begins to be evident, we can always follow the example of Paul and Barnabas who, when their

contention was sharp between them, [went separate ways](#) Acts 15:39. This process still involves forgiveness but may result in more productivity for all parties if there is an agreement to separate.

Forgiveness is about prioritising peace and love in our relationships with others. At the same time, it is important that we consciously put aside feelings of resentment and ill-will.

Practical daily examples

Here are some practical daily examples of where forgiveness might be important even though some of them might appear to be trivial. We should always remember that left without forgiving attention, some of these situations could become more serious:

1. Forgiving someone who didn't meet your expectations.
2. Forgiving a neighbour for their loud noise, barking dog or very untidy yard.
3. In a school or workplace not carrying out an activity that was expected of us and where a teacher or supervisor has occasion to reprimand us.
4. Forgiving a friend or family member for their past mistakes or things they forgot to do.
5. Pardoning a driver who made a reckless error while driving their car.
6. Forgiving yourself for making a poor decision.
7. Getting rid of resentment towards someone who took credit for your idea.
8. Letting go of bitterness towards a former friend.
9. Letting go ill-feeling against a friend who forgot your birthday.
10. Inappropriate comments on social media. This has become a major issue in contemporary society. People can comment on us, or one another, in a most unacceptable way. We need to forgive them, try to resolve the issue, or simply, unfollow or 'unfriend' them, where 'unfriend' is one social media platform's process. This withdraws their ability to spread unsatisfactory comments.

Biblical examples

The Bible contains many examples of forgiveness, demonstrating its importance in the Christian faith. Here are some examples. Others were mentioned by Steve Hyndman in his studies.

1. [Joseph and his brothers](#). Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery out of jealousy. Despite the betrayal, many years later Joseph forgave his brothers, recognizing that God's plan was to use their actions to save many lives. Genesis 45:1-15
 2. [Esau and Jacob](#). Jacob deceived his brother Esau out of his birthright and blessing, causing Esau to want to kill him. When they met years later Esau ran to meet Jacob, embraced him, and forgave him, showing love and reconciliation. Genesis 33:1-11
 3. [David and Saul](#). King Saul, out of jealousy, sought to kill David. When David had the opportunity to kill Saul, he spared his life. David showed mercy to Saul, refusing to harm the Lord's anointed and leaving judgment to God. 1 Samuel 24:1-22
 4. [Jesus on the cross](#). As Jesus was being crucified, he prayed for those who were crucifying him.
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Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing," showing ultimate forgiveness even in the face of extreme suffering. Luke 23:34

5. **Stephen's martyrdom.** Stephen was stoned to death for his faith. As he was being stoned, Stephen prayed, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them," reflecting Jesus' example of forgiving his persecutors. Acts 7:54-60

These examples emphasize the importance of forgiveness, even in situations of deep betrayal or harm. They reflect the Christian belief in God's love, grace and mercy.

Conclusion

Our actions should always be based on love. We ourselves, individually, are responsible to demonstrate love in our relationships in a Christlike manner. This involves not being judgemental. Let us take to our hearts and practice the words of advice given by the Apostle Paul:

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.



EPHESIANS 4:32

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