

Forgiving When you Can't Forget

Regina Boyd

Hi, I'm Regina Boyd, licensed mental health counselor and licensed marriage and family therapist. And today we're talking about forgiveness.

Opening Prayer

Let's pray, In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Come Holy Spirit. Lord, we lift up our hearts to you this day. We ask that you send your grace to our hearts, give us the grace to be open, to receive whatever it is you want us to receive. Help us to be courageous, to take any closer steps towards forgiveness that you're asking us to do. And Mother Mary, we ask for your intercession. As we pray, Hail Mary, full of grace; the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Walking the Path of Forgiveness

What I'm hoping today will be an encouragement for you to walk the path of forgiveness, an invitation to at least take that next step. If there is someone in your life, and there has been a break in the relationship, there's someone that you need to forgive, whether it be someone who's harmed you, who's betrayed you in some way, whether it be yourself, some regret that you have from your past, or even forgiving God, that this can be an inspiration for you. And we can look to our Lord as the ultimate inspiration of forgiveness. In Him, not only laying down His life for us, but in so many ways throughout His life, in His ministry of being a sign of forgiveness. It's tough.

Forgiveness is really tough. We hear it a million times as Christians. We know that we're called to forgive. We know that that's our rule as Catholics, but why is it so hard? I have two theories about why it's hard. The first is forgiveness is painful. It's hard to do because especially in a situation where we've been betrayed or hurt by someone else, there's a deep wound there. There there's harm that has happened to us. And in those moments, our hearts swell with a sense of justice that something wrong has happened here. And sometimes the idea of forgiveness can seem as if we're going to just let that go or, you know, pretend as if it didn't happen, that there's no one there acknowledging the harm that actually has been done. And that couldn't be further from the truth, by the way, but we'll get to that later.

And then the second thing that I think is hard, especially when we're thinking about forgiving yourself, for something that you might've done in your past is, sometimes there can be shame attached to that. And what's really interesting about shame is it can be morphed and twisted into a sense of our identity. We can take and believe, start believing those false beliefs, start believing the lies about whatever it was we did in our past. "Oh, I wish I was nicer to that person. I wish I would have invited them to this family event. I wish I didn't exclude someone in this instance at

work,” whatever it is and what are those lies that we're internally telling ourselves when we think back on those moments, and the enemy has twisted and not allowed us to that space to forgive ourselves in that moment. And so there can be a sense of pride that keeps us from taking that next step of forgiveness, because shame covers that and blankets that, and not, not helping us bring it into the light. So those are two reasons that I think get in the way of helping us take those steps towards forgiveness.

Why Should We Forgive?

So why forgive? We know that our Lord asks us to forgive, and it's really an act of love, love, or at least part of it. There might not, there's no more fundamental act to Christianity and forgiveness, maybe other than giving of ourselves in love. But I think forgiveness is very intimately attached to that piece. Jesus invites us to forgive as part of that invitation to love as God loves. And again, I want to be clear here because when we forgive, that does not mean that we're allowing ourselves to be taken advantage of, that we're becoming a doormat, that we're saying it's okay of what might've happened to us. And we're also not saying that when you forgive that any pain or hurt that's there, from whatever the situation is, it doesn't mean that that automatically goes away either. Unfortunately.

And there's another piece that I just want to add here, a caveat. So, when we take an extreme example of somebody who's been abused, whether physically, sexually abused, mentally, emotionally, when we imply forgiveness, we're not saying that that person should go back into an unsafe situation and be exposed to their abuser again, so that's not what we mean. We're talking about the freedom for yourself as an individual.

We know through research that forgiveness is good for your mental health, not only your mental health, but your physical health as well. So, people who practice forgiveness have lower rates of anxiety, of depression, of severe psychotic diagnoses. They have lower blood pressure and heart disease and lower mortality rates. And so, all of these things are to our end. And we know that God asks us to only do what is good for us. Even when you think about anger, our muscles get really tense and clenched. And when we forgive, there's a relaxation that happens in our bodies. And so all of that plays to our own health and our own benefit.

How can We Forgive?

So how do we forgive others? I think one way to do this is to recognize that the people involved in a situation are people just like us. And if we can take a step back and try to view that other person with some level of empathy, some level of understanding, that they are probably acting out of a place of their own woundedness, that they have not yet received healing for, it can take us out of that situation a bit and hopefully give us a slight sense of compassion for why somebody might act in such a hurtful and rash way. You can consider a lot of alternative explanations for why that incident might have occurred. So for example, if there is a misunderstanding between you and another friend or a family member, a miscommunication, sometimes it's helpful to just consider all the alternatives to what you believe happened in that moment. Not to say that what you believe is not true, but it, again, it helps remove you from that

situation and make it feel less overwhelming, and that can be one step closer to getting to a place where you can potentially forgive in your heart.

And here's the other thing: When you're forgiving others, you don't have to rush into reconciliation. Forgiveness does not always equal reconciliation. Like when I mentioned before, in the case of a severe abuse situation that would not be wise or prudent or helpful to, again, put yourself in a dangerous situation. And so forgiveness at the end of the day is for us and what we're called to do, and for our own benefit to live life in more freedom and to live our calling, to be forgiving and loving towards others.

Forgiving Yourself

When you're thinking about forgiving yourself, if there's something that you need to forgive yourself for, remember that we all make mistakes and that you are not necessarily that same person from whatever that incident was that happened 5 years ago, 10 years ago, 20, 30 years ago. That is not you anymore, and that situation does not define you. And so if you can give yourself a little compassion and look at yourself with more understanding and empathy, then that might be an opportunity to release some of the shame that surrounds that incident for yourself.

Shoulder to Shoulder with God

One exercise that I like to suggest is imagine that you're standing shoulder-to-shoulder with God. You're both looking out on this valley, this precipice, and in front of you is that event, that situation that you regret and that you wish you could change, and reviewing the event with Him, standing shoulder-to-shoulder and asking Him how He sees you in those moments as the event plays out. What does God have to say to you about that situation? And that can be a beautiful exercise to bring about more healing, more forgiveness for yourself.

Now, what about forgiving God? If there's a place in your heart where circumstances have happened in your life, and there's something there that you are mad at God about, the first thing you should do is tell Him. I think people underestimate the relationship we have with our Lord and how He wants to hear us and be with us in those moments. And it's okay to share your anger with Him and to share your frustration and your pain and your hurt. How can we develop our relationship with Him if we're not able to communicate all of us, the good, the bad, the ugly, and the messy, and in-between. He wants to hear that from us.

Learning from Job

And then I think too about Job and his friends. So, Job had been through the worst. He had been through so many painful events in his life, and his friends were convinced that Job had done something wrong to lose favor with God. But Job stood his ground. He was faithful, and he knew his God was faithful. And he said, "I know I haven't done anything wrong. I don't know why this is happening to me, but here I am." And sometimes that's all we can do at the end of the day is trust in God's love for us even when everything in our life seems like it's contrary to the opposite. We still can rely and look to that beautiful example of our Lord on the cross, that forgiveness and

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that love, even when everything seems completely out of whack, untouchable, unattainable, and miserable. We can stand in that fact that He is there for us, no matter what, as hard as it may be.

Supplement with Scripture

And so in closing, I want to leave you with some scripture reflections that you can look up on your own and pray with and hope that you can hear that invitation that we all need to hear over and over again throughout our lives, to take that next step closer towards forgiveness.

The first scripture is Matthew 6: 9-15, Matthew 18: 21-35, Luke 23: 32- 34. And lastly, Luke 15: 1-32.

And so God invites us to live like Him. The more that we do this, the more that we can forgive, the more that we experience the fullness of that calling, the fullness of who we truly are designed to be.

Closing Prayer

And now we'll close in a prayer: *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Our father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

Lord, we ask that you give us the grace to answer the call. To live as you live, to live with a heart quick to forgive, quick towards healing and love, quick to compassion. We just ask for continued strength and guidance to live that because we know we can't do it without you. And please give us the strength, the energy, the perseverance to move forward even when it feels scary, even when it doesn't feel safe. Know that as we take those steps forward, we are showing our trust and reliance in you. We ask all of this through Christ, our Lord. Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

God Bless You.