



Forgiveness Exercise

The purpose of this exercise is to give you a framework for what forgiveness is, what it is not, and how to forgive someone. We want you to understand forgiveness from a psychological and Biblical perspective. Please note that this does not and cannot replace counseling. If at any point you feel you cannot continue or need help, please seek out professional help from a pastor or licensed counselor.

Let's start with a few key considerations:

- Forgiveness is about your freedom. Forgiveness sets you free to move forward with your life. Unforgiveness keeps you bound to the past. Forgiveness helps you own your present and move into your future.
- When unforgiveness is in your life, you are continuing to give the person or organization that hurt you power over your soul. Forgiveness allows you to take back authority over your soul.
- From an agricultural perspective, forgiveness is the soil in which healthy boundaries, communication, and conflict resolution grow. Boundaries set from a place of unforgiveness isolate you from healthy relationships, and we often set boundaries in the wrong ways. You can choose to never speak to someone again from a place of unforgiveness and it eats away at your soul. You can choose to never speak to a person again from a place of forgiveness and your soul is free.
- Unforgiveness can lead to literal illness. The neurochemicals associated with unforgiveness can increase stress and impact the body in negative ways.
- While this is hard to take, forgiveness is commanded in the Scriptures.
 - Ephesians 4: 32, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”
 - Matthew 18: 21-22, “Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.”
 - 2 Corinthians 2:5-8, “Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him.”
 - Colossians 3:13, “Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”

Convinced yet? Before we talk about what forgiveness is and how to do it, let's talk about what forgiveness is not.

Forgiveness is NOT:

- Forgetting. Forgetting is impossible. Only God can choose to not remember our sins. Thinking that we must forget can build frustration and add undo burden to the forgiveness process.
- Weakness. Unforgiveness and anger do not empower you. I know it can feel that way but unforgiveness keeps you in bondage and can impact the health of your body, soul, relationships, and spirit.
- The absence of boundaries. In fact, you can forgive and never see or speak to someone again. Forgiveness helps us set healthy boundaries, meant for self-care rather than as a weapon. The boundary issue becomes particularly important if you are forgiving someone who consistently hurts you. I'll address this later in the video.
- Saying that what someone did or did not do was "ok." It's not an excuse for behavior. In fact, forgiveness is not the absence of judgment. We may not judge someone's character or personhood, but we definitely need to make judgments as to whether someone's behavior is healthy or not.
- Dependent upon an apology. Apologies certainly help, especially when we want to reconcile. But forgiveness is ultimately about your freedom and can be given whether someone apologizes.
- The same thing as reconciliation. While reconciling is definitely a goal of forgiveness, it is not always possible. Sometimes the person we need to forgive has died, refuses to acknowledge and confess, or is dangerous. Whether reconciliation is possible, you can forgive and move into your future in freedom.

Forgiveness *is*:

- One of the hardest things we do; it's also one of the most rewarding.
- In Psalm 103:3, David writes that God "forgives all my iniquity." The word for forgive is pardon, which means to be released from any punishment of an action. All means...well...all. And iniquity here means sin, perversity, depravity, and guilt. There is nothing that we can do outside of "all perversity, depravity and guilt."
- Two parts of a process:
 - Decisional – This happens in a few moments. I'm going to walk you through the decisional part of forgiveness in this exercise.
 - Emotional – This is the part that could change in a moment...or take some time to change. Just know that the emotional part of forgiveness does not always occur simultaneously with the decision. Any lingering emotions do not mean that you have not forgiven. It just means that you are now healing. Consider this example: Someone throws an object and it hits you in the head (whether it was on purpose or an accident is irrelevant...the person hurt you). You can decide to forgive them, but even after forgiving them, you still must heal from the physical wound. Emotional wounds are similar. We can forgive someone with a decision. But sometimes, often times, it takes a while to heal from the emotional wound.

When you decide to forgive someone, you are deciding to “release the offender from the consequences of his or her actions against you.” Think about this. This is the “pardon” that is noted in the Scriptures. You *are not* justifying what happened; you *are not* saying that what happened is ok. You are simply releasing the offender from the consequences of his or her actions against you.

What are the consequences? Consequences can be numerous, broad, and destructive. Someone’s actions or inactions towards us can impact our:

- Body
- Thoughts
- Emotions
- Decision making abilities
- Relationships
- Spirit
- Sexuality
- Finances
- Vocation

After you release the person from the consequences, someone has to take responsibility for the consequences (i.e., the damage done by the offense). That person has to be you...you must take responsibility for the consequences. Wait...what?! Yes. You must take responsibility for the consequences, not because it’s fair, but because someone must take responsibility for your healing. If you continue to blame the offender (i.e., “You did this to me!”), you continue to give that person authority over your soul and you are choosing to remain tethered to the past.

It’s not fair. But what are the other options? You can continue to stay chained to the past and to allow your past to define you. Or, you can forgive and move on with your life in freedom.

So what does it mean to take responsibility for the consequences? It means that you now own the consequences and start to think about what you can do to move towards healing, restoration, stability, safety, etc. Examples are: If someone stole from you, you assess the loss and start making plans to replenish or replace. If someone betrayed you, you get help to process the grief and start to think about who you are after the betrayal and how you will both survive and move forward with life. If you were sexually assaulted, you begin making plans for therapy that help you heal from the trauma, get treatment if you acquired an STD, and so.

This stuff is not easy. But it is worth it. You are worth it. God believes you are worth it and desires for you to be free!

Are you ready to do this? I’ve provided a step-by-step process on how to do this and included a worksheet to use in the process.

Before beginning, please keep a few things in mind:

- This will probably be an emotional process. That’s ok, but if you feel you cannot continue, please do not continue. Seek help from a close friend, pastor, or counselor that you trust.

- It would help to have some basic relaxation skills in your coping skills arsenal. A simple way to get these is in Apps like *Calm*, *Abide*, or *Soultime*. So, before continuing, make sure you have a few skills in place that can help you regulate your emotions. Again, if you need help, please contact a close friend, pastor, or counselor.
- Give yourself about 30 minutes to an hour of uninterrupted time to complete this process. You may not need it all, but you will likely thank me for recommending it.
- Before beginning, read through the entire instructions a couple of times (or as many as needed to get a grasp on the process). This will help the forgiveness process go more smoothly.

Forgiveness Process

1. Identify one person (or organization) to forgive.
2. Once you have identified that person, write his/her name on the top of your worksheet provided below.
3. Think about what the person did or did not do that offended and/or hurt you.
 - a. If it was just one thing, write that in the space *on the worksheet* where it says, “When you did/did not _____.”
 - i. The “did” is for active behaviors that offended you. For example, when someone yelled, disrespected you, talked about you, betrayed you, or even abused you in some way.
 - ii. The “did not” is used when people neglected us, did not follow through on commitments, withheld love/affection, etc.
 - b. If you are forgiving a person for multiple offenses, consider:
 - i. Using a sheet for each offense. Write each offense in the “When you did/did not _____.”
 - ii. If the person did the same thing multiple times, think of a few examples and use those examples to represent the whole. For example, if someone has lied multiple times to you, think of one or two examples that stand out and use those to represent the whole.
4. When you have written what the person did, consider the consequences. As noted earlier, consequences can be numerous. Ask yourself, “When the person did/did not _____, the consequences were _____.” Look at the worksheet and fill in any specifics related to the listed consequences. I recommend praying through this as well. Ask God to bring to mind any consequences of which you might not have thought. When done, continue to step 5.
5. Note: This step may be quite emotional. It’s ok to cry. In fact, you need to allow yourself time to cry. The important thing to remember is that you are safe right now and have the opportunity to forgive. Ready?
 - a. Find a chair next to you and place a small trash can next to you.
 - b. Now, begin to visualize the offender sitting in the chair. See his or her face, what he or she is wearing, his or her posture, etc.
6. Once you have visualized the person, look the person in his or her eyes and say this, out loud, to the person:
 - a. “_____ [say the name of the person you are forgiving].
 - b. “When you _____ [read to the person what they did or did not do].

- c. “I experienced the consequences of [read every single consequence you wrote down].
 - d. Now, look the person in the eyes again and say, “I release you from every consequence. I no longer hold you responsible for the consequences. While it is not fair, I take responsibility for each consequence so that I can heal. You no longer have authority over my life. I forgive you.” Then, watch that person disappear.
7. Now, tear up the sheet of paper and throw it in the trash can next to you. This symbolizes your freedom from that person as well as your willingness to take responsibility for the healing process.
8. Take one deep breath in through your nose, hold it for a moment, and breathe out slowly through your mouth. As you breathe out, feel the weight of the offense leave. You have now made the decision to forgive. Let that sink in.
9. Next steps:
 - a. If you are not a Christian or a person of faith, prayer will not be a part of this process.
 - b. So, over the next several days, consider again the consequences. Except this time, it is not to forgive. This time, you are considering the consequences to know what steps need to be taken for *each* consequence to move you towards healing. The Next Steps Worksheet will help you with this.
 - c. Consider a couple of examples:
 - i. If I am experiencing grief, anxiety, and/or depression, my next step may be counseling.
 - ii. If I have medical issues because of the offense, I will schedule an appointment with the appropriate physician and pursue treatment (and healing if possible).
 - d. If you are a Christian and/or a person of faith, prayer will be a part of this process. If this is true, move now to Step 10.
10. Be sure that you are in a quiet place and have at least 10 minutes of uninterrupted time.
11. Close your eyes and remember an image of Jesus’ cross. But only see the cross. He is not on the cross.
12. Now, see Jesus standing next to you. With a smile on His face, see His hands reached out towards you. He wants to take the consequences from you. He wants to walk with you into healing and growth.
13. Visualize yourself giving Jesus every one of the consequences for which you just took responsibility. As you give Jesus each one, watch as He takes them from you. Allow yourself to feel the weight of the consequences leaving you.
14. Once you are done giving Jesus each consequence, reach out your hands (both in your visualization and literally). Jesus wants to give you something...a gift...to replace everything He just took from you.
15. As Jesus gives you the gift, pay attention to it. What is the gift? He is giving you something that promotes healing, life, and growth.
16. Receive the gift and thank Jesus for it. Take a deep breath and open your eyes.
17. Now, you are not alone in walking through the consequences. Go back to Step 9b and complete 9b and 9c. Jesus is with you. Pray and ask Him for guidance as you walk the journey of healing.

Congratulations! You just forgave! Now that you have an idea about what forgiveness is and how to do it, use this to forgive others as needed.

Last thought: We often need to forgive people who consistently hurt us and/or who cannot be trusted. Love and forgiveness do not equal trust. Boundaries need to be set in ways that promote safety. If you need help with setting boundaries, read Cloud and Townsend's classic book Boundaries and seek help from trusted pastors, counselors, etc.

May your journey of forgiveness and healing be blessed!

Questions or need help?

If you have any questions or you need help, contact your pastoral leadership at Building Church either through email (connect@buildingchurch.tv) or by phone (256-665-3404).

Also, The Well Clinic provides resources to the community to guide you into hope, wellness, and life. If interested, follow us on Facebook @thewellclinic and find us online at www.mywellclinic.com. You can also email The Well Clinic at info@mywellclinic.com with any questions.



Forgiveness Worksheet

Name: _____
[the name of the person you are forgiving]

When you did/did not _____,
[List the offence that you are forgiving.]

The consequences were:

- Physical: _____
- Emotional: _____
- Decisional: _____
- Thought-related: _____
- Relational: _____
- Sexual: _____
- Vocational: _____
- Financial: _____
- Spiritual: _____

Forgiveness

“ _____ [say the name of the person you are forgiving], I release you from every consequence. I no longer hold you responsible for the consequences. While it is not fair, I take responsibility for each consequence so that I can heal. You no longer have authority over my life. I forgive you.”



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L O U I S I A N A

Next Steps Worksheet: What to do after the decision to forgive has been made.

Type of Consequence	Actual Consequence	Next Steps: What steps do I take to promote healing and growth in my life?
Physical:		
Emotional:		
Decisional:		
Thought-related:		
Relational:		
Sexual:		
Vocational:		
Financial:		
Spiritual:		