

Five Steps in Forgiving

By Lynda Savage, MS, LMFT, LPC

Forgiveness is not sympathy. Forgiveness is not denying unfairness.
Forgiveness does not have to forget. Forgiveness may not mean reconciliation.
Forgiveness is a choice.

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us...”

1. The fog lifts. The first step in forgiveness is moving toward learning how the offense has affected you and the consequences of it in your life. When the fog of what has happened begins to lift, moving forward is possible.

2. Fake forgiveness hurts you. The second step is to understand that you have a choice in the matter. In this span of time, it occurs to the offended that to hold back forgiveness is to hurt one's self. This is not a new understanding of the human condition. A fake “I forgive you,” brings a veneer of balance. However, this will eventually crumble.

3. Who owns what? The third step produces a more full understanding of the offense and/or the offender. This does not mean liking or being sympathetic to the offender. In this part of the journey, letting go of anger and hurt depersonalizes the unfair actions of the offender. A major accomplishment here is knowing the harmful actions absolutely do not belong to you as a responsible party or as punishment.

4. Give yourself a break. The fourth step, while not minimizing the offense, is the realization that the continuing to hang on to “unresolve” because of bitterness, confusion, or even an identity as a wounded person, keeps the perpetration and perpetrator much too close.

5. Wisdom from pain. The fifth step is growth that comes from being an overcomer. Forgiveness deepens us. New meaning is possible in suffering. A new purpose in life for having suffered unjustly is out there. It is also possible in this letting go, to discover our own need to ask for forgiveness from others.

Inspired by the writing of Robert Enright

Compliments of Practical Family Living, Inc.
P.O. Box 1676, Appleton, WI 54912 (920) 720-8920

You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute our articles in any format provided that you credit the author, no modifications are made, you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and you include Practical Family Living's web-site address (<http://www.pfl.org>) on the copied resource. Quotations from any article are also permitted with credit to the author and citing the web-site. Any use of other materials on this web-site, including reproduction, modification, distribution or republication, without the prior written consent of Practical Family Living, Inc., is strictly prohibited.