

Healthy Living / Healthy Relationships....**“FORGIVENESS”**

From the Mayo Clinic Staff on a writeup on Healthy Living – Forgiveness: Who hasn't been hurt by the actions or words of another? Perhaps a parent constantly criticized you growing up, a colleague sabotaged a project or your partner had an affair. Or maybe you've had a traumatic experience, such as being physically or emotionally abused by someone close to you. These wounds can leave you with lasting feelings of anger and bitterness; even vengeance. But if you don't practice forgiveness, you might be the one who pays most dearly. By embracing forgiveness, you can also embrace peace, hope, gratitude and joy. Consider how forgiveness can lead you down the path of physical, emotional and spiritual well-being.

What is forgiveness? Dr. Lynn Ponton defines forgiveness as letting go of the need for revenge and releasing negative thoughts of bitterness and resentment. Forgiveness involves a decision to let go of resentment and thoughts of retaliation. In the Bible, the Greek word translated “forgiveness” literally means “to let go.” The act that hurt or offended you might always be with you, but forgiveness can lessen its grip on you and help free you from the control of the person who harmed you. Forgiveness can even lead to feelings of understanding, empathy and compassion for the one who hurt you. We forgive others when we let go of resentment and give up any claim to be compensated for the hurt or loss we have suffered. The Bible teaches in 1 Corinthians 13: 4-5 that unselfish love is the basis for true forgiveness, since love “keeps no record of being wronged.”

Other scriptures on forgiveness:

- Matthew 6: 14-15, *“For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”*
- Matthew 5: 43-45, *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.”*
- Ephesians 4: 31-32, *“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”*

From Dr. Lynn Ponton, "Forgiveness can be a gift that we give to ourselves." Here are some easy steps towards forgiveness:

- Acknowledge your own inner pain.
- Express those emotions in non-hurtful ways
- Protect yourself from further victimization.
- Try to understand the point of view and motivations of the person to be forgiven; replace anger with compassion.
- Forgive yourself for your role in the relationship.
- Decide whether to remain in the relationship.
- Try expressing forgiveness verbally or in writing. *If the person is dead or unreachable, you can still write down your feelings in letter form.*

What Forgiveness Is Not...

- Forgiveness is not forgetting or pretending it didn't happen. It did happen, and we need to retain the lesson learned without holding onto the pain.
- Forgiveness is not excusing. We excuse a person who is not to blame. We forgive because a wrong was committed.
- Forgiveness is not giving permission to continue hurtful behaviors; nor is it condoning the behavior in the past or in the future.
- Forgiveness is not reconciliation. We have to make a separate decision about whether to reconcile with the person we are forgiving or whether to maintain our distance.

Being hurt by someone, particularly someone you love and trust, can cause anger, sadness and confusion. If you dwell on hurtful events or situations, grudges filled with resentment, vengeance and hostility can take root. If you allow negative feelings to crowd out positive feelings, you might find yourself controlled up by your own bitterness or sense of injustice. If you are unforgiving and tend to hold on to grudges, you might:

- Bring anger and bitterness into every relationship and new experience
- Become so wrapped up in the wrong that you can't enjoy the present
- Become depressed or anxious
- Feel that your life lacks meaning or purpose, or that you're at odds with your spiritual beliefs
- Lose valuable and enriching connectedness with others

Forgiveness can be challenging, especially if the person who's hurt you doesn't admit they did anything wrong. If you find yourself not able to forgive someone:

- Practice empathy. Try seeing the situation from the other person's point of view.
- Ask yourself why they would behave in such a way. Perhaps you would have reacted similarly if you faced the same situation.
- Reflect on times you've hurt others and on those who've forgiven you.
- Pray...seek God's strength, guidance and peace
- Write in a journal or talk with a person you've found to be wise and compassionate, such as a pastor, a spiritual leader, a counselor, or an impartial loved one or friend.
- Be aware that forgiveness is a process, and even small hurts may need to be revisited and forgiven over and over again.

What if the person I'm forgiving doesn't change?

Getting another person to change his or her actions, behavior or words isn't the point of forgiveness. Think of forgiveness more about how it can change your life; by bringing you peace, happiness, and emotional and spiritual healing. Forgiveness can take away the power the other person continues to exert in your life.

Benefits of forgiveness

Letting go of grudges and bitterness can make way for improved health and peace of mind. Forgiveness can lead to:

- Healthier relationships
- Improved mental health
- Less anxiety, stress and hostility
- Lower blood pressure
- Fewer symptoms of depression
- A stronger immune system
- Improved heart health
- Improved self-esteem

Genesis 45: 1-15

“Joseph’s forgive his brothers”

Joseph could stand it no longer. There were many people in the room, and he said to his attendants, “Out, all of you!” So he was alone with his brothers when he told them who he was. ² Then he broke down and wept. He wept so loudly the Egyptians could hear him, and word of it quickly carried to Pharaoh’s palace. ³ “I am Joseph!” he said to his brothers. “Is my father still alive?” But his brothers were speechless! They were stunned to realize that Joseph was standing there in front of them. ⁴ “Please, come closer,” he said to them. So they came closer. And he said again, “I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt. ⁵ But don’t be upset, and don’t be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives. ⁶ This famine that has ravaged the land for two years will last five more years, and there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. ⁷ God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and to preserve many survivors. ⁸ So it was God who sent me here, not you! And he is the one who made me an adviser to Pharaoh; the manager of his entire palace and the governor of all Egypt. ⁹ “Now hurry back to my father and tell him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me master over all the land of Egypt. So come down to me immediately! ¹⁰ You can live in the region of Goshen, where you can be near me with all your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and everything you own. ¹¹ I will take care of you there, for there are still five years of famine ahead of us. Otherwise you, your household, and all your animals will starve.’” ¹² Then Joseph added, “Look! You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that I really am Joseph! ¹³ Go tell my father of my honored position here in Egypt. Describe for him everything you have seen, and then bring my father here quickly.” ¹⁴ Weeping with joy, he embraced Benjamin, and Benjamin did the same. ¹⁵ Then Joseph kissed each of his brothers and wept over them, and after that they began talking freely with him.

- Why do you think Joseph cried when he revealed himself to his brothers?
- List some things Joseph’s brothers did to him and what happened to him as a result of what they did to him. How did he come to grips with forgiving his brothers?
- Look again at verses 9-15...would this been possible if forgiveness hadn’t occur

Who is someone, some people in your life you have not forgiven yet?

Are you ready to forgive and experience the joys and benefits that will come from forgiveness?