

The Power of Forgiveness

Part I: Why?



■ by Debi Mitchell, MS, LMFT

“Without forgiveness, there’s no future” –Desmond Tutu

“For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.” –Jesus (Matthew 7:14-15)

What is forgiveness and what is it not?

Although definitions of forgiveness vary, most will agree that forgiveness involves letting go of negative feelings toward an actual or perceived offender. It is making a choice to let go of your right for revenge, and not through simply ignoring that it happened.

Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. Choosing to let go of anger, bitterness, or a host of other bad feelings that occur when someone hurts us or someone we love is not the same as saying it was okay. Choosing forgiveness does not necessarily change the accountability of the person responsible.

Why should I forgive?

The benefits of forgiveness and the costs of holding grudges have been widely researched. Here are some things to consider:

1. **Relational:** If we choose to hold a grudge, we are choosing to remain negative toward someone - this creates additional barriers and throws off the balance of power/equality in any remaining relationship. Choosing to let go of the anger removes one barrier toward reconciling that relationship. Negativity also infects our mindset and our mood, which can cause us to behave with irritability toward those who have done no wrong.
2. **Emotional:** Research has also shown that those who forgive have fewer depressive and anxiety symptoms than those who hold grudges. Picture someone you have not yet forgiven and think about the emotions you are experiencing. Enough said.
3. **Health:** Research has shown that forgiveness has tremendous health benefits, particularly with the cardiovascular system. Do you struggle with high blood pressure, a high resting heart rate, or an overall strain on the heart? Forgiveness can help there.
4. **Lower risk of alcohol and substance abuse:** It makes sense when you think about it. Since many people drink and/or use substances to “feel better” or “forget,” letting go of negative emotions gives you fewer reasons to use them in the first place!
5. **Greater spiritual well-being:** We are made spiritually alive by accepting the forgiveness offered through Christ. An unwillingness to pass on that forgiveness separates us from God. Knowing we are forgiven gives us the boldness we need to reach up as sinful people to a Holy God and live in relationship with Him.

As Easter approaches, remember the forgiveness Christ is offering you, accept it, and choose to pass it on. It will be the best gift you ever give yourself.

In our May/June 2013 *Pressing On* issue, Debi will share “*The Power of Forgiveness—Part II: How?*”

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