

## FORGIVENESS IS NOT....

- a. **Forgetting.** We need to remember what it is that we are trying to forgive.
- b. **Denying that we are hurt.** Forgiveness and healing are only possible when the person recognizes that they are offended and hurt. Emotions are real. We need to learn how to accept and deal with them.
- c. **An instant act of will.** Forgiveness is the end result of a process.
- d. **Something done on command:** to reduce forgiveness to a moral obligation is too superficial.
- e. **To return to the situation, which existed beforehand.** Reconciliation is not the same as forgiveness.
- f. **Does not mean letting go of justice.** To avoid holding people accountable for their behaviour allows encourages the continuation of such crimes.
- g. **Does not mean excusing the other person.** Excusing the other person takes away their moral responsibility. It underestimates the offending person; and implies moral superiority.

**True pardon** begins in humility and opens the road to true forgiveness.

**False pardon** maintains the dominating/dominated relationship, which leads to:

- compulsive person who confronts the other every time something goes wrong
- the sniffer of culpability who seeks out every possible wrong in order to forgive and show themselves to be merciful
- the one who tries to get glory and honour by continuing to be with the offender.

**True pardon** consists in an interior strength, not in a manifestation of power.

- h. **Leaving forgiveness to God.** This is a pretext for not having to deal with forgiveness, for avoiding confrontation with one's own pain, anger, resentment and humiliation. This is avoiding responsibility.
- i. **Forgiveness is not usually a one-shot deal.** Unless the infraction is small, forgiveness is not a singular act to be completed in one sitting. It has many layers and many seasons. It is seldom a 100% proposition. By God's grace we do what we are honestly able and the rest is what we are allowed to leave with God.
  - Some people forgive more easily than others; for some it is a gift; for others, a skill.
  - The important part of forgiveness is to begin and continue; finishing it all is a life's work.

*God grant me the serenity to accept the things I  
cannot change,  
The courage to change the things I can,  
And the wisdom to know the difference.*

## 12 Steps to Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a conscious decision to cease to harbour resentment

**Put an end to the offending behaviour and decide not to take revenge.**

**Recognize the hurt and poverty.** Something has happened that is hurtful and maybe humiliating.

**Share the hurt with someone** who accepts us, is not judgmental, does not come immediately with all sorts of advice; someone who helps put things into perspective. For people of faith, the best place to begin is to take it to God, asking for the wisdom and grace to know how to proceed. Then pick out **one safe** person to continue.

- **It is most helpful if you can safely go directly to the perpetrator and they stop the offending behaviour.**

**Clearly identify where the hurt lies,** knowing what and where the hurt is puts it into perspective and helps to stop distortions.

**Accept you anger.** Anger is an emotional response, which results from feelings of pain and/or fear. Our emotions are neither right nor wrong; it's what we do with them that's important. Attempting to vent our anger by hurting or destroying the offender or someone else is seldom helpful, nor is turning our anger inward until it becomes chronic rage, depression, or a means of staying stuck in the past.

**Identify any role you may have played in the situation and forgive yourself.** Self-forgiveness is an essential element of healing; it returns harmony within. Accepting ourselves as imperfect creatures is part of the process. (Matt 7: 3)

**Try to understand the offender.** Look for the motives of their behaviour; **not to justify but to explain.**

**Look for meaning in the offense.** An injury or hurt can become the starting point for human growth.

- mourn the loss of the previous situation
- reflect: understanding the event can lead to a deeper understanding of self

**Decide how to proceed from here.**

- Know that you are worthy of forgiveness. The one who has received forgiveness can truly forgive.
- Let go of the obsession of having to forgive. Let God be part of the process.
- Let yourself be moved to *the grace of forgiveness*.
- Evaluate relationship with the offender. It may not mean reconciliation.
- Changing the heart of the offender is beyond your control. When we allow God's grace to help us work through our anger, resentments, and disappointments, when we agree to allow those feelings to be replaced, then we are set free.