

Peacemaking for Families

by Ken Sande
Forgiveness

Christians are the most forgiven people in the world, which means we ought to be the most forgiving. But is that the way things happen normally? Probably not. The forgiveness we offer others is often far from complete, and it frequently fails to match the marvelous forgiveness that God bestows on us.

Since we are not God, our forgiveness will not be as complete as His. However, with His constant help, through the Holy Spirit's work in our lives, we can improve in our ability to forgive others. The first step is to adopt an attitude of continual repentance and thankfulness for our salvation.

THE THREE THINGS FORGIVENESS IS NOT

1. Forgiveness is not a feeling.

We should set forgiveness apart from our feelings altogether. To be sure, deciding to forgive can eventually change our feelings tremendously, but that comes later, after we have made the conscious decision to forgive.

2. Forgiveness is not forgetting.

God doesn't forget our sins when He forgives them. He decides not to remember them; not to mention, recount, or think about them ever again; not to hold them against us in the final ledger. Similarly, when we forgive, we must consciously try not to think or talk about what others have done that hurt us. This, of course, is no easy task, especially when the hurt is fresh in our mind. But through God's help, accompanied by a continual awareness of His immeasurable forgiveness for us, painful memories of others' wrongs usually fade with time.

3. Forgiveness is not excusing.

We do not simply sweep our offender's behavior under the rug when we forgive, in effect saying, "You really didn't do anything wrong" or "You couldn't help it." On the contrary, the fact that we forgive indicates that a sin was committed.

DEFINITION OF FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is an act of the will, a decision not to think or talk about what someone has done. It is an active process involving a conscious choice and a deliberate course of action. It is the canceling of a debt that someone has incurred because of improper behavior or words. And just as God's forgiveness of us breaks down the wall we erected between Him and us by our sin, our forgiveness of another opens

the way for a renewed relationship with him or her. It brings us back together after an offense has separated us from each other.

THE FOUR FORGIVENESS PLEDGES

1. I will not think _____ about this incident _____.
2. I will not bring up this incident _____ up again and use it against _____ you.
3. I will not talk _____ to others _____ about this incident.
4. I will not allow _____ this incident to stand between us or hinder _____ our personal relationship.

TABLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is the first of the four forgiveness pledges the hardest and yet most crucial to the process of forgiveness?
2. How should you handle forgiveness if the offending individual does not repent? (This is a primer for next week's lesson.)