



Forgiveness and Restoration

LifeCare Memos® - Messages of Compassion

The older we get the more time we have to think back over our lives. Many times, our thoughts center on negative memories of things that we have done or failed to do, or of things that others have done to us or against us. Listen to comments from Residents in a long-term care facility: *"I don't see how **GOD** could ever forgive me for all the things that I have done."* *"I sure hope my kids will find a way to forgive me before I die."* *"I haven't spoken to my son in over 10 years!"*

Cure for Bitterness

The only cure for bitterness is forgiveness. *"Only when we find the emotional maturity to release those who have wronged us, whether they have repented or not, will the wounds finally start to heal."* (James Dobson, Focus on the Family)

The book of Philemon provides an example of the need to forgive others and of the joy of restoration. Onesimus, a slave of Philemon, evidently decided to rob his master, travel to Rome, and blend into the slave scene. But he left a broken relationship and an unresolved injury. In Rome he came under the influence of the Apostle Paul. As a result of Paul's faithfulness to share the Gospel, Onesimus came to know, and to receive by faith, Jesus Christ as his supreme Lord and Master.

As Onesimus' faith matured, he realized that his past actions against Philemon were wrong. He wanted to make the relationship right, but it was hard to think of dealing directly with him. Paul wrote a letter in which he reintroduced his friend to Philemon, explaining that he was sending him back, not just as a slave but as a brother. Paul tactfully and skillfully asks Philemon to accept and forgive Onesimus because they were now one in Christ. *"Welcome him as you would welcome me!"* Though Paul does not specifically ask Philemon to forgive Onesimus, he clearly assumes that if Philemon could bring himself to relate to his runaway slave as a dear brother, he would have already forgiven him!

"We all agree that forgiveness is a beautiful idea until we have to practice it!" (C. S. Lewis) Forgiving sinners who have hurt or offended us is extremely difficult. It is never easy, does not come naturally, and is a learned capability. Forgiveness is a choice of the will, a genuine gift. The tragedy is that far too many people make a deliberate choice not to forgive those who have inflicted physical or emotional pain.

Stumbling Blocks

There are many reasons people use for not forgiving others. Here are some stumbling blocks to forgiveness:

- 1) Forgiving would lead you to believe that what you did was all right.
- 2) If I forgive you, then you'll do it again. As the old saying goes, "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me!"
- 3) I can't forgive until you hurt as much as I have been hurt.
- 4) I can't.
- 5) You didn't apologize! So I can't forgive you.
- 6) You didn't admit that you were wrong.
- 7) It would just cause another argument. (Hal Baumchen)

All of us would have to confess that these stumbling blocks have popped into our minds. These false beliefs hinder us and make forgiving others a difficult task. So how can we learn to forgive? How can we avoid the painful consequences that refusing to forgive others brings—consequences like depression, anger, physical and emotional problems, broken relationships?

Positive Steps

Here are some steps to help us genuinely forgive those who have hurt or offended us.

- 1) **Restore the attitude of love.** To love a person is to see them as **GOD** sees them—as an individual of value, regardless of shortcomings and failures. Forgiveness cannot begin until love has been re-extended to the offender.
- 2) **Release the past.** What has happened has happened and it will not change. Forgiveness does not mean we ignore what has happened, it means we relate to that person in spite of what has happened. To forgive is to let go of the pain and accept what has happened. Forgiveness is the only way to break the cycle of evil.
- 3) To release the past does not mean we condone it. *"Forgiveness does not mean letting the person off the hook of responsibility, but taking the hook of pain out of your mouth."* (Jim Conway) *"Stop the pain! You don't forgive someone for their sake; you do it for your sake, so you can be free!"* (Neil Anderson) *"More than we want to believe, we have contributed to some of the painful events in our lives. It is good, helpful, healing, and wise to admit what we have done."* (Christian counselor)
- 4) **Reconstruct the relationship.** This is the test of true forgiveness. To review the pain of an offense is never easy. It takes work and prayer but it is the only way to healing and to stop the pain.

5) Reaffirm the relationship. Forgiveness is starting over from where our relationship was fractured with the knowledge we have gained and with a new appreciation for **GOD's** grace in each of our lives. (Gary Hundley)

Promises of Forgiveness

To move toward the rich, redeeming, thoroughly cleansing forgiveness described in Scripture:

- 1) I will not think about this incident.
- 2) I will not bring this incident up 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. (Peacemaker Ministries)

*“This kind of forgiveness is truly what the world needs to see. In addition to preserving precious relationships, you will send the message that **GOD's** forgiveness tears down every wall completely and forever!”* (Ken Sande)

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When experiencing the stresses of life, people need support. The Psalmist needed that support and found it when he turned to God. He said, *“**Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life. I cry to you, O LORD; I say, ‘You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living’**”* (Psalm 142:4-5).

LifeCare Memos are designed as messages of compassion that integrate biblical guidelines for emotional and spiritual well-being. Topics focus on various life-care issues and address them from the perspective of Scripture.