

# FORGIVENESS: PART II



By Joy Quanrud Grimsley, LMFT, EMDR

A happy relationship is a connection between two people who can forgive each other, whether that be with a partner, parent, child, sibling or close friend.

When we forgive an offense, it contributes to contentment and a deeper relationship commitment. Most acts of forgiveness are intertwined with feelings of love. In marriage, forgiveness contributes to deeper satisfaction, commitment, and intimacy. We become less motivated to think, feel, and behave poorly towards the one who hurt us.

Each person brings a personal 'tendency' and level of unforgiveness to the relationship. That tendency is developed in our childhood, influenced by our personalities, and impacted by life experiences and previous relationships. Becoming self-aware of what you bring to the table is having emotional intelligence. In therapy, we say that if you want to change something, you must interrupt the pattern. So, ask yourself, "What is my pattern of forgiveness and unforgiveness?" Remember these forgiveness facts:

- If I forgive, I am not condoning the hurtful behavior.
- If I forgive, I can positively impact my spiritual, physical and mental health.
- If I forgive, I don't need to minimize or ignore my pain.
- If I forgive, I can reduce my stress, angst, and anxiety.

It is possible to feel overall satisfaction with the relationship, but be offended about a particular behavior. It's important to not blanket the relationship as "all-bad" when it really isn't. When we're in a loving relationship, we develop certain assumptions, expectations, or make promises to each other. When we experience something contradictory to those values, we become hurt. The deeper the relationship is, the more vulnerable we are to being hurt. However, without vulnerability and transparency in the relationship, true intimacy isn't experienced. Therefore, be assured that if you're in a loving relationship, you will experience hurt and pain.

Relationships that struggle to resolve differences often have problems with forgiveness. That's because unresolved differences tend to repeat and arguments are regurgitated. It may be difficult to find forgiveness when the wrong-doer doesn't take responsibility for verbal, physical, or emotional aggressions. Interestingly, studies show that women are more likely to forgive when they see the wrong-doer take responsibility for the hurt that occurred. Hmm. I think that may be a universal reaction.

It is good to identify the specific behavior that was physically, emotionally, or spiritually damaging to you. If you feel safe talking to the offender, and feel it is worthwhile, do so. Talking-out the hurtful experience with the wrong-doer is more productive when you: (1) speak from your own perspective of how you feel ("I felt disrespected ..." instead of "You continually disrespect me!") (2) focus on how it negatively impacts the relationship ("When I'm hurt like this, I want to distance myself, but it makes me sad to see us disconnected.") (3) focus on how things can be in the future instead of regurgitating all aspects of the offense over and over ("I want to stay connected and feel close to you." "I'd like to improve our ability to work out our differences.")

If you don't feel safe talking to the offender, you may consider processing your feelings with a therapist. For example, you may know that someone is entrenched in bad behavior and is unapproachable. Talking to the offender may further complicate the pain you feel. If your relationship landscape is littered with verbal and physical aggressions, forgiveness may not have great value. That's because we are not expected to condone abusiveness for the

sake of forgiveness. We can't excuse or forget infidelity and violence. If that's the case, you would definitely benefit from seeking professional advice.

Augustine of Hippo once said, "Resentment is like swallowing poison, and hoping the other person dies." Unforgiveness can turn into reciprocal negativity that involves aggression of sorts and it can overshadow anything positive in the relationship. The entire relationship becomes hijacked and feelings of disconnection and isolation settle into the heart. Individuals with a tendency to ruminate over all the wrongs that have been done to them may be less prone to forgive their partner, friends, and family. If you have a tendency for unforgiveness, challenge yourself this holiday season to be ready to forgive hurtful experiences. Don't let yourself go down that rabbit-hole of tabulating the hurtful actions of others.

The spirit of forgiveness lays the groundwork for change and growth within you! It releases you from the hurt and helps you move forward in life. It is fueled by a deliberate motivation to forgive. It has been said that love is a choice we make, and forgiveness is too. Those of you who have been forgiven can attest that it has often inspired us to love the person more deeply and openly as we appreciate being forgiven for our hurtful behavior or words. Forgiveness fosters productive and deeper communication. It also means that reconciliation can start which will restore feelings of connectedness. Closeness may not happen overnight, but there may be a reduction or an absence of painful silence, mean words, or avoidance. Maybe those things can be a sign that the seeds of forgiveness are germinating.

If you're challenging yourself to forgive, start by identifying the positive and strong parts of the relationship. Focus on the good characteristics of the person. If you intend to maintain the relationship, you must be more ready to forgive an offense. The closeness and quality of your relationship are related to the readiness and capability for both of you to forgive.

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