

6 Keys for Forgiving

We learned about “6 Keys for Apologizing.” But what about when we are the ones being apologized to? **Luke 17:3** says, “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him” (ESV). We are obligated to forgive each other. Further, forgiving is good for us. “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.” (**Matthew 6:14**, ESV). I don’t think this is merely an arbitrary requirement for receiving forgiveness. It is a natural consequence. If we can’t learn to forgive others, how can we ever imagine that anyone, especially God, could forgive us? We will not truly seek forgiveness until we grasp how forgiveness can be granted. Instead, we will be trapped in our sin, misery, pain, and anguish. With forgiveness comes freedom. We do not have to be held captive by grudges and resentment. We can learn to forgive and be set free. Allow me to share 6 keys that will help.

Key #1: Want folks forgiven

The biggest obstacle to forgiving others is that we don’t want them forgiven, we want them punished. And why not? They’ve hurt us, betrayed us, misused us, abused us. No normal person would want them to get away with that.

Look to Jesus on the cross. He had done nothing, but He had been betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter, sold out by the Jews, beaten by the Romans, mocked by the authorities, slandered by the priests. Yet, in **Luke 23:34**, He said, “Father, forgive them” (ESV). He was clearly more concerned about salvation than punishment. When He looked at people, He wanted them saved not punished. What do we want?

Key #2: Ask God for help

Forgiveness is not natural. Therefore, if we are going to forgive, we are going to be going against the grain. What is the best way to do this? Ask for help.

We can do all things through Him who strengthens us (**Philippians 4:13**). God can do far more abundantly than what we ask or think by His power working within us (**Ephesians 3:20-21**). In other words, no matter how hard it is, when we rely on God, we can learn to forgive.

Generally, in our prayers we need to ask for a willingness to forgive. Then, when we are struggling to forgive a particular person, we need to lift his name up in prayer. We need to ask God to give us the willingness and the strength to forgive that person in particular. Pray for her to receive the blessings you desire. Then watch God work in you as He grows you to be able to forgive.

Key #3: Humanize the sinner

One of the biggest struggles with forgiveness is seeing the person as a sinful object. To help you forgive them, humanize them. Humanize them by getting to know them. Learn their stories. Get a grasp of why that sin is part of their lives. I’m not saying their lives justify their sins; I’m simply saying the more we know the sinners’ stories, the more we grasp that their sin was not necessarily about us. It was actually about them and the help they need.

When I learn that the sister who snubbed me and put me down did that because she was abused and therefore puts up walls to keep relationships from growing, I can find it a lot easier to forgive her. When I learn that the brother who gossiped about me did so because of his own tremendous insecurity and need to feel valid, I can find it a lot easier to forgive him.

Isn’t this what Jesus did? Isn’t this the heart of **Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:14-16**? Jesus “learned” what it was like to be human. Therefore, He can help. Jesus humanized sinners, so should we.

Key #4: Remember your own sins and need for forgiveness

How do you want God to treat you when you stand before Him in judgment? Do you want Him to rant about how He just can’t let you get away with it? Do you want Him to ignore your pleas for forgiveness? Do you want Him to cut off His

relationship with you? Or do you want Him to forgive you? Don't be the unforgiving servant of **Matthew 18:21-35**. Forgive others the way you know you need to be forgiven.

Key #5: Be more concerned about God than yourself

When we recognize that what really matters is what was done to God and not us, we will find it easier to forgive. In **Psalm 51:4**, David said, "Against you, you only, have I sinned," (ESV). Though he had sinned against Bathsheba, Uriah, and the entire nation of Israel, what really mattered was what happened between him and God. This was the encouragement God offered Samuel in **I Samuel 8:7**. The Israelites hadn't rejected Samuel, they had rejected God.

Even though the person may have meant what she did to be very personal, don't take it personally. Be upset that she has rejected God. Then be excited that she is reconciling with Him when she repents. Don't hold the grudge about what she's done to you. Help heal her relationship with God.

Key #6: Establish healthy boundaries

Forgiving a sin is not permission to keep committing the sin. If someone has stolen from you, asked for forgiveness, and you gave it to her, you are not required to let her stay in your home unaccompanied. Her sin demonstrates her weakness. While your job is not to keep her from ever sinning again, you are certainly responsible to keep from casting stumbling blocks in her way. You are allowed healthy boundaries.

If someone living in your home violates the rules, you are allowed to ask him to leave, even if you forgive him. If someone has violated your trust repeatedly, you are allowed to proceed with caution before trusting her again. If a business partner embezzled money from you, you are allowed to end the partnership even if you have forgiven him.

Though God is the most forgiving being in the universe, He has established all kinds of boundaries. When He encouraged us to cut off our hands and pluck out our eyes if they make us stumble, He was establishing boundaries even with people He had forgiven (**Matthew 5:29-30**). When He said to those He had forgiven that the wages of sin is death, He was establishing a boundary (**Romans 6:23**). When He told those He had forgiven that if they didn't work, they shouldn't eat, He was establishing a boundary (**II Thessalonians 3:10**).

If a person has lied to you seven times today and has asked you to forgive him seven times, you are to forgive. But that doesn't mean you forget you are working with someone who struggles with lying. That doesn't mean you are required to accept everything the brother ever tells you without getting corroboration.

Yes, forgiveness can be hard. But if we rely on our faith and follow these keys, we can grow even in our ability to forgive.

--Edwin L. Crozier