

WOW Bible Study – Praying Like Jesus Prayed

What Forgiveness Is and What it is Not

This is information from Focus on the Family that talks about what forgives is and is not.

- **Forgiveness is not letting the offender off the hook.** We can and should still hold others accountable for their actions or lack of actions.
- **Forgiveness is returning to God the right to take care of justice.** By refusing to transfer the right to exact punishment or revenge, we are telling God we don't trust him to take care of matters.
- **Forgiveness is not letting the offense recur again and again.** We don't have to tolerate, nor should we keep ourselves open to, lack of respect or any form of abuse.
- **Forgiveness does not mean we have to revert to being the victim.** Forgiving is not saying, "What you did was okay, so go ahead and walk all over me." Nor is it playing the martyr, enjoying the performance of forgiving people because it perpetuates our victim role.
- **Forgiveness is not the same as reconciling.** We can forgive someone even if we never can get along with him again.
- **Forgiveness is a process, not an event.** It might take some time to work through our emotional problems before we can truly forgive. As soon as we can, we should decide to forgive, but it probably is not going to happen right after a tragic divorce. That's okay.
- **We have to forgive every time.** If we find ourselves constantly forgiving, though, we might need to take a look at the dance we are doing with the other person that sets us up to be continually hurt, attacked, or abused.
- **Forgetting does not mean denying reality or ignoring repeated offenses.** Some people are obnoxious, mean-spirited, apathetic, or unreliable. They never will change. We need to change the way we respond to them and quit expecting them to be different.
- **Forgiveness is not based on others' actions but on our attitude.** People will continue to hurt us through life. We either can look outward at them or stay stuck and angry, or we can begin to keep our minds on our loving relationship with God, knowing and trusting in what is good.
- **If they don't repent, we still have to forgive.** Even if they never ask, we need to forgive. We should memorize and repeat over and over: Forgiveness is about our attitude, not their action.
- **We don't always have to tell them we have forgiven them.** Self-righteously announcing our gracious forgiveness to someone who has not asked to be forgiven may be a manipulation to make them feel guilty. It also is a form of pride.
- **Withholding forgiveness is a refusal to let go of perceived power.** We can feel powerful when the offender is in need of forgiveness and only we can give it. We may fear going back to being powerless if we forgive.
- **We might have to forgive more than the divorce.** Post-divorce problems related to money, the kids, and schedules might result in the need to forgive again and to seek forgiveness ourselves.
- **We might forgive too quickly to avoid pain or to manipulate the situation.** Forgiveness releases pain and frees us from focusing on the other person. Too often when we're in the midst of the turmoil after a divorce, we desperately look for a quick fix to make it all go away. Some women want to "hurry up" and forgive so the pain will end, or so they can get along with the other person. We have to be careful not to simply cover our wounds and retard the healing process.

- **We might be pressured into false forgiveness before we are ready.** When we feel obligated or we forgive just so others will still like us, accept us, or not think badly of us, it's not true forgiveness — it's a performance to avoid rejection. Give yourself permission to do it right. Maybe all you can offer today is, "I want to forgive you, but right now I'm struggling emotionally. I promise I will work on it."
- **Forgiveness does not mean forgetting.** It's normal for memories to be triggered in the future. When thoughts of past hurts occur, it's what we do with them that counts. When we find ourselves focusing on a past offense, we can learn to say, "Thank you, God, for this reminder of how important forgiveness is."
- **Forgiveness starts with a mental decision.** The emotional part of forgiveness is finally being able to let go of the resentment. Emotional healing may or may not follow quickly after we forgive.

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