

Healing of the Past

Summary:

Who needs to forgive? All

Who do we need to forgive? Ourselves and others

When do we need to forgive? When we have pain or guilt inside of us.

What are the symptoms of this pain and guilt?

1. anger
2. guilt
3. lack of concentration
4. weight gain or loss
5. sleep difficulty
6. apathy (we no longer care about things)
7. death wish
8. destructive behavior (alcohol and drug use, wasting time, gossiping, failing in school, losing your temper, and being bad)

How do we forgive ourselves?

1. Receive God's free and full forgiveness. This means not trying to get ride of guilt by denial, rationalization, transfer, or self-payment.
2. Confess your mistake.
3. Talk to others.
4. Let God give you another chance.
5. Do what you can where you are.

Forgiving others is not:

1. overlooking the wrong
2. excusing the wrong
3. explaining away the wrong
4. taking the blame ourselves

Forgiving others means:

1. facing the wrong
2. recognize your feelings (abandoned, put down, rejected, injustice, humiliation, neglected, cruelty, and betrayed)
3. face resentment your feel for others
4. be willing to forgive
5. let go of your "old" feelings
 - a. give "old" feelings to God
 - b. keep busy
 - c. help others
 - d. stay physically fit
 - e. maintain strong friendships
6. take responsibility for your life
7. let God take any revenge

All people need healing of the past. All people need to forgive.

Who do we need to forgive?

- A. Ourselves (for mistakes we have made)
- B. Others (for people who have hurt us)

When do we need to forgive? We need to forgive ourselves or others if the pain or guilt is still in us. How can we tell if the pain or guilt is still in us? If the pain or guilt is still in us, then certain symptoms will appear. If you have any of the following symptoms, then perhaps you need to forgive:

- A. Anger (We may be angry with ourselves, parents, friends, society, church, God, teachers or other authority figures, government, victims, etc.)
- B. Guilt (We may say “if only I had done”)
- C. Lack of concentration (We may have difficulty reading or paying attention to others.)
- D. Weight gain or loss
- E. Sleep difficulty
- F. Apathy (We may no longer care about things, including our lives.)
- G. Death wish (We may lose hope and wish we would die somehow.)
- H. Destructive behavior (This may manifest itself in any of the following behaviors:
 - i) Alcohol and drug use
 - ii) Wasting time
 - iii) Gossip (talking negatively about others)
 - iv) Failing in school
 - v) Losing your temper
 - vi) being bad (doing destructive and/or illegal activities)

Forgiving ourselves

First we look at forgiving ourselves. Why do we need to forgive ourselves. Well, maybe you have made a mistake that you greatly regret. Maybe you have hurt someone deeply and the person is suffering or has suffered greatly for your mistakes. If the above symptoms are due to your mistakes in the past, then you need to forgive yourself.

How does one forgive him/herself? Here are some steps to take:

1. Receive God’s free and full forgiveness. This is how we get ride of guilt. While this may sound rather easy, it is, in fact, difficult for most people. Often people try to get ride of guilt in other ways that are not effective. These include:
 - a) Denial. Often people will pretend that the problem does not exist. They may hope that if they don’t think about the problem it will somehow go away. Denial does not work in getting ride of guilt, it only pushes it further inside ourselves.
 - b) Rationalization. People will often say things like “Everyone is doing it,” or “It’s isn’t so bad,” or “We all make mistakes,” or “I may have done some wrong but others did worse than I did,” or “I didn’t have any choice,” or “Well, I’ve been hurt too.” We may try to explain away the problem. Again, this only pushes it deeper inside of us.
 - c) Transfer. Sometimes people will put the problem onto someone else. We might say “He made me do it,” or “She started it,” or “He asked for it.” We try

to blame others for our problems. Again, this does not get ride of the guilt we have.

- d) Self-payment. Sometimes we may feel we don't deserve God's free and full forgiveness so we feel we must do something to earn it. For example, we may try to do many "good deeds" to make up for past mistakes. Again, this doesn't work. We still have guilt and sometimes we just make things worse.
2. Confess your mistake. You will not be able to move forward if you do not take responsibility for the wrong you have done. You may need to confess to a person but maybe not. You do need to confess to God. He may want you to make restitution or maybe not. Nevertheless, you must make a full confession to God. He already knows anyway.
3. Talk to others. Obviously we cannot talk to just anyone. A trusted teacher, religious leader, community elder, or counselor are people we should seek out. The person should be someone we can trust fully.
4. Let God give you another chance. God will always forgive and give us another chance. If your dream is broken beyond repair, then God will give you another dream.
5. Do what you can where you are. We cannot undo the past. We can only live from this day forward. You can only do something now where you are. Maybe you can make restitution but maybe not. Seek wise counsel (talk to a wise person you trust) if you are unsure.

Forgiving others

Maybe you do not need to forgive yourself, but another person. Maybe someone has hurt you deeply. The person may be a friend, a former friend, a family member, a stranger, or a trusted authority figure like a teacher or minister. Maybe the person has already died and you can no longer talk to him/her. Again, if you have any symptoms listed above due to hurt someone has inflicted on you, then you need to forgive that person.

Forgiving others is not easy. Sometimes we really don't want to forgive the person who has hurt us deeply. Maybe we need to look at what forgiving others isn't.

Forgiving others is not:

- A. Overlooking the wrongdoing. It does not mean that we pretend the wrong did not happen. It does not mean we just try to forget about it. It does not mean just acting like there is no hurt or pain.
- B. Not excusing the wrongdoing. It does not mean that we somehow excuse the behavior of the other person, saying something like "He was drunk when he did it and did really know what he was doing," or "She is a monster/animal/demon/etc. and cannot help herself." Forgiveness does not mean covering up the wrongs done to us.
- C. Not explaining away the wrong. In forgiveness we do not explain away the wrong so that it is no longer wrong. In forgiveness we face both the hurt and the wrong.
- D. Not taking the blame ourselves. In forgiveness we do not transfer the wrong to ourselves.

So what is forgiveness and how do we do it?

1. Face the wrong. It is a good idea to write out exactly what the wrong is. Be explicit. Don't pretend at all. Be totally honest. Call any wrong doing a wrong doing. Tell exactly what the other person did to you to hurt you.
2. Recognize your feelings. This is not always easy for people. Sometimes we have difficulty expressing our feelings, even good feelings. Maybe the following list will help you in expressing yourself. Next to the word is a likely expression of the feeling to help you understand.
 - Abandoned. ("My mother walked out on me when I was just a child.")
 - Put down. ("She treated me like dirt.")
 - Rejected ("I wanted to please him but whatever I did was never good enough. I could never please him, never.")
 - Unfairness or injustice. ("I was qualified for the job but he gave it to his son who was not properly qualified. I lost an opportunity that will never come again.")
 - Humiliation. ("They all laughed at me because I was poor. I felt so bad in those ragged clothes.")
 - Neglected or deprived. ("My parents didn't care if I went to school or not. I think even my teachers were happy if I missed school.")
 - Cruelty ("Those children bullied me day after day. They laughed when I cried and asked them to stop.")
 - Betrayed ("He said he loved me and I was the only girl for him. All the time he said those things to me he was seeing two other girls and got both of them pregnant.")

(The Bible quotes Jesus as saying "love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you." (Luke 6:27-28) Jesus did not say "don't have negative feelings toward your enemies, to those who hate you, to those who curse you, and to those who mistreat you." If someone has hurt you, then it is natural to have negative feelings toward that person.)

3. Face the resentment you feel for others. Don't be afraid of your feelings, no matter how negative they may be. If you hurt is very painful, then it is likely that your feelings toward the person who did it will be rather intense.
4. Be willing to forgive. Forgiving is an act of the will. We may not feel like forgiving but we must be willing to forgive. That may take a long time, many years for some people. This is the key to forgiving others.
5. Let go of your "old" feelings. This does not come easily nor does it come quickly usually. It may take years. As someone once said, "you can't stop the birds from flying over your head but you can stop them from building a nest in your hair." The old feelings will likely come back from time to time. However, there are things one can do to minimize them.
 - A. Give "old" feelings to God. Let God deal with them. They may even pop up during our sleep coming to us in our dreams. Let God have them.
 - B. Keep busy. This does not mean we stay so busy that we do not have time for a meaningful life. It means that we stay busy so that we don't always think about the old feelings.
 - C. Help others. When we help others we usually don't dwell on our own problems.

- D. Stay physically fit. Regular exercise, especially vigorous exercise is an excellent way to release tension, stress, and anger. Also if we are vigorously exercising, then we want dwell on old feelings.
- E. Maintain strong friendships. Trusted friends are those who can help us when we need some help.
6. Take responsibility for your life. Some people will hold on to anger and will not forgive so that they don't have to face the responsibility for their failures and broken dreams. If we play the "blame game," then we always have a ready excuse when we fail.
7. Let God take any revenge. Maybe the person has never been punished. Or maybe the person is already dead or a stranger to you. The Bible says, in Romans 12:19 "Never take revenge, my friends, but instead let God's anger do it. For the scripture says, 'I will take revenge, I will pay back, says the Lord.'" We need to do our part and let God do his part. Forgiving others does not let them "get away with it." Trust God to do his part.

Activity:

- This chapter has no activity. Healing of the past is personal and often painful. This is not just about getting information. It involves dealing with emotions, sometimes ones that are still raw and painful to recall.
- Some participants may come to you to talk about their past. Listen. If you can't help the person, then refer them to some one else. Encourage them to talk to elders, teachers, counselors and other wise leaders.
- Working out problems, especially ones that are deep takes time. Don't expect all to finish this in four weeks. For some it make takes years.
- Be patient. Some may not be ready to start the healing process.