

Forgiveness Case Study

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Dr. Ron Walborn

It comes as no surprise to read articles sharing the news that science has discovered forgiveness to be healthy for the human body and mind. Followers of Jesus know this from the Word and personal experience. Unforgiveness traps us in the pain. As a Christian, I believe I am required to forgive. Period. Christians forgive because we recognize how much we have been forgiven. We extend grace because it has been extended to us. Additionally, we are keenly aware of our own sinfulness and acknowledge we too need to be forgiven by others. Scripture says, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive your trespasses" Matthew 6:14-15. However, knowing we need to forgive does not make it easy to do so. The Spirit helps us when we seek to obey God and forgive.

Forgiveness is a decision, not a feeling. We decide to forgive and begin the work of accomplishing forgiveness. As someone who has been married for almost 33 years, I have much experience with forgiveness. Years ago, I thought forgiveness was only possible if my husband owned his wrong and asked for forgiveness. This presents a real challenge because he does not admit wrong or apologize. If confronted, he will generally deny any wrongdoing and tell me my feelings are my problem, not his. Through counseling, leading Emotional Healing classes, and other training, I have learned forgiveness is possible without the other person acknowledging wrong. It is hard and painful. It forces me to recognize all of my sinful responses, exactly as described in

the lecture. I must admit that sometimes I want him to feel the pain I am experiencing, to admit how hurtful he has been, and to beg my forgiveness. I have to acknowledge any inappropriate feelings of superiority I may have because I am forgiving him again. To forgive is to let the other person completely off the hook for the debt they owe. It means I absorb the pain, the cost of the hurt. However, through forgiveness, I gain freedom from the pain, bitterness, and anger. Forgiveness is a process. It would be lovely if forgiveness were accomplished in one brief session with Jesus after which I could skip away with a light spirit. It has been my experience, particularly in the context of a difficult marriage, I need to forgive repeatedly, to sit with Jesus over and over and ask Him again to help me uproot bitterness and release anger. If I fail to get rid of these, they will come out in other ways. I will be sharp and impatient with my children, overreact emotionally over small daily problems, experience sleeplessness, and in my anger, sin. Out of obedience to God as well as for my own wellbeing and that of my family, I have to forgive every offense. I go to Jesus and tell him how I am hurt and ask for help. He knows every hurt already but in His presence I can receive love, compassion, and healing. The last step in accomplishing forgiveness is to reach the point where I have compassion for my husband and am able to pray blessings for him. Jesus helps me see him as He does, to recognize the brokenness and his need for healing. Repeatedly, I arrive at this place in the forgiveness process and pray the Spirit will encounter my husband and change his heart of stone to a heart of flesh. Jesus loves my husband as much as he loves me. Forgiving my husband is for me, my family, and is done out of obedience to and love for Jesus.

