

# The Challenges of Forgiveness – Dan Hitz

This article is part-two of a two part article on forgiveness. Both are included in the “Basics of Recovery” series. Dan Hitz is the Executive Director of Reconciliation Ministries of Michigan, a member ministry of the Restored Hope Network dedicated to bringing freedom to men, women, and adolescents struggling with sexual and relationship issues. For more information contact Reconciliation Ministries at 586.739.5114, or visit us on the web at [www.recmin.org](http://www.recmin.org).



In last month's newsletter we looked at the process of forgiveness and its value in our lives. Even though we have learned about the importance of forgiveness and have heard many sermons about it, there are times in our lives when we wrestle with letting go of the injustice that harmed us. We may struggle with the Lord's commands to forgive, especially as we continue to experience the consequences of the wrongs done to us.

What is the cost of unforgiveness? Forgiveness is a gift from God so that our offenses don't steal our lives and rob us of the blessings that the Lord wants to give us. Unforgiveness acts like a wall around our hearts that block the Holy Spirit from healing the hurts that hold us captive. Anger is a *secondary emotion*. That means that it always covers deeper emotional wounds that need attention. It robs us of the blessings and progress that God wants to give us.

Unforgiveness causes us to focus on the negative traits of those who hurt us. The problem is that we focus so much on the wrongs of the other person that we end up becoming just like him or her. I learned this lesson the hard way. One day I was reading the book of Daniel where Daniel was repenting for the sins of his forefathers and acknowledging that he was no better than they. I told the Lord that I didn't have any problem confessing that I am no better than my father because I realized that I wasn't. I also told the Lord in no uncertain terms that I would NEVER confess that I was no better than my mother because I thought I was MUCH BETTER than she. My mother had hurt me deeply and I swore I would NEVER be like her. The anger that surfaced that day led to a painful season of me doing some of the same things to others that I was furious at my mother for doing to me. I remember the day when I realized how far I had fallen. With devastation in my heart I repented to the Lord. He firmly asked me, “Do you still believe that you are better than your mother?” I was broken. “No, Lord. I'm just like my mother.” That was the beginning of a season of deep healing as I released the anger I had towards my mother and allowed the Lord access to the pain in my heart.

Unforgiveness enlarges the offenses of others and causes us to overreact to minor offenses. We may even become offended when there are no offenses at all. There are people who use anger as a shield to protect themselves from being hurt by others. They subconsciously create a distance between themselves and others by going through life like porcupines, jabbing those they come in contact with. When the others retreat to a safe distance, porcupines blame the others for rejecting them. They don't realize their own angry posture has created the very problem they blame others for. Releasing our anger to the cross helps us to relate to others in a much healthier way. We begin the process of learning to develop healthier relationships and work out our misunderstandings.

Opposite of the porcupine are those who retreat into *defensive detachment*. Those who use defensive detachment shut their hearts off from others in their lives out of fear of being hurt. This may sound like a great option at the time, but it doesn't actually work. Broken, abusive people don't care about the boundaries or emotional walls of others. They push right through them and inflict more pain. Healthy people do respect the boundaries and walls of others and don't try to access the heart hidden behind the wall. Rather than walking in defensive detachment, it is far better to

walk in forgiveness and allow the Lord to be our wall of protection. When we shut our hearts off completely from others, we lose the good that the others may have to offer. I remember shutting my heart off towards my mother and hardening the defensive walls. When she was in her brief seasons of doing well, she was very creative and made beautiful flower arrangements. She was good at balance and design. Throughout middle school my art teachers would tell me that I was very good at drawing. I couldn't receive it. To be good at drawing meant that I was artistic like my mother. I shut my heart off to a good gift that she had to offer. As I learned to walk in forgiveness and allow the Lord to heal my heart, I began to embrace more of my creative side and learned to accept the few good gifts that my mom did have to offer. Today I can express my creativity through photography. An art form that requires balance and design.

Forgiveness is for the benefit of the one who was wounded, and not necessarily for the benefit of the offender. Our offender may be unaware that he has hurt us. He may actually be happy that he hurt us. Sometimes we have no idea where our offender is, or he may actually have passed away a long time ago. There are also times when our offender is still dangerous and it is not safe to associate with him. Forgiveness does not mean that we automatically have to restore the relationship. Forgiveness does not mean that we have to trust those who are untrustworthy and set ourselves up to be victimized again. Forgiveness is essential to our spiritual life, and we must forgive our offender. Our offenders need to earn our trust by showing themselves to be trustworthy. Sometimes our offenders have clearly shown that they cannot be trusted even after we have forgiven them. We can exercise forgiveness at the same time that we can implement appropriate boundaries. Forgiveness does not mean that we are saying that what the other person did was okay, or not a big deal. It is never okay that someone has sinned against us. Some of our wounds really are a big deal and have created huge negative consequences in our hearts. Walking in forgiveness allows us to become free of our anger and bitterness. It frees us to experience a deeper level of healing and walk in a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.

If you have been wounded and are having a difficult time letting go of the anger and walking in forgiveness, quiet your heart before the Lord and ask Him to show you the specific offenses that you are angry about. As you ponder those offenses, ask yourself what it would feel like if you forgave your offender for that offense. Sometimes it helps to put it in the form of a sentence. "I don't want to forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_, because if I do then \_\_\_\_\_. After asking yourself that question, listen to your heart more than your head. The answer will probably not be logical or theologically sound, but it will feel true in your heart. As you begin to sense your resistance to forgiving, ask the Lord for His thoughts about your struggle. As you sit quietly, trust the Lord to speak His truth to your heart. His truth will resolve the conflict in your heart. As Jesus begins to share his perspective on the situation, your heart can begin to embrace a new truth and your resistance begins to melt away. Continue praying through each offense until your heart is settled and you can freely forgive your offender for each of the things that the Lord has brought up in your heart. As you do so, you will begin to experience a deeper level of freedom and a deeper level of peace than you ever imagined.



If you still continue to struggle with bitterness and resentment, reach out to safe Christians for help. Talk to a friend, a pastoral care giver, a counselor, or contact Reconciliation Ministries. Sometimes this is difficult to do if you have been wounded by people in the church, but if you do reach out for help, you will see that the same Body of Christ that contains those who hurt, also contains beautiful trophies of grace that dispense God's love and truth.