

Did you know . . .

Forgiveness: Introduction

Forgiveness is generally defined as a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you, regardless of whether they actually “deserve” your forgiveness.

Modern conceptions of forgiveness focus mainly on the emotional, but in Jesus’ time, forgiveness had more concrete implications. The Greek word translated as “forgive” in the New Testament, *aphiēmi*, carried a wide range of meanings, including to remit (a debt), to leave (something/someone) alone, to allow (an action), to leave, to send away, to desert or abandon, to divorce. The Greek word appears 146 times in the New Testament, yet is translated in most English versions as “forgive” only 38 of those times.

Forgiveness as an emotional state, then, came from sources other than the biblical text. The idea of forgiveness as a psychological or emotional condition traces to 18th-century moral philosophy, not first-century Christian writings. Forgiveness in the time of Jesus was an action verb, and Jesus’ instructions served as checks for the health of the community, both on earth and in the world to come.

Yet, the Bible has plenty to say to us about forgiveness. Consider the following:

- **Colossians 3:13**...Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.
- **Matthew 6:14-15**...For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.
- **Luke 17:3-4**...So watch yourselves. “If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them.”
- **Ephesians 4: 31-32**...All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting and reviling must be removed from you, along with all malice. [And] be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ.

“I would not be surprised if hostility, anger, resentment and hatred proved to be the greatest stumbling blocks to our spiritual growth.” [Henri J. M. Nouwen (1932 –1996), Dutch Catholic priest and author of [The Return of the Prodigal Son](#)]

[Next Week: Forgiveness: What It Is/Is Not]

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