

Forgiveness: Five Christian Misunderstandings About Forgiveness

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by Karla Downing



Forgiveness brings peace of mind

Forgiveness is an important part of the teachings in the Christian faith. However, there are five common Christian misunderstandings about forgiveness that result in people misapplying it to their relationships.

1. Forgiveness means you must have a relationship with the person.

Forgiveness is actually what happens within your heart. It simply means you let go of the desire to get revenge and the bitterness that can build in your heart when you refuse to forgive. It is the bitterness and desire to get even that hurts your relationship with God and consumes your life. You can forgive someone and still not have a relationship with them.

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2. Forgiveness means you have to trust the person again.

Forgiveness isn't about trust at all. You would be wise to not trust someone who has been untrustworthy until the person has re-established a track record that deserves your trust. Trust in relationships is something that has to be earned when it is lost.

3. Forgiveness means you have to forget.

Forgetting is impossible and you can blame God for that! God created our brains to remember by encoding memories into brain cells that can be triggered without us even trying. There is no way you can make yourself forget. The more emotionally traumatic and upsetting an event is the more entrenched the memory will be. Forgiveness is about what you do when you do remember-rather than stirring up the old emotions with the memory, you choose to let them go.

4. Forgiveness means you have to give the person another chance.

Forgiveness doesn't prevent you from setting boundaries. You can protect yourself from being hurt, abused, taken advantage of, mistreated, or disrespected while forgiving the person. God holds people accountable and when they choose wrong, there are consequences. One of those might be that you set a boundary to protect yourself. This is good for both you and the other person.

5. Forgiveness means you can't count how many times the person wrongs you.

1 Corinthians 13:5 says, "Love keeps no record of wrongs." This is misunderstood to mean that you can't pay attention to how many times a person hurts you. It is the intention that is important. You wouldn't want to keep count for the purpose of getting back at the person or holding it over the person's head revengefully, but you would want to use wisdom in observing patterns that the person needs to be accountable for. Understanding these five Christian misunderstandings about forgiveness will help you apply forgiveness to your relationships in a

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way that is truly healthy and freeing for both you and the other person.

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