

DEBBIE BARR

Forgiveness

The Choice That Sets You Free



What Forgiveness Is Not

In light of what forgiveness really is, now consider some aspects of what forgiveness is *not*.

Forgiveness is not an eraser.

Erasers make things disappear. Forgiveness doesn't erase what happened or the imprint it may have left on your life. Forgiving someone is not saying that the consequences for what they did are now erased or that what they did was okay. It is not saying they are no longer responsible for what they said or did, or that they should not be held accountable. If a crime has occurred, forgiving what happened should never keep you from reporting it. A strong sense of justice can trap a person in unforgiveness if they think forgiveness is an eraser. Don't let that happen to you. Forgiveness isn't about excusing the person who hurt you; it's about giving you the peace of mind you deserve.

Forgiveness is not a blindfold.

A blindfold prevents you from seeing. While it is always right for you to forgive, do not confuse forgiveness with trust. Forgiving someone does not require you to now trust a person who has lied to you or about you, betrayed you, stolen from you, or harmed you. Stay unblinded to the truth of what

happened, why it happened, and what it means for your life and your future. It's not wise to assume that because you forgave, "things will be different now." While forgiveness represents the change in *your* heart, nothing at all may have changed yet in that other person. John the Baptist once challenged the religious leaders of his day to "show by the way you live that you have changed" (Matthew 3:8 ERV). You can take the same "prove it" approach. Don't be too quick to trust again. Instead, wait and watch.

Forgiveness is not anesthesia.

Anesthesia keeps you from feeling pain. Forgiving someone is not denying that your pain is real or saying that it doesn't matter. It doesn't mean that you should suppress your pain or numb yourself to it, even if someone else pressures you to "get over it." (Pastor T. D. Jakes has said, "It's always easy to say 'get over it' when you're not the victim."⁵)

While pain is never pleasant, it often has a purpose. Emotional pain alerts us to the fact that something is going wrong in a relationship. While it's smart to pay attention when the pain alarm goes off, it's never smart to let pain control your decisions. Forgiveness is a choice, a decision of the will. Don't let your pain keep you trapped in unforgiveness.

Forgiveness is not glue.

Glue binds things together. Forgiveness doesn't always put relationships back together—nor should it. In a best-case scenario, both people work together to resolve their conflict, forgive each other, and continue on with their relationship. Sometimes going through this process makes a relationship even stronger than it was before. This two-way conversation about forgiveness, known as *transactional forgiveness*, can reconcile a broken relationship. Reconciliation should always be the goal whenever possible. However, when there has been verbal or physical abuse, infidelity, or

"It only takes one to offer forgiveness....

It takes two to reconcile."

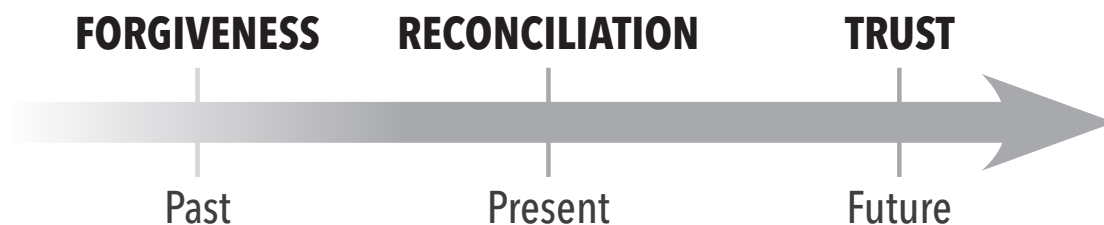
DR. HENRY CLOUD

other serious harm, it may not be possible or safe to continue the relationship unless significant changes occur. Change takes time, and sometimes requires professional help as well. Forgive, yes, but protect your heart. Don't fling the

door to your life wide open right away. Move back toward the relationship only after you have observed the changes that are necessary to repair the breach and restore the relationship. In situations where reconciliation cannot occur, forgiveness will free you to move beyond a toxic relationship.

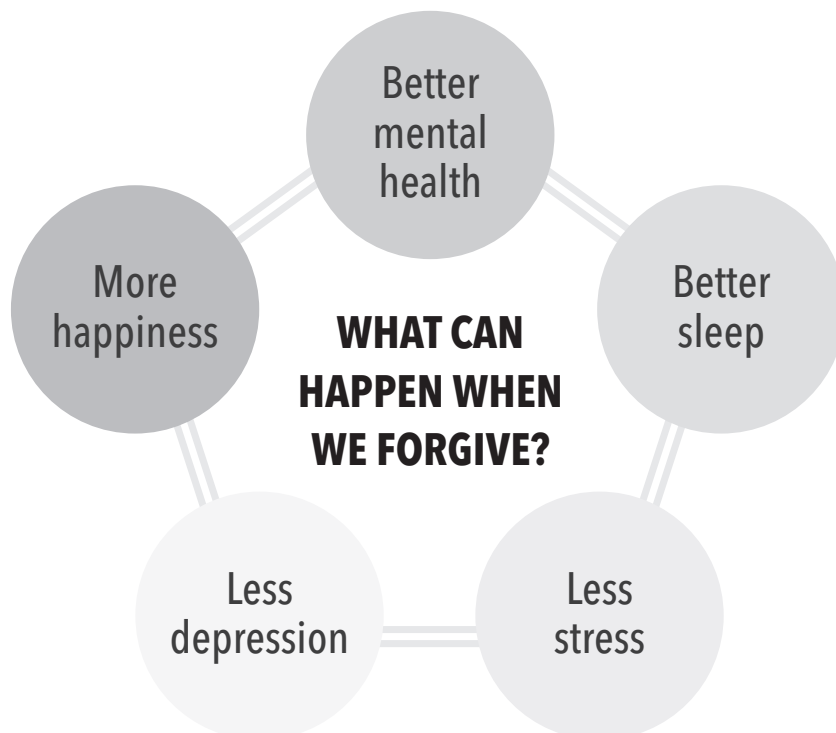
Some of the false beliefs about forgiveness are due to the confusion that arises when trying to discern when to trust and how to reconcile with those we forgive. One of my favorite authors, psychologist Dr. Henry Cloud, makes three very helpful, clarifying points:

1. **“Forgiveness has to do with the past.**
Forgiveness is not holding something someone has done against her. It is letting it go. It only takes one to offer forgiveness....
2. **Reconciliation has to do with the present.** It occurs when the other person apologizes and accepts forgiveness. It takes two to reconcile.
3. **Trust has to do with the future.** It deals with both what you will risk happening again and what you will open yourself up to. A person must show through his actions that he is trustworthy before you trust him again.”⁶



What Happens When We Forgive— and When We Don't

There is now plenty of evidence that forgiveness has a positive impact on both mind and body. More than fifty research studies have shown that forgiveness improves mental health. Studies link forgiveness to reductions in depression, anxiety, and major psychiatric disorders.⁷ One study reported that “greater forgiveness is associated with less stress and, in turn, better mental health.” The authors also noted that numerous other studies link forgiveness with “more happiness, better mental and physical health ... and less depression.”⁸ Research from Johns Hopkins indicates that forgiveness lowers heart attack risk, improves sleep, lowers blood pressure and cholesterol levels, and helps reduce pain.⁹



Unforgiveness has the opposite effect on physical and mental health. Holding onto grudges, nursing bitterness, and harboring resentments amount to keeping unforgiveness on life support. Constantly rehearsing the wrongs done to you keeps your wounds raw, painful, and unable to heal. In time, the toxic residue of unforgiveness seeps into every area of life, diminishing well-being in many ways. A Mayo Clinic article affirms this, noting that an unforgiving person might:

- bring anger and bitterness into new relationships and experiences;
- become so wrapped up in the wrong that they can't enjoy the present;
- become depressed, irritable, or anxious;
- feel at odds with their spiritual beliefs; and
- lose valuable and enriching connections with others.¹⁰



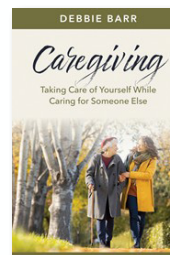
Forgiveness

The Choice That Sets You Free

Forgiveness is one of the most difficult things you may ever have to seek or find. It's also one of the most important and rewarding things you can do. Packed with practical advice, helpful visuals, scannable outlines, and encouraging Scriptures, *Forgiveness* is an all-in-one resource to get you started on your forgiveness journey today!

Award-winning author and speaker Debbie Barr, explains the high price we pay in our mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing when we cling to resentment, bitterness, and thoughts of revenge. Backed by science, psychology, and Scripture, this all-in-one book will equip you with empathy, faith, and resilience to rise to the challenges forgiveness may bring.

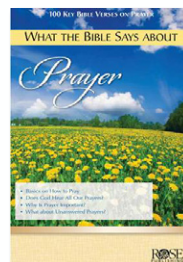
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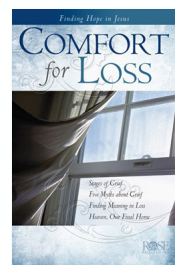
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