

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

I was thirty-six years old, a husband, father of two, and a pastor in the church, and with regards to forgiveness and reconciliation, I would have told you that I had a strong Biblical understanding, and plenty of experience in these matters. But in February of that year, when my dad was sentenced to twelve years in prison for molesting my daughter, forgiveness and reconciliation now felt like unimaginable options. If you've ever wrestled with very challenging forgiveness and seemingly impossible reconciliation, then this essay is meant to be an encouragement for you.

I am the youngest of three brothers, and growing up I believe we had a wonderful upbringing. We lived a modest and comfortable life and we were blessed with a loving mother and father. In my twenties I got married and my wife and I lived about forty-five minutes from my parents. We had two kids of our own, a daughter, and later, a son. Usually, two weekends a month I'd drive my family over to my parent's house and we'd stay the weekend. It was a convenient getaway which provided some fun grandparent time for the kids and a date-night out for my wife and I. On one of these visits, in October of 2010, my wife was putting our nine-year-old daughter to bed. Our daughter asked, *"Can I tell you something, but I don't want anyone to get into trouble."* My daughter had my wife's full attention. My daughter told my wife about various events that took place between her and her "papa," my dad, when they were alone. My wife asked appropriate follow up questions, and assured her that he would never do anything like this to her again.

As shocked as my wife was to receive this news, she held her composure together and after saying goodnight to our daughter, she went directly into my parent's room and shut their door. My wife stood at the end of their bed and looking at my dad and said, *"I need to ask you something and I need your full-attention and complete honesty."* After relaying to him what our daughter had shared, the first thing that my dad had said was, *"Thank God, it's finally over."* This was a telling admission that revealed guilt, shame, and relief; the sort of thing one says when he knows he's been living in hidden sin. After hearing confirmation from my dad, my wife left their room and came out to where I'd been sitting in the family-room. She squeezed in next to me on the couch, and burst into tears. I had no idea what was going on. After my wife could bring herself to speak, she shared the news with me. Our world flipped upside down.

I've learned that everyone responds differently to traumatic news. The greatest initial emotion I experienced was shock. I felt completely deflated. Someone could have hit me in the face with a baseball bat and I'd have sat there unmoved and unresponsive. It was as though I could see and hear nothing. I was like a zombie; dead inside. Later, other swells of emotions would come over me; anger and betrayal. We gathered our kids and our things and we left their house to return home, trying to hold our composure in the car so as to not terrify the kids. We wanted to scream and cry, and we did plenty of this in the days, weeks, and months that would follow. From conversations with our daughter, it appeared this abuse had been going on for about six years. Since then, people have asked, *"Weren't there signs?"* No, there wasn't. Looking back, we had no reason to suspect anything was happening. This gave us some peace, knowing we didn't ignore signs and put our daughter at risk while pretending nothing was going on.

From that night, my wife and I decided that no matter what, the care of our daughter was our first priority. We were going to get her the immediate help she'd need from professional Christian counseling, and follow whatever guidance we believed would be helpful for her. Additionally, we knew that a counselor would be required to report the events to the authorities. In short, getting our daughter help would mean that my dad would face criminal charges, we'd risk exposing our family to public shame, there would be gossip in the

community and the church, etc. For many, these would be reasons to just “*sweep things under the rug.*” Exposing one’s family to public criticism causes so many victims of sexual abuse to keep quiet; tempting parents to do nothing. We knew we couldn’t do that to our daughter. We believed whatever happened to my dad, legally and socially, couldn’t be our focus, and it wasn’t. We weren’t going to be governed by fear.

As expected, the Sheriff’s department had responded to the counselor’s report. After some interviews with our family, we were asked to drive our daughter to the Sheriff’s office where child interrogation experts privately interviewed her in a small recording room. As parents, we weren’t privileged to the details of that interview, but those details eventually led to the State of California bringing numerous felony charges against my dad. By this point, a couple of months had passed since the evening this all came to light, and neither I nor my wife had been in contact with my dad. Neither of us were in a healthy enough place to speak to him, and any communication we had with my parents came through my mom. My wife and I were still so raw and in deep grieving mode. However, the way we grieved and processed these things were so different. I was just about shut down; daily going through the motions of work and home-life while all the while being emotionally numb, tuned out, and distant to everyone. I was still in shock and disbelief that this was our reality. My wife was in full momma-bear mode. I’m sure if anyone would have dared to belittle what our daughter had been through, my wife would have felt like tearing them to shreds. My wife’s heart physically hurt so bad. She would daily go into the garage, and sit in the car and scream cry, or go on a drive and scream cry. Additionally, my wife was hurting because I wasn’t grieving the way she was grieving. She’d look at me in my silence and ask, “*Are you even grieving at all?*” I had to reassure her that I was devastated, but because I grieved differently than her, it wasn’t that I wasn’t hurting. Needless to say, we were both under a tremendous strain, and it greatly impacted our marriage.

During all this, our extended family was divided. Some family members took a passive approach, suggesting we all forgive and move on. One family member turned against my wife and I, saying that it was our fault that my dad was facing criminal charges; claiming this all should have been dealt with “*in family.*” Family strife lasted for years as everyone responded and grieved differently. Everyone was hurt. To varying degrees, we were all victims of my dad’s sin. More can be said about how all of this impacted our lives, but the point is that one person’s sin can be very far-reaching. This is a good reminder that you and I are one bad choice away from destroying relationships that matter.

Amidst all the chaos, by God’s grace, I was able to forgive my dad. Before I get into how that came about, I want to share what Biblical forgiveness really is. The Bible tells of a conversation between Jesus and one of His disciples named Peter. In Matthew 18:21-22, Peter is concerned because his brother has repeatedly sinned against him. This pattern of repeat offense is upsetting and now Peter wonders how often does Jesus expect Him to extend forgiveness, especially when the sincerity of his brother’s apology is questionable. Peter asks, “***How many times must I forgive my brother? Up to seven times?***” Jesus replies, “***No, but up to seventy times seven.***” In short, Jesus is saying, you must always forgive. It’s not up to us to gauge sincerity, that’s God’s job. Man can’t know the heart of another, only God can. Jesus makes it clear that forgiveness is always required of Christians. This truth can be a tough pill to swallow. One might say, “*But isn’t forgiveness a choice?*” Yes, it’s a choice in the same way that serving one another is a choice, and praying is a choice, though these are commanded. You can choose many things even when the Lord provides clarity on what is expected.

Forgiveness is a step of obedience, but obedience must be coupled with sincerity. For example, if a Christian is going to be baptized, so as to publicly declare his faith in Jesus, he doesn’t just take this step until he’s ready to

make this bold proclamation. Just getting baptized when a person doesn't intend to live for Jesus is a worthless gesture. As well, when someone considers giving an offering, God says that He loves a cheerful giver. Therefore, giving an offering with a begrudging attitude is not pleasing to God, and one ought not to give at all with that type of heart. This principle of sincerity obviously applies to forgiveness. Forgiveness can't just be uttering empty words, "*I forgive you,*" when your heart doesn't mean it. Forgiveness is a command, an act of the will, but only has value when sincere.

Keep in mind that a Christian is a person who has come to faith in Jesus, by entrusting himself to Jesus for the forgiveness of his sins. After having one's sins forgiven, Jesus expects that person to live with certain behaviors and attitudes toward other people; if forgiven by God, then I ought to be a forgiver, and if I've received mercy and grace from God then I ought to be merciful and gracious. Of course, a Christian will himself continue to sin, daily, and therefore he needs to keep seeking forgiveness from God as he sins. This continued seeking of forgiveness isn't for the purpose of maintaining one's salvation, as a Christian can't lose his salvation. Instead, it's to maintain communion and intimacy with God since sin creates a disconnect in our relationship with Him. Jesus clearly warns Christians that when others sin against you, the believer must extend forgiveness, and if we don't, God will not forgive us when we turn to Him for the ongoing forgiveness we need (Matthew 6:14, and Matthew 18:21-35).

Matthew 6:14, **"For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you."** The word forgive here, in the original Greek, means to give up a debt, to let go. Colossians 3:12-13, **"...forgiving each other...just as the Lord forgave you."** Here, in the original Greek, the words forgiving and forgave, mean to do a favor for, to pardon. When we look at what forgiveness is, it's to do the favor of pardoning a debt; to let go of what's owed.

Forgiving an offender isn't just words, forgiveness must also show corresponding action. For example, when I forgive someone I can't later speak ill of that person, or forgo doing right by him. Romans 12:20 speaks of the unconditional love that we are to have toward all people, even our enemies, by saying, **"IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK."** Two things are important here. First, just because I've forgiven someone of an offense, doesn't necessarily mean he will want to have a peaceful relationship with me. He may still despise me even though I've forgiven him. Secondly, if giving food and drink ought to be done to someone that is considered an enemy, how much more so should it be done to someone I say I've forgiven? So, forgiveness, when genuine, will promote the good-will of the person I've forgiven.

However, forgiveness does not always lead to reconciliation. Romans 12:21 says, **"overcome evil with good."** This Scripture says that my behavior, specifically my kindness, can serve to win over those that are in opposition to me. Kindness can soften the heart of others. Abraham Lincoln said, **"I kill my enemies by making them my friends."** Willingness to provide food and drink shows my forgiveness isn't just mere words, but this may not always result in reconciliation. Reconciliation requires the other person to do something as well. More will be said on that soon.

It had been about a month or two since we learned of my dad's abuse with our daughter. Up to this point, I wasn't in a place where I could genuinely forgive him. One day, as clear as I can ever recall God speaking to my conscience, the Lord told me to forgive my dad. Not only did the Spirit give me this prompting, He softened my heart and gave me the compassion to be able to forgive with a genuine attitude. I knew in my mind it was Biblically necessary to do, and my heart was free to do it without conditions attached. I knew I'd need to talk

to my dad in person, due to the gravity of his offense, and especially as we hadn't talked in so long. We agreed to meet up half way between where we lived. Sitting in a car together in a parking lot, I told him that I loved him and that I forgive him. In that moment, in both of our lives, there was a significant measure of freedom experienced. This is a testimony of how gracious God is!

Some have asked, *"How could you forgive such an offense?"* I think the reasons we might ask this question come from believing lies about what forgiveness really is. Here are six facts about forgiveness, and once we understand them, we become less likely to withhold forgiveness from others. 1) Forgiving someone does NOT mean that what they did was okay. 2) Forgiving someone does NOT mean that I won't feel hurt anymore. 3) Forgiving someone does NOT mean that the person can do the same thing again. 4) Forgiveness does NOT mean that I won't dwell on the offense. This point may be true or false, depending on the circumstances. Sometimes, petty grudges can be quickly forgotten after forgiveness takes place. Other times, trauma can be severe, which may require the offense to be revisited in order for the healing process to take place. 5) Forgiveness is NOT primarily for the other person. Forgiveness is first and foremost for me. When I don't forgive someone, it's like me drinking poison but hoping the other person dies. Forgiveness sets ME free, even if the other person may reject it. However, the great reality is that my forgiveness often softens the heart of the offender as well. 6) Forgiveness means I renounce the right to get even, to get back what's been lost. Forgiveness is to let go of what I'm owed.

My dad and I talked for about twenty minutes, and I returned home. I'd genuinely forgiven him. That part was now settled and behind me. However, forgiveness and reconciliation are not the same thing. A closer look at God's Word gives us some insight as to what reconciliation is, and how it differs from forgiveness.

2 Corinthians 5:18, says that God reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. When God reconciled us to Himself, that word reconciled, in the Greek, means a thorough change, a restoration, to return to favor. As God gave us the ministry of reconciliation, this word in the original Greek means the office and doctrine of restoration for us to carry out with others. Reconciliation is to return to favor a broken relationship; to bring in.

Forgiveness is to let go. Reconciliation is to bring in. They are opposite responses. They both have their place.

Forgiveness is a command, and a step of obedience. Reconciliation is not a command, but it is God's best for us. Unlike forgiveness, reconciliation is earned and requires trust. Where trust is deeply broken, reconciliation can be a lengthy process. Three things bring about reconciliation. The first is forgiveness from the offended. Second, there must be repentance from the offender. Third, depending on the depth of the offense, other factors may be required for healing, such as counseling, time, etc. As for me, I'd forgiven my dad, but reconciliation wouldn't happen yet, as I still needed to heal, and trust was not yet reestablished.

Not too long after I'd forgiven my dad, the Sheriff put out a warrant for his arrest. He was in a county jail for about a year and a half. At his eventual sentencing, additional details had been shared by the District Attorney about my dad's abuse of our daughter. These previously unheard facts were devastating for us to hear and they created a great deal of new anger in me. Anger is a healthy response when evil is committed. How we manage our anger is critical. At that point I knew that if reconciliation was to happen between my dad and I, it would be a very slow process. That day he was sentenced to twelve years in prison.

Back when I had forgiven my dad, my wife felt like I had betrayed her and our daughter. She was processing things at a different pace than I was. I had only arrived at my forgiveness because the Spirit had equipped me to do so. In God's divine wisdom, when we are hurt and angry, He stirs in us at a time that is unique to each one of us. Sometime He allows us to run longer, like Jonah, and other times he stops us in our tracks, like Balaam (Numbers 22). It's not that my wife wasn't praying, or that she didn't want to honor the Lord, but she was still in a state of hurt that needed more time to genuinely arrive at the place God wanted her to be. Daily, my wife cried out to the Lord, begging God, *"Why my baby girl? How are you going to heal this?"*

For many years my wife had worked as a care-giver for seniors, and as such, she seemed to have a built-in heart of compassion for people. After my dad was sentenced, one particular day, she knew the Holy Spirit had spoken to her by saying, *"I am going to heal you by having you serve the man who harmed your daughter."* These words seemed unimaginable to her. She thought this news couldn't be from God. After all, she'd determined in her heart that she was never going to see my dad again! She believed that God would never ask her to serve the man whose choices had almost destroyed our family and broke our daughter's spirit. But God spoke to my wife again saying, *"You think man's hands can destroy your family, but My hands were pierced for your family, and for your father-in-law. Trust Me. I'll be with you."* My wife realized that if she didn't forgive my dad, then she'd be teaching our daughter that the cross was not enough.

A tipping point came for my wife when she was on a particular care-giving assignment. She was caring for an elderly man of ninety-three years. This man was a Christian, but she'd noticed that he was grieving something terrible. He shared with her that many years ago he'd sexually abused his own daughter, and despite his repentance and apologies, his daughter hadn't spoken to him in over twenty years. My wife felt compassion for him, especially having witnessed his grief and repentance first hand. My wife recalled that my dad had also expressed the same grief and repentance to her, by way of communication from my mom, but she'd not accepted it. It was hard for my wife to view my dad with compassionate eyes in the way she was now seeing this broken elderly man. This goes to show that when we can view someone else's suffering from an impartial position, we tend to see how we might want to change the way we respond to others. My wife understood that forgiveness offered freedom for her own spirit, but seeing the torment of this old man whose daughter wouldn't forgive him, showed my wife how painful it is to withhold forgiveness from others. My wife felt the Lord saying to her, *"When other's desire forgiveness, give it to them, so they don't die from grief."* Not long after, this ninety-three-year-old man passed away, having died of old age and what my wife believes was a broken heart.

In this situation, we don't know all the particulars of the communication between this old man and his daughter. Perhaps long ago, forgiveness had been expressed, but reconciliation was never extended. It's uncertain. Ultimately though, when we are faced with these choices, it's important to remember that the offender doesn't need to repent in order for us to extend forgiveness, but reconciliation will depend on the offender's repentance. How will you know if the offender is genuinely repentant? I think there are five key signs that show the offender is genuinely repentant. First, the offender is not defensive, nor tries to minimize the offense. Second, the offender welcomes accountability. Third, the offender demonstrates changed behavior. The Bible says in Proverb 28:13, ***"he who confesses and forsakes (his transgressions) will find compassion."*** Anyone can confess, but the additional "forsaking" of the sin is crucial. To confess means to speak in agreement with, and to forsake means to leave, or depart from a behavior or attitude. These are required for showing changed behavior. Only God can read hearts, so we evaluate *actions*. And, don't be fooled by displays of tears, which aren't a substitute for changed behavior. Fourth, the offender does not

resent your desire to confirm his repentance. If you say you need evidence of repentance, only an unrepentant offender will manipulate you by stating things like, *"Well, I guess you can't find it in yourself to be forgiving."* If they go this route, you can respond, *"I've already forgiven. We're now working on reconciliation."* Fifth, the offender makes restitution, when applicable.

Back to my own testimony, let me fast forward quite a bit to when my dad was about to be released. He would serve ten years of a twelve-year sentence. During his incarceration, I had visited him a couple of times and we'd exchanged a few letters. However, my communication was superficial, as I wasn't yet ready to trust him with details of our personal lives. Reconciliation was a slow process. As for my wife and daughter, neither had any communication with him since the night his abuse came to light. When we learned that my dad was being released early, my wife believed that she was ready to forgive him face to face. By this time, I had moved my family to Pennsylvania, having taken a pastoral role there. We were not able to be present in California when my dad was released.

A few months before my dad was released, during my mom's regular visits with him, she'd noticed he'd been acting strange; becoming increasingly less engaging and unemotional. Upon his return home, my mom saw a greater magnitude of change in his behavior. He appeared numb and always blank-faced. Concerned for things like dementia, she took him for some testing. His condition was worse than anyone thought. He was diagnosed with a severe type of cancer and had a large growing tumor in his brain. It was inoperable and he was given a few months to live. It was clear why God had allowed his sentence to be cut short, and for him to return home when he did. His cognitive abilities were still present but were slowly diminishing. My wife and I knew that if any forgiveness and reconciliation were to be settled, we'd need to act soon.

By this time, our daughter was a young adult, nineteen or twenty years old. We sat with our kids and I told them that mom and I were going to fly back to California to reconcile with my dad, and ultimately say goodbye as he was declining. We offered for them to come with us, but shared that it was entirely their choice. We asked our daughter to pray about whether she should go out or not. We didn't want her to regret any decision, or decide without seeking the Lord. My daughter wasn't comfortable seeing my dad, but had written about a four-page letter that she wanted him to hear, a letter that expressed her trauma and how he'd impacted her life. We affirmed her decision. My wife, son, and I packed for the trip. As we packed, the Lord told my wife, *"You need to pack two suitcases and plan to stay there indefinitely. You are going to be his caregiver until he passes."* My wife was stunned. She came to me and shared what she knew the Lord had spoken to her. In agreement, I replied, *"Then you'd better pack two suitcases."* She was at peace with this decision.

Soon after we arrived at my parents, my wife knew she needed to talk to my dad. It would be their first direct communication in over ten years. She and I met with him alone. My dad looked at her and began to cry. My wife sat next to him and said, *"I came here to tell you that I love you and I forgive you. Because God loves and forgives me, I can love and forgive you."* He started sobbing. He tried to get up so we helped him up. We all cried and hugged. He sat down and continued to say how he told the judge he was guilty and what he did was wrong and he deserved to go to prison. Healing washed over him and us.

Essentially, my dad was bed-ridden and was declining by the day. We told our daughter about his physical condition. His inability to move around gave her the assurance that she could approach him and feel safe. She agreed to fly out. She showed up with her iPad full of her thoughts that she wanted to share with my dad, things like the impact of his choices on her emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. Shortly after arriving at the house, she and I and my wife went privately into my dad's room where he was laying in bed. I stood

next to my dad, my wife next to me, and my daughter at the foot of the bed. He looked up, recognized her, and began to weep. I told him that she has something to share with him. It was a nervous and emotional moment. My wife and I didn't know exactly what she'd written, but we knew she had the right to express herself to the man who had hurt her for six years of her young life. She raised up her iPad to read, but then paused. As she looked at my dad, she eventually set the iPad down and simply said, *"I want you to know that I love you and forgive you for everything you've done to me."* That was it. That was all she said. In that moment, nothing more mattered to her. My daughter felt God wanting her to put her words aside and only speak His words of love to him. My dad cried uncontrollably and said, *"The best gift you can give anyone is forgiveness."*

My daughter didn't stay for long, and I don't think she engaged my dad beyond that. But that was enough. She'd faced the perpetrator of her trauma, and genuinely forgive him. She was at peace about that decision, and his heart was set at peace having been forgiven by her. Shortly afterward, my daughter, my son, and I returned home while my wife stayed to care for my dad. The one condition that my wife gave to my mom was that she wouldn't help my mom clean him. My dad had become incontinent, wore a diaper, and needed sponge bathing. My wife said, with everything else I will take over, but with his cleaning, you'll need to handle that. My mom agreed. However, my dad was a large man, about six foot three inches tall, and my mom was aged and frail. As my wife watched my mom labor to roll my dad over to navigate his diaper and try to clean him, she could see my mom wasn't physically strong enough for the demand. Again, the Lord poured out a measure of compassion in my wife's heart, and she said to my mom, *"I'll do that. I'll clean him and manage his incontinence."* Going forward, my wife was not only caring for the man who molested her daughter, but she was cleaning his entire body. Doing this was by no means a demeaning act, nor was it some sort of punishment, but instead it was quite the opposite. Her unconditional service testified of the good things that Jesus has done for us that we can never deserve.

My wife chose to bend her will to what God was doing. For both of us, surrendering became easier when we let God do the things that only He could do. We each had to be humbled by our own sin and our own great need to be forgiven. In our own unique time, we each came to stop trying to do things in our own strength. God enabled forgiveness and reconciliation for all of us, and thankfully God orchestrated these things before my dad was unable to receive it. We all healed tremendously. These seemingly impossible scenarios were made possible by the work of His Spirit in us and through us. To God be the glory!

Additional Truths to Consider Regarding Forgiveness and Reconciliation

When an offender is genuinely repentant, it's important to be open to reconciliation. Jesus spoke about reconciliation with a sense of urgency (Matthew 5:23-24). If you are hesitant to reconcile, work through these seven guidelines.

1. **Forgiveness** - Make sure forgiveness has taken place first so that motives can be honest. Don't offer guidelines for reconciliation that are retaliatory in nature, but only those which are helpful.
2. **Humility** - Be humble in your attitude. For example, we are not to demand that a person earn our forgiveness, that should have happened already. The issue now is working toward reconciling.
3. **Prayer** - Be prayerful about the one who hurt you. Jesus taught His disciples to pray for those who mistreat them (Luke 6:28). Pray also for strength to follow through with difficult choices, Hebrews 4:16, ***"Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."***

4. **Ownership** - Be willing to admit ways you might have contributed to the problem. Even if you did not start the problem, your lack of understanding, careless words, impatience, or failure to respond in a loving manner may have aggravated the situation, Matthew 7:3, ***“Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?”***

5. **Honesty** - Be honest with the offender. If you need more time to absorb the reality of what was said or done, express this honestly to the one who hurt you. Yet, we must not use this time as a means of manipulation and punishment.

6. **Objectivity** - Perhaps you have good reasons for being hesitant to reconcile, but the reasons must be objectively stated. For example, repeated offenses of the same nature make it understandably challenging for trust to be rebuilt. Be clear about any guidelines for restoration. Requirements might include such factors as maintaining financial accountability, seeking treatment for substance abuse, etc.

7. **Realistic** - Be realistic about the process. Change often requires time and hard work. Periodic failure by an offender does not always indicate an unrepentant heart. A key indicator of change is the attitude of the offender.

REASONS WHY WE DON'T FORGIVE

1. **PRIDE** - Pride is what keeps me in bondage and hinders my growth. I might wrongly believe that forgiving someone makes me look weak. I may wrongly feel like I am better than others. I might think to myself, *“Wait a minute, I was right and he was wrong!”* and I might wrongly feel that my forgiveness means that I’m giving in to him.

2. **A FALSE SENSE OF CONTROL** – I might think that if I were to forgive, I’ll feel out of control. I want to feel in control and be able to manipulate others by holding the debt against them. However, the truth is, I am out of control when I cling to my hurt; I am the one in bondage.

3. **A FALSE SENSE OF SELF-PROTECTION** – I might think that if I forgive, I may get hurt again, so it’s best to not forgive. However, the truth is that I am going to get hurt again by others regardless of what I do. The issue is how I decide to respond to these hurts so that I am not living in fear and being controlled by others.

4. **IGNORE THE SITUATION** – I might think that if I ignore it, the problem will go away. However, the truth is that the problem just gets buried and resurfaces later. Unresolved baggage from the past is brought into the present.

5. **REVENGE** – I might think that the person has to pay for what he’s done. They need to be punished and learn a lesson. I want to hang on to the right to be a judge. However, the truth is that I'm not God, and trying to play God will get me in trouble. Vengeance belongs to the Lord.

6. **LACK OF UNDERSTANDING** – When I fail to understand the depth God's love, and fail to recognize how much of my own sin God forgave, then I can’t understand the value of loving and forgiving others. The truth is, I cannot give a gift to someone unless I first have something to give.

7. **OVERCOMPLICATING THINGS** – I might think, forgiveness seems too easy and unfair; it seems I'm overlooking or condoning their sin. However, the truth is that when I forgive, I am recognizing that Jesus died on the cross for that sin, as well as mine.

8. **SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITY** – I might think that since he’s the offender, I should wait for the offender to come to me first. However, the truth is that this rarely happens. I’m to forgive, not wait on their response.

9. **I’M HELD HOSTAGE** – I might think that he isn't sorry for what he’s done, and he shows no sign of repentance. Therefore, I’m held captive until his repentance releases me. However, the truth is that he may never be sorry. At any rate, my forgiveness is a necessary obedience, as it sets me free from being held hostage until they repentant, which may not happen.

10. FEELINGS – I might think that if I choose to forgive, I'm acting like a hypocrite because I don't "feel" loving and forgiving. However, the truth is that I'm a hypocrite if I don't forgive because my real nature in Christ is now a forgiving nature. Additionally, I might think that raw feelings might be stirred up if I forgive. But the truth is, God knows how to gently let the feelings surface that need to be healed. I won't go crazy or die.

11. TIMING – I might tell myself that I'm waiting for a "convenient" time. However, the truth is that it may never be convenient. Instead, I will likely have to go out of my way to orchestrate an opportunity to express my forgiveness. I might also tell myself that it'll take too much time to go and forgive him, and I'm so busy. However, I can't afford not to forgive, because I am the one in torment and in suffering if I harbor unforgiveness.

OTHER COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS REGARDING FORGIVENESS.

The following are lies that we use to convince ourselves that we have forgiven someone when in fact we haven't, or, that the need to forgive is no longer necessary.

"I don't need to forgive because I don't feel angry anymore."

"Forgiveness doesn't matter anymore because I am able to understand his hurtful behavior. I can see some of the reasons why he did it."

"Forgiveness isn't important because I am able to separate the person from the behavior."

"Forgiveness doesn't matter because I am giving him the benefit of the doubt. He didn't mean it."

"I don't need to forgive because I believe that time heals all wounds."

"I don't need to forgive because I am willing to just forget about it."

"Forgiveness isn't necessary because I am able to pray for the person who has hurt me."

"Forgiving him isn't necessary because I have asked God to forgive him."

"I don't need to forgive because I have confronted this person about his behavior."

"I don't need to forgive because I am able to say that I haven't really been hurt that badly."

"I don't need to forgive because I have attempted reconciliation."

"I don't actually have to forgive; I just have to be willing in my heart to forgive."

"Forgiveness doesn't matter since I am willing to be nice and "turn the other cheek."

"I don't need to forgive as long as I am trying to behave in a forgiving manner."

Forgiveness is NONE of these things. Some of these may be of help in the process of getting ready to forgive, or may be byproducts of the forgiveness process, but they are not actually the same as forgiving.