

How Do I Know If I've Forgiven Someone?

Forgiveness does not mean all the pain is gone. It doesn't mean justice is served or the offender has a change of heart or behavior. It's not a release of responsibility nor does it mean an absence of healthy boundaries. Reconciliation or remorse on the part of the offending party may not happen but it is not a requirement for forgiveness. Forgiveness is a process that brings relief and freedom from the control the offender and the offense may have on your life. Ongoing bitterness, anger and the desire to retaliate allows the offender to continually reoffend. Forgiveness is a gift you give yourself and the person who hurt you, regardless of the circumstances. Is this easy? No. Does it require reconciliation? No. Is it necessary for your own recovery and quality of life? Yes!

How Do I Know I've Forgiven?	
Forgiveness	Unforgiveness
You think about the offense or the offender infrequently.	You think about the offense and the offender often.
The offense is discussed infrequently.	The offense is discussed often with others.
You no longer have a desire to get even.	You want to retaliate or get even.
You are able to hold the offender responsible without malice.	You want the offender to hurt and wish him or her harm.
You understand the offender's behavioral agenda and are able to see his/her humanness.	The function of the act or the behavioral agenda is not as important as pay-back.
You are no longer controlled by anger and resentment.	Memories of the offense and anger or bitterness impact and control your life and outlook.
Your thoughts regarding the offender are more global without focusing only on the injury.	The first thought you have about the offender is the injury they caused.
You can have a more positive view of the offender without excusing the offense.	You view all aspects of the offense and the offender in the most negative light
You stop keeping score or a record of the wrongs.	You constantly keep score of the offenses in order to justify unforgiveness.
You no longer have to win to feel good.	Winning is of primary importance.
You are not waiting for the offending party to make restitution or change his or her behavior.	You refuse to forgive until the other person makes restitution or behavior changes.
You canceled the debt owed to you by the offending person.	You are not willing to forget the debt owed to you by the offender.
You can pray for the offender's salvation and for God to lead him or her to make change.	You are unable to pray for the offender's salvation because your anger and bitterness interferes.

The Spiritual Perspective

The Bible says we have forgiven when:

- We are to get rid of all the bitterness, rage and anger before it becomes sin (Ephesians 4:31-32; Mark 11:25; Hebrews 12:15). It's important to note that anger is not always sin. God has demonstrated anger (Psalm 7:11) as did Jesus (Mark 3:5). Biblically, anger is God-given energy intended to help us set appropriate boundaries. Anger at an injustice can be appropriate. It can be a warning flag that alerts us to the behavior of others who may be violating our boundaries. Anger can become sin when it lingers, turns into bitterness and controls us (Ephesians 4:26-27).
- We are able to treat the offender with kindness even when we set healthy boundaries and decide not to reconcile (Ephesians 4:29,32; Romans 12:21; Proverbs 25:21-22; Luke 6:27-28). We are able to speak the truth and establish boundaries in a caring manner (Ephesians 4:15). It is important to weigh our words (James 1:19-20).
- We do not wish the offender ill (Romans 12:14,17; Proverbs 24:17-20; Proverbs 20:22).
- We give up the desire to retaliate and turn it over to God (1 Peter 3:9; Romans 12:19-21).
- We hold the offender responsible but offer forgiveness. This requires wisdom and discernment to determine our accountability and responsibility vs. the accountability of the offender (Matthew 10:16; 1 Corinthians 2:15-16).
- We do not use abusive or offensive language in confronting the offender or talking about him or her (Ephesians 4:29;31).
- We can pray for the offender (Matthew 5:43-44; Luke 6:27-28).
- We remember the offensive behavior but we are not continually thinking and talking about it (Philippians 4:8).
- We can understand the offender's behavioral agenda and are able to see his/her humanness (Colossians 3:13).
- Understanding that forgiveness is a process, we are willing to forgive over and over again. God is wanting a forgiving spirit and offers grace for our struggle to forgive. (Matthew 18:21-22; Luke 17:3-4).

The Forgiveness Check

How do you rate on these ten Forgiveness Check items? Mark each item that you believe applies to you at this moment in time for a hurt or wound from the past. Remember, forgiveness is a process and this exercise can increase awareness of the forgiveness work that remains.

1. _____ I do not think about the offense and the offender often.
2. _____ I do not discuss the situation with friends, family and others frequently
3. _____ I have surrendered my right to get even.
4. _____ I have canceled the debt owed to me by the offending person.

- 5. _____ I am no longer waiting for the offender apologize or change behavior to forgive .
- 6. _____ I am able to hold the offender responsible without anger or resentment.
- 7. _____ I do not fantasize or hope that harm would come to the offender.
- 8. _____ I can treat the offender appropriately without malice.
- 9. _____ I can set good boundaries with the offender without anger and resentment.
- 10. _____ I am able to pray for the offender.

Important Forgiveness Check Questions:

How many items were you able to check? _____

What forgiveness areas still need work?

What is your plan for addressing these areas?

Write a prayer asking God to reveal his will and provide you with the courage and strength to overcome your struggles with forgiveness. Be specific in your requests.

How has God been there for you throughout your forgiveness journey thus far?

Why does God asks us to forgive others before he forgives us?

Read the parable of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18:21-35. According to this parable, there was a king who had a servant who owed him a large amount of money. Since the servant couldn't pay him, he ordered the man, his wife, children and all of his possessions to be sold to pay the debt. The servant fell on his knees and begged the king to have mercy. The king took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

After his release, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a small amount of money. He grabbed the servant and began to choke him, demanding that he pay the debt. The servant begged for mercy, but he refused. He had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

When the king was told about this, he called in the servant who owned him money. This servant was confronted by the king for failing to show mercy on his fellow servant as it had been shown to him. In anger, the king turned him over to the jailers until he could pay back all he owned.

Nothing men can do to us can compare with what we have done to God; man's sin brought about the death of His son. Yet God forgives us and asks us to pass this mercy on to others. God wants us to model forgiveness so others can grasp the concept of His grace and mercy.

I'm having trouble forgiving someone and I'm afraid God won't forgive me.

Forgiveness is a complex process that takes time. God as our powerful creator can forgive instantly but we as fallible beings often must work through forgiveness more slowly and deliberately. God knows your heart and resolve to forgive. He knows how tough it is for us to forgive, especially when we are deliberately wronged. God offers grace even when you earnestly want to forgive someone but are overcome by anger and hurt.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)