

## 26. How do I forgive?

### Psalm 103:8-13

The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbour his anger for ever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him...

Thirst for revenge comes to us more naturally than willingness to forgive. Only someone who has received the forgiveness of God through the cross of Jesus can act counter to our natural urge. Psalm 103:8-13 reminds believers of the love God has shown us. How, in practice, can we extend the same grace to others?

What follows is not a technique, as if performing the technique will automatically produce forgiveness. We have to want to forgive, in principle at least. But if you do want to forgive, here are some useful steps to work through:

**Pray for God's help**, because we can't summon up power from within ourselves to forgive.

**Recognise what you are forgiving.** Sometimes people try to minimise what has happened to them thinking that will make forgiveness easier; others exaggerate how wronged they have been, without weighing things up from the point of view of the wrongdoer. We need to forgive what has truly and actually been perpetrated against us.

**Recognise how much you have been forgiven**, because only the forgiveness of God can unlock our hearts to forgive others. When faced with the challenge of forgiveness we need to recall our own sins in the light of texts like Psalm 103:8-13, Micah 5:18-19, Romans 5:6-8 and 1 John 1:8-9.

**Entrust judgement to God**, because what the other person did does matter, it's just not your job to punish.

**Make a decision to forgive**, because sometimes the will has to act before the emotions. It is a good idea to mark your decision in some tangible way that you will make it more than a hidden decision in your mind. Some people write it down, others tell a friend. In some cases, it is appropriate to tell the person you are forgiving.

**Renew that decision when you fail.** Forgiveness involves not demanding any kind of payment from the person who has wronged us; not treating them badly, not bad-mouthing them or not expecting them to grovel and feel guilty for what they did. As a result, you will feel deprived, robbed even. You will be tempted to go back on your decision. Every time you are tempted, return to your decision. Remind yourself, ask God's forgiveness and resolve again to forgive.

For some time you will have to fight off the feeling from within, and even criticism from others, that you have taken the fool's path. As time goes on, and your heart gradually melts with godlike love and you breathe the free air again, you will know for sure that you did the right thing.