

To Forgive is Divine – A Pre-Counselling Exercise in Forgiveness

Sometimes when we have a difficulty with forgiveness, the prayerful support of a counsellor can guide us to a place of healing and/or restoration. To see if you are ready for and willing to accept this support, these pages contain an exercise that you can do in advance of a counselling session. You may even find, after doing this exercise, that a counselling consultation is not necessary, although discussing it with someone you trust is therapeutic and reinforces your decision to forgive.

When Alexander Pope, in *An Essay On Criticism* (1711) wrote, “To err is human, to forgive is divine” he did not mean that only God can forgive, rather that without God’s influence we cannot forgive. This exercise is to prepare you for discussing your own circumstances with your counsellor or other friend to effect a healing.



*“To err is human, to forgive is divine,
and well... I’ve done my part.”*

Illustration: Martha Campbell, from BH Wilkerson et al, *Family Walk*, Zondervan, 1991

1. Think of a time when you didn't get what you deserved in the way of a punishment. Out of an act of charity or compassion, someone took pity on you and kept you from getting a traffic ticket, a bad grade, a “poor work slip”, prevented you from getting fired or _____ (you fill in the blank).

Describe the scenario and be prepared to discuss the following two questions with your counsellor (please read both questions first before you respond):

- What was your overall emotional reaction to the compassion offered you? What kind of response did you have inwardly?

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- How did you feel about the person who offered the forgiveness; how did you respond to them?

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Henry Ward Beecher said that a man who was starving to death would not go into the laboratory to try and figure out how wheat germinates in the soil nor demand a chemical analysis of bread. So I suggest that those who are really conscious of their need to forgive someone are not concerned with the mechanics of atonement, but only concerned that they themselves dispense its effects.

2. Because hurt is inevitable in a fallen world – everyone will fail or hurt someone else eventually, God offers us forgiveness so that no deed done could ever have to hinder our communion with Him or with each other.

Various dictionaries and lexicons define forgiveness in diverse ways:

“1) A benevolent act of superior generosity, 2) a sacrificial act of one-way absorbing of the other's debt, 3) an obedient act of unconditional acceptance.”

Pause for a few moments to pray for God's guidance, and then match the following passages with the definition that comes closest to explaining the aspect of forgiveness revealed (this will not be an easy assignment but it will show us important things to consider when we offer forgiveness):

a. Acts 7:60

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b. II Samuel 12:13

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c. Luke 7:45-47

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d. Ephesians 4:32

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3. Which do you think brings the greater joy: seeing the results of forgiveness given in the life of the one to whom you gave it or experiencing forgiveness received from another for something you have done? Why?

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4. Read Psalm 103:8-18. List the characteristics in this passage that describe, confirm or illustrate the fact that God is forgiving:

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5. Read Matthew 6:12-15, Romans 12:14 and Colossians 3:13. How important is the concept of forgiveness toward others in the life of the believer? List some of the things that can happen to the person that uses it:

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List some of the things that can happen to the person that does NOT use it:

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6. For a time of prayer and sharing...

Is there someone who has hurt you recently that you have not offered forgiveness toward? Is your heart cold toward them? Do you wish them a blessing – or a curse?

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There are few truths more significant than this as proclaimed by Jesus in the pages of Scripture: forgiveness is vital for spiritual and emotional health and fulfilment. During your counselling session, you will be invited with your counsellor to pray for the person (or persons) that fall into that category, to mention their name(s) and by praying for them, see if you can appropriate some of God's forgiveness to use to release the hurt that you have.

Bring these notes to your counselling session.

An apology is a good way to have the last word.

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