

HOW CAN YOU FORGIVE YOURSELF?

Is there a person upon the earth who hasn't experienced a time when he needed to forgive himself? Is there anyone who hasn't found himself in a set of dire circumstances and had to live with the knowledge that it was due to his own stupidity?

It is relatively easy for me to write this as I'm one who has been there more times than I can count. In fact, I've been so mad at myself on numerous occasions that I've had an intense desire to commit suicide. Other times, I have just wanted to cause myself some pain – anything to make myself suffer and pay for what I had done!

There are times when we look back and recall some really stupid decision we made long ago. Some of us might have a lot of those decisions for which we need to forgive ourselves. I often minister to men in prison, many of whom have a life sentence, and many of them have to deal daily with this. Yet, one doesn't need to be in prison to regret having made a decision to marry the wrong person, having taken a wrong career turn long ago, or passed up a scholarship that would have helped paint a different future.

Learning how to forgive yourself might just be one of the most important things you will ever learn. Certainly, a close second might be learning how to forgive others. The bitterness carried by those who fail to forgive often does more damage than the sin that was committed against them. It has been said that failure to forgive is one of the

greatest sins a person ever commits against himself.

There are three aspects of forgiveness that bear considering just now. The main ones are:

- ❑ How can we receive forgiveness?
- ❑ How can we forgive others?
- ❑ How can we forgive ourselves?

Receiving forgiveness is one of man's greatest needs. Perhaps there are many who don't actually realize this, or if they do, choose to suppress it, but the need is there nonetheless.

I learned this at the age of 22, now more than 40 years ago, when I first understood that God offers us His forgiveness as a gift. I don't recall ever sitting around thinking that I needed God's forgiveness but I can attest to the fact that I felt like a giant load had been removed from my shoulders when I received it. Wow! It was as if a hundred-pound backpack had been instantaneously removed!

That experience really opened my eyes to the value of forgiveness. I was reading a Christian tract that explained how a person could have assurance of going to heaven when he died. I realized at that point that entering heaven would require me to be forgiven of my sins but what I did not know was how to be forgiven. The tract contained many verses and among them were these:

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever believes in Him should not perish** but have everlasting life.*
(John 3:16)

*Most assuredly, I say to you, **he who believes in Me has everlasting life.***
(John 6:47)

*For by grace you have been saved through faith, **and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.***
(Ephesians 2:8 & 9)

*But as many as **received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:***
(John 1:12)

*Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him **everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified** by the law of Moses.*
(Acts 13:38-39)

*These things I have written to **you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.***
(1 John 5:13)

To this very day, that message remains the best news I've ever learned! The freedom I received by being forgiven has given me indescribable joy. Those verses made it clear that eternal life is a GIFT and it is received by simply BELIEVING.

It wasn't long after that when I sensed that God also wanted me to seek the forgiveness of others whom I had wronged. Fortunately, I did that, although I first had to fight a battle within myself before humbling myself enough to seek that forgiveness. I imagine I will always remember how difficult it was to humble myself, and yet how rewarding it was, once I did. Receiving forgiveness from some I had wronged brought me such relief—relief I didn't even know I needed.

Sadly, there are many things we have done for which we cannot seek the forgiveness of others. This is especially true when the person is no longer alive, or has moved on and cannot be located. There may be times when we have sought forgiveness and the person from whom we have sought it has refused to forgive. This, we must accept.

Next, came the need to forgive others. For me, this was relatively easy, as I focused on how much I had been forgiven. I was even able to let go of some terrible injustices that had occurred to me many years before.

Without a doubt, the most difficult person to forgive was myself. I've no doubt that the inability to forgive one's self has a lot to do with pride. Somehow, I think I must feel I'm being more righteous to maintain contempt for myself than to simply forgive myself. Somehow, I become deceived into believing that my own self-hatred makes me a better person.

Did you ever feel that no party is as meaningful as a "pity party?" It has been said that depression is the only sickness from which the sick person does not want to be delivered. For me, my greatest periods of depression have come as I've focused on the mistakes I've made and the ways in which I have hurt myself. Therein lies a great need for forgiveness. Can you identify?

Perhaps the first step in forgiving ourselves is to realize that if God, who is holy and righteous, can forgive us, who are we to fail to do so? Is our standard higher than God's? Are we somehow more just than God as we withhold forgiveness from ourselves? Can we somehow be right in continuing to

condemn one for whom Christ died and has already forgiven? The answer is "No."

Some mistakenly think that we are supposed to "forgive and forget." Then, when we find that we still remember something we have supposedly forgiven, we think that we have actually failed to forgive. When God says in His Word that He "remembers no more," it means that He doesn't ever bring it up to us again after forgiving us. It doesn't mean that He suddenly develops amnesia.

We need to accept the fact that we are not perfect but, instead, are far from it! Believing in Jesus doesn't make us perfect, nor does even committing one's life to Him. Sure, we have sinned and we will continue to sin. We need to deal with it, as 1 John 1:8,9 tells us to—by confessing it!

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

So, let's confess our sins, learn from them, and even teach others so they don't make the same ones. Forgive yourself and get on with making the most of the rest of your life.

**(NOTE: All quoted scripture is from the New King James Version of the Bible, published by Thomas Nelson Publishers) (Scripture emphases mine.)*

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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***"the most difficult person in
the whole world to forgive***

may be yourself.”