



STEPS TO RECONCILIATION

HOW TO FORGIVE YOURSELF AND OTHERS

(Excerpts by Father Eamon Tobin, @2006)

As we continue our 2023 Lenten journey is there some residual or excess baggage that we have been holding on to for far too long? Is there someone (a family member, ex-spouse, co-worker, friend, or even ourselves) that we just can't bring the ability to forgive and move on? Here are a few suggestions that I ask you to prayerfully consider and meditate on.

- What forgiveness *is*:
 - A process (which may take a day, a year, or a lifetime) during which we seek to eliminate from our mind and heart, all resentment and hurt feelings that we have because of what someone did or said to us.
 - The spiritual surgery that we perform on ourselves (with the help of God's mercy and grace) to free ourselves from all the poisonous venom we feel as the result of a hurt or injustice.
 - A gift we enjoy so that we do not remain stuck in the past and in our pain, living as victims of some big hurt or injustice day-after-day, year-after-year.

- What forgiveness *isn't*:
 - Meant to mean that we must forget a hurt or injustice. We often hear the advice "forgive and forget". However, often that is unrealistic and unachievable. What we can and should seek to do is to be healed and let go of the resentments connected with the hurt. If we don't, these resentments will continue to wound us, cloud the way we see reality, and control our actions—how we interact or relate to others.
 - Meant to mean that we surrender our right to justice either. We shouldn't confuse forgiveness with stupidity. (Jesus asked us to readily forgive, not keep inviting others to hurt or step on us—like a human doormat.)
 - A quick fix to repair lines of communication. While our Christian values may demand that we try to relate well to the offending person, forgiveness does not necessarily mean that I have to overly like or befriend them.
 - Meant to mean that I have to put up with someone's intolerable behavior.
 - Meant to mean excusing, condoning, or minimizing the wrong inflicted on us. Jesus never suggested that we do any of the above. He only asks that we forgive. Remember: Forgive – not forget!
 - Something we do solely for other people; we do it for ourselves to get well and move on.

- Three good reasons to forgive:
 - God's word tells us to do so, not once but many, many times.
 - To free our hearts from the destructive power of *un-forgiveness*.
 - When we forgive, we make our world less violent and more loving.

- Thirteen “things” to remember about the forgiveness process:
 1. Forgiveness is God’s way of dealing with the hurt and wrong done to us. Seeking revenge or seeking to get even is the world’s way!
 2. Normally, people hurt us to do us wrong because they are immature, spiritually blind, weak, wounded, and imperfect.
 3. Forgiveness of a hurt, especially a big hurt, usually will take time, patience, humility, and lots of prayer.
 4. Before we can forgive a hurt or wrong done to us, we usually will need to name, own, and give some expression to the feelings around the hurt (e.g., anger, disappointment, or a sense of betrayal). For example: When you call me names in front of our children, I feel angry and humiliated.
 5. We will need to pray for God’s grace to help us let go of a big hurt.
 6. Another reason we may not make much progress in our efforts to forgive is because deep down we do not want to let go or feel they don’t deserve our forgiveness.
 7. There is a difference between the forgiveness and the healing of a hurt.
 8. There is a difference also between the forgiveness and the reconciliation of a hurt.
 9. Sometimes the reason we have a difficult time forgiving others is because we have a difficult time forgiving ourselves.
 10. Some hurts may be so serious and complex, that we will need a good counselor to help us work through the hurt and back to a state of wellness.
 11. It is important to remember that forgiveness of a hurt or wrong done to us is not a wimpy or weak response—it’s actually us resuming responsibility for our lives, rather than letting others dictate them for us.
 12. It is important not to confuse the Gospel call to forgive hurts with simply tolerating on-going hurtful, destructive behavior and/or painful situations.
 13. Remember that sometimes the truth hurts. Our challenge is not so much to forgive some hurtful words spoken to us, but to sometimes face the truth of the words spoken to us.

- Forgiving a deceased person: When a loved one dies, many people have to face what is called “unfinished business”. If the death was sudden, there was probably no opportunity to say goodbye or repair/mend the broken bridges. The Preface of a Catholic Funeral Mass states: *“Lord, for your faithful people life is changed, not ended. When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death, we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven.”* We can still communicate with those who have gone before us and trust that they are aware of what we are saying to them, either by the writing of a farewell letter or a letter dealing with our residual hurt and resentment. If there is a great deal of hurt inside us, we will most likely need the assistance of a good counselor to help us process it. Ultimately, we are called to find that physical, mental, and spiritual place; when and where we can imagine ourselves in the presence of Jesus and our loved one. Say whatever needs to be said. Embrace Jesus. Embrace our loved one and let him or her go on to Jesus.