

Letting Go of Past Hurts

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by Peter Stone



Past emotional, mental or physical abuse, or being deeply hurt or mistreated by a friend or an enemy, are common causes of depression. I have had my share of such experiences. Bitterness, anger and unforgiveness are typical responses to such injustices suffered, but as these reactions hinder our walk with Christ, the Bible gives us ample instructions on how to overcome them.

Let me also mention here that in many of the above cases, especially where abuse is involved, getting help from a trained Christian counsellor or a professional health care worker is very highly recommended if not absolutely necessary.

Keep No Record of Wrongs

[Isaiah 43:18-19](#) "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland."

This passage provides a vivid description of a life damaged by past hurts—a life that has become a wasteland, a desert. Dwelling upon a record of wrongs weighs us down and heavily burdens us. But the Lord's instructions to forget those former things and not dwell on them, comes with a beautiful promise. Letting them go releases streams of living water into our life and enables God to do a new work in us.

One of the greatest new works Christ does in our lives is to bring us to a place where we can forgive those who have hurt us. This is such an important aspect of our daily Christian walk that Jesus included it as part of the Lord's prayer. [Luke 11:4](#) "Forgive us our sins, for we also

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forgive everyone who sins against us."

Instead of dwelling on past hurts, we can let go of those memories and forgive the person that hurt us .

Although we cannot make ourselves forget the memories, if we stop clinging to them the painful associations will fade significantly.

[1 Corinthians 13: 4-5](#) 'Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.'

"But it is Part of Who I am"

One reason I had trouble letting go of past hurts was because they had become part of my identity. "I am this way because of how that person mistreated me," was an excuse I believed. I feared that if I let go of the anger and record of wrongs and forgave the person who had hurt me, I would lose a part of myself, part of my very individuality.

However, Jesus taught me that such fears were unfounded, that I did not have to hold onto past hurts in order to maintain my identity. He showed me that there was another option - to allow His love and forgiveness to flow from me towards the person who hurt me. And when I did this, instead of anger and the record of past wrongs being part of who I was, Christ's love and forgiveness became part of my identity.

If someone were to meet me and hear my testimony now, they would not hear me say, "I am this way because of how that person mistreated me." Instead, they would see that I have forgiven the person who wounded me, and in fact love them dearly with the love of Christ. If they were to ask me how this could be so, I would answer, "I am this way because of Christ's work of love and forgiveness in my life."

When we let Christ's love and forgiveness become part of who we are, we change and become more like Christ.

And is that not our goal, to become more like Him? 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.' [Galatians 2:20 \(NLT\)](#)

As we learn to surrender our lives to Christ, He can give us such a powerful revelation of His love for us that we can view others through His loving gaze rather than through our own eyes. I have experienced this very powerfully in my life.

Let us be like Stephen, whose attitude towards those who unjustly stoned him to death was:

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'While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.' [Luke 7:59-60](#)

What a wonderful testimony this is to the power of God's love. When others see us forgive - even love - those who have hurt us, they see the power of God's kingdom in action, and their lives are changed too. I have heard of many cases of abusive prison wardens in Soviet countries coming to Christ after witnessing the unconditional love and forgiveness of their captives.

Harbouring Unforgiveness Hurts Ourselves

If we have been deeply hurt by someone in the past, we earnestly desire to flee that pain and be set free from the wounds. A thought that I would like us to bear in mind is that by consciously or unconsciously harbouring anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness towards that person, we unwittingly participate in keeping those wounds fresh and unable to heal. That is one reason that Jesus spoke so often of the importance of forgiving those who have wronged us. By not forgiving them, we hurt ourselves even further.

To Forgive Others, Reflect On How Much God Has Forgiven Us

The most liberating Biblical truth that helps us to forgive those who have treated us unjustly is to recognize the depths to which God has forgiven us.

Why does the Bible say, "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you," [Matthew 6:14](#) ? It is because for us to refuse to forgive others after God has forgiven our massive debts towards Him, shows a lack of appreciation of how much God has forgiven us.

We all know of the parable in [Matthew 18:21-35](#) , where a servant who owed millions of dollars to a king, had that debt cancelled when he asked for mercy. The servant then went on to throw a fellow servant that owed him a few dollars into prison, because he had not paused to reflect on the mercy the king had extended towards him.

This is the key to forgiving others, as Selwyn Hughes writes: 'I would not judge you or condemn you if you said: "I can never forgive that person for what he (or she) did to me." But what I would say to you is this: the more you reflect on the wonder of how much you have been forgiven the easier it will be to forgive even the worst sins that have been committed against you.' (1)

So, regardless of how much we have been hurt by others, let us forgive them. If God forgives us of our numerous sins towards Him, we can forgive others of their (comparatively) lesser sins towards us.

And then we will be sons and daughters of God, revealing His nature to a hurting world, as it

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shows us in [Luke 6:35-36](#) "But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

(1) Every Day with Jesus, Monday 18th Feb, Selwyn Hughes, CWR, Jan/Feb 2002.

All verses from NIV unless noted otherwise.

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