



## Forgiveness: What It Is/Is Not

Forgiveness means different things to different people. In general, it involves a decision to let go of resentment and thoughts of revenge. Forgiveness can lessen the grip that the perceived injustice has on you and lead to understanding, empathy and compassion for the one who hurt you. It is “letting someone off the hook.”

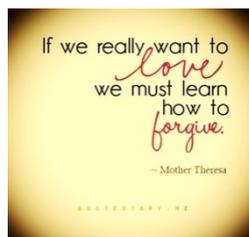
To better understand forgiveness, it is good to know what it is not: The following are adapted from The Forgiveness Book – A Catholic Approach by Alice Camille & Fr. Paul Boudreau:

- Forgiveness is **not ignoring** an offense. The offense has occurred and now a response needs to be formulated, with full awareness of your reaction.
- Forgiveness is **not forgetting**. Forgiveness without forgetting means you let go of your emotions of anger and bitterness, yet you remember what happened to you so you can learn from your past and grow stronger.
- Forgiveness **does not mean “it’s all right.”** By offering forgiveness, you are not condoning what was done, but choosing to forego retaliatory behavior, punishment and revenge, and instead choosing to reconcile.
- Forgiveness **does not absolve the offender**; absolution comes from God. You are only responsible for your response to the problem.
- Forgiveness is **not a form of self-sacrifice**. Rather, it is a form of self-interest...letting your heart be filled with love rather than bitterness and resentment. There is really no room for both.
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Forgiveness can be challenging, especially if the person who hurt you doesn’t admit to the wrong. Some people are naturally more forgiving than others, but even “grudge holders” can learn to be more forgiving.

Forgiveness is a process. Even small hurts may need to be revisited and forgiven over and over again.

With God’s grace, everyone can learn to forgive.



[Next week: The 5 C’s of Forgiveness]

*Judy Pearson*

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