

SOME THOUGHTS ON FORGIVENESS, RECONCILIATION, AND FREEDOM

- 1. forgiveness is freeing**
- 2. we are forgiven by God**
- 3. you got hurt**
- 4. how important is forgiveness?**
- 5. what does an attitude of forgiveness look like? where do i start?**
- 6. what if i never want to see their face again?**
- 7. what if i will never meet them?**
- 8. what if they aren't sorry?**
- 9. what if they still aren't sorry?**
- 10. how can i balance a forgiving attitude with having to speak hard truths to one another?**
- 11. so me and that person talked about it. what is the next step in forgiveness?**
- 12. what about forgiving myself?**
- 13. i am willing to forgive, but not forget**
- 14. how do i know if i've truly forgiven someone?**
- 15. i want to move on but i just can't forgive. do i have to?**

1. forgiveness is freeing

I'd wake up on the floor of my buddy Dave's room. Matthew Good Band was blaring on the stereo, sun streaming through the windows. We'd decide it was a cliff jumping sort of day. So we'd take some scissors and cut off our shirt sleeves, grab our sunglasses and board shorts and hop in the car. We'd drive for an hour, then stop and buy ten pounds of blueberries (it's not like we had the foresight to pack a lunch). Then we'd drive another hour to the lake. Then we'd hike for another hour or two to the spot. It was tiring to get there; tough climbs, frightfully high ledges, loose stones and sharp branches peppered the trail and left their marks from rolled ankles to scrapped arms. But then we'd get there. Crystal clear water, a beautiful view, and the smokin' hot sun beating down on us. The only thing left to do was fly. The jump and cool splash would only last a matter of seconds. Hardly anything compared to the journey of getting there. But plunging into that refreshingly cold water felt like freedom. It was worth the trek. Every time.

I find forgiveness is like that. It can take a while to get there. The journey can have painful moments. Frightening moments even. But forgiveness is to the soul what crystal clear BC lake water is to the body: refreshing, invigorating, energizing. And it feels like freedom.

2. we are forgiven by God

Where do we begin the journey of forgiveness? I encourage you not to begin by dwelling on the offense you need to forgive (that'll probably drive you crazy). Begin by examining the forgiveness you have been offered.

The forgiveness offered by God is complete. It is motivated by His everlasting love and allows for you to be set free from the eternal consequences of your sin. He didn't obliterate justice in order to forgive you, no instead He willingly sent His Son to stand in your place while that punishment was dished out. Justice has been served, just not by you. Your transgressions are then removed as

far from you as the East is from the West. No matter how vile your offense, it will not be held against you. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ (Romans 8:1). No matter how plentiful your offenses, they will not be held against you. You have been washed as white as snow (Psalm 51:7).

Jesus knew that the forgiveness that would be offered by God to people through His death and resurrection would be incomparable to so much of the strife between people that would destroy relationships. So he told a simple story of how those who have received abundant forgiveness ought to act towards others. Check it out in Matthew 18:21-35. (Seriously, go read it. It's an important step in finding the desire to move towards forgiveness, and I'm not going to make it too easy by summarizing it for you here).

3. you got hurt

You are not alone. Getting hurt isn't what makes us human, but it is an inescapable part of the human experience. People do wrong to us and those we love. Even the Earth itself seems to revolt against our happy and peaceful existence here from time to time. But not every wound kills us. And not every thing that fails to kill us feels like it makes us stronger either. More bitter, resentful, angry and guarded sure, but not stronger.

One time I stepped on sea urchins. A lot of sea urchins. And I had dozens of spines stuck in both my feet. I tried to dig them out with an ice cube and a safety pin, but just could not get them out. So I gave up for the night. I went to bed with incredibly sore feet. You think I'd wake up in the morning and find dozens of small, swollen, infected spots around the foreign objects lodged into my feet. But I didn't. Surprisingly, there wasn't a little black spine to be found. No pain, nothing. I am assuming because they were organic matter my body was able to break them down and absorb them. Now I have the strength of a man and a sea urchin combined.

That's an experience I have never had with a nasty sliver. Slivers are merciless. They invade your body and remind you they are there with a sharp pain every time you touch near where they are.

Sometimes the area around the sliver can begin to heal, but it's still a sensitive spot. And it will be until that foreign object is permanently evicted.

My experience with emotional pain and the bitterness and hurt reminds me more of slivers than sea urchin spines. They don't just become a part of me. Instead there is something inside of me that needs to be removed, and I know it. Sure healing can begin before the hurt and the lies have been identified and removed. Healing can happen around our slivers. But it'll remain a sensitive spot. Forgiveness acts as a way to get the sliver out of us so that we can heal properly and fully, not just heal around the pain.

4. how important is forgiveness?

Jesus had a couple of sayings that have caused a lot of Christians to say "uh oh, I'm in trouble." And frankly it makes sense! It is unsettling to consider what Jesus meant by "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

When we think about the common struggle we have with forgiving others, we don't like what this kind of teaching by Jesus is getting at.

My hope in this little guide is not to do a theological exposition of the topic of forgiveness, but instead to provide more practical help and ideas to move forward in a difficult yet godly thing. That's not to say good theology doesn't lead to good practice, of course it does. But a thorough theological examination of forgiveness can still leave us scratching our head about what we are to do with that pain we feel and the people who caused it.

So how important is forgiveness? It is critical. Vital. Crucial. Key. Significant. (I could keep going but you can use synonym.com yourself like I did).

What makes it so important? The God of all the universe commands that we forgive as we've been forgiven (Ephesians 4:32). Our Saviour didn't pull any punches when suggesting our willingness to forgive is directly related to our having received forgiveness. And the Holy Spirit urges us towards it, strengthens us for it, guides us in it, and gives us the peace of God both during and after it.

The big question that rises up when that quote of Jesus is read is of course, "does my salvation depend on it?" or "can I lose my salvation if I don't forgive people?"

Again, this is intended to be more of a practical guide than a theological piece, but in short you can take solace in the simple answer; no. Your salvation does not hang in the balance based on your willingness to forgive those who hurt you. Your salvation does not hang on anything you've done, but entirely on the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross, whose righteousness became yours when you accepted reconciliation with God by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 3:22-24).

So then what does Jesus mean by saying His Father will not forgive those who will not forgive? Or, maybe to phrase the question more directly reflecting what we really think after we've been hurt, "Do I really have to forgive this person if I want to go to Heaven?" Rehashing all that's been said about that would take thousands of pages, and while we can be confident in our salvation being secured by Jesus Christ and his work alone, we cannot pretend he did not say these things, or that he didn't teach about trees being recognized by their fruit (Matthew 7:18-20), or that James didn't say "faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (James 2:17).

So while I would not say your salvation is secured by your willingness to forgive or lost if you aren't, I think the thought provoking reality Jesus and James were getting at is this; *our salvation will be clearly evidenced by our attitudes and actions*. The state of your heart is for no one other than God to judge. But the

meditations of your mind, the words on your lips, and the acts of your hands will surely tell a story about the state of your heart (see what Jesus had to say about that in Matthew 15:17-20).

My encouragement is not to proceed with forgiveness begrudgingly, as if "ugh, my eternal life is on the line so I guess I'd better do it." Instead, consider the greatness of the forgiveness that has been offered to you, consider the sovereignty of God who has issued the command to forgive, and pray that God will move your heart to desire to forgive as a reflection of God's work in your life and not as an effort to make sure your seat in heaven stays saved. And don't forget that "considering" those things thoughtfully takes time. Considering it for as long as you just spent reading that sentence suggesting you consider it isn't long enough. Here is a suggestion:

take a pen and paper and spend some time alone with God. Write down some of the things you've been forgiven by God for, then write down some of the things you know about the God who is Lord in your life (putting his glorious character traits and works beside a list of your sins has a way of increasing thankfulness and humility in us), and then writing a prayer asking God to help your life be a living reflection of the power of the gospel of forgiveness and reconciliation through Jesus.

5. what does an attitude of forgiveness look like? where do i start?

Romans 12 offers some of the most clear words about how a Christian is to respond when evil has been done to us. It might also be some of the most challenging. Go read Romans 12:17-21 right now.

If you are looking for a place to find some practical advice on beginning the process of forgiveness, this is it. In summary, it commands that we:

- 1) Resolve not to take revenge.
- 2) Show love.
- 3) Leave the results in God's hands.

When resolving not to take revenge, we have to be sensitive to the subtle ways this could come into play. Revenge isn't always executed by a violent vigilante. It is used every day by spouses who feel their needs weren't met so gives their husband or wife the cold shoulder when it comes to physical affection. Revenge as any act that is intended to tarnish a reputation, cause pain, or otherwise harm another is not permissible, no matter how justified it may seem to be (or how small in comparison to what they did first). Spending time hatching or executing plans for revenge is like pouring Miracle-Grow on your bitterness and it will leave you unsatisfied. It doesn't matter how much pain you can inflict on another, it doesn't take an ounce of your pain away. Pain doesn't work like that. It just distracts you from it, for now.

Showing love and compassion when we are hurt is unnatural, but it is right. It is not right based on your current situation...it is right to love because it is always right to love. While each circumstance will call for a unique response, the response that looks more like love and less like hatred will be the right one to pursue.

Leaving the results in God's hands is an essential thing to strive to do from the get go. If you only release bitterness and extend forgiveness when a person meets certain conditions that appease your sense of justice for their offense...you will be left a bitter and unforgiving person. There is a lot of peace to be found when we "foreswear personal vendettas and bitterness by leaving room for God's wrath (on the cross or in hell) and by trusting ourselves to the one who judges justly" (as a pastor named Kevin DeYoung put it).

It's also important to remember that beginning the journey of forgiveness is not a way of saying that what someone did was acceptable or okay in any way, nor is it giving them a pass from natural consequences that may result from their actions. It is about freeing yourself from bitterness and anger, freeing them from being indebted to you, and inviting God to enter the situation to bring justice, healing, and restoration as He determines it to be.

6. what if i never want to see their face again?

In many situations, I'd say this is fair enough. Especially in cases that involve criminal activity such as abuse, it may not be appropriate to meet face to face and restore the relationship that existed before. Talk to godly people and pray about this. The story of Chris Carrier and David McAllister (Google it) shows us what can happen when someone who is physically hurt decides to face the one who hurt them and offer forgiveness and even form a friendship. And it can be a beautiful depiction of the gospel on display for the world to see. But that isn't always a wise thing to do. God does not desire that forgiveness happen at the expense of justice, or that people subject themselves to ongoing abuse in the name of forgiveness. It's easy to say "forgiveness should always lead to reconciliation", but I think wisdom would disagree every situation should unfold that way.

That said, I would also say that there are far too many situations where Christians don't want to ever see another person again and are wrong to feel that way. Just because you voted for different color fabrics on the church auditorium chairs does not mean you should tell someone off, leave the church, and unfriend them on Facebook (oh no, that'll mean you're officially not friends anymore!). There are a number of issues that should simply be overlooked (because "love covers a multitude of sins - 1 Peter 4:8), and others which should be addressed. The situations where there is no face to face follow up after an offense should be considered the exception to the rule, not the norm, especially between brothers and sisters in Christ.

Here is a prayer to guide you as you consider this:

Heavenly Father, please guide me in your wisdom about how to move forward with forgiveness. Provide me with godly people who will counsel me towards what would be most pleasing to you. I cannot control the actions of anyone besides myself, but I will choose not to let pride, fear, or anger stop me from doing what you ask of me. Help me know what that is in this situation. Amen.

7. what if i will never meet them?

Maybe someone hurt someone you love 25 years ago...should you look them up and arrange a meeting and try and offer forgiveness? Or would that just be the weirdest thing ever? Maybe the person who hurt you has since passed away...should you visit their grave to offer forgiveness?

There are certain situations where forgiveness needs to take place, but there is no actual flesh and blood person to forgive. In *Unpacking Forgiveness* Chris Braun said, "Forgiveness is a figurative handshake. You cannot shake hands alone. For forgiveness to happen, you need to seek out the offending party (or the offended party if you are the offender), extend your hand, and pray that the other party will offer his or hers to you." I think he would disagree that forgiveness (as a transaction between two parties) can happen with only one person participating, but that doesn't satisfy the ache within a person who wants to forgive but has no legitimate opportunity to pursue a handshake with an offender. To be fair I do think we need to be weary of entirely privatizing forgiveness to the point where there is no need for rebuke, correction, and restoration of relationships. That would negate the need for Jesus' words in Matthew 18:15-20 which are designed to restore relationships and bring unity in the church. Restoration of relationships, when it is safe to do so, should be the primary goal of forgiveness (as this best reflects the forgiveness of Jesus which restores our relationship with God).

But in those situations where the other person is inaccessible, forgiveness can and still should take place. As God has relieved you

of the eternal consequences of your actions, so to in grace should you let people off the hook. Your hook that is. It's entirely fair for God to still deal with them as He sees fit, along with the judicial system. They are still on those 'hooks', but they can be let off your hook wherein you feel anger, animosity, and bitterness towards them and will continue to until they somehow suffer or make amends.

How can you tell if someone is still on your hook? Would you use a word like "hate" to describe them? They are probably on your hook. Do you want to see them pay or suffer before you are willing to let the offense go? They are probably on your hook. Do you spend more time wishing that God would punish them than praying that God would bless them? They are probably still on your hook.

How can you forgive someone you'll never meet? Here are some suggestions:

- 1) Pray that God will help you trust Him to deal justly in all things.
- 2) Write a prayer of blessing for them (if they are still living).
- 3) Write a list of the potential good that has or could come about from the situation. Remember God is able to work all things together for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28), so the pain you have felt does not have to be the end of this chapter.
- 4) Resolve not to talk negatively about that person (unless with a safe person in a counselling type situation as you continue the process of forgiveness). If you can't think of anything nice to say (perhaps you never knew anything nice about them), maybe its time to stop talking about them all together.

8. what if they aren't sorry?

If they aren't sorry, you should make them sorry. JUST KIDDING!
If they aren't sorry there are some questions you need to ask to determine why they aren't sorry before you take your next step. Are they not sorry because they don't know they hurt you? Or because they don't think they were in the wrong?

If a person does not know they hurt you, you've likely got some work to do. First I'd recommend beginning with a prayer for grace. Pray that God's grace would help you see reconciliation as the end goal as you move forward. It can be totally appropriate to help a person see that they hurt you (and how much). But it can also be a dangerous and malicious conversation. Before you approach someone to let them know that they have hurt you, ask yourself:

- 1) Do I want to tell them to make them feel guilty or ashamed as a way to punish them?
- 2) If the person was to sincerely apologize and take responsibility for their part, would I accept it?

If you answered "no" and then "yes", you are probably in a good heart space to gently initiate a conversation with the person who hurt you.

Now if they disagree that they were in the wrong, the next steps are quite different. Anyone who is married knows what it's like for two people who are convinced they are right to argue about who is more right. Everyone loses. If the person disagrees that they were in the wrong, the best process for exploring reconciliation together would have to be the one found on the lips of Jesus in Matthew 18. Although a thousand great summaries of it have been written, it is actually pretty a self-explanatory text. It's far harder to do than to understand. Now is the time to go read Matthew 18:15-19. A quick search online or talk with a mature Christian will give you some ideas on how to put this type of process in motion. You might be turned off because of how difficult it is, and you can probably find

an easier way to attempt to deal with a conflict, but you won't find a better one.

Each circumstance is unique, so the best thing you can do is invite respectable Christians to walk alongside you. People who are courageous and loving enough to give you advice that is intended to lead you to glorify God in your actions rather than advice that appeases your feelings would be best. Ask them to help you navigate a "Matthew 18" process of mining out the truth and moving forward in reconciliation.

9. what if they still aren't sorry?

This is an extremely difficult place to be. When you want to forgive someone and you want to rid yourself of the bitterness and anger that has grown inside of you, but they just won't say sorry or admit they did anything. It hardly gets more frustrating than this, but it happens. Before you throw up your hands and say "I'm through with this", remember that God is omniscient, which means he is all-knowing. He knows your innocence (and also your guiltiness), and he knows the guiltiness of the one who has hurt you. And along with being all knowing, he is also completely just. And oh yes, he is merciful too. Even if a person never fesses up to their wrongs, God will still be just. And that justice will cause them to suffer consequences for their actions, or will see their punishment nailed to the cross in Christ. Although our natural inclination is to prefer that people suffer rather than be forgiven, the very same gospel that allowed for God to remove your transgressions against Him and others from you is available to those who have hurt you. Your prayers should be that they would discover it, and you'd get to start a new relationship afresh together in Heaven. If that isn't your hearts desire (and that is surely understandable), pray that God would make it so. These deep heart level changes to our being only happen by the Holy Spirit, so prayer is key.

If those mature Christians you have asked to help you in the process of forgiveness suggest it is appropriate to stop actively seeking reconciliation, the time to turn it over to God in a new way

has arrived. Having begun by asking God to be the author and source for your journey towards forgiving is certainly a way to turn the process over to Him, but there may also come a time where you finally entrust the outcome of a situation to God and stop pursuing closure or justice in it.

Try (healthy) things (painting, running, music) that may help you connect with God in a way that communicates the pain of lacking proper restorative and justice-satisfying closure, but a desire to leave it in the past and move on in peace.

10. how can i balance a forgiving attitude with having to speak hard truths to one another?

If someone has hurt you, a forgiving attitude should always underlie efforts to rebuke, admonish, correct, or rebuke another. The Scriptures have been given to us for these purposes. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Think about it this way...if you are building a tiny birdhouse, ideally you'll want to use a small, lightweight finishing hammer. But you'll find that it's not just having the right tool that is important, but also using it properly. If you don't use the tool properly, you can destroy that tiny birdhouse in a hurry.

The Bible is tool for training one another in righteousness, but we have to be mindful that we can use the right tool the wrong way. We can use the Bible to cause people shame, or guilt, or sorrow. We can use it as a weapon to destroy instead of a tool to build up.

That is why a forgiving attitude must underlie our efforts to rebuke and correct one another if we have been wronged. Otherwise we run the risk of using the Bible to exact revenge by shaming another person for their wrongdoing. Sure we can disguise it in a Christian cloak of trying to "help someone understand how they can be more godly" (and indeed, it isn't beyond God to use our malice intentions

for his good in spiritual forming someone), but it isn't how we should intentionally approach correcting each other.

To be sure, there are some offenses which should be overlooked. 1 Peter 4:8 reads, "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins." But not every grievance between people should be overlooked, and probably less than we tend to bury because of our discomfort with conflict.

RC Sproul Jr wrote, "When we are wronged our calling is to practice a careful moral calculus. Is this offense one I should let go of? Is it among the multitude that love covers? Or is this offense grievous enough that love means confronting in grace my brother? Sadly what we usually do is think we are practicing the former while actually holding grudges and putting miracle-grow on roots of bitterness. Peace in the church calls us to under-accuse, over-repent and over-forgive. Let us not be afraid to call sin sin, but let us not be slow to forgive it and to look past it."

My encouragement would not to be to see forgiveness and speaking honest and corrective words from Scripture as two opposites that need to be balanced, but instead speaking truth to one another in love as most effective (and most godly!) when spoken while standing on a foundation of a forgiving attitude.

11. so me and that person talked about it. what is the next step in forgiveness?

There is only so much you can do. It is not up to you to determine if the person changes their attitude or lives out repentance by changing their ways. What you can do is resolve to act in Christ-like ways, showing grace and living with integrity no matter what circumstances you face. Ken Sande in his book *The Peacemaker* offered four promises that Christians ought to make and follow through with when they forgive each other. They are:

- 1) "I will not dwell on this incident."
- 2) "I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you."

3) "I will not talk to others about this incident."

4) "I will not let this incident stand between us or hinder our personal relationship."

He writes "By making and keeping these promises, you can tear down the walls that stand between you and your offender. You promise not to dwell on or brood over the problem or to punish by holding the person at a distance. You clear the way for your relationship to develop unhindered by memories of past wrongs. This is exactly what God does for us, and it is what he calls us to do for others."

Living by these four promises will create the environment for a restored relationship. Perhaps things will return to what they once were, or maybe they won't. Only God knows the future. But by living by these words you give full reconciliation as fair shot, and in the midst of it, you and the offender act out the good news of reconciliation with God that is made available through Christ. The same gospel that invites us to draw near our Heavenly Father in love, boldly approaching the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16) instead of slinking away from God with our tails between our legs because of our shame.

12. what about forgiving myself?

Some may say you can't technically forgive yourself because "forgiveness" is about relationships being reconciled and you can't do that with yourself. Whether they are technically right or not is one thing, but after you've blown it again and you can't stand to look at yourself in the mirror, you need to do something to stop the self-loathing that can consume you and lead you to other self-destructive behaviours. I don't really care if it's called forgiveness of self or something else, I think we all know what we mean.

One thing I would encourage you to do when you struggle to look at yourself is to look at yourself the way God sees you. And that is

clothed in the righteousness of Christ. He commands you to be holy as he is holy, but with full awareness that you'd be unable to live up to that He created a way for you to be forgiven for your shortcomings. If our holy and mighty God in Heaven is willing to forgive you and love you despite your shortcomings, shouldn't you be able to do the same? Or at least willing to try?

With humility because of what has become true about you through Christ, spend some time reflecting on what is true about you as a result of the righteousness that has been given to you. Type "Freedom In Christ Ministries - Who Am I In Christ" into Google and say what you find out loud. Write them on sticky notes and put them on your bathroom mirror. You might find some of it hard to believe, but that doesn't make it any less true. You are accepted, secure, and significant. Even after you stumbled and sinned yet again.

13. i am willing to forgive, but not forget

I've got a bad memory. I blame it on this one time I hit my head on a rock. But maybe I already told you that? I can't remember. It seems like I struggle to make new memories, but when I have an experience with my heart, I can remember. Whether it is one of great joy or deep pain, it seems easily remembered. And when it's painful, it is not easily forgotten. God promises to separate our trespasses from us as far as the East is from the West (Psalm 103:12) and that He won't remember our sins and hold them against us (Hebrews 8:12, Isaiah 43:25). We aren't so good at that. But sometimes that is okay. Forgiveness does not require forgetting. In some situations, like those where abuse has taken place, remembering may actually serve to protect you and those you love in the future. That surely isn't wrong.

How can you work to ensure that your remembering isn't contributing to resentment or bitterness? Let your remembering of the person or event spur you to something positive. When you see the person who hurt you, say a prayer of thanksgiving for God's gracious forgiveness towards you. When you think of that thing she

said about you, recite one of the "Who Am I In Christ" truths that God says about you. When someone else talks about that person and your blood begins to boil, pray that God would slowly but surely be at work in your heart to set you free from the anger and move you towards forgiveness. If you are driven to prayer and reflection on God's goodness to you every time you are reminded of the incident or person that caused you pain, you'll find that the Spirit will be at work to bring healing to your heart.

14. how do i know if i've truly forgiven someone?

That's a hard question to answer. Maybe it's when you can share a laugh when they come again. Maybe it's when you can wish them well (and mean it) on a new job they are starting. Maybe it is a moment in which you sincerely pray that God would forgive them of their sins against you and would bless them with a close relationship with Himself.

It may come soon, or it may take a long, long time. C.S. Lewis once remarked that incredibly, one day while praying he was suddenly able to forgive someone he had been trying to forgive for over thirty years. The process will look different for each person and in each situation. The completion of the process will be just as unique in its timing, circumstances, and moment of realization.

It is in pursuit of confirmation of deep spiritual realities such as this that we call upon and trust the Holy Spirit to guide us. He who has been sent to convict and guide us (John 14, 16) will surely speak to us in matters of forgiveness and can be trusted to reveal to us when and how God desires us to proceed in or close a chapter of our life in which we've sought to forgive those who have trespassed against us.

Ask the Holy Spirit, "Is this over? Have I forgiven? Or is there more for me to do and You to do in me?" If he continues to guide you, follow His lead. If He tells you it is over, they'll be the sweetest words you can hear after obeying him through the journey of identifying and removing the sliver of bitterness and pain.

15. i want to move on but i just can't forgive. do i have to?

Baby steps. Don't let another day go by where you make an agreement in your heart that you cannot or will not ever forgive. Small changes. "I do not ever see myself wanting to forgive" is only an inch closer to forgiving someone than saying "I will never forgive." But instead of slamming the door of your heart shut with an absolute, you leave that door open just an inch. And it's amazing what God can do with an inch. Keep praying. Rest in the forgiveness you've been offered. Ask God what He is asking of you, and listen to what He has to say.

My encouragement to pursue forgiveness is less about what benefits may lay ahead if you choose to forgive (or pain if you don't). Instead, we should appeal to the goodness of the God who instructs us to forgive. God knows what is best for us, and He desires what is best for us, so I am inclined to think that our best and what will be most glorifying to Him will be for us to obey him and pursue forgiveness. He instructs us to with both our good and His glory in mind, so while it may be a long, challenging, unnatural process...if it is our good God's guidance for us, it must be good.

Our God is a patient God, and with Him a thousand years are like a day (2 Peter 3:8, Psalm 90:4). He isn't sitting with a stopwatch, counting down the moments you have left to forgive that person before He rescinds His offer of forgiveness to you. He will be merciful if you struggle to forgive, just as he is merciful to us in all our struggles to obey him. But along with mercy when we fail, He also gives us the strength and desire to obey. To flee evil and pursue righteousness (2 Timothy 2:22). To love one another like Jesus loved us (John 13:34-35), and yes, even to forgive as we have been forgiven (Colossians 3:13, Ephesians 4:32). As you submit your life to Christ, lay down your pain as well. He is a Wonderful Counsellor (Isaiah 9:6), one who weeps with us in our pain (John 11:35), and the one who can restore joy and peace to your heart and soul (Psalm 29:11, Philippians 4). Continue to walk in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:25), beside Jesus, and in obedience to the Father. He will continue the good work he began

in you to completion (Philippians 1:6) and will conform you more and more into the image of His Son (Romans 8:29).

And as you grow to be like Christ in the area of forgiveness, may you know the closeness and comfort of our God. After all, He is the "God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ" (2 Corinthians 1:3-5).