

How To Forgive Someone Who Has Hurt You

By Rick Warren

Last week I shared with you why it's so important to forgive people who've hurt you. It's important for you, and it's important for your church. Way too many Christians aren't fulfilling God's purpose for their life because they're harboring past hurts. And way too many churches are suffering because of it. In this article, I'm going to share with you three steps that you and those you lead can take to forgive those who've hurt you.

Relinquish your right to get even.

You have to start by letting the person who has hurt you off the hook. That's not fair, you say? You're right. Forgiveness isn't fair. It wasn't fair when God forgave you, and it's not fair for you to forgive someone else. God doesn't give us what we deserve. He gives us what we need.

The Bible says God is just. One day he'll settle the score. In the meantime, we must let God fill our hearts with peace and grace.

The Bible says in Romans 12:19 (TLB), "Never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God, for he has said that he will repay those who deserve it." The first step to forgiveness is to commit to not take justice into your

own hands. Let God be the impartial judge.

Every time you remember how you've been hurt, release it. It's got to be constant. When Jesus was asked how often we should forgive someone who sins against us, he said 70 times seven. Or in other words, we just keep forgiving.

How do you know when you've totally released the hurt? It doesn't hurt any more. You might have to forgive someone a thousand times to make that a reality. But every time the pain comes to your mind you say, "God, I give it to you again. For the hundredth time, Lord, I'm letting them off the hook and relinquishing my right to get even." Every time you rehearse it, you make the pain deeper. But every time you release it, the pain gets weaker in your life.

Refocus on God's purpose for your life.

You can either focus on the past or the future – not both. Focus in on what God wants to do in your life. As long as you focus on the person who has hurt you, they control you. You don't want anyone who has hurt you in the past to control you in the present. You want God to control your life.

The truth

is, if you don't release the person who has hurt you, then you will resemble him. Whatever you focus on, you'll become like. If you focus on pain, that's what you move toward. If you focus on purpose, that's what you move toward.

How do you do that? The Bible tells us in Job 11: 13-16, "Put your heart right, reach out to God...then face the world again, firm and

courageous. Then all your troubles will fade from your memory, like floods that are past and remembered no more.”

Put your heart right. That just means do the right thing. Forgive the person. Let him off the hook.

Reach out to God. Ask Jesus Christ to come into the situation and fill you with his love.

Face the world again. Don't withdraw. Don't put yourself in a shell. You can't love without being vulnerable. And a loveless life is diametrically opposed to God's purpose for your life.

Respond to the evil with good.

Paul tells us in Romans 12:21 (NIV), “Don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” There's a lot of evil in this world. You don't overcome it by criticizing it. You overcome it with good.

At Saddleback, we're not a culture-war church. We don't spend our time criticizing what the world does. We don't expect unbelievers to act like believers until they are. You don't change the world by criticizing it.

Through the PEACE Plan, we've sent thousands of teams around the world since 2004 to confront evil with good by promoting reconciliation, equipping servant leaders, assisting the poor, caring for the sick, and educating the next generation.

One country we've focused on is Rwanda. You've probably heard or read about the horrible atrocities that took place in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide. Hatred was everywhere. But God has done amazing

things in that country. Last year Bishop John Rucyahana visited Saddleback, and together we spoke to the church about this topic. That day he shared this in regard to the amazing recovery process that's going on in his home country:

“My brothers and sisters, the Jesus we worship, the Lord we praise and have faith in, is the key to restoring relationships. You cannot invest in disparity and get good results...In Rwanda we cannot afford revenge...We have to engage in reconciliation...We have to face our weakness, our feeble state of life, our sins. We have to face them head on with Jesus Christ in the middle of life, in order to make a nation again. We have to live.

We don't invest anymore in the hurt. We invest in hope. It's amazing that when you see the hope through the lens of Jesus Christ, your hope is very bright. Very, very bright. Rwanda can be the hub of African development. People will be coming to us to learn. But not because we shall claim it. No. It's to the glory of God. It's God doing it. God does the reconstruction. God does things in his own mighty, divine way.” That's a big-picture example of responding to evil with good. You can do it in your own life too. When someone hurts you, do something good for them. Is it easy? Of course not. Every bone in your body wants to respond to evil with evil. But forgiveness happens when we respond with good.

I hope you'll challenge your congregation to do this – really do this – in their own life. This fall, we'll give you a great tool to help them on this journey of forgiveness. To learn more about the Life's Healing Choices spiritual-growth campaign, visit www.lifeshealingchoices.com.