

UNDERSTANDING FORGIVENESS

"How Can I Ever Forgive Them?"

THE **HOPE** LINE

TheHopeLine.com



Why read a Guide on forgiveness?

After so many of the issues people face, such as abuse, divorce, cheating, abandonment, and more, ***we need to heal.***

It is safe to say that ***everyone*** has been hurt by someone, and ***everyone*** has hurt someone else.

The pain we feel after hurts, big and small, can fester and become bitterness and resentment if we're not careful, and those things can impact your relationships and keep you from living life to the fullest.

It's perfectly reasonable to be upset and angry when you've been hurt, and accountability is important... forgiveness is ***not*** about letting the person off the hook for their decisions. However, there may come a time when you realize that holding onto the pain is only making it grow. Forgiveness can help you release that and move forward.



The intent of this Guide is to help you heal by:

- Looking at why forgiveness is so important
- Dispelling several misunderstandings about what forgiveness involves
- Providing a game plan for starting the process of forgiveness
- Helping you seek forgiveness if you are the one in the wrong

When someone has deeply hurt you, it feels like they owe you a debt. They have taken something from you, be that your sense of safety, security, love... even your sense of happiness and wholeness. It makes perfect sense that you might want them to give that back to you or, maybe, you want to take something from them.

Forgiveness is letting go of the expectation that the other person will ever be able to undo what's been done. It allows *you* the freedom to finally get out from under the pain this hurt has caused you. It is an active process in which you make a conscious decision to get out from under the hold this hurt has on you.

Forgiveness can be freeing to the person who hurt, too. Too often, however, they'll never seek your forgiveness, or it would be inappropriate for you to communicate with them ever again. If they do seek your forgiveness, it is up to you whether you want to let them know what you've decided, and it's important to remember that forgiveness doesn't mean they won't face consequences. It can, however, relieve the emotional burden of the past for both of you, if you choose.



Forgiveness says:

"I **refuse** to babysit these horrible emotions any longer."

"I **refuse** to allow the person who hurt me to continue to have this power over my emotions."

Consider this statement: Holding onto unforgiveness is like continually drinking rat poison, hoping the rat will die.

Are you drinking the poison of bitterness, hoping it will somehow hurt the person who hurt you?

Josh wrote: "I was under the impression that we were fine and going to marry, but yet she was living this completely separate life. This tore me apart. I am very bitter and I hold a strong grudge against her. I know that this is tearing my life apart and I need to let go of the hate in my heart and forgive her. It is just so hard. I almost don't feel like I should forgive her, yet I am the one hurting because of it."

What happens when we hold onto the pain?

When you aren't able to come to peace about your past, you may find that the hurt you haven't processed begins to cause new pain in your present. How?

- You may find yourself bringing anger and bitterness into every relationship and new experience.
- You may become so wrapped up in the wrong you have done, or has been done to you, that you can't enjoy the present without thinking about it.
- You may become depressed or anxious because the past has become so internalized that you aren't able to see past it.
- You may feel that life lacks meaning or purpose, or that you are at odds with your spiritual beliefs.
- You may lose valuable and enriching connectedness with others for fear that they won't accept you or that they'll only hurt you, too.
- You may become exhausted or emotionally drained from all the energy it takes to hold a grudge or desire revenge.



Health benefits of forgiveness

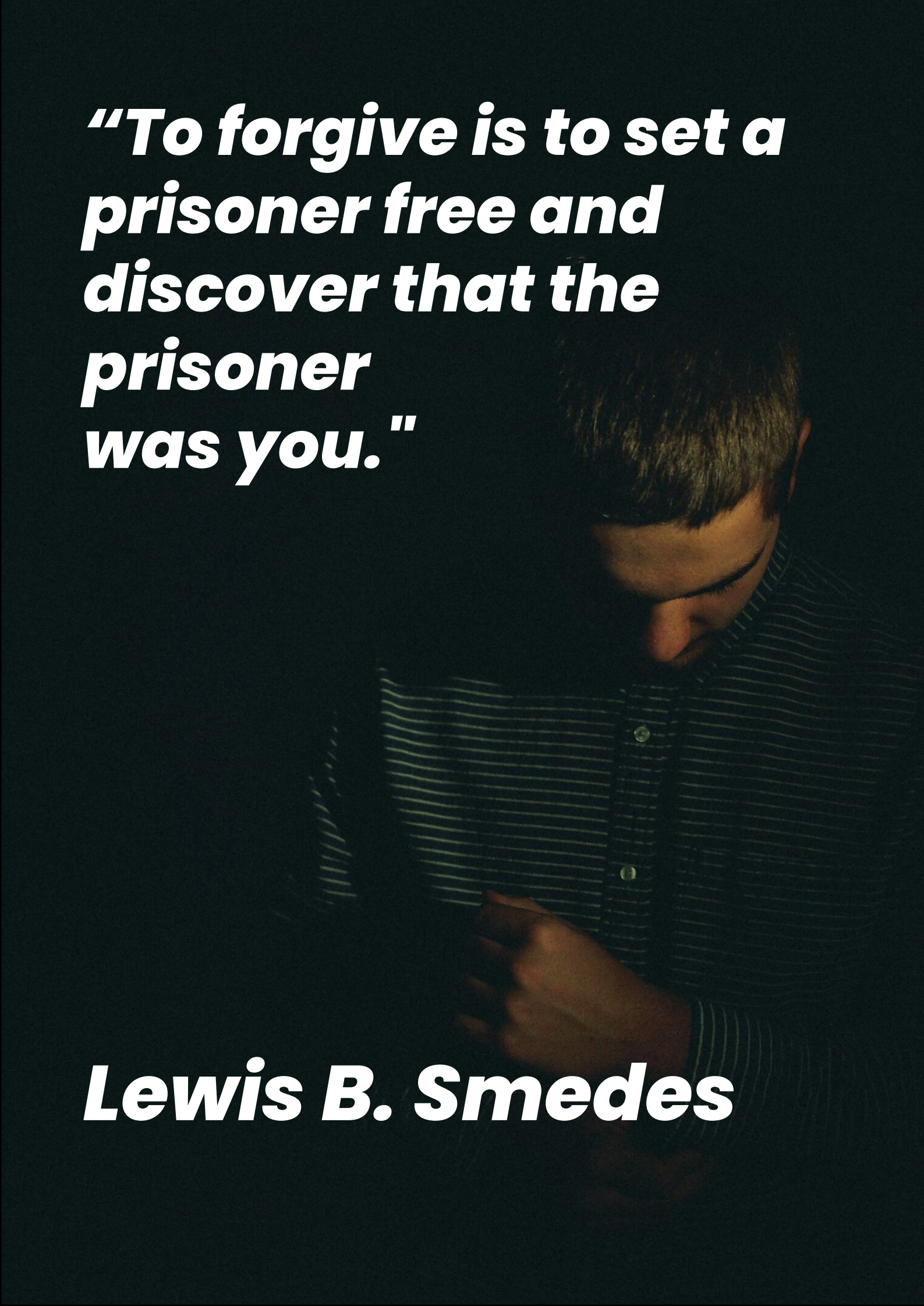
Studies have found that the act of forgiveness can reap huge rewards for your health!

“There is an enormous physical burden to being hurt and disappointed,” says Dr. Karen Swartz, director of the Mood Disorders Adult Consultation Clinic at Johns Hopkins Hospital. “Forgiveness, however, calms stress levels, leading to improved health.”



Forgiveness can lead to:

- Healthier relationships**
- Greater spiritual and psychological well-being**
- Less anxiety, stress and hostility**
- Lower blood pressure**
- Fewer symptoms of depression**
- Stronger immune system**
- Improved heart health**

A man with short brown hair, wearing a dark blue and white striped button-down shirt, is shown from the chest up. He is looking down, his head tilted slightly to the right. The background is dark, and the lighting is soft, highlighting his face and shirt. The overall mood is contemplative or somber.

***"To forgive is to set a
prisoner free and
discover that the
prisoner
was you."***

Lewis B. Smedes

Myths about forgiveness

There are many popular ideas about forgiveness that are false, and these myths often keep people from forgiving someone who has hurt them.

M
Y
T
H

1

You need to be friendly with the person that hurt you again and go back to the old relationship.

Just because you forgive someone, doesn't mean you have to trust that person again. Forgiveness is a gift we give to ourselves and others. Trust is something that is earned. You will need to make a decision about whether to continue a relationship with the person you are forgiving, or if it would be better to maintain your distance. Forgiveness does not mean letting the offense recur again and again.

M Y T H

2

To forgive is to excuse or ignore the offender's actions.

If you could excuse the behavior of the person who hurt you, forgiveness would not be necessary. In fact, what the person who hurt you did is inexcusable. You aren't excusing them for what they did, you are forgiving them. Forgiving them allows you to let go of the bitterness while remembering very clearly your rights to healthy boundaries.

M Y T H

3

To forgive is to forget.

Forgiving others does not eliminate the memory of their violating you. ***It is because we remember, that we need to forgive.*** It's not as though when you forgive someone, some kind of magical amnesia comes over you, and you have no memory of the horrible hurt they inflicted. When you forgive someone, you're saying that the memory will no longer fill you with bitterness and hate.

MYTH

4

I must forgive immediately.

There is something to be said for righteous anger and giving yourself time to process your feelings. When someone has done you wrong, you have a right to be upset. While someone might ask you for forgiveness immediately, or while you might feel pressure to forgive swiftly because of your beliefs, it's vital that you give yourself the time to come to terms with what has happened. When you reach the point of feeling that letting go is better for your mental health, it's time to forgive. You may not "feel" like it, because, again, you have good reason to feel hurt. But it's a choice you need to make for you.

MYTH

5

Forgiveness means I have to revert to being the victim.

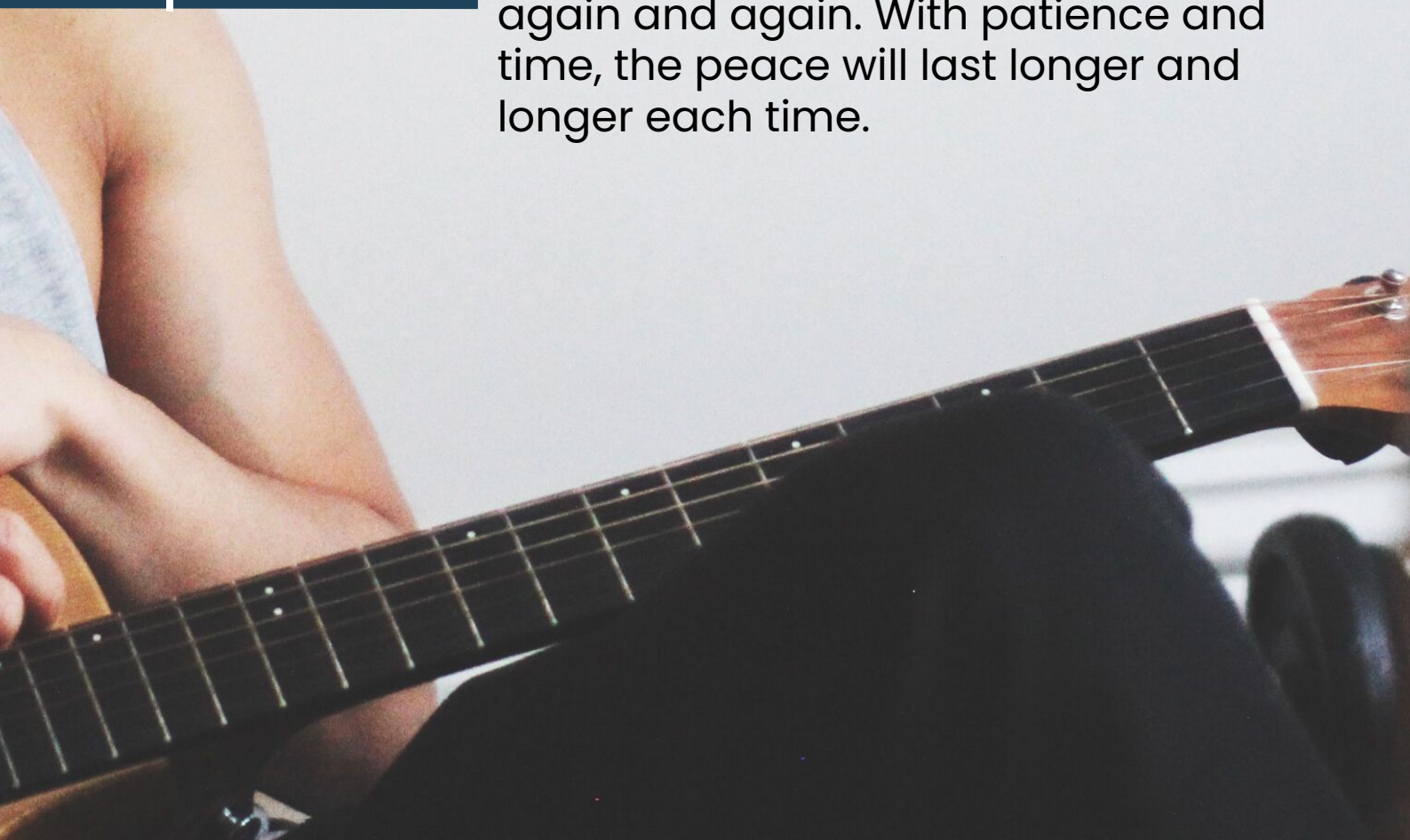
Forgiving is not saying, "What you did was okay, so go ahead and walk all over me." Nor is it playing the martyr, enjoying the performance of forgiving people without truly letting go. "Playing the victim," or simply saying that you forgive when you have not made peace in your heart and still hold a grudge, will only make your pain and resentment worse.

MYTH

6

When I forgive I only have to do it once.

It is only natural to want to have some kind of emotional moment where you forgive and then everything is wonderful from that point on. This is usually not the case. Even after you forgive someone, your feelings of hurt, anger, and resentment might come over you again. Forgiving someone is a process. Forgiving and healing take time - the greater the hurt, the greater the time. You have to practice forgiveness again and again, and experience the peace again and again. With patience and time, the peace will last longer and longer each time.



How to

To begin with, don't be pressured into false forgiveness. This needs to be your choice, when you are ready. When you feel *obligated* to forgive, or you forgive so others will still like you, it's not true forgiveness — it's a performance to avoid rejection.

Maybe all you can offer today is, "I want to forgive you, but right now I'm struggling. I promise I will work on it." Once you've decided you are ready, here are some things you can do to get started.

6 STEPS toward forgiveness:

1

Grasp the extent of the violation that has been done against you.

You can't truly forgive until you come to terms with how deeply you've been hurt. With the help of a licensed therapist, you need to seek to understand what happened to you and why it hurts so much.

Think of times when you've been offered forgiveness from others or from God.

Reflect on things you have done for which you need forgiveness. When you realize you can be forgiven for everything you have ever done, you might be able to consider forgiving people who have hurt you. This doesn't mean that whoever hurt you is somehow justified simply because everyone messes up. Rather, it allows you to grasp how to show mercy to others because you realize your own need for mercy.



3

Write down the name of the person you have chosen to forgive.

Try to understand them. What motivates them? Why would they have hurt you in this way? What is in their past that could have caused them to act as they did? Again, this is not excusing their actions, rather it is helping you see them as a flawed person...a person who shouldn't hold power over you any longer.



4

Make the decision to surrender.

Let go of your deep desire to get back what you lost from the person who has violated you. Come up with a prayer or affirmation acknowledging your decision.

Here's an example: "By an act of my will, and God's power, I release the hold (insert name) still has on me. I make a commitment that when that hold threatens to grip me again, I will let it go. I won't babysit these feelings. I admit the feelings are real and valid, but I choose not to be controlled by them any longer."

5

Make the choice to have compassion on your violator.

Look at them first, as a tragedy. Realize that some people will never change, even after you offer forgiveness. They will remain obnoxious, mean-spirited, uncaring, or unreliable. For your own sake, forgive so that you can change the way you respond to them, and quit expecting them to be different. Maybe you can even pray for them or someday reach a point where you can wish them well from afar.





6 **Move on.**

When you're ready, one of the best gifts you can give yourself is to stop dwelling on what happened. By forgiving someone, you're promising to leave the past in the past. You are also promising yourself that you won't let the offense hold your joy hostage any longer.

If you want help walking through the steps of forgiving someone who has wronged you. [Chat with TheHopeLine!](#)

“Grudges create stress, but forgiveness creates freedom. If you’re carrying around a big, invisible scorecard of everyone who has ever wronged you, it’s going to create a lot of unnecessary strain and stress in your life. When you choose to forgive and move forward, you’re not saying those betrayals didn’t hurt; you’re just choosing to live in freedom instead of a prison cell of anger.”

– **Dave Willis**



Jon Jorgenson answers the question:

***"How Do You Forgive Someone
Who Has Repeatedly Hurt You?"***



Have you ever heard the words, "I wished I never had you, and I never want to see you again" from a parent? Shayna's mom told her that after she was in a minor fender bender with her boyfriend. Shayna says she was treated more like a slave than a daughter during her 18 years of growing up. She explains her struggles to Dawson.

Seeking forgiveness

Are you the one who has hurt someone and needs to be forgiven?



If you have admitted to yourself that you have caused someone pain, intentionally or unintentionally, that is an important first step.

Many people never attempt to heal broken relationships because they refuse to take responsibility for their own actions.

5 steps to seeking forgiveness:

1

Admit to yourself you have hurt another person.

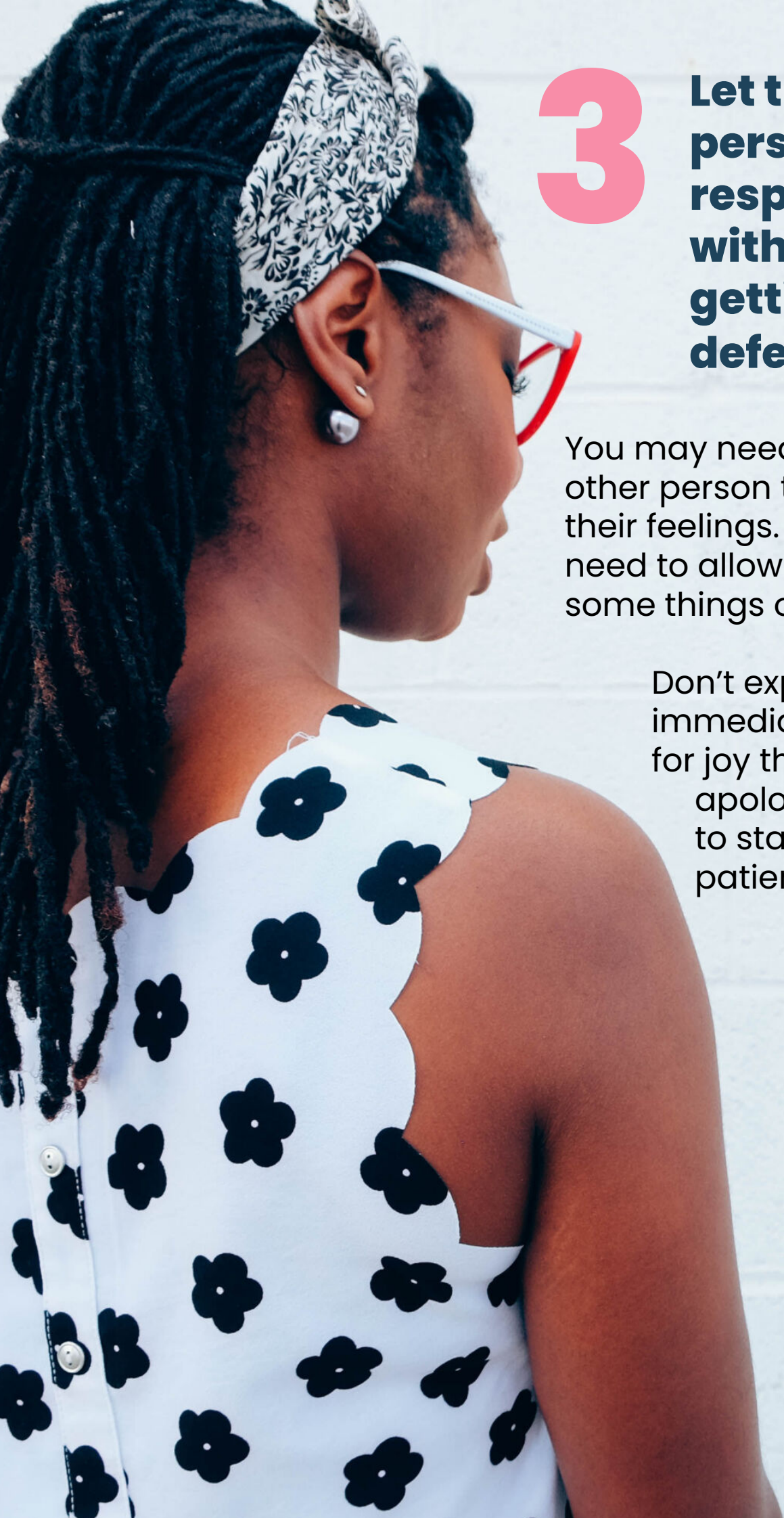
You can't make excuses for your actions. You have to realize that you were in the wrong. Asking someone to forgive you requires humbleness and a willingness to repair the damage you have done.

2

Ask for forgiveness from the person you hurt.

First, ask the person if they're willing to speak to you. If not, respect that boundary. If they're willing to listen to you, be honest and genuine. Don't apologize just to make an uncomfortable situation go away. You need to clearly explain what you are sorry for and help them to see that you mean it.





3

Let the other person respond to you without getting defensive.

You may need to give the other person time to sort out their feelings. You may need to allow them to get some things off their chest.

Don't expect them to immediately jump for joy the moment you apologize. Continue to stay humble. Be patient and kind.

4

Show yourself as continually trustworthy.

Avoid slipping back into wrongful behavior. Even if the other person does not forgive you immediately, in time they may come around. Remember, you are responsible for this conflict because of your actions. Demonstrating new attitudes and behaviors will be the best way to prove you are truly sorry for what happened.

5

Whether or not the person you wronged forgives you, learn to forgive yourself.

If you have done everything you can to show yourself as genuinely sorry, and you have changed your ways, yet they still won't forgive you, you need to now move forward. You can't control how another person feels and reacts. So it's time for you to forgive yourself. You realize you've made mistakes. You've owned up to them and you've learned from them. Continually dwelling on past mistakes will keep you stuck in a place of shame. Accept that your own forgiveness, as well as God's, will have to be enough for you to make peace.

A Spiritual Perspective on Forgiveness

Forgiveness, next to loving your neighbor, is perhaps the most important thing Jesus preached. It's important to remember, though, that Jesus' message of forgiveness is and was radical. People struggle with forgiveness and for good reason: they've been hurt.

If you're struggling with the idea of forgiving someone, including yourself, don't judge yourself. It's hard stuff, but ultimately it may just be what you need to do in order to move forward, out of the shadow your pain casts on your daily life and into the peaceful and joyful life God wants for you.

There is nothing quite like living at peace with yourself and others. The Bible asks us to live at peace with ourselves and others. It says, "If it depends on you, live at peace with all people."

12:8

 THE SOLUTION

When you're contemplating forgiving someone, or when you're wondering whether you yourself deserve forgiveness, it may help to remember the solution Jesus offers.

Wherever you are in the process of dealing with the pain that someone else has caused you, know that "The LORD is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."

Psalm 34:18

If you want to know more about having a relationship with God or have questions about self-worth, chat online with a HopeCoach at ***[TheHopeLine.com](https://www.thehopeline.com)***.

Verses of Hope for Forgiveness



SOURCES

1. <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/forgiveness/art-20047692>
2. http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/healthy_aging/healthy_connections/forgiveness-your-health-depends-on-it
3. <http://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/divorce-and-infidelity/forgiveness-and-restoration/forgiveness-what-it-is-and-what-it-isnt>
4. <https://www.thehopeline.com/tags/seriesforgiveness/>