

WHAT FORGIVENESS IS NOT

Adapted from *The First Responder Healing Manual* by Chris & Rahnella Adsit¹

Many people are reluctant to forgive those who have hurt them because they have misconceptions about what true forgiveness is. Sometimes it's useful to understand a concept by first realizing what it is NOT. As we go through this list, see if you might be holding some of these misconceptions:

1. NOT EXONERATION

When someone breaks the law, they need to be brought under the corrective actions of the state – for the victim's, the public's, and their own good. Law-breaking has consequences. Biblical forgiveness isn't about letting criminals skate free, but about how to keep those who harm you personally from dragging you down.

2. NOT FORGETTING

Deep hurts can rarely be wiped out of one's awareness. We can't just make-believe that the evil never happened. Forgiveness isn't a plastering over of wrong. Forgive and *forget*? Won't happen. But that's OK. We *can* come to the place where the memories of the malevolent trauma no longer control us.

3. NOT RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation requires agreement between two parties. But the perpetrator may not agree with your assessment that they did wrong. An injured party can forgive an offender without reconciliation. You can only control what happens on your side of the ledger.

4. NOT AGREEING WITH YOUR ABUSER

"If I don't take the opportunity to even the score, I'm letting them get away with their abuse." Forgiving isn't a sign that they've won, it's a sign that they're *wrong*, and you've finally figured it out. They can no longer keep you tied to the abuse.

5. NOT DISMISSING

It isn't trivializing the wrong, it's canceling the debt that is owed because of the wrong. When Jesus forgave us, it wasn't a simple dismissal of all charges. It was a very expensive transaction that cost the Forgiver far more than it cost us who were being forgiven. He paid *our* debt.

6. NOT PARDONING

A pardon is a *legal* transaction that releases an offender from the consequences of an action. Forgiveness is a *personal* transaction that releases the one offended (you) from the on-going torment of the offense.

7. NOT EMOTION

A loss of anxiety and gaining of joy may or may not be immediate products of forgiveness. Over time most people see this positive change, but it's not automatic.

8. NOT JUSTICE

Justice involves reciprocity of some kind – reaping what one sowed. Forgiveness is an unconditional gift given to somebody who does not deserve it. That's not justice, that's love. It's what *we* received from God because of Jesus Christ's sacrificial gift of himself.

¹ Adsit, Chris & Rahnella, *The First Responder Healing Manual* (Eugene, OR: Branches of Valor, 2015). pp 93-94.