

RESOURCE:

THE COST OF FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness means giving up the right to revenge, the right to seek repayment from the one who harmed you...it is a form of voluntary suffering.

When ANY wrong is done, there is always a debt, and there is no way to deal with it without suffering—either you make the perpetrator suffer for it or you forgive and suffer for it yourself. Forgiveness is always costly. So, in forgiveness you pay the debt yourself in several ways:

- 1. You refuse to hurt the person directly.** You refuse vengeance, payback, or the infliction of pain in order to try to relieve the sense of debt you feel. Instead, you are as cordial as possible. Beware of subtle ways that we can try to make others suffer:
 - Making cutting remarks and drag out the past over and over
 - Being far more demanding and controlling with the person than you are with others, all because you feel deep down that they still owe you
 - Punishing them with self-righteous “mercy” that is really a way to make them feel small and to justify yourself
 - Avoiding them and/or being cold to them in overt or more subtle ways
- 2. You refuse to cut the person down to others.** You refuse to diminish them in the eyes of others through innuendo, “spin,” hint, gossip, or direct slander.
 - Don’t run them down to others under the guise of “warning” people about them
 - Don’t run them down to others under the guise of seeking sympathy and support and sharing your hurt
 - Beware of how requests for prayer can be co-opted as a way of hurting others
- 3. You refuse to indulge in ill will in your heart.**
 - Don’t continually replay the “videotapes” of the wrong in your imagination, in order to keep the sense of loss and hurt fresh and real to you so you can stay actively hostile to the person and feel virtuous yourself
 - Don’t vilify or demonize the offender in your imagination. Rather, remember the common sinful humanity you share with them
 - Don’t indulge in “rooting for them to fail,” hoping for their pain. Instead, pray positively for their growth and restoration

Forgiveness is granted *before* it is felt. It is a promise to refrain from the three things above and pray for the perpetrator as you remind yourself of God’s grace to you. Though it is extremely difficult and painful (you are bearing the cost of the sin yourself!), forgiveness will deepen your character, free you to talk to and help the person, and lead to love and peace rather than bitterness.

Adapted from Tim Keller’s *Forgive*

FORGIVE