

## “WHAT ABOUT FORGIVENESS?”

By

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### Why is Forgiveness Important For a Survivor of CSA?

Jesus said we should forgive our enemies. Whew! That seems impossible! However, as victims of CSA, that is not our first responsibility. Our first task is to understand the truth of what happened and allow ourselves to feel the pain. We must understand the power dynamic involved and then take the responsibility to search out our vulnerabilities and know why we allowed our offender to use us for his own needs. As we journey in this process, there comes a time when we need to move toward forgiveness. Yes, he was in a position of professional and spiritual authority! Yes, he was responsible to be the shepherd, to protect! Yes, he betrayed us at the deepest level of our soul! Yes, it *seems unforgivable!*

But God wants to help us heal and grow. He knows we will destroy ourselves if we harbor resentment and anger for the rest of our lives. There comes a day when we know we are ready to forgive with authenticity. We are ready to release the person whom we thought was our caretaker into God's hands. We are ready to find freedom from the power our betrayer held over us. We are ready to experience our own personal empowerment given to us by God himself.

### What is Forgiveness?

It is *not* putting a band-aid on an injury that needs a tourniquet or even a transfusion! Right after I made my disclosure and chaos erupted in the church, a fellow congregant called to tell me I needed to “just forgive him” so I could get on with my ministry there. It seemed the motive was to just “fix it” so life could go on as if nothing had happened. That heaped more pain upon the existing pain.

Forgiveness is a process. We forgive another when we recognize the depth of our injury. If you break your leg, you don't say, “Oh my, that really didn't happen. I need to get up and walk and then it will be okay.” We must not minimize the injury. In order for our leg to heal, we must take the necessary steps to make sure it will eventually heal correctly. Splints and casts are first applied to the leg. One day the doctor will remove the cast and we walk with crutches. After a season, we discard the crutches. But the hard work of physical therapy goes on for some time. We need to strengthen the muscles that have been traumatized by the injury. This whole process will not be without pain. But, if we do it right, we will be healed. Truly free! So it is with our soul; we cannot ignore the injured emotions and minimize what happened. We cannot slap a band-aid of “forgiveness” on to so deep a wound.

Another misunderstanding we Christians sometimes get caught in is the difference between ***vengeance*** and ***justice***. ***Vengeance*** is not bad, but it is God's. ***Justice*** is

good and Good wants us to seek after it. One can forgive and seek justice at the same time. In fact, God wants us to seek **justice**.

When crimes are committed, God desires government systems to see that there is order and laws are upheld. Our systems are flawed, but true justice should lead to repentance, restitution, and even reconciliation.

The reason so many survivors experience such great frustration is because our church systems misunderstand our motives. We do not seek vengeance. We seek justice. We want to make sure that there will be no other victims. We seek to forgive. Nothing would make us happier than to have our offender admit responsibility for what happened, guilt, apologize, truly repent, make necessary restitution, show that he will no longer violate others. The ultimate goal would be for him to be reconciled as a brother in God's family. That does not necessarily mean he will be reconciled to a position as pastor or counselor. In the secular world, if a professional caretaker sexually violates his clients, congregants, or students, he loses his right to work in such a position in the future.

### **When do I forgive?**

This is not meant to prescribe a time period for forgiveness; but it took me months to work through my emotional pain because those emotions were so tied to my history of rejection and of abuse. After two years of soul-searching, therapy, there came the day when I knew I was ready to move on with my life. The "cast" on my broken soul that had once been support to aid my healing, then became a cumbersome weight. I knew at this point that forgiveness would be my final release to walk in wholeness. I even dared to look beyond my desire to walk. I longed to fly!

### **How do I forgive?**

There comes a time when a survivor knows she has done what God has required of her to find healing and to seek justice. She knows that in order to maintain her own mental health, she must move on in life. She knows she needs to turn loose of her anger. There came a day, when God impressed on my spirit that I needed to open my hands and place my abuser in God's hands. I literally opened my hands and said, "Here he is God. You take him and do as you will." As I did that tangible act, it felt as though a ton of weights lifted from my shoulders. He was no longer my responsibility; he was God's. I felt free!

I still feel anger when I hear of pastors who have abused and betrayed a congregant under their care. Emotions arise that cause me to continue to seek justice in God's family. That is a positive pursuit. Gone is the negative, when invokes hate and bitterness. I now pray for my abuser, that he will be obedient to God. I pray he no longer uses power to harm others.