

THE 3 LEVELS OF CHRISTIAN FORGIVENESS

I will refer to this message as “going the full circle”

I am not saying that this message is in any way the complete product, but it is a step in the right direction to achieve total restoration through forgiveness

Job not only had to battle with his own humanity and limited understanding, he also had to release his friends and I would think his wife as well, before he could truly be reconciled to his accusers

He had to go through a total metamorphoses, a total transformation of his human reasoning and emotions before he could experience a God tuned mindset for suffering, forgiveness and then restoration

The bible says that Job was not only forgiven and restored, he was also given the responsibility to apply his new understanding to forgiving his friends the way in God forgives

FORGIVENESS: LEVEL 1 – BREAKING THE CHAIN AND CLEARING THE CLOSET

I want us to think of forgiveness on three different levels.

Let's describe this “level 1” forgiveness as getting rid of bitterness, anger, and rage. It's the cleaning out your closet and deciding that you are no longer going to live with feelings of resentment and animosity over something that was said or done to you in the past.

It doesn't mean all those feelings will go away. Not at all! It just means that when those feelings come, you are not going to put them on and wear them around. You are going to get rid of them.

The problem with “level one” forgiveness is that here you may never feel like forgiving someone.

Maybe you've even tried to feel differently as you have read the chapters of scripture.

You've said to yourself, I want to forgive. I want to let go of bitterness and hatred, but I feel bitter and hateful. When I stop feeling bitter and hateful, then I can forgive.

Look, if you wait to forgive until you feel like forgiving, it could be awhile. If you wait to stop feeling angry and bitter until you stop feeling angry and bitter, well, good luck with that.

Getting rid of those feelings is much more a matter of obedience than most of us realize.

When one of those feelings comes boiling to the surface we must hold it up, examine it, and then decide to get rid of it!

Instead of continuing to replay the offense and relive the hurt, “level one” forgiveness is releasing that pain to God.

It's making the decision to stop calling up what was done *to* us and start focusing on what was done *for* us.

FORGIVENESS: LEVEL 2 – IDENTIFYING THE COMPONENTS – LETTING GO

This level of forgiveness isn't so much about releasing hurt as it is releasing the person who hurt you.

It's choosing to write off the debt. You release your right to retaliate, and instead of seeking revenge against those who have hurt you, you begin to pray for them.

It may mean accepting that you are going to have to live with the consequences of another person's sin, but you are no longer going to look to the person who hurt you to make things right or somehow pay for what they have done wrong.

Respected TV speaker and Christian author Joyce Meyer writes in her book Beauty for Ashes, that when she was at a very young age her father started molesting her. Soon it turned to rape.

Joyce says a conservative estimate is that her father raped her more than two hundred times before she turned eighteen.

At one point she approached her mother and told her what her father was doing to her. But her mother either didn't believe her or was too afraid to do anything about it, because nothing happened, nothing changed.

When Joyce turned eighteen she moved out of her parents' house as fast as she could. She then went on a journey toward forgiveness. She had given her life to Jesus when she was nine but then basically walked away from her faith for years.

As she came back to it, she realized she had to forgive her father. If she didn't, she knew what he did would continue to imprison her.

At the time she had no relationship with him, but her Bible told her she had to offer him forgiveness. So, despite her feelings, she did.

When she went to him and forgave him, he didn't acknowledge that he had done anything wrong. But as much as his response upset her, she knew it didn't change what God had asked her to do.

FORGIVENESS: LEVEL 3: JOINING THE DOTS - RECONCILIATION

For some people, "level three" forgiveness will seem more than unrealistic maybe even offensive.

This level can be define as *a willingness to be reconciled with the person who or the situation which hurt you and caused you pain.*

I realize this isn't always possible. The offender may not want reconciliation, or may no longer be living, or it may not be safe for you.

I also realize that certain levels of reconciliation may not be wise in certain situations.

I'm not suggesting you submit yourself to further abuse. But when it's possible, "level three" forgiveness is the goal, because this level of forgiveness is what we have received from God through Jesus.

Joyce Meyer had an evil father who abused her in the ugliest of ways, but as a follower of Jesus she knew she had to forgive him. So despite not feeling like it, she made the decision, went to her father, and offered him forgiveness.

Several years later she was reading in the Bible (Luke 6) where Jesus tells us to love our enemies and do "good" to those who have hated us. Later she was praying and felt like God was saying to her: "You need to take care of your parents. You need to do "good" and take good care of your parents".

Her parents were aging and lived about two hundred miles away in a different town. Joyce had done some things through the years to help take care of them financially but felt like God was asking her to take it to a new level.

She and her husband talked, looked at their finances, and realized they had enough to buy her parents a house that was for sale about eight miles from where they lived.

She realized her parents could also use a newer car and newer furniture. God had told her: "You need to take good care of your parents, so she bought them the house, a car, and furniture"

Her parents thanked her, but still her dad was a bitter man, and it continued on like that for several years.

Then one Thanksgiving morning, Joyce's mom called her and said, "Your father has been crying and crying all week. Will you please come over? He needs to speak to you."

Joyce and her husband went over to her parents' house. Her dad confessed to her the horrible things he had done to her and apologized. He then turned to her husband and thanked him for the years of undeserved kindness he had given him.

Joyce could see there was genuine regret. She took the opportunity to explain the gospel to him again (she had done so before). She asked, "Dad, do you need to give your life to Christ?" And ten days later she baptized him in their church.

The grace Joyce showed her father may seem crazy, but how much crazier is the grace that the God of the universe has shown us?

The Bible says we are to forgive as God forgave us. When God forgave us, he didn't say, "I forgive you, but we can't have a relationship. I mean, I won't hold your sins against you, but we're not going to have anything to do with each other. You go your way, I'll go mine." No, God's forgiveness of us leads to him reconciling with us despite our sin.