



Catholic
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Working to Reduce Poverty in America.

What is Forgiveness?

- Forgiveness is a DECISION
- Forgiveness is a PROCESS
- Forgiveness is a GIFT



Forgiveness is a DECISION

- Forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling
- We choose to let go of any desire for revenge or retaliation
- Our choice frees us from resentment



Forgiveness is a PROCESS

- Letting go of resentment takes time
- The choice to forgive may need to be made over and over again



Forgiveness is a GIFT

- It's not earned or deserved
- It's a gift given without expectations, exceptions, or limits
- Also, forgiveness is a gift God freely gives to us



Does Forgiveness Make Us a Doormat?

- Jesus taught us to forgive 70 x 7
- Does this invite repeated abuse?



Does Forgiveness Make Us a Doormat?

NECESSARY SUFFERING...

...springs from our loving choices to help others or ourselves become the people God created us to be.

UNNECESSARY SUFFERING...

...simply makes us a victim of another's illness or sin.



Does Forgiveness Make Us a Doormat?

- But what about “turn the other cheek?”
- Jesus is speaking about avoiding retaliation, not submitting to further abuse.



Reconciliation:

Broken Relationship Restored

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AT-ONE-MENT



Sometimes reconciliation isn't possible or advisable:

- Perhaps a person has died
- Maybe they're dangerous



Forgiveness ≠ Reconciliation

- We can always forgive, but sometimes trust cannot be restored
- We can forgive from a distance the people we should keep at a distance



Forgiving ≠ Forgetting

- Forgiving a great hurt is often impossible.
- Some hurts we need to remember, to avoid being hurt again.



Forgiving ≠ Forgetting

We often can't forget,
but we can “let go.”

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“When we forgive,
we remember differently”



- Forgiveness isn't "fair."
- Forgiveness is a free gift of love and mercy.
- But forgiveness doesn't negate justice.



Are Some Hurts Unforgivable?



God's forgiveness has no limits;
neither does his love.



To forgive like Jesus, we need the help of Jesus.



All things are possible with grace.



Get Mad, But Don't Get Even

- Anger = Normal Response to Injustice
- Anger is a feeling
- Feelings are morally “neutral”
- Jesus got angry
- It's okay for us to feel angry too



Get Mad, But Don't Get Even

Anger needs to be healthily expressed



Avoid getting “stuck” in anger



Remember D.N.R. –
“Do Not Retaliate”



Step One: Turn Toward God



Step Two: Don't Get Stuck



Step Three: Choose the Narrow Way



Step Four: Avoid Danger



Step Five: Stop Into Church



Step Six: Ask for Directions



Step Seven: Lighten Your Load



Step Eight:

Look Over Your Shoulder



Step Nine: Don't Turn Back



Step Ten: Journey's End



Ten Steps Toward Forgiveness

Ten Steps Toward Forgiveness

From *Forgiveness: A Catholic Approach* by R. Scott Hurd

Step One: Turn Toward God

The forgiveness journey begins with our making a turn, a turn toward God. It's only when we face him that we'll be able to face our pain.

God wants to be our traveling companion on this journey, and he doesn't want us to travel in silence. We need to speak with him, and ask for help and healing, patience and courage, wisdom and strength. What we say to God may change over the course of the journey. We may begin by saying "Help me," but end by saying "Thank you."

Step Two: Don't Get Stuck

Feeling angry when we've been hurt is no sin. God gave us the capacity for anger. What we do with that anger, however, can make or break our journey of forgiveness.

If our anger hardens into bitterness and resentment, or leads us to seek retaliation or revenge, we'll be stuck in our anger. On the other hand, our anger can move us forward. It can lead us to confront an injustice, defend ourselves, or challenge the one who hurt us. Anger and love can go hand-in-hand.

Tell God if you feel angry with him. Our anger may reveal a lack of faith and trust. But God always meets us where we are; he doesn't rush ahead and wait for us to catch up. God is always at our side on this journey—even if we have a long way to go.

Step Three: Choose the Narrow Way

Forgiveness is a decision, not a feeling. When we've been hurt, we may feel angry, sad, frustrated, confused, or scared, and that's OK. But in spite of our feelings, we can still choose to forgive: to avoid retaliation, and do what love requires.

On the journey of forgiveness, we'll encounter a crossroads. We can choose the way of resentment and retaliation, or we can choose the way of forgiveness and peace. The way of forgiveness may be the more narrow and difficult path. But it's the only one that will lead us to where we ultimately want to be.

Step Four: Avoid Danger

The way of forgiveness is often hard. But that doesn't mean we can't steer clear of unnecessary hardships or outright danger. If you're a victim of violence or serious abuse, walk away, or run if you have to. Jesus himself avoided danger many times.

Jesus did suffer, but only when it was necessary to fulfill God's plan for his life. Carrying a cross was part of his journey. We'll carry crosses, too. But not all suffering is a cross Jesus wants us to carry. Some suffering we're meant to avoid.

Step Five: Stop Into Church

On any long, hard journey, we'll need both nourishment for strength, and healing for when we're weary and wounded. On the journey of forgiveness, Jesus offers us both. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, he forgives and heals the wounds of our sins, so we might give what we have been given. In the Eucharist, he



Ten Steps Toward Forgiveness

nourishes us with the food and drink of his Body and Blood. He gives us grace to carry on, and then sends us forth in peace to love, and to forgive.

Step Six: Ask for Directions

We're not the first to make the journey of forgiveness. Those who have gone before us can help us on our way. We should ask directions from such a person. He or she might be a wise and trusted friend, a brother or sister in Christ, a priest, deacon, or other minister, or a professional counselor. God knows we need such help. He may send someone to cross our path, to keep us going on that path. Sometimes they'll walk alongside us. At other times they'll push us from behind, or even drag us onward.

Step Seven: Lighten Your Load

When he first sent out his disciples, Jesus instructed them to travel lightly. On the journey of forgiveness, we need to travel lightly too. To do that, we may need to shed some baggage. We can unload paralyzing guilt, by seeking God's forgiveness, and we can unburden ourselves of any unreasonable expectations we've placed on the one we're trying to forgive.

Step Eight: Look Over Your Shoulder

As we journey toward forgiveness, it helps to look back to the time when we were hurt, and evaluate what happened. Were we in any way responsible? Did we do something, or fail to do something, that contributed to the circumstances? What about the persons who hurt us? What has their life's journey been like? What factors have led them to become who they are or do what they do? Understanding their brokenness can help us forgive their contributions to ours.

Step Nine: Don't Turn Back

Forgiveness isn't a sprint; it's a marathon. It's a long, hard journey, and we can't expect to reach our destination quickly. At times, we may feel like giving up. It may seem like we're taking one step forward, and two steps back! But we need to keep on keeping on, and persevere in putting one foot in front of the other. Consider Jesus: he pressed on to Jerusalem, knowing that there he would carry the cross, and then be nailed to it. But he knew also that his journey would end in resurrection. There's hope for the end of our journey, too.

Step Ten: Journey's End

Our journey's destination is forgiveness. But how do we know if we've arrived? Our thoughts, actions, and feelings will tell us if we're getting closer. It may be that our journey of forgiveness will not be complete until our life's journey is complete. It's good to imagine that day, however, and consider the choices we must make to be the type of person we'll want to be when we meet Jesus face-to-face.

Until then, we can hope that our final end, and the final end of the one who hurt us, will be one and the same. That's what Jesus wants, and so should we.

These "Ten Steps" are adapted from R. Scott Hurd's book, *Forgiveness: A Catholic Approach* (Pauline Books and Media 2011). Information about all Scott's titles is available on his Amazon author page at [amazon.com/author/rscotthurd](https://www.amazon.com/author/rscotthurd).

