

## ***Can You Let Go of a Grudge: Spirituality of Forgiveness*** ***Fr. Frank Desiderio, CSP***

### **Forgiveness Prayer**

Lord Jesus, our brother, you were betrayed by your friends  
and knew the deepest pain of human sin;  
from the cross you said, "Father, forgive them."  
You taught us to pray to our Father, "forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against us."  
You are the lord of justice, help us to tell the truth and live it.  
You are the compassion of God, help us to show mercy and mean it.  
You are the divine healer, help us to forgive and feel it.  
We pray this in the power of the Holy Spirit  
who is our strength to let go of the past  
and courage to grow into our best selves. Amen.

Why Forgiveness: Getting Past Your Past, To Grow Into a Better Future, To Be  
More Like Our Merciful God.

### **Why Do We Forgive?**

#### **Mental Health**

The brain's "sulfate drug for anger."

Lessens symptoms of depression, anxiety and hopelessness.

Improves friendships and a sense of well being

#### **Physical Health**

Reduces stress

Lowers blood pressure and heart rate

Reduces chronic pain, stomach aches, sleep disorders

#### **Spiritual Health**

Forgiveness is a way to become what we are meant to be, the image and likeness of God.

Forgiveness is a principle teaching of Jesus.

The practice of compassion is at the heart of every major religion.

Matthew 9:5-7 Jesus does holistic healing of body, emotions and spirit.

### **THE BIG THOUGHT**

God is love.

Love is self-giving.

God gave of Self by creation.

God gave of Self in Jesus Christ.

We are made in the image of God.

We are to be like God.

We are to give of ourselves.

We give of ourselves by forgiving.

We forgive to be more like God.

### **What Forgiveness Is NOT.**

Not Forgetting – you can't forget but you can remember differently.

Not Condoning – Forgiveness does not pretend that bad behavior is acceptable.

Not Dismissing Justice – You can pardon a person's unjust behavior and still recognize the injustice for what it is.

Not Capitulation – you don't give up your power to the other person. After forgiveness the power relationship is reciprocal.

Not Reconciliation – Both people have to want to restore the relationship for reconciliation to happen.

### **Scriptures on Forgiveness:**

Sermon on the Mount

*The Our Father* – Matthew 6

*The Golden Rule* – Matthew 7:13

Love Your Enemies – Matthew 5:44

## What Is Forgiveness?

### Psychological Definition:

Forgiveness is a decision to let go of resentments and revenge thoughts and release the other person from any emotional debt they owe you.

Resentment: *Sentire (L – to feel) Re – (L – again, as in repeat)*  
To feel over and over again.

### Religious Definition:

Forgiveness is a decision to accept God's grace and extend it to others.

**Acceptance** – Prior to forgiveness is acceptance; that is, giving up the hope for a better past.

## Two Kinds of Forgiveness

Conditional Forgiveness – forgiveness can only be given after an apology is offered.

Unconditional Forgiveness – forgiveness is given when there is no apology.

*...Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.*

*Luke 23:33*

*But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust.*

*Matt 5:44*

## T'shuva

Regret. Have regret for what you have done wrong.

Remorse. Express your remorse to the person you have wronged.

Repent. Decide not to do the hurtful behavior anymore.

Resolve. Express your resolve to the person you have harmed.

Right thing. Do the right thing and apologize, ask for forgiveness.

Restitution. Compensate the person for the wrong as best you can.

Rehabilitation. Change your behavior.

**Apologies:** Different ways to apologies work depending on the situation and people.

## Why We Don't Forgive

**Justice** –God is a God of justice and mercy and both are built into us. We have a deep hunger for justice.

**Justice** – We don't want to forgive because we don't want someone to get away with bad behavior. Between how we want to be treated and the hurt done to us is a breach; a justice gap. The bigger the gap, the greater the hurt. Forgiveness spans the gap. The value of forgiveness is in proportion to the size of the hurt.

### **Justice and Forgiveness**

The job of justice is to right wrongs.

The job of forgiveness is to heal hurts.

Retributive Justice: An eye for an eye, getting even, settling the score.

Restorative Justice: restoring a relationship or equilibrium in society.

### **Why We Don't Forgive**

Anger - we are hurt, we get angry and we don't want to forgive, we want to get even.

Anger is a normal thing.

Revenge – We want to get even and we ruminate on the hurt and how to hurt the other person. Revenge is a fun thing.

### **The Alchemy of Anger**

Anger is biological response

Anger is energy

Domesticating the wild: The anger of Jesus confronts evil with love.

**Red** - normal, flare up and move on

**Purple** - resentment and hostility

**White** - resentment + rage = wrath

**Beige** - anger in hibernation

**Blue** – depression

**Silver** - a scalpel or hammer

“effective instruments of change,” social transformation

**Golden** - the anger of Jesus, confronts evil with love, personal transformation.

**Revenge** is a normal activity that has evolved in the brain to help them seek justice and relieve pain. Revenge is trying to harm someone who has harmed you beyond just self-defense. When you are safe and want to get back at them; that's revenge

**Revenge Is Fun** - Dr. Michael McCullough's research shows that thoughts of revenge activate the pleasure pathways in the brain.

**Problem of Revenge** - Revenge can become an obsession, take on a life of it's own. Like any addiction it robs you of freedom and keeps you from things you care about.

Antidote to Revenge: *Forgiveness = Let Go*

### **How Do We Let Go?**

**L** Look deeply at what went wrong

**E** Empathy for the other is key

**T** Tell the story differently

**G** Give the gift of forgiveness

**O** One day at a time, keep forgiveness strong

### **Look Deeply**

The beginning of forgiveness is honesty, which includes awareness of self and others. Understanding – a gift of the Holy Spirit. (Forgiveness is a grace.)

### **Look Deeply**

What happened?

What really happened?

What did they do?

What was your part?

### **Are you a victim or a participant?**

### **Look Deeply**

There are two sides to every relationship, which involves two imperfect people.

What is their responsibility?

What is your responsibility?

**Mad and Sad:** Name Your Feelings.

## **Forgive Yourself**

Maybe it wasn't your fault at all but you may have to forgive yourself anyway.

When you are down on yourself – feeling guilt or self-pity:

Practice gratitude

Cultivate compassion

Ask what have I learned?

## **Discernment Question**

If you can forgive a friend, why not forgive yourself?

## **The Two Shadows:**

### **Nemesis**

When I point a finger, three are pointing back at me. What most angers me in others are the very things I don't like about myself. The less I admit the fault, the angrier I get.

### **Shame**

The feeling that I am a mistake, rather than, I made a mistake.

## **Transformation Through Meditation – Exercise**

Contemplation – A long, loving look at the real.

Relax – feet on the floor, back straight, eyes closed or at half-mast.

Deep Breaths – breath in through your nose, into your belly and out through your mouth.

Focus on your heart – bring your consciousness to the area around your heart.

Invite in God's Love

Reflect on love or beauty or gratitude and bring that positive feeling to your heart.

## **Step Two: Empathy For The Other Is Key**

Pity

Sympathy

Compassion

Love

**Empathy Exercise:** “...just like me.”

Whenever you make an assessment of another person add the phrase, “just like me.”

**Stages of Praying for the Other Person**

- Admit you don’t want to do it.
- Pray anyway through gritted teeth.
- Pray they get what they deserve.
- Pray that God will grant them what you want for yourself.
- Pray that God will give them what they need to be happy.
- Pray God will bless them, as God wants to bless them.

**How To Pray For The Other Person**

*Our Father, .....*

*forgive me my trespass and I forgive \_\_\_\_\_*

*and lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from the evil of resentment.*

**Step Three: Tell The Story Differently**

Personal stories shape us.

**Homework**

Think of a situation where you would like to forgive or be forgiven.

Write the situation from your perspective.

Write the situation from the other person’s perspective.

How do the stories differ?

How do you two differ as people?

How do they treat you?

How would you like to be treated?

How do you treat the other person?

How do you think they would like to be treated?

Sometimes it’s a matter of style: you are impulsive and they are careful, you are informal and they are formal.

**Venting Anger**

Tell the story and then stop after you get past the point of catharsis and before you get into self-pity. Telling the story over and over just keeps you worked up.

Tell the story to someone who can help you to reframe the story and get a new perspective.

If you presumed good will on the part of the other person, would it change the story?

What good can come out of the story?

## **Story of Joseph and His Brothers** Genesis 50:15-21

### **Tell The Story From God's Point of View**

How does Jesus see the story?

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust.”  
Matthew 5:43-48

**Exercise:** Meditation.

### **Step Four: Give The Gift of Forgiveness**

*God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him... We, for our part, love because he first loved us.*  
1John:16b,19

#### **Give What We've Been Given**

The person doesn't deserve it, that's why it's a gift. We bless the person as God has blessed us. Power comes from God, we don't forgive, God forgives through us.

#### **Forgiveness Is A Decision**

##### **Decisional Forgiveness**

You decide of your own free will to renounce any right to revenge.  
You decide to release the person from any emotional debt you feel they owe you.  
You treat them as you would want to be treated.

##### **Emotional Forgiveness**

You feel differently about the person.  
You don't condemn them anymore.  
You don't want revenge because you more positive, feelings about the person.  
You may feel sympathy, compassion or even love for the person.

##### **They Ain't All Bad**

Remind yourself of your good qualities and character flaws.  
Remind yourself of the other person's good qualities as well as their flaws.  
Affirm their good qualities.

##### **Miracle**

Forgiveness is a small miracle worked through us.  
We don't want to do it.  
The other person doesn't deserve it.  
Even after people forgive, they may feel cheated.

It's grace that enables us to forgive and moves us from feeling cheated to feeling made whole.

**Commit To Forgive:**

Tell somebody

**Exercise:**

Write a Declaration of Forgiveness  
Make out a receipt for God

**Step Five: One Day At A Time, Keep Forgiveness Strong**

Forgiveness Is Always In The Present.

Forgiveness is both a daily decision and a way of life. Forgiveness is a necessary part of the ongoing conversion to become a more spiritual person.

**Taming the bad dogs:**

Hurt

Self-blame

Self-pity

Persistent annoyance

Revenge thoughts

**One Day At A Time**

Remember Who You Are: A Child of God  
Remember Who They Are: A Child of God  
Treat them the way you would want to be treated.

**Stay out of bad neighborhoods!**

Bringing up the past.

**Meet The Person For the First Time:**

What they did in the past is not the truth of the whole person in the present.

**Passing The Peace**

## **Exercise**

Keep the five steps bookmark someplace where you can see it. Write the steps out on a card and keep it in your wallet. Write them on a sticky note and post it on your bathroom mirror, stick them on your refrigerator with a magnet. Keep them in front of you.

## **The Art of Reconciliation**

*The practice of peace and reconciliation is one of the most vital and artistic of human actions.*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

Reconciliation is necessary because conflict is inevitable.

We want different things.

We have different values.

Egos clash and armor clanks

*As long as we are on earth, the love that unites us will bring us suffering by our very contact with one another, because this love is the resetting of a Body of broken bones. Even the saints cannot live with saints on this earth without some anguish, without some pain at the differences that come between them. There are two things which men can do about the pain of disunion with other men. They can love or they can hate. Hatred recoils from the sacrifice and the sorrow that are the price of this resetting of bones. It refuses the pain of reunion. But love, by the acceptance of the pain of reunion, begins to heal all wounds.*

*Thomas Merton*

## **Reconciliation**

- To get beyond conflict of interests
- To restore a relationship
- To cooperate
- To behave as we did before the offense.
- Maybe, agree to disagree

## **Two way street**

Both people have to want to do it

There has to be some remorse for the hurt

Apology given and accepted

Result is peace

## **To Be Or Not To Be Reconciled**

Reasons To Be Reconciled

Live at peace with others

Atonement

Restore community

### **Reasons Not To Be Reconciled**

No Change of Heart So No Change of Behavior - same old stuff.

Toxic chemistry

Open self up to more abuse.

### **Sacrament of Reconciliation** Model for any human reconciliation

- Examination of Conscience
- Firm Purpose of Amendment
- Confession
- Act of Contrition
- Penance
- Absolution
- Go In Peace

"The Big Question: A Film About Forgiveness" **\$15.00**

Available from Vision Video at [www.visionvideo.com](http://www.visionvideo.com).

**1-800-523-0226**

**Letting Go: Five Steps to Forgiveness** **\$40.00**

Audio Program of 12 25-minute talks on 5 CDs is available from Know You Know Media. [www.NowYouKnowMedia.com](http://www.NowYouKnowMedia.com). 1-800-955-3904.

**Can You Let Go of a Grudge** **\$15.00**

Book available from Paulist Press. [www.paulistpress.com](http://www.paulistpress.com).

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## Morning Prayer

Merciful Friend, show me your way today.  
Let me know your love so I can love you  
with my whole heart, mind and strength  
and be a blessing to everyone I meet.  
Deliver me from self-pity and dishonesty.  
Help me to live in gratitude and integrity.  
Don't let me be caught in resentment or fear  
if they appear, turn my thoughts into prayer  
for my enemy or someone in need.  
Throughout this day show me the way of kindness  
courage, patience and forgiveness.  
When anxiety besets me  
may I find peace in you  
and not escape in gluttony, lust, envy  
arrogance, greed, lethargy,  
or any misuse of my freedom.  
If I do harm someone, including me,  
show me the best way to make amends.  
When I am stuck in indecision,  
I will relax and remember  
that you want the best for me  
and will show me the next step.  
Guide me as I plan what to do today.  
Give me the intuition to know your will  
in all I do and the strength to do it.  
Help me to be of service to others.  
Good God, keep me in the flow of your grace. Amen.