



# LifeCare Ministries



## Forgiveness—The great de-stressor

By Jeff Stewart, Executive Pastor

**Every year** millions of dollars are spent or lost due to our inability to handle our emotions well. In fact, in the last couple of years, many major corporations have allotted significant amounts of money to find solutions to work-related stress. Though we are living much faster paced lives than in any other time in history—which is creating a great deal of stress—I can't help but wonder how much of our emotional distress is due to our inability or unwillingness to forgive those who hurt us.

What is forgiveness and why does its absence contribute to so many problems?

When the Bible talks about forgiveness, the Greek work *aphiemi* is generally used (see Matthew 6:12, Matthew 18:21-27, and Colossians 3:12-13). The work refers to refraining from collecting payment or inflicting punishment. It is a picture of someone canceling a debt owed to him.

Though forgiveness is choosing to cancel the debt, we need to keep in mind that it does not mean the violator is “getting away with” the behavior. God reminds us in Scripture that there is an eternal

consequence for every violation or sin. No sin is going to go unnoticed or unpunished. Someone will be punished for every sin ever committed—either the person who committed the sin or Jesus. These are the only two options. Individuals who have been severely hurt by someone else often have a barrier to forgiveness, fearing that forgiving the offender would send a message of condoning the behavior or a fear that the person would be getting away with the violation. God clearly tells us that every sin, big or small, will be perfectly paid for in full. Forgiveness is ultimately for us, not for the offender. Unless we plan to restore the relationship, the violator really does not need our forgiveness. He does need God's forgiveness, but that is a matter between him and God. Forgiving someone is more for our own benefit.

This brings us to the question of why unforgiveness causes us so many problems. Using a courtroom analogy, when we choose not to forgive, we take on the role of judge, jury, and prosecutor. We often have this fantasy that someday we might have an opportunity to dangle the evidence in front of the violator and get a fast, remorseful confession from him. The problem is that

by taking on this role, we have to carry around all the evidence. This includes all the emotional distress that accompanied the violation. We were not created to bear this kind of load. It can be compared to running a race with a large sofa on our back. Is it any wonder that those who do not forgive often end up bitter, depressed, anxious, and physically sick?

You may have heard it said that we forgive someone in order to set the prisoner free from our wrath and bitterness, only to discover that we are the prisoners set free. Forgiving someone of a violation is often very difficult. The greater the violation suffered, the more resources we may need to draw upon to forgive. In addition to prayer, this might include a close friend, a support group, or talking to a pastor or even a counselor. Paul encourages us to forgive others (Colossians 3:13) in the same way we have been forgiven. During this Lenten season, meditate on the great act of forgiveness we have received from Christ, so you will be able to give your burden to God through forgiveness. God takes care of the evidence of the violation and will ensure that the violation is paid in full. ✦

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