

Reclaim Your Life Through Forgiveness

The alarm goes off and through the thin slit between your eyelids, a sliver of white daylight gets in, signaling another day has begun. With your sore, aching body, you buckle up your lead boots, strap on your sack of anger and resentment, and trudge laboriously into your day. You're weak, exhausted, and burdened with pain before the day even starts. This is what it feels like to carry around anger, resentment, and emotional pain day after day. You have no energy left for things that might bring you joy or happiness. In fact, if asked, you may not even remember the last time you had a truly great day. All you keep seeing in your mind's eye is replay after replay of the person you're angry at, the person who wronged you. This may be a difficult thing to hear but the only person being hurt carrying this emotional baggage around is you. According to a study performed at the Harvard School of Public Health, those scoring highest on an anger scale were three times more likely to develop heart disease over several years than those scoring lowest. And here's another other thing you might not want to hear - each day you hold on to that emotional pain and resentment, you give the person who wronged you control over your life. Each and every day drains away more and more of your own personal power. There is a way out of this soul-depleting cycle -- it's forgiveness. You probably don't want to hear that word either. But that one word carries the most incredible power of healing and growth. If you're like many people in a state of emotional suffering, you may confuse forgiveness with excusing the wounding behavior, or simply forgetting about it, condoning it, or reconciling with the hurtful person. Forgiveness doesn't mean any of those things. Forgiveness is having the courage to let go of the negative emotions you have about the person who hurt you. Researchers on forgiveness believe you are in control of your behavior and have the ability to make a personal choice to forgive or not. Choosing to forgive is YOU having personal control over your own life -- instead of giving that control over to the person who hurt you. This does not mean the offending person is unaccountable for their actions. The goal of forgiveness is to take you from the place of victim to the place of improved health and greater personal power. You're probably saying to yourself, "Yes, I'd love to let go of the heavy load I'm carrying around, but forgiving is easier said than done." You're absolutely right - forgiveness is probably one of the most difficult things to practice. Here are seven steps you can follow to help you in your process of forgiving and lead you into reclaiming your life. (You can find more steps at The Worldwide Forgiveness Alliance, a non-profit, tax-exempt educational foundation dedicated to evoking the healing power of forgiveness worldwide.)

1. In order to start the process of forgiveness, you must first acknowledge your anger, fear, resentment, and grief. Your feelings are justified and should not be minimized.
2. Recognize that to dwell on your negative feelings will do serious damage your physical and emotional health.
3. Understand that forgiveness does not condone the behavior that has brought you pain nor does it allow you to be abused.
4. Accept that you are responsible for your own feelings and it is up to you to heal your pain.
5. Make a choice to release the anger, sadness, grief, and fear your feeling by seeking appropriate professional help.
6. Make the decision to forgive the person who harmed you.
7. Remember you are forgiving the other person in order to free yourself from unnecessary pain and suffering - not the other way around. Practicing these steps can help you reduce anger, hurt, depression and stress and lead you on the path toward physical and emotional strength and well-being. Remember forgiveness is for you - for your health, overall wellness, and quality of life. It's not for the offending person. You, and only you, can make the choice to take off the lead boots, un-strap the heavy sack filled with anger, resentment, and pain and start living your life free of the past.

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