

Forgiveness Steps

Find a quiet place where you can be alone with the Lord and with your own thoughts (someplace where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved would be ideal, but a quiet room at home would suffice). Then ask the Holy Spirit to come and to be with you as you go through these forgiveness steps.

Step 1: Tell the Lord exactly how you feel about the person who's offended you. Close your eyes, talk to Jesus like He's your best friend (since He is), and express your anger (avoiding vulgarities, of course!). Take your time with this step; it may take a minute, or it may take much longer.

Step 2: Once you've expressed your feelings in this way, say to the Lord, "Lord Jesus Christ, in your name I forgive _____ for what he/she has done to offend me." Don't worry about whether you "feel" like forgiving the person in question. Forgiveness is NOT an emotion, it's AN ACT OF THE WILL! This means it's possible to forgive someone even when you don't feel like it. Interestingly enough, sometimes our feelings change only after we've made the decision to forgive.

Step 3: Ask Jesus to forgive the person for what he or she has done. The Lord tells us that we are to love our enemies. That does not mean we have to like the things they do, nor does it mean we have to like them as we like our closest friends. It means we must always desire "good things" for them in their lives. The best thing we can possibly desire for another human person is that they be forgiven by God and become holy in his sight. This is why step three is so important.

Step 4: Ask Jesus to forgive YOU for your sinful reaction toward the person who hurt you. Yes, it's true: this individual sinned against you and hurt you deeply. But, in allowing hatred, anger and resentment to fester and grow in your heart you have also committed a sin. It may even be a mortal sin. (Remember, St. John in his first letter equates deep hatred with MURDER!) But even if your level of anger and unforgiveness doesn't qualify as mortally sinful, repentance is still required. After asking the Lord to forgive you, I recommend saying an act of contrition. You may use this prayer or one like it:

"O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you; and I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell; but most of all because they offend you, my God, who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life. Amen."

One footnote: if this HAS been a case of deep hate or anger on your part, you should make plans to go to Confession at the next available opportunity.

Step 5: Ask Jesus to fill you with the Holy Spirit, and for whatever "fruits" of the Spirit you desire: love, joy, peace, patience, etc. You've just gotten rid of your anger and hate, now you should want the Lord to fill your heart with his life and blessings. (See Galatians 5. 22-23 for a complete list of the fruits of the Spirit.)

The second part of the last step is to ask the Lord to bless the person who offended you. Pray that God's perfect plan will be fulfilled in this person's life. If you can get to the point where you sincerely ask for this blessing, then you will know that you've worked through at least some of your unforgiveness.

"If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you."

Matthew 6.-15