**“Forgive HIM? Never!”**

***13 excuses you’ll use to never forgive…***

Scenario: My husband committed adultery (or viewed pornography…again!) and has asked me to forgive him. I don’t think I can forgive him….but I know God has told us to forgive one another. How can I get past my feelings?

First of all, we must realize that forgiveness is not a feeling, but an action that God commands; we must choose whether we will obey by faith (in spite of our feelings!) or disobey His command (because of our feelings!). In Ephesians 4:32 God gave us the model when HE forgave our sins at great cost to Himself but with grace and mercy to us.

Refusing to forgive binds us, not the person who has sinned against us (Mt 6:14,15). God’s ways always lead to the abundant life, to freedom and blessings, even when they are hard paths, or feel impossible, from our human perspective. God teaches us how to reach out and love with His love, to forgive with His forgiveness, to return His blessing for their cursing (Romans 12: 9-21). Only genuine heart change allows the Holy Spirit to do such a wonderful work in our hearts that we can love those we would rather hate!

I hear excuses all the time about why someone just can’t forgive. Here are a few:

* ***“How can I forgive him after what he’s done to our marriage?”*** His intent most likely was not to destroy the marriage…his SIN does affect the marriage, but so does your response to his sin! Forgiving may point him to Christ and to godly sorrow that produces the fruit of repentance and change – 2Cor 7:9-10. Your godly response may actually help to redeem the marriage!
* ***“How can I forgive him again?”***How many times has the Lord forgiven you? Mt 17:3-4 makes it very clear that we must repeatedly forgive. But notice the next verse where the Disciples are begging for faith to obey. Yet the Lord’s response paraphrased says, “You don’t need more faith, you just need to put your little bit of faith into action and do what is your duty, to obey me!” Wow! That can be hard, but it is the right thing to do when he is truly repentant, and only the Lord knows that! So we forgive again….
* ***“How can I forgive him? This is way too big!”*** His sin is big, and so is mine! God doesn’t measure sin by the same yardstick that you and I do. He measures it against absolute obedience to Him, and we all fall pitifully short! Yet the Lord warns us strongly against playing god and thinking we hold the yardstick for others to live up to – Mt 7:1-5.
* ***“How can I forgive him after his total betrayal of me?”***Paul understood the principle that to share in the suffering of Christ makes us more like Christ – Php 3:10. Our betrayal helps us to identify with HIS betrayal. Peter taught us that suffering when we are doing the right thing reveals God’s glory in us – 1Pe 4:12-14, 19. The Christian life is not about me but about honoring my Lord, especially in the deepest trials of life.
* ***“How can I forgive him when he hasn’t repented?”*** His repentance is between him and God, so we forgive from the heart and trust God to do the convicting and changing him from the inside out. That typically doesn’t happen overnight, but God has made a promise to each of His own to complete what he has started in us – Php 1:6! Pray for God to do His work in your husband and He will – in His time and His way.
* ***“How can I forgive him when I don’t feel it?”***Forgiveness is a heart issue…forgive anyone anything – Mk 11:25. It’s an act of obedience. The feelings come when forgiveness is asked and granted, and then there is a “forgetfulness” modeled after the way God removes our sin and remembers it no more – Jer 31:34. We choose not to keep “remembering” it to ourselves, to others, or to the offender in destructive ways.
* ***“How can I forgive him when he hasn’t asked?”***You can’t! God doesn’t forgive us until we ask. But you can have a heart **ready** **and willing** to forgive him the moment he does ask, just as God forgives us the moment we ask. You will have fulfilled your duty toward God and toward your husband when your heart desires repentance more than anything for him. That means you don’t shortcut God’s convicting power over his sin by saying prematurely to him that you have forgiven him, but only saying you are willing to forgive when he repents and asks. The transaction is complete when forgiveness is asked and granted! God provided for our forgiveness long before we asked!
* ***“How can I forgive him when I keep thinking about it?”***When forgiveness has been asked and granted, it is your responsibility to exercise thought control and think of his sin only in the context of God’s grace. You no longer dwell on it or replay the video in your mind, because that keeps bitterness stirred up in you.
* ***“How can I forgive him if his sin is a common topic with my family or friends?”***Gossip is a desire to make others judge the offender just as you have judged him. It is talking to people who are not a part of the problem or a part of the solution. Discussion about his sin must cease once the issue has been settled, and that includes bringing it up to him, using it as a weapon to wound him just as he wounded you. That is what it means to remember it no more just as God does for our sin – Jer 31:34. We will never stand in judgment for our sin because it has been forgiven – Rom 8:1.
* ***“How can I forgive God for letting him do this to me?”***God has never sinned and will never sin, and therefore needs no one’s forgiveness…this is blasphemy to falsely accuse God. God never tempts anyone to sin – Jas 1:13-16 – and cannot be blamed when anyone chooses to sin. God does allow us to make sinful choices. Freedom to choose parallels His love, but sometimes we make foolish choices. Thank God for grace and mercy!
* ***“How can I forgive him when I can’t even forgive myself?”***This excuse makes my standard of perfection above God’s. My comparison and expectation for myself and others will always fall short – 2Cor 10:12. That’s why we desperately need God’s grace and mercy, all of us! We are never commanded to forgive ourselves, but to accept God’s forgiveness, and to then grant that same forgiveness to others, recognizing that all sin is sin against God first and foremost, and HE forgives anyone who asks.
* ***“How can I forgive him when I still don’t trust him?”***Trust takes time to rebuild. It is not the same as forgiveness that comes from your own heart. Rebuilding trust is the responsibility of the offender, as he demonstrates over time his faithfulness, dependability, accountability, and consistency. But you must allow him that time as you invest in the relationship, and he must work toward rebuilding the trust by faithfully honoring God and you to the best of his human ability.
* ***“Maybe I will forgive someday….but not today!”***Eph 4:26-27 tells us to not keep holding onto those things that make us angry because it gives the devil a foothold in our hearts and keeps our bitterness alive – Heb 12:15. Settling and forgiving offences is God’s way for each of us!

I’ve heard all of these excuses, but the best definition of an excuse that I’ve ever heard is ***“A skin of a reason, stuffed with a LIE!”***  Let’s all examine ourselves to see that we are living by faith in Truth, not with excuses of why we can’t forgive someone!

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