

Matthew 5:21-30

‘You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, “You shall not murder”; and “whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.” But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, “You fool”, you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

‘You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.

Ryana Holt – ELCA Missionary to Chile.

From gospel: If you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

Lord’s Prayer: Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us.

Forgiveness: Letting go of grudges and bitterness

When someone you care about hurts you, you can hold on to anger, resentment and thoughts of revenge — or embrace forgiveness and move forward.

Nearly everyone has been hurt by the actions or words of another. Perhaps your mother criticized your parenting skills, your colleague sabotaged a project or your partner had an affair. These wounds can leave you with lasting feelings of anger, bitterness or even vengeance.

But if you don't practice forgiveness, you might be the one who pays most dearly. By embracing forgiveness, you can also embrace peace, hope, gratitude and joy.

What is forgiveness?

Forgiveness is a decision to let go of resentment and thoughts of revenge. The act that hurt or offended you might always remain a part of your life, but forgiveness can lessen its grip on you and help you focus on other, more positive parts of your life. Forgiveness can even lead to feelings of understanding, empathy and compassion for the one who hurt you.

Forgiveness doesn't mean that you deny the other person's responsibility for hurting you, and it doesn't minimize the wrong. You can forgive the person without excusing the act. Forgiveness brings a kind of peace that helps you go on with life.

What are the benefits of forgiving someone?

Letting go of grudges and bitterness can make way for happiness, health and peace.

Forgiveness can lead to: From the mayo clinic health newsletter:

Healthier relationships

Greater spiritual and psychological well-being

Less anxiety, stress and hostility

Lower blood pressure

Fewer symptoms of depression

Stronger immune system

Improved heart health

Higher self-esteem

Why is it so easy to hold a grudge?

When you're hurt by someone you love and trust, you might become angry, sad or confused. If you dwell on hurtful events or situations, grudges filled with resentment, vengeance and hostility can take root. If you allow negative feelings to crowd out positive feelings, you might find yourself swallowed up by your own bitterness or sense of injustice.

What are the effects of holding a grudge?

If you're unforgiving, you might:

Bring anger and bitterness into every relationship and new experience

Become so wrapped up in the wrong that you can't enjoy the present

Become depressed or anxious

Feel that your life lacks meaning or purpose, or that you're at odds with your spiritual beliefs

It may cause you to lose valuable and enriching connectedness with others

How do I reach a state of forgiveness?

Forgiveness is a commitment to a process of change. To begin, you might:

Consider the value of forgiveness and its importance in your life at a given time

Reflect on the facts of the situation, how you've reacted, and how this combination has affected your life, health and well-being

When you are ready, actively choose to forgive the person who's offended you.

Move away from your role as victim and release the control and power the offending person and situation have had in your life.

As you let go of grudges, you'll no longer define your life by how you've been hurt and may find yourself experiencing more compassion and understanding.

What happens if I can't forgive someone?

Forgiveness can be challenging, especially if the person who's hurt you doesn't admit wrong or doesn't speak of his or her sorrow. If you find yourself stuck:

Consider the situation from the other person's point of view.

Ask yourself why he or she would behave in such a way. Perhaps you would have reacted similarly if you faced the same situation.

Reflect on times you've hurt others and on those who've forgiven you.

Be aware that forgiveness is a process and even small hurts may need to be revisited and forgiven over and over again.

Does forgiveness guarantee reconciliation?

If the hurtful event involved someone whose relationship you otherwise value, forgiveness can lead to reconciliation. This isn't always the case, however.

Reconciliation might be impossible if the offender has died or is unwilling to communicate with you. In other cases, reconciliation might not be appropriate. Still, forgiveness is possible — even if reconciliation isn't.

It is amazing how many times the bible calls us to forgive others. Forgiveness is really a way of life and not an isolated event.

For Jesus, it continued right up to his death: “Father forgive them, they know not what they do.”