

## **Four Steps To Overcome A Painful Past**

### **1. Place blame appropriately.**

You can't forgive people you don't blame appropriately, by either giving too much blame or not enough. One way to evenly implicate is to use the bucket exercise.

### **2. Grieve.**

An essential step in the forgiveness process is that we grieve what has been lost. Every painful offense involves a loss of some kind that can only be processed through grief.

Grief begins with denial, bitterness, resentment and hurt, and ends with acceptance and forgiveness. In the process we feel anger and sadness, and will protest the wrong. We will experience sadness and resignation over what was lost.

We typically bounce back and forth between anger and sadness, but both must be experienced for us to grieve successfully.

Consider writing a letter of hurt and pain. Write a letter to each person (bucket) describing the offense and the wrong experienced because of their contribution. Relive the experience so that you are feeling sadness and anger about the event. Express how you feel about the event and about that person's contribution. You may decide to never read the letter to the individual, but it's important that you write it and read it yourself.

- Imagine the person sitting in your living room
- Read the letter with emotion
- Weep, pound the arm of your chair, use a tone of voice that emphasizes your emotion
- Share the specific points you placed in their bucket
- Don't leave anything out

### **3. Forgive.**

Once you have spent time feeling both emotions, you are free to move on to the next step on the path, which is where we take action and actually forgive the one who hurt us so deeply.

At the end of the letter, look the imaginary person in the eyes and say, "I forgive you!" Make sure you say the words out loud so that you can hear it. Document that you have completed the granting of forgiveness (circle the date on your calendar, tell your spouse/friend, burn the letter). You might need these reminders that you have indeed granted forgiveness.

***Forgive people in your life, even those who are not sorry for their actions. Holding on to anger only hurts you, not them.***

One additional and very important point must be noted: once you have forgiven someone of the offense, you have given up the right ever to use that offense against

him or her in any way. Not only have you given up your right to get even or to demand payment, you have also given up your right to “hold it over them.” Forgiveness means the offense is gone. You may remember the offense, but you will “remember it against them no more.” Even if at some later time that person hurts you again, the previous offense is a dead issue. You have given up the right to use it against them, ever! Now live in your forgiveness!

**REMEMBER:** Forgiving a person does not require that we trust that person. If there have been multiple offenses and/or there doesn't seem to be any change in the future, it would be wise to say “I forgive you, but I don't trust you.” Forgiveness does not mean reconciliation. Reconciliation requires trust. So, if all parties desire reconciliation, there must be an equal effort to rebuild trust.

#### **4. Accept your loss as a part of your story.**

You can now envision a better future. When you retell your loss, speak of it as a part of your life you wouldn't want to relive, but it has brought you growth you would not have experienced. You can't change your past, but you change the way you talk about it.

How can you begin thinking, writing and speaking about this event differently?