

7 Forgiveness Mistakes That Keep Us Stuck

(And the Christian Fix for Each One)

Forgiveness is one of the most beautiful teachings of the Christian life — but it is also one of the most misunderstood. This guide helps you recognize common mistakes that keep us trapped in shame, anger, resentment, or confusion and offers a more faithful path toward mercy, healing, and peace.

This Is for You If

- † You are trying to forgive but feel stuck, confused, resistant, or emotionally exhausted
- † You are carrying guilt from your own mistakes or struggling to apologize

This Matters Because

As Christians, it is our imperative to forgive. We have the capacity to do so because God forgives us first. Choosing forgiveness releases the hold that wrongdoing has over us and enables us to become merciful, peaceful, loving, and free. Over time, forgiveness brings serenity regarding our past and hope regarding our future.

Mistake 1: Presuming Forgiveness Undoes the Harm

Forgiveness does not mean denying the suffering, minimizing the sin, or acting as though nothing happened. When we pretend we are not hurt, we bury the injury instead of healing from it.

The Christian Fix

Bring it before God. Forgiveness begins when we allow Him to meet us in our pain. Let the love He shows us through His mercy fill our hearts with charity and compassion. Both our ability and our offender's ability to grow in love depend on the cycle of forgiveness. *"So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little"* (Luke 7:47).

Ask yourself:

What are the true consequences from this injury? How can I recover with compassion and respond with love?

Prayer prompt:

Lord, help me face this honestly. Give me the courage to see beyond this burden without hardening my heart.

Mistake 2: Conflating Forgiveness with Forgetting

"Forgive and forget" sounds holy, but it is not realistic when remembering protects us from future harm. Although it is merciful to forget a transgression, some incidents have lasting repercussions or teach us important lessons. Remembering does not prevent forgiving. While recalling incidents for the sake of personal growth is helpful, dredging up the past to judge others keeps us trapped.

The Christian Fix

Ask God to transform the memory so that you feel empowered and peaceful rather than victimized and resentful.

"All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, and reviling must be removed from you, along with all malice. [And] be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ" (Ephesians 4:31-32).

Ask yourself:

What lessons can I learn from this? How can I move forward without this memory haunting me?

Practice:

When the memory returns, pray: "Jesus, I bring this to you again. Heal what still hurts. Guide what still needs action."

Mistake 3: Thinking Forgiveness Excuses Bad Behavior

Forgiveness is not the same as tolerance and acceptance. Sin still matters. Harm still matters. Justice still matters.

The Christian Fix

Separate forgiveness from approval. You can forgive someone while still recognizing that their behavior is wrong; you can admonish bad behavior without condemning the sinner. Showing mercy is for everyone, but passing judgement is reserved for God.

"Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven" (Luke 6:37).

Ask yourself:

What part of this situation deserves mercy and what part demands accountability, justice, or restitution? Am I confusing compassion with permission? Am I mistaking moral awareness for judgement and condemnation?

Action step:

Compose one clear sentence that names both truth and mercy: "I acknowledge that what happened is wrong, but I ask God to help me respond without damnation or hatred."

Mistake 4: Believing Forgiveness Permits Continued Abuse

Forgiveness does not mean you remain in a dangerous, abusive, manipulative, or harmful situation. Reconciliation necessitates repentance, change, trust, and security. Forgiveness can begin in the heart even when distance or boundaries are needed.

The Christian Fix

Choose mercy with wisdom. Forgiveness may release hatred, but space may protect dignity and safety.

"But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).

Ask yourself:

Is this relationship safe? Does the aggressor show real remorse and changed behavior? What limits might be required to promote peace, respect, and healing?

Important note:

If you are in danger, seek help from trusted people and appropriate professionals. Just because you forgive does not mean that you should tolerate continued abuse.

Mistake 5: Mistaking Shame for Repentance

Guilt helps us recognize that we are doing something wrong. Remorse moves us toward apology, repair, and change. But shame says we are bad beyond hope and deflects accountability. Shame perpetuates self-punishment over opportunities for grace.

The Christian Fix

Forgiveness with love helps to alleviate shame. God's mercy invites us to accept culpability, make amends, and start fresh. Our goal in both forgiving ourselves and others is compassionate restoration and reconciliation, not vituperation and alienation.

"This punishment by the majority is enough for such a person, so that on the contrary you should forgive and encourage him instead, or else the person may be overwhelmed by excessive pain" (2 Corinthians 2:6-7).

Ask yourself:

Am I encouraging remorse or inflicting shame? What responsibility needs to be taken for sincere repentance?

Action step:

Complete this sentence: "This situation can be lovingly resolved by..."

Mistake 6: Waiting Until You Feel Ready to Forgive

Forgiveness often begins before we feel peaceful. Our feelings may take time to process, and wanting to forgive may come slowly. That does not mean nothing is happening.

The Christian Fix

Do not compound the damage by responding with hate. Ask God for the desire to forgive, even if you are not fully there yet. Be open to forgiveness and willing to love.

"Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun set on your anger, and do not leave room for the devil" (Ephesians 4:26-27).

Ask yourself:

What anger, grief, or fear do I need to bring to prayer first? What small step would move me toward peace today?

Prayer prompt:

Lord, I am not sure I am ready to forgive. Please give me the inclination and the ability to take one step toward mercy.

Mistake 7: Trying to Forgive Without God's Help

Some wounds are too heavy to carry alone. Some offenses feel impossible to overcome by human strength alone. But forgiveness is not merely a human effort. It requires grace.

The Christian Fix

Start with prayer. Ask God for help. Jesus shows us the way of mercy, and He gives us the grace to walk that path.

"If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing" (1 John 1:9).

Ask yourself:

Where do I need God's help most: forgiving myself, asking for forgiveness, trusting God's forgiveness, forgiving someone else, or responding to evil with good? What burden have I been trying to carry alone? What would it look like to entrust justice to God?

Prayer prompt:

Jesus, you have forgiven me first. Teach me how to forgive with wisdom, courage, and love. Help me release bitterness, seek peace, and trust you with what I cannot fix.

"Lord, you are good and forgiving, most merciful to all who call on you" (Psalm 86:5).

*Alleluia*nyc*