**Step 8: Willing To Forgive**

Have you ever tried something you were hesitant to do and learned you benefited from it? You may not have even liked the idea, but you decided to try it anyway.

I can think of several examples. Here are a few…. Exercise (pic). How many of you LOVE to work out? Listen, when I work out consistently, I benefit from it. I feel better and look better. But it took me quite some time to finally do it.

How about skydiving (pic)? I am more than a little hesitant to do that, but from what I hear, it is exhilarating and a powerful experience. Some people say it’s life-changing. I think that's probably right, especially if your chute doesn't open up!

Eliminating all caffeine is supposed to be good for you. I have heard from several people who have experienced terrific benefits from not drinking coffee (pic). A few years ago, a doctor told me I could experience some improvements in my sleep and other benefits if I quit drinking coffee. I listened to him and adjusted my coffee consumption, such as rarely drinking coffee after 6:00 p.m., and then I found a new doctor. I'm pretty sure he was about half crazy!

Another example is going in for regular medical check-ups (pic). Now, I don't know anyone who likes to go in for medical exams, but I know many who have benefitted from it, including myself. I recently had a visit with my urologist on a Wednesday and had a colonoscopy on a Thursday. That was undoubtedly a fun 36 hours of my life! On a serious note, it's always good to maintain your health or find out if something requires treatment. Ignoring or putting off those visits can lead to some pretty severe problems.

The same can be said of working on your recovery, specifically, ignoring the amends process. If you don't take care of your part, your relationships and your recovery health will deteriorate. You may be hesitant to try it, but you WILL benefit significantly from thoroughly working Steps 8 and 9.

**Step 8: We make a list of every person we have harmed and those who have harmed us and become willing to make amends and forgive them all.**

I recently shared a message on Step 8 entitled The List. I shared some steps on how to become willing to make amends. Our focus tonight will be on how to become willing to forgive. In light of our goal, let’s take a look at Step 8 using “I” and “me” statements:

**I make a list of every person I have harmed and those who have harmed me and become willing to make amends and forgive them all.**

One of the most difficult aspects of working on Step 8 is becoming willing to forgive. **Willingness** is the quality or state of being prepared to do something. In order to forgive, you must prepare and get ready to forgive.

Developing a willingness to forgive is a process that rarely happens overnight. In fact, depending on the gravity of the offense, it may take some time. However, forgiveness isn't an option, especially for people who are in recovery. Unforgiveness leads to resentments, and resentments lead to relapse. This is why Steps 8 and 9 are so critical to your recovery.

Tonight, we will look at the pathway you'll take to become willing to forgive. But first, you need to identify those you need to forgive eventually. You need to make a list!

The first to go on your list are **people who have harmed you the most**. Usually, this is a reasonably obvious group. Now I know what you're thinking…. "Why would I want to even think about those people, let alone consider forgiving them?" Let me answer that question in two parts. First, I know it's painful to dredge up old memories of the pain that you have endured. However, God will ease the pain and protect you. Psalm 147:3*He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.* God will be with you and begin the healing process the moment you start your list. Second, forgiving others is much more about you than it is about them. It frees you from the bondage of the past and results in blessing. 1 Peter 3:9*Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.*

The following person you need to be willing to forgive is **yourself**. Go ahead and put yourself on the list. Yes, you've done some terrible things. You've hurt people you love. You've lied. You've let people down. There is no doubt you have done some despicable things. **But**…. If you have accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, **you are forgiven**! Romans 8:1*There is, therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

Considering to forgive yourself is often a tough task. But remember, we are only at Step 8. You are striving for willingness. God will soften your heart toward others and yourself. Jesus has already paid the price for your sins so you can be free from self-condemnation.

And for some of you, the last name to put on the list is **God**. You’ve been mad at God because of the pain you’ve endured. You might feel as if he has forgotten you. Psalm 22:2*O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer and by night, but I find no rest.*

If you're like me, you may have blamed God for your deeply ingrained character defects. When I was about six months sober, I remember saying to God, "Why did You make me this way?" I had to realize that it wasn't God's fault, but it was my own decisions that had caused me to go down a road of self-destruction and addiction.

The key to developing a willingness to forgive God is prayer. He's a big God. He can handle your doubts, complaints, and blame. Just talk to Him and let Him know how you feel. When you pray and lay it all at His feet, your anxiety and doubt will dissipate, and God will fill you with peace.

Philippians 4:6-7 *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.**And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Once you’ve completed the list of people you need to become willing to forgive, it’s time to get ready. But how do you prepare to forgive people, including yourself, who’ve done so much harm? Here are my five steps to becoming willing to forgive.

First, **acknowledge the hurt** as you look at each person on your list. It's important not to minimize the pain you've endured. It was real, and it had significant consequences. By acknowledging the effect it had on your life, you are starting the process of being released from the pain you endured.

One of the leading causes of acting out in an addictive or compulsive behavior is not acknowledging the pain from the past. *Jeremiah 6:14* reminds us that *You can’t heal a wound by saying it’s not there!* Once you’ve admitted the pain was real, and it had a significant effect on you, the healing process can begin.

Once you've acknowledged the hurt, you can move to the next step in the process, which is to **practice empathy and compassion rather than judgment**. As you ponder forgiving each person on your list, consider what causes might have led this person to hurt you. I'm not suggesting you try to justify or excuse the person's behavior that caused so much harm. I simply want you to try to empathize. The reality is that hurting people hurts people. Listen to these words Paul wrote….

Ephesians 4:31-32*Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior.**Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you (NLT).*

Paul most likely wrote these words while he was in prison in Rome. I'm sure he knew firsthand what it felt like to be enraged and bitter towards those who had caused him harm. But he also knew what empathy looked like. Paul remembered the words of his Savior as he was nailed to the cross…. Luke 23:34*Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.” And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice.* Jesus showed empathy and compassion to the very people who had nailed Him to the cross and were now gambling for His clothes. **If you want to become willing to forgive, practice empathy rather than judgment.**

The third step is **to live in the present rather than the past.** You can’t change what happened in the past. If you could, you would have already done that. Don’t dwell in the dark places of your yesterdays. When you focus on the wrongs of the past, it’s hard to focus on what’s right today.

Isaiah 43:18- 19 *Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old.Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.*

I want to give you an example of what I'm talking about. I was counseling a young woman we'll call Sadie, who had endured six years of marriage to an abusive and addicted husband who had done some unspeakable things to her throughout their marriage. It was horrific. Their marriage ended in divorce. They had children together, and she was having some problems with their oldest child, a son. That's why we were meeting. As we spoke about their son's issues, what struck me was not once did she blame or talk badly about her ex-husband. It was quite the opposite. She spoke kindly of him and told me he was an excellent father to their children.

You see, a couple of years after they divorced, her husband went into rehab and afterward went through intense counseling. He became a completely different man. She consciously decided to stop dwelling on the past and instead focused on the present. As a result, she could forgive the very man who caused her much pain and suffering.

If you want to become willing to forgive, be like Sadie and **live in the present rather than in the past**.

The next step is **to surrender the hurt to Jesus.** The most effective way to work on Step 8 is to focus on one person on your list at a time. You will remember the harm inflicted on you as you look at each individual. When each offense comes to mind, surrender it to Jesus.

Just pray, “Jesus, I give this offense over to you. Your suffering that you bore on the cross covers all of my suffering. I surrender my pain, my sadness, my anger, my doubt, and every emotion attached to this memory to You. Thank you for taking this burden from me. In Your name, I pray, Amen!" God loves you and will carry the burden for you. 1 Peter 5:7*Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.* You can **surrender the hurt to Jesus**.

The last step in the process of becoming willing to forgive is the most obvious…. **Pray for willingness to forgive**. After surrendering your hurts to Jesus, you'll be ready to ask Him to help you become willing to forgive. Remember, you're not working on every name on your list at the same time. That would be far too overwhelming. Instead, you'll pray for each individual name on your list.

When you sincerely ask for His help, God will soften your heart. Listen to this passage from *Ezekiel 36:26*: *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.*

Now, I know what some of you are thinking…. You're saying, "Pastor Layne, how can I forgive someone who has hurt me over and over and over again? The pain is too deep. How can I ever forgive all that's been done to me?" Listen…. I know it sounds impossible. Alone, you'll fail, but with God, you can, and you will become willing to forgive.

**Dismissal**

Here is my challenge for you this week. In order to become willing to forgive, make sure you put this card (show card) somewhere so you will see it every day, several times a day. Pray for willingness to forgive one person at a time, and when you are ready to forgive that person, move on to the next person on your list. By working step 8 using this simple process, you'll be well on your way to ridding yourself of unforgiveness.

Here is your **Leader’s Question**: Are you ready to be freed

from the bondage of unforgiveness? Share why or why not.