

Forgive Your Parents (Part 3 of 6)

The roots of our general outlook toward life develop in us as children. Much of this has to do with our experiences in our family. The good experiences as well as the bad remain, regardless of our age. There were, for all of us, moments of happiness and moments we would rather forget. This Lent, let us take some time to reflect on our experiences of bliss and pain. In our desire to know God better, let us seek to forgive the hurts and the pain that can handicap our experience of happiness and whole-ness.

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Forgive your parents for **bringing you into a world that is often cruel**, a world that can be very harsh on occasion. There may be times we resent even being a part of it. It is not their fault that life is hard.

Forgive your parents for embarrassing you by **not being perfect**, for not being adequate heroes or role models. They are human beings, too, and few received any courses on how to be perfect parents. **Their** parents may not have been very good teachers to them.

Forgive them for **always having an opinion** about how you are handling your life. It is hard to turn off the worry and concern they developed for you when you were young. Learning to let go is an art, one that is difficult for many parents to learn.

Forgive them for **not being able to understand** you. The world is constantly changing and there is a such thing as a generation gap. At the same time, you may need to forgive them for understanding you better than you would like. There is nothing more infuriating than feeling we are predictable. Part of establishing our own identities involves trying to be different. Parents often know us better than we would like to admit.

Forgive them for **playing the role of a parent** when you need them as a **friend**. It is a difficult role for some of them to grow into. Sometimes it feels like we are back in 6th grade when we are around our parents. On the other hand, you may need to forgive them for relating **too much as a friend**, as a peer, when what you really need is a parent.

Forgive them for **breaking up**. Divorce hits hard and some children never manage to work through their parents' separation. Try to give them the

benefit of the doubt. If you are married yourself, you know how difficult it can be. Your parents probably struggled to stay together as long as they did. If they remarried, forgive them for "replacing" the other. They were not trying to replace your mom or dad, but **their** husband or wife. Allow them the freedom of their own choices. They did not mean to hurt you.

Forgive them for **wanting the best** for you, for placing expectations on you that are hard to live up to.

Forgive them for **getting old**. Forgive them for **dying**. A life-long smoker or an overweight couch potato might have died earlier than was necessary. While some of us may harbor an unconscious "death wish," anyone who tries to take care of him/herself knows it can be a formidable challenge. When a parent dies, there is an unsettling feeling of being alone in the world. This may be a discovery of our own mortality: "I'm next."

Forgive them for **not being able to let go** and give you the freedom you need. Forgive them for loving you when you didn't want their love. There may come a time when they need you more than you need them. Or forgive them for **letting you go too early**, for pushing you out of the nest before you were ready.

Forgive the **abuse**: emotional, physical, even sexual. There are no excuses for it, but by holding onto the pain, you remain in their power. Nobody wanted to abuse a child. It is something parents often "learned" from their parents when they were children.

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Our parents' inner lives may be mysterious or they may be an open book. The fact of the matter is: they probably tried, and tried hard. You may never forget the hurts but you can try to remember the joys. And you can try to empathize with the pressures they were under, and the sadness and pain they had to endure.

Forgiveness is always difficult, and the pains from our childhood may be among the deepest wounds we bear. Cuts do heal, though, even if the scars never go away. Healing means letting go. Healing means forgiving.