Keys to the Practice of Intentional Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a choice
In most cases the choice to forgive brings eventual personal and/or relational healing. The choice not to forgive may produce what the Bible calls “roots of bitterness” which can lead to self-harm, harm to others, and harm to future generations.

The choice to forgive is immediate
The choice to forgive is immediate; the process of forgiveness is hard work.

The intentional forgiver forgives and remembers
That is, the forgiver forgives the hurt of the offense, but remembers its impact, and so requires appropriate humility and acceptance of responsibility by the offender (when this is possible) in order for the relationship to continue.

The intentional forgiver forgives for the sake of self
Intentional forgiveness is seen as healthy self-care in that it eliminates the “psychological cancer” of bitterness, freeing the forgiver to be an instrument of peace and healing rather than bitterness and resentment.

Intentional forgiveness is given with “mercy in one hand, justice in the other”
This means that, where possible and practical, parties mercifully seek to be emotionally, spiritually, and physically present to one another. Parties act with justice whenever they lovingly and firmly challenge any behavior (in themselves or the other) that leads away from presence to one another.

Intentional forgiveness involves both intention and impact
It is both the intention to forgive and be forgiven (which is a mental/emotional attitude) and the willingness to acknowledge, together, harmful impact(s) that resulted from the behavior.

Intentional forgiveness can be learned and, once present, produces ongoing connectedness
The learning of intentional forgiveness involves a constant movement toward openness and humility, and away from pride, defensiveness, and resentment. The connectedness which is produced by forgiveness gives rise to ongoing empathy and closeness.

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1 These keys were adapted from factors that were first described by Dr. Shann Ferch, who offered them in an article in Marriage and family: a Christian Journal (Vol. 2, 1999).