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# Forgiveness

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# Forgiveness

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Forgiveness ... at times a very difficult word. A word that is critical to our relationship with God: We experience forgiveness because of what Christ did for us on the cross.

When someone hurts us, we are often willing to forgive them based on the severity of their offense. If the offense doesn't seem too severe, we will probably forgive them. But, if in our minds, or even in the minds of others, the offense is serious, we may hold our forgiveness back.

However, forgiveness is necessary for our relationships with others: We extend forgiveness because we have experienced it.

Jesus tells us: "For if you forgive others their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive you your sins." —Matthew 6:14-15

What does this mean?

Forgiveness frees us from the non-productive and destructive emotions which chain and enslaved us to the object of our anger and pain. Sometimes a story can help us understand a concept better than an explanation ... Henry Brandt shares this story in his book, *Heart of the Problem*.

"At a conference in Zimbabwe, I told the audience the story of a Ugandan businessman I had met who had lost everything when Idi Amin's soldiers had seized his possession and his family had to flee to the forests. This businessman had peace in his heart only after he had forgiven the soldiers.

"After my morning address, I received a note requesting a private meeting. To my surprise, I found myself sitting across from a couple from Uganda who had been urged by some friends to attend this conference. Deeply disturbed by a tragedy in their own lives, the couple had listened intently to the story of my Ugandan friend.

"As they sat before me, they hold me how they had struggled to keep their business going in spite of the turbulence of Uganda's last twenty years.

“Then one day during the bloody reign of Idi Amin, they receive a note stating their twenty-six-year-old son had been kidnapped and was being held for ransom. The parents did nothing for a few days, and then received a note threatening that their son would be killed if they did not pay the ransom.

“The couple sought legal advice and consulted with the proper government authorities. They were advised to resist payment. Then came another note. This was the final warning. If payment was not made immediately, their son would be tortured and killed. As they agonized over what to do, they receive a note stating that their son was dead. Grief-stricken; the father tried to locate the body.

“Finally he found someone who, for a price, would lead him to his son’s body. When he arrived at the appointed place, he was seized by a group of soldiers and taken to a prison. In the same cell that had held his son, they stripped him to the waist, made him face a wall, and with a whip made of leather strips, they cut his back to ribbons. They loaded him into the back of a pickup truck and dropped him off on a street corner. They shouted at him that if he ever tried to locate his son again, he would be killed.

“Two years had passed. The couple had suffered bitter, deep hatred toward unknown soldiers who had murdered their son and beaten the father. They could no longer enjoy success in business, a spacious home in the country, and a happy family life. Now each day was filled with sorrow, hatred, and thoughts of revenge. The story of the Ugandan businessman had disturbed them; they wanted to know if I believed they were wrong to treasure their misery and keep their hatred alive. It seemed to them that resentment was normal and proper. To forgive the soldiers seemed to them to be inappropriate and disloyal to the memory of their son.

“What could I say? Theirs was a tragic story. Surely they had the option to choose their own approach to the cruel, heartless event that had clouded their lives. The problem was so far removed from my own life experiences that it seemed almost from another world. I required more wisdom than I possessed. ‘God, help me,’ I quietly prayed.

“We sat in silence in a dimly lit room. I couldn’t think of anything to say to this couple. The woman’s eyes were filled with tears. The gentleman sat with his elbows on his knees and both hands covering his face. The wife whispered, ‘It would be a relief to put this behind us and get on with the future.’ ‘Yes, it would,’ he replied. ‘Can you help us?’

“How could I help? I leaned back in my chair and thought to myself, ‘What would the Ugandan businessman who had lost everything say to them right now?’ I believe he would have said: ‘You must put away all bitterness, anger, wrath, quarreling, and slanderous talk—indeed all malice. Instead, be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you’ (Ephesians 4:31-32).

“Murder and merciless beatings are heinous deeds. Many friends and associates had assured them that revenge, anger, and hatred were natural responses. To think of being kind and tenderhearted and forgiving was beyond consideration.

“As the three of us struggled in that dark room in Zimbabwe, it seemed to me that there was another presence in the room. God was there telling me to gently urge this dear couple to let go of their hostile spirit and let Him cleanse their hearts. He would give them a forgiving spirit. Jesus would say: ‘But I say to you, love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you’ (Matthew 5:44).

“I suggested that they needed to pray for such a change of heart. After a long silence, the man said in a trembling voice, ‘I am ready.’ His wife said, ‘So am I.’

“The three of us knelt by the bed in that quiet room. I have never heard such moving prayers. We stood up and embraced each other with tears of supernatural joy streaming down our cheeks. The next day the man and his wife stood before the entire gathering. He told the group that he and his wife were leaving a heavy burden behind and looking forward to a new life in the future.”

Dr. Brandt goes on to say:

“We want to know when it is acceptable not to forgive. We are confronted on all sides with physical abuse, sexual abuse, rape, unfaithfulness, suffering. The list is long. Is no one entitled to nurse resentment, bitterness, and to withhold forgiveness? Why should we forgive?

“The answer is clear. The Ugandan couple experienced miraculous healing when they released their anger and bitterness. Forgiveness freed them from the non-productive and destructive emotion which chained them and enslaved them to the object of their anger and pain. They found that forgiveness was the beginning of a free life.”

God's children have full access to the limitless supply of the fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Isn't it odd, therefore, that we should ever choose hatred, resentment, or anger, not over the great tragedies of life, but more often, over the small grievances of daily living?

Forgiveness is a tough concept! And one in which we grow and stretch and learn and process. It will be a life-long journey as God teaches about forgiveness and helps you to forgive.

### **Application**

Q. Are there people in your life you can't or won't forgive?

Take some time alone with God to confess your inability to forgive, and ask the Holy Spirit to forgive them through you. As you rely on Him, He will give you the power!