

What Forgiveness *IS* and is *NOT* March 10, 2019

When the transforming power of Jesus starts changing us,
there are some parts of our life that are more resistant to change than other.
One area that challenges us to the core.
is also at the very core of the Christian message . .

FORGIVENESS.

So help me out here. Why is forgiveness so hard?

To talk about forgiving people means bringing up
all the horrible stuff that's happened to you and people you love,
You're drudging up
physically and emotionally abuse,
betrayal,
manipulation,
disappointment, pain and suffering.

And it makes you angry all over again.

Some people just hear the word forgiveness and they panic.

**“You have no idea about my life;
don't you dare talk to me about forgiveness.”**

What are some reasons that run through your mind for NOT forgiving someone?

- “The person hasn't apologized or taken responsibility for what he/she has done.”
- “I would be a hypocrite if I forgave because I do not feel like forgiving.”
- “Forgiving is only for weak people.”
- “If I forgive, he/she wins and will just do it again.”
- “If I forgive, the other person will have power over me and I won't be safe.”
- “The person doesn't deserve to be forgiven.”

Hey, we humans are *hardwired* to retaliate when they have been hurt by another person.
It's a survival instinct.

Even if it's just our pride or self-esteem that is injured
we have lost something very valuable to us and want recompense for the damages.
And to forgive means we accept the reality that we have suffered a great loss
And may not be recompensed.

I've heard it said:

“Forgiveness is giving up all hope of a better past.” - Jack Kornfield

YES. Forgiveness is HARD!

And it's even harder because we don't play on a fair playing field.

When other people hurt us, it's because there is something really wrong with them.

“They're self-absorbed.”

“They're controlling.”

“They've got an agenda.”

However, when *we* cause harm it's because of our circumstances.

“I lost it because he/she was acting like such a jerk.”

“I was rude way because I had such a long, tiring day at work.”

“I succumbed to my drug of choice because they, he, she . . . out there . . .

We assign total responsibility and blame to others for their bad behavior

while explaining away our own bad behavior

as the result of people and circumstances—out there

Come on! We ALL do it.

If you don't know that about yourself, you don't yet know yourself!

That's another reason why forgiveness is SO difficult.

If it's so difficult and so against our natural instincts, then why bother?

First of all, the Scriptures tell us to:

(I'm going to be giving you lots of Scripture today, so I've made a few handouts for those who might want to take one home to review.)

Colossians 3:13

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

But what Jesus himself gives an even more compelling reason

Luke 6:37

Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven.

My forgiving others comes BEFORE my being forgiven

Jesus states it even more clearly in . . .

Mark 11:25

And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”

And then he eliminates all wiggle room in . . .

Matthew 6:14-15

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

If this doesn't scare you, you weren't listened.
But isn't there a limit, you say?

Matthew 18:21-22

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

(I'm really being generous here!)

Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven.

OK, I'll forgive, meaning . . .

I'll play nice, but my heart's not really in it.

Jesus is telling a parable about a king who had forgiven his servant a great debt, but then the servant turned around refused to forgive the debt of a fellow servant.

The king said, (**Matthew 18: 32-35**)

‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you? In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

And then Jesus said: Matthew 18:35

“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

There goes the rest of my wiggle room!

Jesus knows what you and I usually learn the hard way.
Forgiveness is the **ONLY** path to peace and life.

Forgiveness is taking back control of your own life
You are telling the other person that they no longer have control
over your life and your emotions.

Yes, what they did to you was horrible, but you're not going to allow it to define you.
When you choose to forgive, you are choosing to heal yourself, your soul,
and *maybe* even a relationship.

Unforgiveness, in contrast, keeps the pain in circulation.
We keep the pain alive by rethinking what the other person did,
over and over again!

They may have only hurt us once in real time
but when we continually rethink the event over and over again
the hurt reoccurs hundreds or thousands of times.

With unforgiveness, they get all the blame – but we get all the pain.

So what have we established?

1. Forgiveness is really hard.
2. Forgiveness is really of life-and-death importance

For some of you it is the key to unlocking your future.

It may be what's at the root of your addiction, your depression, your failure to thrive.

BUT now. . . let me tell you a story.

David has been fleeing from King Saul who is set on killing him.

There is this one, almost comical moment, when David is hiding in the back of the cave that
Saul chooses to go into to relieve himself.

David sneaks up behind him and cuts off a piece of his robe with his sword.

Later, David calls out to Saul saying,

**“See I could have killed you today,
but I would never raise my hand against the Lord's anointed.”**

Saul is taken aback and says,

1 Samuel 25:21-24

I have sinned. Come back, David my son.

Because you considered my life precious today,

I will not try to harm you again.

Surely I have acted like a fool and have been terribly wrong.

Wow! Saul admitted he was wrong, terribly wrong, a fool!

Isn't that the kind of apology you've been waiting for?!

And Saul promises *never* to harm David again.

Wouldn't God want David to forgive Saul,
accept his humble apology
and return with him to Jerusalem?
Isn't that what a godly person would do?

What does David do? **1 Samuel 26:25**
So David went on his way, and Saul returned home.

Don't miss this.
This is powerful.
David's words and action suggest he truly forgave Saul from his heart
BUT he doesn't trust him, as well he shouldn't.

If we don't get this, we'll end up playing the fool
and doing ourselves and others great damage.

As David just illustrated,
Forgiveness does *not* necessarily restore trust.

Here's what trust is:
The confident expectation that the other is both desirous and capable
of protecting what is in your best interest
even when it's very tempting to do otherwise.

So Saul was probably sincerely desirous of doing right by David,
but not capable when tempted by his own self-interest.

That simply is not the case of everyone who offers you a heartfelt apology,
like King Saul did is capable of change and worthy of your trust.

Jesus understood this. **John 2:24**
This is what is said about how he responded to all his adoring fans.
Because of the miraculous signs Jesus did in Jerusalem at the Passover celebration,
many began to trust in him. (well-placed trust)
But Jesus didn't trust them, because he knew human nature.
No one needed to tell him what mankind is really like.

He didn't trust them.
Some people are dangerous.
They hurt you and then they will hurt you again.
No matter how much they insist and believe that won't.

Listen Prov 26:11 and become wise:

As a dog returns to his vomit, so a fool returns to its folly.

If you don't get this, you're left scratching your head saying,

How did I get myself in this same mess again?!

If you are always angry with someone, maybe you should ask,

“Am I really angry at them

or am I angry at myself for letting this happen over and over again?”

Being a healthy, grounded spiritually mature person,

means there are times when it's and healthy wise to recognize that

some people are toxic and dangerous

and leave destruction in their wake wherever they go.

To admit that does not mean that you are a mean, vindictive and revengeful
or unforgiving person;

Take to heart **Proverbs 27:12**

A prudent person foresees danger and takes precautions.

The simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences.

Forgiveness is not intended to make you a fool.

If you are easily manipulated by duty, guilt and obligation,

or if you are too naïve for your own good,

you need to take this Scripture to heart.

In fact, did you know there are many Scriptural commands
to sever relationships that are harmful?

Listen to what Paul tells Titus, who is the pastor of a local church. **Titus 3:9-10**

Avoid foolish controversies and genealogies

and arguments and quarrels about the law,

because these are unprofitable and useless.

Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time.

After that, have nothing to do with them.

Before you holler, “How unforgiving!”

but Paul is saying, “How smart!”

Sometimes you can forgive someone and say,

“We're not going to talk about this anymore.”

You can forgive someone
but not have them in your life anymore.

Forgiveness is different than reconciliation based on restored trust.

In fact, you'll find you have a much greater capacity to forgive
once you establish wise boundaries.

Wise and appropriate boundaries is setting someone free and finding out that it's you.

So forgiveness does NOT necessarily restore trust
Forgiveness does NOT necessarily restore relationship

(Let me read you a story and you tell me what else forgiveness is NOT)

Children of Israel, **Numbers 14:11-12, 20-23**

The Lord is so angry with the Children of Israel because of their lack of faith and says,

Will they never believe me, even after all the miraculous signs I have done among them?
I will disown them and destroy them with a plague.
Then I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they are!"

But Moses pleads for the people, and the Lord relents saying, **Numbers 14:20-23**
I have forgiven them, as you asked.

Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth,
not one of those who saw my glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness
but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times—
not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors.

18 Forgiveness is NOT . . . the removal of all consequences. (*better than dying, but . . .*)

Consequences have a purifying effect on us and on society.
Forgive yes, but don't be squeamish about exacting appropriate consequences.

And finally,
Forgiveness is NOT easy.
And most often, NOT a one-time for all-time decision

Because forgiveness is giving of all hope of a different past, it represents a great loss. Losses must be grieved.

In the PROCESS of forgiveness, you'll undoubtedly cycle through the stages of grief:

- Denial
- Bargaining
- Anger
- Depression
- And ultimately acceptance

Premature forgiveness can do great harm as it ignores this necessary process.

The transforming power of Jesus will get us there—probably not on our own. We'll need each other.

Let's be gentle with each other in the process.

Here's a prayer for us:

Worship Team

Lord, I offer my life to You
Everything I've been through
Use it for Your glory
Lord I offer my days to You
Lifting my praise to You
As a pleasing sacrifice
Lord I offer You my life

Things in the past
Things yet unseen
Wishes and dreams that are yet to come true
All of my hopes
And all of my plans
My heart and my hands are lifted to You