

## The Power of Forgiveness

Dear Friend,

Even though unforgiveness is like a cancer that slowly eat away at one's soul many continue to engage in this deadly activity. Jesus knowing how deadly unforgiveness is, gave us the parable found in Matthew 18:21-35.

Prior to sharing the parable Jesus told Peter that those in the Kingdom of God are to forgive seventy times seven. Real forgiveness does not keep track of offenses.

The rabbi's taught that people should forgive those who offend them – but only 3 times. Peter, trying to be especially generous asks Jesus if 7 (the perfect number) was enough times to forgive someone. But Jesus answered, “*Seventy times seven*” meaning that we shouldn't even keep track of how many times we forgive someone. We should always forgive those who are truly repentant, no matter how many times they ask.

The parable is about a man who was forgiven a large amount only to refuse forgiveness to someone who owed the forgiven man a much smaller sum. The end result is found in verses 33 and 35 where the King declares to the one he initially forgave and then refused to forgive others. “Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you? And his Lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. So shall My heavenly Father also do to you. If each of you does not forgive his brother (and sister) from your heart.”

Nadine Collier showed the power of forgiveness when she exercised Mathew 18:23-35. Nadine's words, “You took something very precious away from me, but I forgive you,” were words of power that were heard around the world. Twenty-one-year-old white supremacist Dylann Roof had earlier come to a Bible study at Nadine's church, and then killed her mother and eight others who were in attendance.

In the days following, Nadine's expression of forgiveness continued to be expressed by family members who had seen their loved ones gunned down that tragic night at Emmanuel African Methodist Church, in Charleston, South Carolina.

The first to be shot was the Pastor, Clementa Pinckney. Not only was he a great civil rights leader and a state senator, but he had also been a great minister

who had taught the members of his congregation the power of forgiveness.

The Washington Times, like so many members of the media pointed out, that if there's one positive to be found in this tragedy, it is Charleston's response. The city did not "erupt into riot and violence" after the shooting. Instead, tens of thousands of residents, black and white, came together and joined hands on a unity march.

The only way Nadine Collier and the other heroes of faith could stand steadfast in the midst of this tragedy, was because they had learned the power of forgiveness.

Real forgiveness follows God's pattern. Because God has forgiven all our sins, we should not withhold forgiveness from others. Matthew 18:21-35 points out that realizing how completely Christ has forgiven us should produce a free and generous attitude of forgiveness toward others. When we don't forgive others, we are setting ourselves above Christ's law of love. As that happens we will never experience the power of forgiveness.

Getting rid of un-forgiveness means completely letting go of the hurts that the other person has done. It also includes letting go of the hold this event that has impacted your life has had upon you.

Forgiving does not mean forgetting what has been done. Instead, it means filtering the hurt through the love of God. Under Jesus direction, and by His love, action can then be taken to put the power of forgiveness to work.

To forgive is to live. Forgiving means letting go of the plague of unforgiveness which has resulted from the hurt people have done. This letting go involves granting forgiveness in exchange for emotional health and happiness. When you let the power of forgiveness take place, you will also find the weight of anger lifted from you.

Like waves lapping at a shore, generations of abuse tend to follow one another. Each generation trapping the next in the emotional bondage of bitterness, anger and unforgiveness. As a result, untold thousands who have let unforgiveness plague their lives, walk around angry at their parents or someone else who has mistreated them in their past. Their lives are confused, their emotions crushed, and their ability to help others who are in need, destroyed.

As we read the scriptures, we are introduced to people like Joseph (Genesis, chapters 37-50). Joseph had received terrible mistreatment, yet he refused to accept the role of being a victim of unforgiveness and bitterness. After being thrown in a well by his brothers and sold into slavery, he was falsely accused by his master's wife and ended up in prison. Even after all of this, Joseph still refused to resume the role of a victim locked in the emotional prison of hatred and hopelessness.

When Joseph became a leader in the land of Egypt, with power to destroy the brothers who mistreated him, Joseph showed he had not let un-forgiveness plague his life when he said in Genesis 50:20-21 [NIV], "***You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.' And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.***"

Genesis 39:2 [NIV] says, "***The Lord was with Joseph.***" The fact is the Lord is also with you. Now you can have the same security and emotional healing that Joseph had when he went through his trials. What is needed is the implementation of the power of forgiveness that Jesus Christ made possible through His death and resurrection.

It is Christ's forgiveness which is extended to each of us that makes it possible for us to forgive those who have mistreated us. As a result, the forgiveness Jesus provides releases us from the plague of bitterness that locks us into being victims of the past and frees us to receive the promise of the future. As we choose to release the past and forgive, we in turn allow God to regain control of our lives and heal our emotions.

It is the certainty of this forgiveness which Christ provides that gives us the motivation to forgive others. Paul put it this way, "***Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you***" (Ephesians 4:32 NIV).

The Bible tells us that God's forgiveness of our sins compels us to forgive those who sin against us. Jesus expressed this fact in the Lord's Prayer when He prays, "***Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors***" (Matthew 6:12 NIV).

As we choose to exercise the power of forgiveness, we are freed from being victims of the past, and become victors of the present. As we forgive those who have hurt us, we discover, because of Christ's forgiveness and His justification, our emotional well-being is not dependent on the response of the offender. We are freed to move as victims of the past to be victors in the present who are agents of the power of forgiveness. This frees us from the tyranny of self, and enables us to be creative forces of good in a hurting world.

It's much easier to forgive our offender when we see that in many cases, they too are broken people who are victims of their past. Jesus, recognizing this, was able to declare from the cross, "***Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing***" (Luke 23:34 NIV).

To forgive may also involve confronting the offender on a one-to-one basis. Prior to doing this, we must pray and meditate on Philippians 4:8, "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-think about such things."

Remember that you are encountering the offender to forgive and restore a relationship, not to seek revenge. As indicated earlier, because you have been justified by Christ, your emotional well-being is not dependent on their response. This means you are free to forgive and share the love of Christ.

Without genuine love and forgiveness, a home will be torn apart; a friendship destroyed; a church and its ministry rendered unproductive and ineffective.

As long as you continue to hold on to your bitterness, you will continue to be a victim. Yes, you were deeply hurt in the past, but the fact is you cannot change the past. What you can change is your perception of it and the feelings, which enslave you in the present. That is why you need to start all over and respond in a positive way to the invitation that Jesus gives in Matthew 11:28 [NIV] when He says, "***Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.***"

When I let bitterness and unforgiveness live in my life, I am not able to experience God's blessings in the present. Worry keeps me from experiencing the wonders of God's creation in the present. It fills me so full of self, there is no room for God. When there is no room for God, there is no room for other people.

Bitterness and unforgiveness drives me into a self-centered spirituality that does not include the needs of others. That is why I must daily allow God to drive bitterness and unforgiveness out of my life by spending time alone with the Lord in prayer and daily Bible reading.

I believe people grow old not because of the hardening of the arteries, but because of a hardening of the heart. Time and hopelessness wear us down as we travel down the journey of life. Yet I have learned that daily implementing the power of God's forgiveness keeps the heart of love from hardening. ***"Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day"*** (2 Corinthians 4:16 NIV).

The Message Bible expresses 2 Cor. 4:16 in the following fashion: ***"We're not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without His unfolding grace."***

It is the reality of the presence of Jesus Christ, which breaks the hard shell of bitterness around us and gives us the power to forgive. By His emotional healing, we realize that the events of the past may have taken their destructive toll, but as we surrender to Christ, we understand that we can become better rather than bitter as we get older.

Now let's take a deeper look at how the power of forgiveness allows emotional healing to take place in our lives.

1. Emotional healing begins when we let forgiveness flow as we follow Jesus, and we begin to become like Him. As this happens, we begin to walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6), love as He loved (John 13:34-35), pray as He prayed (Matthew 6:9-15), and forgive as He forgave (Colossians 3:13). Our complete emotional healing takes on His personality traits, actions, and reactions to events. Our lives are modeled after Jesus Christ, as He becomes the focal point of our emotions and actions. In order for this to happen, it is absolutely essential that we pray and daily study the word of God.
2. The emotionally mature person, in whom forgiveness lives is willing to suffer as Christ suffered (Galatians 6:17, 2 Corinthians 4:10). We cannot get closer to Christ than to abide in His wounds, and let our hurts be filled through His love.

3. The more we become aware of the fact that we are sinners saved by grace, the more we appreciate that Christ has removed the plague of sin from our lives. The power of forgiveness Jesus provides frees us from the emotional roller coaster of a life of bitterness, and allows us to enter into the emotional healing, power and purpose that Jesus Christ has for each and every one of us.

It is a fact, your past no longer has to define your future. You may have been hurt by parents, friends or strangers, but you are now given the opportunity through the grace of God to be set free by forgiving them. It may seem like the hardest thing you have ever had to do, but it is also the most necessary. If you don't let the power of forgiveness go to work in your life today, by first receiving Christ's forgiveness for your sins, and then forgiving others, you will waste the rest of your life.

Let the power of forgiveness that Jesus Christ gives work a miracle in your life today. Then you will experience the power to forgive those who have harmed you. This is the day to be SET FREE from the ongoing struggle of living with the weight of anger, fear, bitterness and revenge that comes from a spirit of un-forgiveness. Tell God at this moment you are forgiving those who have harmed you, and want to live the rest of your life in the power that forgiveness gives.

Yours in Christ,

  
Larry Rice