

Forgiving

The Art & Challenge of Forgiving.

Some thoughts to stimulate us in practical forgiving

It's part of the process of our salvation.

By putting forgiveness into practice we will understand
better what God has done for us in Jesus.

Bring Jesus into the situation.

We can always share our problems with God and Jesus in prayer.

He was tempted in all points like us and He knows the struggles we have -
"Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men." We can be truthful with
them about how hard it can be to forgive - and let's be honest - it is difficult!

Forgiving is a process not an event.

Be prepared for it to take some time. It might be better to say

"I'm working on it at the moment." rather than, "Oh, it's all right," when it clearly isn't
all right.

Don't try to get an agreed version of the events.

This will always create conflict and tension.

It usually means we want our version agreed.

Don't wait until you get a repentance.

You may have a long wait! It may never occur! It may not be possible when
the person has died or is unknown to us. Nevertheless we must forgive.

Communication lies at the heart of forgiving.

One definition of forgiving is "The willingness to communicate when in pain."

Forgiving confronts the facts - it does not sweep them under the carpet.

This does not mean being vindictive, but to ignore the problem means it is not
being addressed.

Forgiving is not the same as forgetting.

God has not given us the ability to forget, so we must develop a strategy to
forgive whilst remembering. We can learn from those memories and can grow closer to
God when we remember what Jesus suffered as well.

Forgiving is what is needed when all the excuses have finished.

If there is an excuse, then forgiving isn't really necessary. Forgiving is needed
when there is no excuse - when the injury is compounded by real injustice.

I can choose not to dwell on the event(s)

This is the starting point after the initial remembering.

There is plenty of encouragement in the Bible to "think on these things" to discipline our minds towards better emotions than resentment (and worse.)

I choose not to seek revenge.

Revenge is the opposite of forgiving. If I choose to leave revenge to God, I am taking the strongest step I can to move in a positive direction.

The future of the relationship may be changed, and re-trusting may not be appropriate. Retrusting is not the same as forgiving. To forgive is something within my control, but trust rests partly with the other person, who must earn trust again, if indeed that is ever possible.

It is good to see God's providence in the events.

If we choose to see God's hand at work, then the most awful situations can be transformed. God has said he will never leave us or forsake us - and He means it - even when we have suffered grievous wrong. Accepting God's freely given forgiveness is part of the process. In knowing ourselves and appreciating what God has done we are strengthened to go out and forgive others - letting go of pride and self-reliance

Ultimate forgiving is characterised by Agape love - (charity): "I will provide."

This is the target. This is what we aspire to. God shows his love to the just and the unjust - to those who love Him and to those who hate Him. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to a knowledge of the truth-"When we were yet in our sins, Christ died for us." It is possible, because Jesus did it, ultimately holding out the promise of eternal life to those who persecuted him. As Paul said,"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst."

There are some *myths about forgiving*. They include;

Forgiving is just for God.

It isn't. It is a very necessary ingredient in normal human life as an antidote to revenge. As Christians - forgiven sinners - we should be at the forefront of forgiving.

Forgiving is achieved when you say the words.

Perhaps it is, but it is usually more helpful to think of forgiving as a process and

not an event.

Forgiveness need only be given after repentance.

How long do you intend to wait? Their repentance is not in your control. We must address our internal struggle. To do so is the first step in controlling ourselves in the process of forgiving. It will sometimes be the case that the other person has died or is not known to us. Even then we need to cultivate forgiveness.

To forgive, you must be a martyr.

No; forgiveness is a liberating & healing concept. There is no need to stand there and take unnecessary abuse without comment. Often it is necessary to say something and direct the other's attention to the wrong.

Evil is wrong. Even Jesus commented on that at his trial.

"You must forgive and forget."

It is not given to us by God to forget. We need to forgive whilst remembering.

When I have forgotten, I have forgiven.

This may be the case for minor matters, but to bury serious matters in our mind does not address the damage that has been done. Many victims, in therapy, need first to remember the event and only then can they begin to address the matter, including the question of forgiving.

Making excuses for someone is the same as forgiving.

No, if there is a simple reason why someone behaved as they did, it may cause pain, but there was no evil intended - there was no injustice. We can excuse the person. True forgiving starts when there are no excuses.

When I forgive someone, I must re-trust them.

This is not necessary and confuses forgiving with the need to protect oneself and those with us. There may be no lasting grudges held against the other, but there is no need to allow oneself to be put in the position of repeated abuse.

In order to test these ideas you could look at incidents in the lives of these people to see if you can spot some of the elements listed above:

Joseph and his brothers - From Genesis 50 v 15 – 21.

(Probably the best coherent description available in Scripture.)

Instructions from Jesus - Matthew 18v 15 – 20.

(Read this as an exercise in forgiving - not disfellowshipping!)

Euodia and Syntche - Philippians 4 v 2 – 9.

(Imagine the quarrel! See the whole passage for the elements of forgiving.)

Paul & the brother at Corinth -1 Cor 5 + 2 Cor 2 v 5- 11.

David and Saul- From 1Sam chapters 19, 24 & 26.

Here are some verses to remind ourselves of the love of God in forgiving us through Jesus - because of what He has done.

Out of the depths I cry to you O Lord; O Lord hear my prayer.

Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.

If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord who could *stand I*

But with you there is forgiveness, therefore you are feared.

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in His word I put my hope.

Psalm 130

I want you to know that it is in Jesus that forgiveness is proclaimed to you.

Acts 13 v 38

In him we have redemption through His blood.

Ephesians 1 v 7

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will. purify us from
all unrighteousness.

1 John 1 v 9

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in
Christ, God forgave you.

Ephesians 4 v 32

As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved,

clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Bear with each other

and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another.

Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

And over all these virtues put on love,

which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Colossians 3 v 12-13.

But we must play our part.

Forgiving is good for me.

- When I learn to forgive I am following the example of Jesus.
- I find peace of mind.
- It releases me and gives me strength to move forward.
- It is essential for my salvation.
- It is only when I know the pain involved that I understand what Jesus and God have done for me.
- "It is in pardoning that I am pardoned."
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Forgiving is good for you.

- When I forgive you, we begin to communicate again - we understand each other better.
- You realise the true effect of your actions.
- Hopefully you come closer to God.

Make me a channel of your peace

Where there is hatred let me bring your love

Where there is injury your pardon Lord

And where there's doubt, true faith in you.

Oh Master grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console
To be understood as to understand
To be loved as to love with all my soul.

Make me a channel of your peace
Where there's despair in life let me bring hope
Where there is darkness, only light
And where there's sadness ever joy

Make me a channel of your peace
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned
In giving of ourselves that we receive
And in dying that we're born to eternal life

Based on the prayer of St Francis of Assisi.

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