

Forgiveness is a Choice



“Forgiveness is not a spiritual gift, a skill, or an inherited trait. Forgiveness is a choice. Jesus looked down on those who had ruthlessly and mockingly nailed Him to a cross, yet He cried out: ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do’ (Luke 23:34). How, then, can we refuse to forgive those who have committed offenses against us?” Henry Blackaby

Some time ago, while in Germany, I had the privilege of teaching a session on forgiveness as a part of a training course for individuals who are serving God in many nations. The course was called “Face-to-Face.” It was about coming face-to-face with God in intimacy and face-to-face with one another. Forgiving others who have hurt us is a personal choice. Truly forgiving can be very difficult for our flesh; however, it is one of the greatest ways we can ever show the reality of our walk with God to others.

In order to come close to God in intimacy, we must learn to walk in forgiveness.

Unforgiveness keeps us from God and hinders our prayer life. Living in forgiveness is key for each of us who want to grow in prayer and intercession. We want intimacy with God, so let us break every barrier. We naturally want to blame others and to take revenge. I am sure you will agree that choosing to forgive is an act of the will against human nature.

We see forgiveness demonstrated in the life of Joseph. He is a tremendous example of choosing to forgive family members who had deeply hurt him. Through Joseph’s act of forgiveness, God used him to bring about a great deliverance in the lives of his family. He had every reason to be bitter. He lived in prison for years because his brothers had sold him into slavery; however, he chose to forgive and to be reconciled to his brothers. He was so full of forgiveness that he begged his brothers to forgive themselves. He said the following, “Do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life... and to keep you alive by a great deliverance” (Genesis 45:5, 7).

“There was no bitterness, no revenge, and no angry last word preceding his forgiveness. There was only the foretaste of Christ’s own unconditional forgiveness to every self-condemned sinner. Indeed, like Joseph, every time we forgive, we too ‘preserve life.’ We restore our brethren to wholeness ‘by a great deliverance.’” Francis Frangipane

Hindrances to Forgiveness

“There is nothing so deeply imbedded in your heart that God’s grace cannot reach down and remove it. No area in your life is so painful that God’s grace cannot bring total healing. No offense committed against you is so heinous that God’s love cannot enable you to forgive.” Henry Blackaby

- **Lack of understanding of God’s judgment and righteousness** - We think we must take the matter into our own hands. If we don’t think that others are being punished properly, we try to help God. We must leave the dealing with God, trusting Him as judge.

- **Pride in our life** - We want to be right. We don't think others deserve forgiveness. We may think that there is no need to forgive. We forget that we, ourselves, have already experienced the rich, undeserved forgiveness of God through Jesus' sacrifice. Now we are called to walk in that grace towards others.
- **An unwillingness to face the pain of the offense** - We must know that we can bring the pain of offense to Jesus. "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).
- **Bitterness in our heart** - We may hold revenge and want to punish. Do not forget that bitterness and unforgiveness bind us to the offender. We must cut the rope, and be set free.
- **Not regarding sin seriously enough** - Sin is serious business. We must come to grips with our hurt and forgive the offender. We cannot rationalize nor try to explain away a sinful response on our part. Unforgiveness puts a barrier between us and the Lord.

We need God's help to forgive. Jesus knows the pain of betrayal. He understands humiliation, misunderstanding, shame and hurt. Jesus is the greatest example of one who forgave others freely and fully. Our Father God develops and shows His character in and through us by allowing us to experience difficult situations. His grace enables us to walk out responses that give Him honor. As a result, we can walk in righteousness, peace and joy, demonstrating the life of Jesus here on earth.

"The choice to forgive opens my own prison doors. When I choose to hold someone in my debtor's prison, I am the captive. My mind is occupied with justifying why they are there. I become obsessed with their punishment being carried out. In choosing to become their judge, I become their jailer and ironically enough, their captive. We all know that whatever we focus upon becomes the center of our lives." Dudley Hall

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