

Does Forgiveness Make You a Doormat?

This is part 1 of a two-part series. Watch for part 2, coming soon!

There are a lot of reasons we struggle to forgive, and one is that we feel like forgiving is condoning what someone did—just lying down and taking it, being a doormat. We think, “If I forgive them, I’m saying what they did was OK.” But that’s not what forgiveness is.

Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines “condoning” as “brushing off, excusing, discounting, disregarding, glossing over or overlooking.” Forgiving someone does *not* mean we’re brushing it off, disregarding the hurt, pretending it never happened or letting them get away with it. Forgiving is not validating someone’s actions; it’s *freeing us* from their actions.

When I was a Bible school instructor, I used to teach on forgiveness every year in class. One day after I taught it, an older student—let’s call him Hugo—came to my office.

Hugo was a businessman from another country, and he had left his business in the care of his business partner while he came to school in America. Unfortunately, he discovered, over time, that his business partner had stolen from him and from the employees, and Hugo was forced to sue him.

Hugo asked me, “Karen, you say I must forgive this man who stole from me and my employees. Does that mean I just let him get away with it? Am I not allowed to take him to court?”

There’s a Natural Side

I assured Hugo that’s not what forgiveness means. Forgiveness is a heart issue. First we are to take care of that issue in

our hearts by forgiving. Then yes, we might have to take some action in the natural.

If an employee, for example, is stealing from the company or treating another employee badly, of course he must be reprimanded, or perhaps even penalized, fired or sued. If a child is being bullied in school, of course action must be taken. If someone has been abusive or even killed someone, they must face the consequences and be held accountable for their actions. And the same is true in many other situations, including heated disagreements of any kind.

Many times, a situation will call for a confrontation. Forgiveness is not ignoring or walking away from someone when a conflict needs to be resolved. In fact, being angry at someone without telling them about it isn't really fair. If there is disagreement, be willing to talk things through.

In other words, there is a practical, natural side to this. If someone has stolen from you or committed a crime of any kind, it's right to take legal action against them. If there are issues happening in everyday life that need to be confronted, then do it. Just forgive first. It's not okay to harbor unforgiveness against them while you're doing it. Forgive for your own heart's sake.

Understandably, Hugo didn't want his business partner getting away with stealing. Suing him was the right thing to do, as long as Hugo forgave him first.

You don't have to worry about someone getting away with what they've done. Galatians 6:7 says, "Be not deceived. God is not mocked. For whatever a man sows, that will he also reap."

"God is not mocked" means He is no fool! He knows all about human nature; He's seen it all, and He says that whatever a person sows, that will He also reap.

You do what you have to in the natural, but in your heart, you

can forgive, leaving “payback” to God. Forgiveness doesn’t make you a doormat—it makes you free. {eo}

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