

God Forgives When We Can't

My gift of mercy seemed to fail me as I struggled over the actions of two people who had deeply hurt me.

I hurried down the hall to Suzanne's* office. The star young lawyer in my law firm had requested a few minutes of my time.

As soon as I settled myself into a chair, she got straight to the point. "I've been offered a position with Bennigan and Glover*. A headhunter called me, asked me to interview, and I submitted a résumé. They needed to fill a slot in their tax department."

No, I thought. This can't be true. Just last week I had met with my close friend and colleague at Bennigan and Glover, Paul Dietzel*, to discuss our joint teaching projects. Paul would not have allowed his firm to make an offer to my associate.

I struggled to process what I was hearing. I had groomed Suzanne for months and frequently pictured her taking over my law practice when I retired.

Paul was my best professional friend. He knew how much I depended on Suzanne.

Anger and desperation showed their ugly faces deep inside me. I wanted to scream and throw something. I wanted to yell at Suzanne and call up Paul to bless him out.

Normally, I am a calm and even-tempered person. But at that moment a violent internal storm unleashed its fury and I had no umbrella. I battled the winds, lightning and rain unaided.

What did I do wrong? Or is this all their fault? An ungrateful associate? A disloyal friend? Help me, Father.

I must control myself. I am a professional. I cannot let myself break down in front of my associate.

"How much did they offer you?" I asked, too angry to cry. I tried to maintain my professional façade.

Suzanne named a figure out of my league.

What do I say, Lord? I prayed. Please help me.

The next words I heard myself saying surprised me: "That's a great offer. You should accept it."

Good riddance, I thought, as anger churned deep inside. We discussed a date for her departure from my firm, and I left her office.

REALITY SETS IN

Returning to my desk, shocked, I knew there had to be a mistake. Paul and I had collaborated on many projects during the years. Where had his loyalty gone?

I couldn't really blame Suzanne. She was simply bettering herself by moving to a larger and more prestigious firm that pays more and offers more opportunities.

That's what I kept telling myself, anyway. In reality, I blamed her as much as I blamed Paul.

Often, I had bragged about her to Paul, telling him what a great protégé I had. And now they had both betrayed me!

For the next several days, I nursed my anger and bitterness. Oh, did I ever! My husband took my side, of course. We had regular discussions at the dinner table about how I'd been royally stabbed in the back.

Suzanne remained at the firm two more weeks. Once during that time she commented, "I'm surprised you are even speaking to me."

I chose not to respond, but I thought, Me, too.

I spoke with Paul at a professional seminar soon thereafter. When I told him how shocked and hurt I felt that he had gone behind my back and hired Suzanne, he became defensive. "Hey", he said, "it's business, not personal."

He doesn't get it at all, I thought. Why waste time explaining how I feel?

"Well," I said, "At least I don't hold grudges." That was a lie.

My anger soon became a broken heart. Obviously our relationship meant far less to Paul than it did to me. And Suzanne had used me as a stepping stone. I found myself sobbing two or three times a day as the reality set in.

I took long walks and cried my heart out. "Why, God?" I sobbed. "How could anyone cause another human being so much pain?"

I walked and sobbed. I sobbed and walked. Could the "night of mourning" David referred to in the Psalms be as dark as my spirit felt on those walks?

GOD'S MERCY

After a while my broken heart turned into self-righteousness. I'd never do that to anyone.

I was the model. They were the outcasts.

I threw world-class pity parties in my honor. I imagined mutual friends siding with me against them and privately discussing how despicable their actions had been.

I rather enjoyed visualizing our friends ostracizing Paul and Suzanne and idealizing me as I bravely carried on. I'd do my own work and Suzanne's without complaining.

I knew God was not happy about my attitude or my pity party, but I clung to both. Though mercy had always been my strong suit, mercy for these two eluded me.

I prayed: "God, be merciful through me. My best is not enough. Come in and do this for me.

"I can't forgive them. Please do it for me. I'm praying Your will, Father. You promised to answer if we prayed Your will."

My pain remained. "Please, God, get on with it. I'm so tired of this burden of grief." My frustration increased as I waited for God's answer.

IT TOOK A MIRACLE

Trying to come to terms with my anger and frustration, I recalled a story about a World War II prisoner of war who was tortured by the Japanese to release critical information.

After one of the grueling sessions he cried out to God, "That's it. I can't take it anymore. If You don't do something I'll give them what they want. Help me." He reported he never again felt any pain from their torture techniques.

God always comes through. Being helpless is a great place to be because God will get the glory when the answer comes. "Please, God," I continued to pray. "Do it for me. Forgive them. I can't."

Finally, I don't know exactly how or when, the pain disappeared. I didn't forget what had happened. It just no longer mattered that Paul had gone behind my back or that Suzanne had used me.

I was free—free from anger, free from bitterness, free from resentment, free from losing two friends, free from sadness. A quiet miracle had occurred. I thought forgiveness would benefit Paul and Suzanne, but forgiveness had blessed me.

I rejoiced in my freedom: "God, You did it. You did for me

what I couldn't do for myself. Thank You. Thank You."

The whole experience had been for my benefit. Paul and Suzanne, the teachers, taught me a valuable lesson.

They taught me I couldn't fulfill God's commandments in my own strength. God, in His great mercy, obeyed Himself through me when I asked Him to.

Today I often thank God for one of the great blessings of my life—what I learned through this experience. Mercifully, God even blessed the friendships.

Paul and his wife and my husband and I get together for dinner every few months. Suzanne (who married and moved to another city) keeps in touch through letters and through family. God turned my night of mourning into morning joy.

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*** Names have been changed to protect privacy.**