

How Forgiveness Can Turn Into a Battle of Wills

I imagine you have heard the saying “forgive and forget.” It sounds easy, doesn’t it?

If we are truthful with ourselves and with others, we have to admit that it’s not easy at all. There is often a battle to forgive that happens between obedience to God and our will.

Joseph: Sold to Save

Have you ever sat and pondered the life of Joseph?

A Typical Teenager

- A bit full of himself.
- Believes he is invincible.
- Dreaming about a future.
- Prone to bragging.

As with many children, Joseph had siblings. And as with many families there were massive sibling squabbles and favoritism. In fact, Joseph’s brothers have no doubt that he is the favored son.

In the mist of the squabbles and favoritism Joseph’s brothers come up with a plan to teach the dreamer, Joseph, a lesson in humility. In the midst of this plan lurks a plot that takes sibling rivalry to a whole new level. The brothers throw Joseph into a pit and then sell him into slavery. If you think that your kids do not get along, take a good look at this family!

Joseph was:

- Rejected by his brothers.
- Sold into captivity.
- Letting go of his dreams with every step.
- Scared.

I think that we can probably say that fear and anger burned within Joseph as he traveled toward Egypt and an unknown future. I have little doubt that Joseph made vows and judgments against his brothers and maybe even his father, as he moved further and further from his homeland and into bondage.

Here is this young boy, rejected, sold and hauled into slavery. We have to remember that he didn't know the end of the story. Joseph had to live the story. I'd say it is safe to assume that fear and anger burned against his brothers. And, many would say that he had every right to plot and plan revenge.

9 Possible Side Effects of Unforgiveness

- Anger.
- Resentment.
- Loss of relationship(s).
- Bitterness.
- Increased stress.
- Physical issues/sickness.
- Anxiety.
- Self-doubt.
- Trouble sleeping.

But God

When we allow God to enter the scene, everything changes. Somewhere in Joseph's journey, he allowed God to heal his heart. The way Joseph worked through his challenges becomes evident years later when he sees his brothers and he tells them that what they meant for evil God intended for good.

It's so difficult to understand why God would allow Joseph to walk through everything that he walked through. We have to assume that in the formative years before Joseph was sold into slavery, a strong foundation had been laid. It was on this foundation that Joseph landed. And on this foundation, he left the blame and pain.

By the time Joseph's brothers appeared in Egypt, Joseph was in a position of authority where he could have had them executed. Yet, Joseph poured out mercy instead of judgment; something that God does for you and me over and over.

A simplified definition of forgiveness is to let go of past grudges or anger against a person. That person is often someone else, however, there are times when we need to forgive ourselves.

Forgiving Ourselves

Paul, who penned a good portion of the New Testament, had persecuted the church. At the time, he thought it was the right things to do. However, after a radical encounter with Jesus Christ, his whole life was turned around. He could not undo his past, but he could let go of it to move into his future. Often, we don't realize that we are harder on ourselves than God is. If you have repented and confessed to God, you are forgiven by Him. If the God of the universe has declared that you are forgiven, then it is time to forgive yourself. God removes our sins as far as the east from the west and remembers them no more.

4 Keys to Forgiving Yourself

- Repent and confess to God; ask for His forgiveness.
- Know that He is faithful and will forgive you.
- Ask Him to help you forgive yourself.
- Do not go by your feelings; stand on the promises of God.

God is for us and not against us! Therefore, we can walk in the knowledge that because He has forgiven us, we can forgive ourselves. It is impossible to walk into all God has called us to do if we are harboring unforgiveness toward ourselves.

Also, we are reminded that because God had mercy on us and extended His forgiveness to us, we need to forgive the person who wounded us. If Joseph had the New Testament in front of him, I do not doubt that Colossians 3:13 would have spoken into his struggle to forgive his brothers and others who forgot him or falsely accused him: “Bear with one another and forgive one another. If anyone has a quarrel against anyone, even as Christ forgave you, so you must do.”

Forgiveness Sets Us Free

As much as we want to be free from the one that has deeply hurt us and as justified as we feel in the offense, we run into a problem. Choosing to live in unforgiveness is the same as remaining chained to the other person. Unforgiveness holds us in bondage and has the potential to become an entry point for the demonic.

It is also difficult with repeat offenders. Do you have one of those in your life? In Matthew 18, Peter asks Jesus a significant question about how many times he has to forgive. Peter throws out a possible number: seven.

I imagine that Peter believed he was generous. If that were us today, I can hear us saying that seven is the number of

perfection and completeness. However, Jesus was not allowing Peter, nor any of us, to stop at seven. Jesus responded that we were to forgive someone up to 490 times. Before you start keeping a tally of how many times you have forgiven, remember there is more behind Jesus' response than a math problem. We have to be obedient to the fullness of the Word of God.

"And may you be completely faithful to the Lord our God. May you always obey His decrees and commands, just as you are doing today" (1 Kings 8:61, NLT).

6 Things That Forgiveness Does

1. Deals with the depth and reality of the wound.
2. Does not deny the pain but will deny the pain the right to control our lives.
3. Allows us to grow in grace and mercy.
4. Sets us free from bondage.
5. Closes the doors to the demonic.
6. Paves the way to grow closer to God.

So, how do I know if I have forgiven? Our litmus test is the absence of bitterness. If you still have bitterness, you are still in the process of forgiving.

Are you ready to venture into the realm of forgiveness God's way? If so, pray the prayer below and begin the journey. And remember, it's a journey so your feelings may take time to catch up with your decision to extend forgiveness. And yes, it is OK to pray the prayer over and over. Join hands with our amazing God, who has extended us much grace and mercy. He's ready to walk right beside you.

5 Steps Towards Freedom

1. Recognize that you are struggling to forgive.

2. Ask God to help you come to a point where you are willing to forgive.
3. Make a conscious decision to begin the process of forgiving. Stop the conversations in your head. Release the demand for an apology.
4. Pray. Tell God that out of obedience to Him, you are forgiving. Ask God to help your feelings match your intent.
5. Repeat as often as necessary.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, You have made it clear that You desire healing and freedom for me and that healing and freedom can only come through forgiveness. Therefore, today I choose to begin the process of forgiving (name). I ask You to take me on a journey to freedom. Teach me through the ups and downs along the way to depend on You. Help me to forgive them just as You have forgiven me. I release the pain, bitterness and anger to You. And I receive Your grace, mercy and love.

Extras

- Pro Tip: When struggling to forgive, pray blessing over the individual (including yourself if you are struggling to forgive yourself) every time you think of them.
- Pro Tip: Sign-up for the e-course to dive deeper.

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