

Not Just Another Forgiveness Teaching

Recently I've had a few people tell that if I've forgiven my ex-husband I should be in a better place. From what I've heard I shouldn't be angry at him again. The only problem with this idea is that I gotta deal with the man and he's difficult so that's gonna be real hard.

It isn't so much how he treats me—honestly, whatever. But I do have a hard time with how he treats my kids. So, being human, I'm pretty sure I'm gonna have to forgive him repeatedly and sometimes I'm gonna even get angry before I forgive.

I think there is this thought that once you forgive you forget and live happily ever after. I wish that were the case. It's really more like this:

Forgive... move forward... something unpleasant happens... forgive again... move forward again... something difficult happens... forgive again... repeat until heaven...

I think if you are to a place that you don't have to repeatedly forgive an unrepentant person for their continued rotten actions—you rock! And I mean that! And I do truly wish I could be like you.

But I'm finding forgiveness to be a rather long and arduous process. But God in his infinite wisdom, grace, love and faithfulness has some instructions and some encouragement for me (and you if you are like me).

I guess the first thing is this...

Forgiveness takes time, effort, intentionality and God.

I don't have it in myself to be a completely forgiving person, but God is utterly and infinitely forgiving and I have Him, so that makes all the difference.

God can enable me to forgive anyone, but He also allows this whole forgiveness thing to be part of my sanctifying. Do you remember how many times Jesus said you have to forgive? **70×7** (Matthew 18:21-22). His point was that we need to forgive **a lot**. Why would He say that we were gonna need to forgive so much if we weren't gonna need to forgive so much?

I think that if Jesus was just talking about how much we forgive in general he wouldn't have even needed to say 70×7. I can absolutely forgive one person one time... It's having to repeatedly forgive the same person that's tricky.

In my situation with my ex—forgiveness must be offered without request or repentance. In fact, I think we have been moving further away from repentance rather than closer to it over these past few years. So forgiveness is challenging—and continually choosing to forgive is also challenging (sometimes almost as much as the first time).

In marriage we must continually offer forgiveness. It is the same in divorce. But I'm kinda getting the impression from people that it is not okay to have to repeatedly forgive my ex. That I should forgive and move on already. (I think that is a message I'm getting about a lot of things, but I will hit that in another post.)

When I forgave my husband's adultery and then his abandonment I didn't understand the nature of forgiveness... at least not totally. I kind of expected some warm fuzzies and some serious peace about things... a happily ever after of sorts. Although I did experience that peace which passes all understanding, it came with a cost. I had to and continue to have to lay aside my feelings in order to embrace the gospel as it relates to forgiveness. And boy does it!

God has modeled forgiveness for us... and to us.

Forgiveness requires sacrifice on the part of the forgiver.

God sacrificed His son and Jesus sacrificed His life so that we could be forgiven. God didn't want to be separated from us so He made that sacrifice. So that he could have a relationship with us. That forgiveness offer is available to anyone who accepts it, but it only changes the nature of our relationship with Him when we accept it. If someone doesn't accept it, the relationship is not restored... in fact, there is no relationship. And that sin still separates and grieves the Lord. In fact, my sin still grieves the Lord even though I can ask for forgiveness and receive reconciliation.

Forgiveness is offered over and over again.

God continues to forgive me even when I sin repeatedly. He accepts my repentance every single time. He never says, "Sorry, that is the 70^x8th time you've done that... we are done." Oh my, I'm so thankful He doesn't.

The difficulty we have—those of us who forgive because we are called to not because it was asked for by the offender—is that we must often deal with repeatedly being offended and continually having to offer forgiveness.

What has helped me immensely is understanding that I have truly been forgiven so very much and that, but for the grace of God, I could be that offender... that person who rebels. I could be rotten... well, rottener. That gives me a measure of grace for my ex.

I see that often forgiveness is like love... it's a choice I make, something I do even if I don't feel it. I decide I'm going to be gracious and kind, and I act that way. But that gracious kind way might have to come after a little bit of fussiness and anger.

But honestly, to think that the lousy things my ex-husband does are not gonna bug me? Really. (Please comment if you have no problem with that sort of thing and tell me how you do it!)

I love my kids and when they are hurting my mama bear comes out... can't seem to help that.

And that brings me to my second point...

Anger isn't bad.

It's what we do with that anger that can be very bad. Feeling a justified emotion is not a sin, but acting bitterly, unkindly, rudely and punitively is.

God doesn't say, "Don't get angry." God says, "Don't sin in your anger."

It isn't a bad emotion, it's a valid emotion God gave us to signal that something is wrong... that something needs to be dealt with.

God gets angry... and I am made in His image.

What about the Old Testament? God has some righteous anger at Israel... it's justified and often acted upon but always with the purpose of drawing His people back to Him. Responding to my anger with the purpose of just simply punishing is wrong, but taking my anger to God and asking Him to give me wise ways to deal with it... that's good.

I have read back through my blogs, and I don't see that I'm sinning in my anger at my ex-husband. I admit I have anger towards him at times... again, human. But I truly am trying to not sin in my anger.

The amazing thing is that God uses my anger to draw me closer to Him. He's cool that way. He uses everything in our lives—if we will let Him—to draw us closer to Him. He sanctifies us in

the most amazing ways.

So despite what some people say or think, I do think I'm in a good place. I'm forgiven and I'm learning to continually forgive... so far I think I'm on step 659... ☐

Father, guard us against being prideful, bitter and angry. Soften our hearts, "renew a right spirit" within us, and give us compassion for our ex-spouses (Psalm 51:10). Please help us be like Christ. It seems impossible at times, but You tell us that we "can do all things through [Christ] who strengthens" us (Philippians 4:13), and we ask that You would give us strength to forgive 70×7 times because forgiveness gives us the ability to move forward and enables us to be used by You. God, help us give our children the gift of a forgiving, loving parent. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Sue Birdseye is an author and single mom of five kids that range from 4-years-old to 17-years-old. Her book, *When Happily Ever After Shatters* (Tyndale House) is in bookstores. This is adapted from her blog, .