

Saying Goodbye to Hurt, Hello to Healing: Part 2

Lacking **forgiveness** may cause other problems from illness (James 5:16) to retention of our own sins (Mark 11:25).

In her autobiography, *Something More*, the late Catherine Marshall tells the story of her stepdaughter, Linda. Catherine married Linda's widowed father when Linda was 12.

In Linda's early adolescence, her behavior and grades seesawed wildly. After leaving high school, Linda joined the 1960s generation of rebellion. Catherine did not succeed in her attempts to establish a warm relationship.

One day Catherine read Jesus' words from the King James Version about having aughts against another. She learned if you did not forgive those aughts, God would not forgive your own aughts (Mark 11:25). She filled her journal with three pages of specific aughts she had against Linda and forgave each one.

In a matter of weeks, Linda's attitude toward her stepmother began to dramatically change. Catherine had learned a powerful lesson from Jesus: We must not retain wrongs.

On the cross Jesus did not clench His nail-pierced hands into a fist and yell, "I'll get even with you for this." Instead, He opened His hands and cried, "Father, forgive."

A concentration camp survivor said, "My heart is so bitter that if you were to open me and lick my heart you would die of poison." What does your heart look like?

Someone said getting even with another person for the wrong he has done is like throwing a cactus. When the cactus hits him, he will hurt; but you will hurt your own hands in the process.

How To Forgive

Unforgiveness has a high cost, but how does one proceed in forgiveness? Allow me to suggest three steps.

First, re-evaluate.

Several years ago I watched a motivational film that recorded a scientific experiment done on a northern pike, a cold-water fish found in the north central United States.

The scientist placed the fish in a glass tank filled with water and denied it food. Next, he placed a glass cylinder containing minnows – the pike's favorite food – in the center of the tank. The pike could not detect the glass that stood between him and dinner. He backed up and charged for the kill. Smash! Smash! Smash!

After several unsuccessful attempts, he finally stopped. The scientist then removed the glass cylinder. Minnows swam throughout the tank, even up to the pike's nose. He never stirred. He remained quiet and beaten, and he died. He died because he did not re-evaluate the changing situation.

The same thing can happen to pastors. They get hurt and find it hard to trust again. Understandable.

Re-evaluation, however, must be ongoing in the journey of life. If the apostle Paul had not re-evaluated John Mark, we would not have the second Gospel.

Second, repent.

The great preacher Clarence Macartney told this story about Leonardo da Vinci. The story itself may not be true, but it well illustrates a point.

Just before da Vinci began work on his famous fresco, The Last Supper, he quarreled violently with a fellow painter. Da Vinci was so enraged and bitter he determined that when he painted

Judas, he would model Judas' face after the face of his enemy. He would get revenge as future generations looked on Judas' face with scorn and infamy. The face of Judas was one of the first he finished, and everyone easily recognized it as the face of the painter with whom he had quarreled.

The last face da Vinci needed to paint was that of Christ; however, he made no progress. Something baffled him, held him back, and frustrated his best efforts.

He concluded that the one thing that hindered him was the fact he had used his enemy's face when painting Judas. He took his brush and gave Judas a new face. With ease, he then finished the face of Christ.

A pastor cannot paint the features of Christ into his own life while painting the face of another with colors of enmity and hatred.

Repentance means to change your mind. Some call repentance the first word of the gospel because it was the message of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2), Jesus (Matthew 4:17), the Twelve (Mark 6:12), Jesus after His resurrection (Luke 24:47), Peter (Acts 2:38), and Paul (Acts 26:20).

Repentance is unilateral. It does not, therefore, wait for another person to first repent.

Furthermore, repentance has nothing to do with one's feelings. It involves a mindset change that brings different behavior. Jesus describes in the Sermon on the Mount how we are to treat our enemy: We are to bless him, go the extra mile, turn the other cheek, pray for him, and forgive him. None of these actions require our enemy to do a single thing. All address our behavior.

If a pastor waits until he has the right feelings, he may never forgive. The Lord calls us to repent if we have any attitude unlike His.

Third, redeem.

Goldie Bristol wrote a book entitled, *These Tears Are for Diane*. A man raped and murdered her 21-year-old daughter. Police found the perpetrator, and a jury sentenced him to a double-life term.

Five years later Goldie and her husband Bob concluded, "We can see no other purpose for his coming into our lives if there is no possibility that he will be saved."

They wrote him a letter – not condoning the crime – but expressing their concern and God's for him. After two more letters, they received a reply. The man said he had not realized there were people in the world anywhere who could place their concern for him above their own hurt.

"What good does it do to hate?" Goldie asked. Hate could not bring her daughter back; it would only spread the poison of anger and unforgiveness in her own life, and it would not have any effect on her daughter's killer.

Goldie wrote: "The dictionary associates malice with malignancy – it eats and consumes and finally destroys. If I allow it to take hold in my life, I am anything but a free person. The very tool I would use to get even is the one that would chain me. Only God is able to handle this kind of treachery in our lives and release us from the entrapment. So the decision is mine. I either carry anger, unforgiveness, and resentment around with me, and break under the load, or hand it over to my Heavenly Father who can bear the weight."

Goldie's insight is not new. Stephen knew the power of redemptive forgiveness when "he fell on his knees and cried out, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them' " (Acts 7:60). Ultimately, Stephen's prayer resulted in Saul's conversion.

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