

The Forgiveness Habit

by John L. and Paula Sandford

Our relationships become healthier when we remember the message of the cross.

In our relationships, it is important for us to remember that mutual love and respect are to be accomplished out of reverence to Christ. To the degree that each of us is subject to Jesus Christ, the Lord enables us to relate to each other lovingly and respectfully.

The reverse corollary is also true. To the degree that we are not subject to Jesus Christ, He will not rule our hearts, and forgiveness will not be built into us as a moment-by-moment daily practice. When we do not submit our wills to Him, we will be subject to one another, but to one another's selfish control rather than to blessing.

Good, bad or indifferent, each of us does relate to every person with whom we come in contact. We affect others in some way. In that sense, we cannot avoid being subject to one another.

Without the presence of Jesus in our lives, we will relate to others only according to the flesh and not by the Spirit. Only when the cross is present is the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ able to transform our relationships to produce blessing rather than harm.

Our distance from the cross of Christ, practically, in daily living, is the reason we have so many broken relationships and divorces today. People are paying lip service to Jesus, but they don't know how to walk with Him moment by moment. They can't maintain long-term relationships because the fire of unforgiveness burns within them.

When a man and woman enter the marriage relationship, the

husband and wife often tend to counterbalance each other. For example, if one tends to talk too much, the other is likely to remain silent. If one is a strong disciplinarian, the other probably will be more lax.

When this tendency to counterbalance one another occurs, tensions develop between partners because one or the other is pressed to lean uncomfortably toward behavior contrary to his or her normal temperament or beliefs. This counterbalancing dynamic is also active among siblings, friends and business associates.

The key to overcoming this dynamic is in sensitive applications of the cross and forgiveness. We must evaluate what is happening in all our relationships and put our own ego in proper perspective.

Jesus said, " 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me'" (, NKJV). We can take the practices of our relationships to the cross through forgiveness so that through the power of Jesus Christ our selfishness can be put to death and our wounded feelings healed.

Read a sample chapter from Choosing Forgiveness, from which this article was adapted. Log on at