

Why Forgiveness Can Be So Difficult Yet Very Rewarding

In 1956, five American missionaries headed to the rainforest of the eastern Amazon in Ecuador to make a second visit to the Huaorani tribe, which anthropologists said was the most vicious, violent society on the face of the earth. They had a culture of killing, and studies showed 60 percent of the tribe died by homicide.

As soon as the missionaries got out of the plane, they were speared to death by members of the tribe. The brutal murders made news around the world and the cover of *Life* magazine, *TIME* and *Newsweek*. Many newspapers reported the deaths of these men, who included Nate Saint and Jim Elliot.

A couple years later, Elisabeth and Valerie Elliot, wife and daughter of Jim, and Rachel Saint, sister of Nate, moved into the Huaorani village to show love and forgiveness and minister to the people who had killed their family. Eventually, Mincaye, the leader of the tribe, and the five men who participated in the missionary murders all became Christians.

The kind of forgiveness that Elisabeth Elliot and Rachel Saint modeled doesn't make sense until God has forgiven you. Once you've experienced it, how do you forgive? You do the four things that these women did:

Relinquish your right to get even. Romans 12:19 says, *"Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to God's wrath, for it is written: 'Vengeance is Mine. I will repay,' says the Lord."* Leave it up to God. He'll take care of it, and He'll do a much better job than you ever could.

Respond to evil with good. How can you tell when you've

completely forgiven someone? You actually pray for God to bless the person who hurt you. The Bible says, *“Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you”* (Luke 6:27-28).

Repeat these steps as long as necessary. Peter asked Jesus in Matthew 18:21, *“Then Peter came to Him and said, ‘Lord, how often shall I forgive my brother who sins against me? Up to seven times?’”* Jesus replied, *“I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”* Sometimes forgiveness has to be continual.

Rescue others with the Good News of God’s forgiveness. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, *“All this is from God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their sins against them, and has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us. We implore you in Christ’s stead: Be reconciled to God.”*

Talk It Over

- Why do you think it’s so difficult to let go of our need to get even or “have the last word”?
- What can you do to model forgiveness in your life?
- Who in your life needs to hear God’s message of peace and salvation? {eo}

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