

Why You Should Imitate Paul's Attitude of Forgiveness

Have you ever been disappointed in people? You've befriended, encouraged and mentored them, yet, at some point, they have walked away, never saying thank you.

Think what the apostle Paul must have felt during his final days. In that dark and terrible Roman dungeon, he wrote to his faithful disciple and co-worker, Timothy: "At my first defense, no one stood with me, but everyone forsook me" (2 Tim. 4:16).

Paul didn't explain why, but we can speculate. There were many in Rome who had come to Christ through Paul's ministry; yet, when he faced accusations by the evil Emperor Nero, many who knew about his incarceration deserted him. They were, no doubt, horribly fearful—Nero hated Christians. Nevertheless, this betrayal was perhaps one of Paul's most painful experiences.

A Powerful Lesson in Forgiveness

Note Paul's response as he continued his letter: "May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the preaching might be fully known and that all the Gentiles might hear (2 Tim. 4:16-17). Paul's attitude of forgiveness is convicting. He didn't want their selfishness and neglect held against them at the judgment seat of Christ.

A Powerful Lesson in Avoiding Forgetfulness

I've tried to learn from Paul's graciousness toward people who are ungrateful—or who simply forget to say thank you. I, too, want to have a forgiving spirit, while I also want to avoid this kind of behavior in my own life. Our failure to say thank

you may be rooted in pride. When we are successful in life, most of us stand on the shoulders of someone else who encouraged us, recommended us and opened doors of opportunity. Our tendency, however, is to never look back to express appreciation. Rather, we tend to say, "I did this myself!"

Some Personal Reflections

I would never have been able to do what I'm doing were it not for Dr. Harold Garner at Moody Bible Institute. He believed in a young kid just out of high school when I didn't believe in myself.

When I couldn't write or speak English well, he wrote positive comments on my written assignments. He kept a goal in front of me—that someday I would be his associate. Though his comments at that point went in one ear and out the other, they eventually came true. I finished my college work and earned a master's degree. And, as far as I know, I became, at age 23, the youngest full-time faculty member at Moody Bible Institute.

Did I accomplish this myself? Absolutely not! I remember the day I wrote Dr. Garner a lengthy letter expressing my deep appreciation. Without his encouragement, I wouldn't have gone on for advanced education.

I can think of several key people who were great mentors. One evening, my wife and I took one of these godly men to dinner. As we began the evening, I mentioned that I had only one agenda—to say thank you for what he meant in my life. I'll never forget the response of this teacher, who had poured into the lives of thousands. He said: "Gene, I can almost count on one hand those who have looked back over their shoulder and said thank you."

Let's not forget to express appreciation to those who have built into our lives. But for those who forget what we have done to help them along the way, let's pray for Paul's

attitude of forgiveness. Let his words ring in our ears: "May it not be counted against them!" {eoa}

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