

Saying Goodbye to Hurt, Hello to Healing: Part 1

“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins” (Mark 11:25).

Life is full of hurts, but Jesus is full of healing.

Ministers, their spouses, and families are not exempt from being hurt. As we move into a new year, now is the time to examine the hurts of your past and find freedom in forgiveness.

How does hurt come?

Identifying the Sources of Our Hurts

Who hurt you? Was it a parent, family member, spouse, children, friend, fellow minister, board member, or congregants? The closer the relationship, the deeper the hurt.

The wife of Leo Tolstoi, the great Russian writer, said concerning her husband: “His biographers will tell of how he helped the laborers carry buckets of water, but no one will ever know that he never gave his wife a rest and never – in all these 32 years – gave his child a drink of water or spent 5 minutes by his bedside to give me a chance to rest a little from all my labors.”

Ministers are not immune to hurts caused by others. And some spouses, even of ministers, might identify with the remarks of Mrs. Tolstoi.

Pastors can also hurt themselves.

Many years ago I stood at the rim of the Grand Canyon. About two or three feet from the ledge a rock island rose from the

canyon floor. Its flat surface was level with the ground I stood on. Over time, people had tossed coins onto this island. Suddenly, a 6-year-old child ran from the crowd, jumped over to this rock island, and started scooping up the coins. Along with others, I watched paralyzed with fear for this child's safety. His mother screamed, "Johnny, get back here." With his pockets full of coins, and without hesitation, he immediately leapt back to our side.

I thought later, What if he had missed on the return jump? Would his mother ever be able to forgive herself for her instinctive reaction and for not waiting for expert help to arrive to extract her son from that place of danger?

Forgiving others may be easier than forgiving ourselves.

We may also feel God has caused or permitted some of our hurts.

Early in David Wilkerson's ministry a pastor friend was backing his car out of the driveway and ran over his toddler. David Wilkerson wrestled with how God could have permitted this to happen to his friend, and his despair almost drove him from the ministry and effective service to Christ.

The Price of Unforgiveness

Seldom do we discuss the high price for unforgiveness, but consider the consequences for harboring grievances:

- The fruit of the Spirit ebbs away.
- Indifference or hatred displaces love.
- Bitterness or depression displaces joy.
- Anxiety displaces peace.
- Short-temperedness displaces patience.
- Hard-heartedness or indifference displaces kindness.
- Meanness or a get-even attitude displaces goodness.
- A demanding nature displaces gentleness.
- Resignation from responsibility displaces self-control.

- When we do not forgive, we can easily blame someone else for our condition.

When we do, we forsake our responsibility to control our own responses. Basilea Schlink, founder of the charismatic Lutheran community of the Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary in Darmstadt, Germany, tells the story of Plumb Orchard in her book, *Realities*. The Sisterhood needed the property next to their community to expand their ministry, but the owner refused to sell. The sister who tried to negotiate never made it past this woman's front door.

One day, the woman's great nephew met the sister at the door and let her in. In his great-aunt's room she understood why they were having problems purchasing the property. The room was crowded with inherited furniture – enough to fill a house – and most of it was dilapidated. One room had 13 mattresses stacked one on top of another – a stepladder was required to reach the top.

As the sisters began to pray, the Lord began to deal with them about inviting Him to judge their own lives in relationship to what they saw in another's. They had no estate to manage, but they did have secret attachments – a pretty picture postcard, a certain personal necessity, a little wooden cross. "Oh, I hope the day will never come when God will ask this of me," each said.

But the Spirit impressed them to have a surrender week. Each one was to let loose of her secret attachment. After that week they visited the woman. She had changed her heart.

Basilea Schlink said that experience taught them the power of empathetic forgiveness, and that people cannot make progress when they blame someone else. People must deal with their own attitudes first.

George O. Wood *is general superintendent of the Assemblies of God.*