

January 24, 2021

“Forgive Who?”



Ephesians 4:32

32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Special Music: “Forgiveness” Matthew West

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1Lu5udXEZI>

Reader's Digest published these and several other stories in August of 2017.

In an interview with [Real Simple](#), domestic violence survivor Pascale Kavanagh said that she never thought she would reconnect with her mother—her abuser—during her adult life. However, in 2010, her mother suffered several strokes that left her unable to communicate or take care of herself. With no one else to help, Kavanagh began to sit by her mother's bedside and read to her. Through this, Kavanagh says the hate she had for her mother dissipated into forgiveness and love.

During a night swim with girlfriends, bride-to-be Rachelle Friedman was horsing around and got jokingly pushed into the shallow end of the pool, where her head hit the bottom. She cracked her neck, reported Today, and has not been able to feel anything below it since. Despite the life-changing injury, Friedman went on with her marriage and has said she never harbored resentment toward her friend about the freak accident. “There is no use in being down in the dumps and depressed. It's not going to get you anywhere,” she told Today.

Sandra Walker, a mother of two, lost her husband in a car accident that also caused her to have a life-changing brain injury, according to [The Daily Mail](#). At the trial for the accident, in her court statement Walker said she sympathized with the woman who crashed into them—who herself lost a child in the accident—and

gave her a hug. “I know she is going through as much pain as I am feeling. I wanted her to know that I forgive her for what she did,” Walker told WSB-TV.

Mary Johnson lost her son in 1993 after a then-teenaged Oshea Israel got into a fight with him at a party, and shot him. With so much unanswered, Johnson went to visit Oshea in jail. After their first contact, “I began to feel this movement in my feet,” Johnson told [The Daily Beast](#). “It moved up my legs, and it just moved up my body. When I felt it leave me, I instantly knew that all that anger and hatred and animosity I had in my heart for you for 12 years was over. I had totally forgiven you.” The two now live as neighbors in the same duplex, and Johnson has even referred to Israel as “son” in interviews. “I admire you for your being brave enough to offer forgiveness, and for being brave enough to take that step,” Israel told The Daily Beast. “It motivates me to make sure that I stay on the right path.”

There are thousands of stories about people who have forgiven those who have wronged them in some way. Every week we come together in worship and we recite “The Lord’s Prayer” saying, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,” “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive our trespassers,” “Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who have sinned against us.” However we say it, whatever translation or paraphrase we use, the meaning remains the same.

“God, forgive us for our wrongdoings, as we forgive those who have wronged us.” Too often though, when we say this, we are thinking, “God forgive me for all my sins, no matter how great or small, but allow me to choose who I forgive, because there are some people that have really done me wrong that just don’t deserve, nor do they want, my forgiveness.”

Which begs the question, “Who benefits from forgiveness?” Our human nature pushes us to believe that we have the right to forgive whom we want to forgive and not forgive those that we feel are not worthy of our forgiveness. When we choose not to forgive someone, deserving or undeserving, we harbor that hurt and resentment in our hearts. The other person may or may not suffer at all, but we will always carry that burden with us. Each and every burden like that, adds to our wagonload of resentment and self-righteousness.

As Christians, we come before God and ask God to forgive us for not forgiving someone else. I truly believe that God answers prayer but this is one prayer I can testify to everyone that God will not answer. What we are really asking God to do is take away the resentment that we are clinging to without doing the work of letting it go. God is not asking us to carry that burden. We are choosing to carry that burden rather than do the work of forgiving those who have wronged us. We are choosing to burden ourselves with this Great Consternation. If we truly want God to forgive us and relieve us of the burden of resentment, then we need

to let God work through us to forgive the other party, acknowledge that the burden in OUR choice, not theirs.

It is easy enough to see how non-Christians can decide to carry this burden around with them, but Christians are called to release the burden. When we look at someone who is harboring resentment, animosity, holding onto a grudge that they refuse to let go of, we can see how it affects their attitude, bearing and sense of community. We simply cannot ask God to forgive us for something that we refuse to release to Him. He is not going to take it from us if we insist on letting it take up residence in our hearts. One of the heaviest responsibilities that we have with regards to forgiving others is letting the pain and resentment to go. How can God lift a burden from us that we refuse to put down through either pride or hubris? And when we refuse to let it go, we are telling God that we choose to carry that pain around with us; that we choose to let it weigh us down; that we choose to let it affect our attitudes and our interactions with others; that we choose to let it spew from our mouths reflecting the darkness that we have allowed to occupy a space in our hearts meant for Jesus. When we set our hearts on hate and animosity, we are telling Jesus that our desire towards hate and animosity are more important to us than our relationship with Him; that there is a place in our hearts that we are reserving for ourselves out of selfishness. We are telling God that He needs to find a way to work with that because we aren't willing to give it up to him; that it is our right to carry that burden if we choose to do so.

There are some people simply do not want our forgiveness. They may even be proud of the way that they hurt us or feel superior in some way because they got the best of us. And, in a backend kind of way, it is true. They can choose to gloat about what they have done to us as if that makes for some kind of credibility just like we can either choose to hold onto the resentment or lay it down at the foot of the cross and let it go. If we choose to carry the burden, then we are also giving the other party ammunition for our future interactions with them.

So, if they don't want forgiveness, just what good does it do for us to expend the energy to forgive them? We need to come to the understanding that WE benefit from forgiving them more than they benefit by accepting the forgiveness. When we allow Jesus to work through our heart and purge the anger and resentment from it, He also removes the pain, guilt and stress from our hearts.

Ecclesiastes 7:9 says: "Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools"

Ephesian 4:31 says: "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice."

Colossians 3:8 states: "But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander and obscene talk from your mouth."

James 1:20 says: "...for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God."

And the list goes on. The message of the Bible is a message of love, not anger. And while anger, in and of itself, is not a sin, anger that leads us into sin by retaliating against an offender or by allowing that anger to harden our hearts is contrary to the teachings of Jesus. Look at the example that Jesus set by forgiving the very people that were crucifying Him.

Jesus was not a stranger to anger. He knew all of the emotions that engage with the human heart. When Jesus got angry at the money changers and the sellers of doves at the temple, we can see the emotions welling up inside of Him. The incident is found in all four gospels. Matthew tells it this way:

Matthew 21:12-13

Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.

“It is written,” he said to them, “My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’

There are several things we need to consider here that are important to understanding why Jesus gets angry and how he chose to engage with that anger.

- 1. It was not forbidden or unusual for sacrificial animals to be bought and sold, and money to be exchanged, but for some reason, this practice had been moved inside the temple walls. Jesus was angry because the Temple was meant for worship, not for doing business.**
- 2. People traveled from near and far to worship and offer sacrifices at the temple. In a way, these vendors provided a necessary service.**
- 3. The money changers and sellers of sacrificial animals had taken to overcharging for their services and products. They were taking advantage of the people that had traveled there and whose earnest intent was to worship at the temple.**
- 4. Jesus' anger stems from this abuse and with the fact that it was happening inside the temple walls.**

So, how does He handle it? Well, first of all, He didn't hit or physically accost anyone, but he does show His anger by turning over the tables and reminding them of scripture:

“It is written,” he said to them, “My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’

The Jews constantly held themselves accountable to scripture, so Jesus quotes from Isaiah the prophet, chapter 56: 7

7 these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.”

But I don't think Jesus is using the words of Isaiah as a sword to validate His anger, but as a teaching tool, stressing the importance of reverence for God and His temple. He is using the passage to push the Kingdom of God forward into the hearts and minds of the people. He is also trying to correct a wrongdoing against the people by the vendors that they were dependent on.

We need to be honest with ourselves though, when we get angry, is it for the same reason that Jesus got angry? Does the Kingdom of God get lifted and is reverence for God expressed, or are we doing it out of our own selfish desire to let someone know that they have crossed a forbidden line that has caused us hurt, offense, or loss?

When we look at the stories that I read at the beginning today, can we place ourselves in the shoes of the offended? Have we ever been forced by events out of our own control to be the caregiver for someone who has truly hurt us in the past? Have we ever been in a position where someone has unintentionally and without malice hurt us so deep that we will carry the scars for the rest of our lives? Have we ever been seriously injured or lost a child or spouse due to the negligence of others? Have we ever had an event in our lives where the actions

of someone else caused us great loss but also suffered a great loss in the occurrence? Has anyone ever hurt us so deep financially that our recovery is questionable, and the offending party is so destitute that there is no hope of recompense? Could we handle such an event with the grace, compassion, and mercy that we find in the victims in these stories or from Jesus, our example here on earth? Can we handle the taunts and ridicule of our friends and family who think we are idiots by not demanding restitution even though no restitution is possible? Are we truly capable of embracing the truth that “eye for an eye” is simply not the way Jesus wants us to treat others? Are we capable of forgiving someone who truly does not deserve or want forgiveness?

The truth is that we are human. We are perfectly willing to accept that God is in control... until it looks like He isn't or that He isn't paying attention. “God would never allow that to happen.” “I'm pretty sure God didn't mean it to turn out like that.” “God must have blinked, because I got hurt.” We place the burden of belief regarding “God is in control” on our own perceptions of what we think things should look like through our very human eyes. In other words, we fall back on the notion that “if God is in control, I wouldn't have lost my job.” “If God is in control, my daughter would not have died.” “If God is in control, there never would have been a Carona Virus.” “If God is in control, I would never have lost my life savings to that marketing scam.” “if bad things happen, it's God's fault for allowing it to happen and I am not going to forgive Him.” It is very twisted logic, but a logic that we seem to gravitate toward as human beings.

We need to realize that we need new glasses to adjust our perspective. We need to see the world as Jesus sees the world. We need to become like-minded with the way Jesus does things. If we do not accept that God knows what He is doing, that He knows what is best for us, we will drive ourselves crazy trying to balance the consternations that we face. We will run ourselves ragged trying to make God adjust to our way of thinking, instead of adjusting our minds to the way that Jesus teaches us by giving us insight into something greater than life on this planet.

Jesus shows us how to do that. He freely gives us a new perspective. But we have to accept it, even when it isn't convenient for us to do so. In John 14:1—4 Jesus tells us:

- 1 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me**
- 2 .My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?**
- 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.**
- 4 You know the way to the place where I am going.”**

We have a place prepared for us and it is not of this world. But, more often than not, we choose to remain firmly grounded here rather than embracing the perspective that this is not our home. And because we have our feet so firmly

planted on this world, we feel it is our right to be offended when we can't seem to control the environment around us.

A great part of understanding the true nature of this precept is striving to grasp the element of forgiveness as God sees forgiveness. We want clean hearts when we stand in the presence of our creator, so we need to let go of the filth. We need to let go of the vengeance. We need to let go of the hatred. We need to relinquish our desire for control. We need to let go of the desire for revenge. If anyone deserves vengeance, it is God for the way we have treated Him and His son. Instead, He shows us grace and mercy by forgiving us when we fail. He expects for those of us who believe in Him to do the same. It is the only way we will ever find peace in our hearts.

AMEN

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