

HOW TO FORGIVE OTHERS

Forgiveness. Now, here is a topic for you. Forgiveness for some of us is much easier to preach than to live. Oh, we like forgiveness, especially when we are on the receiving end of it. What many of us find, however, is that it is easier to receive forgiveness than to give it.

As Christians, we are given many tasks to do and certainly “forgiving one another” is one of those tasks. It is easy to recognize others who are forgiving but not nearly as easy to practice forgiveness ourselves.

I’ve viewed the Christian film, “Amish Grace,” numerous times. This is the story of the ten Amish schoolgirls who were shot in October 2006 while attending their Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania schoolhouse. Five of them were killed. The world was shocked when, almost immediately thereafter, a group of Amish men approached the widow of the man who had killed the girls before taking his own life.

They went to let her know that they forgave her husband and felt no malice toward her or her children. They offered their condolences and any assistance they could provide to her and her two children, recognizing that they, too, had suffered a great loss.

They explained to her that it was not easy for them to forgive but, forgive they must, as

they could not allow themselves to be poisoned with bitterness. They acknowledged that God required them to forgive. The world was shocked because most people could not imagine themselves being able to so quickly forgive.

Forgiveness does not come easy. In fact, in many cases it is downright impossible! Often, even when we know we should forgive and want to do so, we simply cannot let go of the bitterness we feel. Perhaps, for some reason, we think that forgiving will be saying we are okay with what was done. Perhaps, also, it will be letting go of the hurt or pain that we feel and we are not so quick to release it.

It has been said that when we harbor bitterness towards someone, it is a lot like drinking poison and hoping the other person will die as a result. In reality, the other person may not be feeling any pain at all and certainly our bitterness is giving us far more pain than it is to the person who offended us.

Let me repeat, in many cases forgiving someone is downright impossible! We simply cannot do this in our own strength. It takes a supernatural strength and that strength must be supplied to us by God Himself! This, He is willing to do. Consider these verses:

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing

with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. (Colossians 3:12-13)

“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matthew 6:14-15)

Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:31-32)

Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.” (Matthew 18:21-22)

“Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.” (Luke 6:37)

“And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses” . (Mark 11:25)

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13)

And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

Those first several verses tell us to forgive and why and the last two passages tell us how—in the strength of Jesus.

One might think that it becomes much easier to forgive as we become more mature in Christ but I find that the truth is that it is often impossible, even after living the Christian life for more than 44 years, to forgive without God’s strength. As long as we remain here on the earth in these bodies, we will be able to identify with the Apostle Paul who said:

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. (Romans 7:17-19)

How often we must agree with Paul on this. We want to do the right thing and we even determine we will do it but then we find we lack the wherewithal, the power to do it!

Let’s face it. When we refuse to forgive, we are the ones who suffer. It might also be our loved ones, as well, as they can become

contaminated with our bitterness. To say the least, we lose our joy for it is impossible to harbor bitterness and be joyful at the same time. Nobody wins when we fail to forgive.

I have certainly experienced my own battles with this. An exercise that has helped me let go of my bitterness and truly forgive is to write down the names of those I need to forgive, including myself, on a piece of paper and then destroy it, giving it to God in prayer while destroying it.

This is not to say that Satan will not attempt to get us to pick up the offense again and we will need to go through the same thing. He wants us to pick up our burdens and walk away carrying them, even after giving them to God.

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. (1 Peter 5:6-9)

The bottom line in all this is we must forgive for God tells us to. He not only tells us to forgive but gives us the means to do so—His power. He, who never sinned, demonstrated His love to us when He paid

for our sin and offers us forgiveness by simply trusting Him for it.

NOTE: All quoted scripture is from the New King James Version of the Bible, published by Thomas Nelson Publishers (Scripture emphases mine.)

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“Few things can seem more difficult than actually forgiving someone who has been the

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*cause of great pain or
suffering in your life.”*