

THE BLESSING OF RECEIVING AND GIVING FORGIVENESS

Which is easier, to receive forgiveness or to give it? Or, to ask it another way, which is more difficult, to receive forgiveness or to give it?

For some, the answer to these two questions might seem easy and yet, for others, their past proves that neither is easy and both are difficult, if not impossible. For those of us who have learned how to both receive and give forgiveness, we see it as being an issue of light verses darkness. We are so grateful that the veil has been lifted and our blindness is gone!

Sadly, many don't realize how desperately they themselves need forgiveness. This is especially true in their relationship with God. They live day-after-day ignoring their need for a relationship with God and find it easier to simply ignore His existence, rather than accept any responsibility to acknowledge His presence and their need to know Him.

We, whose eyes have been opened both to our need to receive forgiveness and to give it, are truly blessed. We have a peace and joy that transcends the purposelessness of life that most people experience day-after-day. What we have is so great that we wish it for everyone!

Perhaps a passage found in John 10 explains this best. Jesus, who was literally God in the flesh, said:

I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. (John 10:9-10)

That we all desperately need life and would rather have it more abundantly, if we understood what that means, is a fact.

Let's examine the subject of forgiveness from both positions, that of being the receiver and that of being the giver. First that of the receiver.

Why do we need it? The reason is simple. We are sinners, selfish and self absorbed. We offend others, ignoring their needs and rights, thinking primarily of what we want. We turn away from God because, due to our sinful condition, we love darkness over the light. We don't like being told what we can or cannot do. We allow our sin to negatively affect our relationships, even to the point of destroying them. Yes, we all need forgiveness.

Why should we give it? This answer is also simple. Our failure to forgive produces bitterness and bitterness robs us of our joy. To refuse to forgive another is like drinking poison, hoping the other person will die. This bitterness defiles, affecting even our relationships with others as they cannot bear being around us. We should forgive because God tells us to. We should forgive because it is best for us. We should forgive because we have been forgiven.

I look back on June 7, 1970 as the greatest day of my life. I had just turned 22 exactly one month earlier and was facing what I feared would be a disappointing life. I had no vision for the future and very little hope that my life would ever amount to anything worthwhile. Yes, although I acted differently and therefore few, if any knew, I was devoid of any hope and was depressed whenever I thought about the future. I had already considered suicide hundreds of times and had even spent three tours of duty in the Vietnam war with hopes that I might die a hero there and thereby have some purpose.

That morning, while reading a gospel tract, I learned that God loved me and had demonstrated His love when Jesus died on the cross to pay for my sins and provide for me the gift of eternal life. I had given up any hope that, if God did exist, He had any love for me. I learned that the only way I

could receive His gift of eternal life was to believe Him for it. That morning, I did.

The Gospel Changed Everything!

As I write this, that morning was more than 47 years and 4 months ago. I shudder to think what my life would have been like had I not read that gospel tract. I find it impossible to believe that I would still be alive. I believe I would have surely taken my own life within a few months or years. The fact that I've lived as long as I have and have enjoyed a full productive and joy-filled life seems to me to be a miracle!

I think this thing called forgiveness is often overlooked or downplayed. That pamphlet quoted Acts 13:38-39 which says:

Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.

I've since come to believe that this is one of the most powerful and meaningful passages in the entire Bible. It tells us that receiving forgiveness of sins and justification is based on belief in Jesus. (To be justified means *to be declared righteous* by God.) Many religious people think that these things come by turning away from sin, giving up sinful habits, or committing one's life to God and promising to serve Him. Yet, the Bible makes it clear in numerous passages that it is faith in Jesus that saves a person. The following are some of those verses.

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.** For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. **He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.***

(John 3:16-18)

*Most assuredly, I say to you, **he who believes in Me has everlasting life.*** (John 6:47)

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household. (Acts 16:31)

*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and **believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.*** (John 5:24)

*Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. **He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.*** (John 11:25-26)

He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God. (1 John 5:10-13)

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8 & 9)

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:5)

Now, let's examine forgiveness from the other angle—that of being the giver. Undoubtedly, you at times, have found it difficult to forgive others. You've been deeply offended or hurt and wanted to exact revenge. The last thing on your mind was forgiveness.

In talking with others about this, I find that most people have very little experience in practicing

forgiveness. In fact, I've had pastors tell me that they think learning to be a forgiver may be one of our greatest needs. This is true even among Christians in the same church!

I'm presently working on a book I plan to title "The Joy of Forgiveness." I've been motivated to write this book after forgiving the woman who murdered our son by strangling him. Although we had never yet met her, we did this three days after learning of Robby's death. The joy wasn't instant by any means. In fact, it wasn't until we notified her in writing of our forgiveness several months later that we really began experiencing the joy. Initially, all we did was obey God and as a result, avoided the bitterness that accompanies unforgiveness.

This woman, Lindsay Haugen, is in a prison serving a 60-year term wrote back expressing her great sorrow over killing Robby and her deep appreciation for our forgiveness. This began a relationship between us that has now grown to such proportions that we consider her like a daughter and have such a great love for her that our phone calls each week, lasting one to three hours, are among the highlights of our week. We've visited and met with her in person, spending eight hours together, and each of those hours were precious! (You can view video or our meeting by going to youtube.com and typing in my name.

What we often tell others is this. If God could forgive us our many sins, what great thing is it that we've forgiven Lindsay one sin?

In closing, let me encourage you, the reader, to experience the joy of both receiving and giving forgiveness.

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

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

THE BLESSING OF GIVING AND RECEIVING FORGIVENESS

Written by Gene Greeson
1/28/2018

“Forgiveness is a more important topic than most people realize.”