

FORGIVENESS: COST-BENEFIT

Are you a forgiver? Do you only hang with forgivers? Then your life's as smooth as a baby's bum.

"Forgive" means "to stop being angry about or resenting somebody or somebody's behavior; to excuse or pardon somebody for a mistake, a misunderstanding, wrongdoing, or an inappropriateness; to cancel an obligation, such as a debt."

"Forgiveness" is "the tendency to forgive offenses readily and easily." Is forgiveness part of your skill set? If not, do you want to develop it as an automatic response?

My dad was unfaithful to and abused my mom for years. While she may have forgiven him, my mom never forgot...which makes me wonder if she really DID forgive. Or is "forgetting" a separate "art?"

'Til her death at 87 she replayed those hurtful tapes in nearly every lengthy visit. Rehearsing hurts was her default position.

She gets straight A's for as a mom and a godly woman. But I share her inability to let go of the past.

Tonight's Big Question is a two-parter:

1. "Who really needs to ask you for your forgiveness?"
2. "Whose forgiveness do you need to ask for?"

(DISCUSSION)

In his best-seller, THE PURPOSE-DRIVEN LIFE, Rick Warren says "life is meant to be shared." The word is "fellowship" -- a sharing, a friendly association, a companionship where people operate from common values, "experiencing life together."

Warren says experiencing a fulfilling life together requires "unselfish loving, honest sharing, practical serving, sacrificial giving, sympathetic comforting" and all the other relationship counsel found in the New Testament.

But can we really pull this off? Warren charts this path:

"In real fellowship people experience authenticity.

... People wear masks, keep their guard up, and act as if everything is rosy ... It is only as we become open about our lives that we experience real fellowship."

"In real fellowship people experience mutuality.

Mutuality is the art of giving and receiving...depending on each other ... building reciprocal relationships, sharing responsibilities, and helping each other."

"In real fellowship people experience sympathy.

Sympathy is not giving advice or quick, cosmetic help; sympathy is entering in and sharing the pain of others."

"In real fellowship people experience mercy.

Fellowship is a place of grace, where mistakes aren't rubbed in but rubbed out. Fellowship happens when mercy wins over justice.

"We all need mercy, because we all stumble and fall and require help getting back on track. We need to offer mercy to each other and be willing to receive it from each other. God says, *'When people sin, you should forgive and comfort them, so they won't give up in despair (2 Corinthians 2:7).'*

"You can't have fellowship without forgiveness. God warns, *'Never hold grudges, (Colossians 3:13)'* because bitterness and resentment always destroy fellowship. Because we're imperfect, sinful people, we inevitably hurt each other when we're together for a long enough time. Sometimes we hurt each other intentionally, sometimes unintentionally, but either way, it takes massive amounts of mercy and grace to create and maintain fellowship. The Bible says, *'You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others (Colossians 3:13).'*"

Our Forgiver-in-Chief

Nailed to the cross, beaten, speared and jeered, Jesus prayed, *"Father, forgive them because they don't know what they're doing (Luke 23:34)."* Before God could forgive your sins and mine, Jesus had to forgive His killers! He's our Example.

"God's mercy to us is the motivation for showing mercy to others. Remember, **you'll never be asked to forgive someone else more than God has already forgiven you.** Whenever you've been hurt, you have a choice: *'Will I use my energy and emotions for retaliation or for resolution?'*

"Many are reluctant to show mercy because they don't understand the difference between trust and forgiveness. *Forgiveness* is letting go of the *past*. *Trust* has to do with *future* behavior.

"Forgiveness must be *immediate*, whether or not a person asks for it. Trust must be *rebuilt* over time. Trust requires a track record. If someone hurts you repeatedly, you're commanded by God to forgive them instantly, but you're not expected to continue allowing them to hurt you. They must prove they have changed over time. The best place to restore trust is within the supportive context of a small group that offers both encouragement and accountability."

People who hurt others deserve justice. But instead of being self-appointed justice dispensers, we can dish out mercy, grace and forgiveness - because we too deserved God's justice, but He acted first, offering us His unconditional love.

That motivates us to forgive others, then move on.

Before the cross, sacrifices had to be offered to God for sins to be *temporarily* forgiven. *After* the cross where Jesus offered Himself as the perfect, once-for-all Sacrifice, God the Father then justly, permanently, forgave the sins of all mankind.

Before he gave his life to Christ, Paul (then called Saul) led the anti-Jesus jihad across Palestine, arresting, torturing and snuffing out the lives of Jesus' new followers. Then as a new follower of Christ, he took the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles everywhere. How did he cope with guilt and shame, having his past thrown in his face constantly?

He wrote, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith unto this grace in which we now stand (Rom. 5:1-2)."

"You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness (Rom. 6:18)."

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:1-2)."

And "Forgetting what is behind, and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. (Philippians 3:14-15)."

GOD HOLDS **NOTHING** AGAINST YOU! YOU ARE **FORGIVEN!**

Is there someone who you dearly wish would accept your forgiveness? You've said, "I'm sorry, I was wrong, please forgive me"... yet, he/she is holding out, refusing to forgive?

That's how God feels after sending His Son to die in our place as the only perfect Sacrifice for our sin. He credited that sacrificial act to our individual accounts, wiping out *all* our sins forever! He's told us again and again that He's forgiven us, but some still haven't reached out and accepted His free gift of love, grace and mercy.

Question: **What one step can I take with someone, even myself, in the next 24 hours to move toward this biblical model of forgiveness ... and experiencing life together?**

Want more?

Matthew 18:21-35

Colossians 3:1-17

2 Corinthians 2:5-11

Romans 14:1-23

His Deal

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