

Addressing Diversity Promoting Reconciliation

Subtopic: Forgiveness –By Jasmine R. Gordon

What is forgiveness and why does it matter?

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life,” (John 3: 16). Humankind sinned and turned away from God. This caused the relationship man had with God to be broken. In the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sinned by disobeying God they hid themselves from God. The relationship they once had and enjoyed with God was broken. God was **hurt** and as a result He punished Adam and Eve. God told Eve, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you. To Adam God said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, you must not eat of it, “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you... “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground” (Genesis 3: 16-19). But, God in His loving kindness forgave them. “The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them” (Genesis 3: 21). This is the beginning of **hurt**, “heart pain” and **forgiveness**. Adam and Eve knew that they did wrong and they knew that God would not be pleased. As a result, they were disappointed in themselves and ashamed. They hid from God. God in His divine mercy forgave humankind and **reconciled** us back to Himself through the death of His Son Jesus. God’s plan of redemption for mankind is **forgiveness**. God loves us so much He provided a way for us to be forgiven and that way is through Jesus Christ. Jesus confirmed that in no uncertain terms when he said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6). God's plan of salvation was to send Jesus, his only Son, into the world as a sacrifice for our sins. On the cross Jesus said, “Father, **forgive** them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23: 34). That sacrifice was necessary to satisfy God's justice. Moreover, that sacrifice had to be perfect and spotless. Because of our sinful nature, we cannot repair our broken relationship with God on our own. Only Jesus was qualified to do that for us. At the Last Supper, on the night before his crucifixion,

He took a cup of wine and told his apostles, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the **forgiveness** of sins," (Matthew 26:28). When others wrong us or we wrong them, we experience **hurt** and this causes our relationships to be broken. We mend our broken relationships when we **forgive** one another and **reconcile** with one another.

How should we forgive?

There are two types of forgiveness that appear in the Bible: 1) God's pardon of our sins and, 2) our obligation to pardon others. Mankind has a sinful nature. Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, and humans have been sinning against God ever since. As believers, our relationship with God is restored. However, what about our relationship with our fellow human beings? The Bible states that when someone **hurts** us, we are under an obligation to God to forgive that person. Jesus is very clear on this point. "For if you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also **forgive** you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins," (Matthew 6: 14-15). Refusing to forgive is a sin. If we receive forgiveness from God, we must forgive others who **hurt** us. We cannot hold grudges or seek revenge. We are to trust God for justice and forgive the person who offends us. That does not mean we must forget the offense. Forgiveness means releasing the other person, the offender from blame, leaving the event in God's hands, and move on.

Biblical example of forgiveness: (Matthew 18: 21 & 22). "Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?" "Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." Jesus was not giving us a mathematical equation or formula. He meant that we are to **forgive** indefinitely, repeatedly, and as often as necessary which is the way He has forgiven us. And God's continual forgiveness and tolerance of our own failures and shortcomings creates within us a tolerance for the imperfections of others. By the Lord's example, we learn, as Ephesians 4:2 describes, to be "completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another. We cannot simply forgive and then walk away. We have to live with one another, and the thing that we forgave this person for may happen again and again. Then we find ourselves having to forgive over and over again.

This answer by Jesus makes it clear that forgiveness is not easy for us. Also, Jesus' answer makes it clear that forgiveness is not a one-time choice and then we automatically live in a state of forgiveness. His answer suggests that forgiveness may require a lifetime of forgiving and forgiving is important to the Lord. As children of God we must continue forgiving until the matter is settled in our heart. I have personally found that prayer is one of the best ways to break down the wall of un-forgiveness in my heart. When I begin to pray for the person who has wronged me, God gives me new eyes to see and a new heart to care for that person. As I pray, I start to see that person as God sees him/her, and I realize that he or she is precious to the Lord. I also see myself in a new light, just as guilty of sin and failure as the other person. When I ask God for grace to **forgive** those who wrong me I see myself as someone also in need of forgiveness from others and from God. If God did not withhold his forgiveness from me, why should I withhold my forgiveness from another? Forgiveness is letting go of grudges and bitterness. When someone hurts you, you can hold on to anger, resentment and thoughts of revenge. Or, you can embrace **forgiveness** and reconcile to move forward by God's grace. "**The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.**" Mahatma Gandhi

One of the most important issues that we all face in life is the question of forgiveness. As mortals we will never be free of the need of receiving forgiveness from God and from one another. There will also be the need to **forgive** others. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus demonstrated the significance of forgiveness by including in the prayer our request for God's forgiveness and our willingness or pledge to **forgive** others. Jesus taught His disciples how to pray and in praying to ask for forgiveness and to forgive, (Matthew 6: 9-14). This request should be part of our daily prayer. We are required by God to deny ourselves and take up our cross daily and follow Him, (Matthew 16: 24). Therefore, forgiving is a significant practice of our daily Christian walk. Forgiveness is a choice that we make which is grounded in our obedience to God and His command to forgive. The Bible instructs us to forgive as the Lord forgave us. "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be **reconciled** to your brother; then come and offer your gift," (Matthew 5: 23-24). When someone wrongs us it causes **hurt**, therefore, we must go to them and reconcile even without their request or asking for forgiveness. For, when we forgive, not only do we free our offender but we also free ourselves in the process.

Points to remember about forgiveness:

1. Forgiveness is not forgetting.
2. The pain may not be completely gone. One can forgive and still grieve a loss or feel pain from a wound or hurt caused by the wrong done to you.
3. Damage and wounds can take time to repair or heal.
4. Forgiveness does not deny responsibility for the behavior. When you forgive you have simply committed to not hold the other person in debt. "Forgive us our debt as we forgive our debtors," (Matthew 6: 12).
5. You relieve yourself of the burden of the past. You shed the hurt, pain, anger, and loneliness. You can begin to heal.
6. You give the person you forgive, even yourself, the freedom to live in peace and to be able to change for the better.

Forgiveness: An individual exercise

1. Write down with pen and paper all of the things that you have done wrong. It is imperative that you write. Thought processing is not the same as writing.
2. Read the list of things you have written down.
3. Now say, "I did the best that I could with the knowledge that I had at that time. With the help of God's grace by the Holy Spirit, I now forgive myself and go free."
4. Destroy (burn or shred) the list.
5. Repeat the exercise for each person who has hurt you.
6. Go to each person in the spirit of love and kindly let them know that their words or behavior did hurt you but by God's grace you have forgiven them.
7. Now begin anew to live your life without the burden of unforgiving pain which is unnecessary suffering. **"To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you."** Lewis B. Smedes

Individual forgiveness

Forgive yourself for judging yourself. Have the strength and courage to allow yourself to be vulnerable for God's grace is sufficient to keep you. Be kind and loving to yourself. Practice holding a positive vision for yourself. Make choices that support you in moving forward in your life. Choose to forgive yourself and then move forward and let go of your past. Live for today and enjoy the journey of life itself. (Philippians 1: 6). "And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. We will know the work of forgiveness is complete when we experience the freedom that comes as a result. We are the ones who suffer most when we choose not to forgive. When we do forgive, the Lord sets our hearts free from the anger, bitterness, resentment and the hurt that previously imprisoned us.

We **forgive** as a result of obedience to the Lord. Forgiveness calls for humility. It is a choice, and a conscious decision that we make. However, as we do this "forgiving," we discover the command is in place for our own good, and we receive the reward of our forgiveness, freedom. "And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns". When we offend one another knowingly, deliberately, unconsciously or otherwise, it paralyzes us. God has called us to the ministry of **reconciliation**. As a result, we must demonstrate our love for one another within the church practicing Jesus' principles of **forgiveness**. So that when others, "the outside world, the communities" those we serve, see Christ in us they are drawn to come and serve God as Savior. The Word of God states that if He be lifted up He will draw men. As disciples, of Christ, we must **forgive** and **reconcile** as soon as we are aware that something is wrong. Moreover, the Word of God states that, "When He the Spirit of Truth is come He will guide you into all truth." Since the human element is subject to fail and desire to seek revenge, we should first pray that the Holy Spirit directs our thoughts on what to say and gives us the right attitude in accepting our faults as well. Next we should approach the situation before bitterness sets in. Then we should confess to one another and apologize. Next we should repent and turn from those ways. Then release the situation and let it go by God's grace and mercy. Now we are ready

to move forward in peace and with peace of heart and mind. “Forgiveness is a gift you give to yourself. It is a release from the burden of anger and pain. When you choose to forgive, you choose to live in the present and the future instead of the past. It does not mean to forget but it does mean to release and go forward. Forgiveness doesn't happen by chance, we all must choose to forgive.

In conclusion, spending time with God in prayer and reading His Word will have an obvious effect on our lives. We will begin to notice some positive changes taking place in our relationships with others. These changes will not happen overnight, but as we spend more time with God, the results will become evident for we will be more tolerant and forgiving of others. It's impossible to spend time with God and not become more like Jesus and more forgiving. Since we have experienced the forgiveness of God in our lives, His love in our hearts enables us to forgive others. In Luke 11:4, Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us." We are to forgive as the Lord forgave us. We have been forgiven much, so, in turn, we should forgive much. “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you,” (Colossians 3:13). In (Matthew 18:23-35), Jesus told the parable of the unmerciful servant who begged a king to have mercy on him for the debt he owed and the king had pity on him, canceled his debt and forgave him. The same servant who received forgiveness from the king went out and found a fellow servant who owed him money. Although his fellow servant begged for mercy he had him thrown into prison. When the king heard of the incident he called the unforgiving servant in and expressed how disappointed he was. In anger the king had the unforgiving servant turned over to the jailers to be tortured until he should pay back all he owed. **“He who cannot forgive breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass.”** George Herbert

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Note: All Scriptures used in this paper were taken from *The New International Version* of the Holy Bible.

