

Forgiveness

by Sarah Young from Jesus Today & FaithGateway Women Editor Laurie McClure

I am the God of Love and Peace. Let the splendor of this glorious truth sink into the depths of your heart, mind, and spirit. The One who is always with you is the God of Love and Peace! When you feel a need for more Love, come to Me and let Me lavish it upon you.

Whenever you are feeling anxious or afraid, come into My peaceful Presence - and relax in the everlasting arms awaiting you.

I want your character to reflect Me more and more. So endeavor to be loving and peaceful in your relationships with other people. When someone irritates or upsets you, try to see Me in that person. Remember that I created everyone in My own image. The most effective way to love people is to allow My Love to flow through you to them. My Spirit lives inside you, and you can ask Him to love others through you.

To live peacefully, you need to forgive people quickly - including yourself.

Make every effort to live close to Me, the God of Love and Peace.

Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. - 2 Corinthians 13:11

The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. He will drive out your enemy before you, saying, "Destroy him!" - Deuteronomy 33:27

God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. - Genesis 1:27

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You know that thing where you feel completely at peace about an old conflict? You are ok about it now. You've forgiven. Been forgiven. Phew! Maturity and peace at last! It's totally done, right?..

Until you run into that person unexpectedly and your stomach squeezes up, your expression sours, and you maniacally duck behind cars in a parking lot and hide until the person you had no idea you still had venom in your heart for finally leaves? And, all the while you're thinking What in the blue blazes is wrong with me? What am I... 12?

Or, if the situation cannot be avoided and you have to have a polite interaction with this unfortunate old friend and you realize you suddenly feel the urge to bite them - hard? And, all the while you're thinking I could totally do that right now and it would feel so stinkin' awesome! What am I... in preschool?

I had a dream the other night that fully displayed the ugliness in my heart. I dreamt of a circumstance where I was at a social gathering and unexpectedly saw a person who

has consistently been extremely difficult and caused a lot of pain over a lot of years (self-righteously, aggressively and absolutely unrepentantly). This person whom I seriously thought I'd forgiven ages ago, thoroughly, haven't-even-thought-about-it-in-forever kind of forgiven, walked up to me to start a conversation and my response was an emotional volcano eruption. Like a raving lunatic, I thrust both arms straight out, palms flat in the universal sign for Stop Right Where You Are, and said "NO! You need to back up far away from me. Right now."

I woke up and thought,

Houston, we have a problem.

That's not me! For many years, yes, I struggled with being that foolish, emotional lunatic woman reacting wildly out of confusion, shock, grief and anger, fear, insecurity, and the supreme agony of a crumbling, destructive marriage, but I'm not the person I used to be, thank GOD! He is helping me kill the crazy lady (over and over again) and I've made so much progress, but I cannot do it by myself any more than a puny pre-teen could kill a 9 ½ foot giant (1 Samuel 17) without the Lord doing the job through him. I can talk the talk, but walking the walk is like wearing lead boots. I simply am not capable of walking out of crazy-town on my own.

No matter what the relationship or circumstances, it takes the strength of God Almighty to walk in mercy and grace towards people who hurt you "deliberately, willfully, presumptuously, impudently, boastfully, maliciously, frequently, obstinately, with delight, and continually" (Westminster Larger Catechism) and to let go of what they continually, purposefully do while not letting it dig under your skin and poison you.

Remember that scene in Spiderman 3? The ultimate Nice Guy Peter Parker has grown obsessed with revenge and this evil, alien entity attacks him wrapping around his body, encasing him in the black, tarry mystery substance. This parasitic extraterrestrial has changed him into a dark character and amplified his aggression and desire for vengeance, which initially feels good and powerful, but it takes him almost to the brink of dangerous madness. When he sheds the malevolent tar in the bell tower of the church, the black goopy stuff falls on Eddie Brock taking him over and he becomes the villain Venom.

The panic (of deeply broken relationships, the silence, the rejection, the harsh words, the absence of intimacy, the questions, the lack of answers, the hurt) completely changes people - makes them act in ways they normally never would. ~ Lysa TerKeurst

That's it! Bitter, scornful, hateful, mocking, stomach-squeezing, aggressive, putrid unforgiveness is that vile and dangerous! It will take you over and it will take you down!

Unforgiveness can steal your thoughts, your joy, and even your health.

"Not forgiving - nursing a grudge - is so caustic, it raises your blood pressure, depletes your immune function, makes you more depressed and causes enormous

physical stress to the whole body.” ~ Fred Luskin, PhD, health psychologist at Stanford University

So, when dealing with difficult, destructive, or dangerous people or in painful, unfair situations, how do you firmly land in grace territory and also be a person with healthy boundaries, while not allowing your heart to get bound up in the gooey black tar of hidden unforgiveness and resentment?

It is definitely a process. It may feel cyclical in that you might think you've made a lot of headway and suddenly find yourself back at the beginning again. That's ok. That's normal. Hang in there, babe.

Before forgiveness is even possible, you have to acknowledge what happened that caused you pain. Think back, walk through it, let yourself look at the situation from beginning to end. Maybe it was years long and this may take a while to unfold, or you may need a friend or two who knew what happened to help you sort out the details that have gotten smashed together. You may need to talk this out with a counselor who can help you pull out the parts you've not wanted to admit happened especially if there was shame and/or abuse involved. But, spend some time there, acknowledge it, allow yourself to admit what hurt and why.

In the middle of that, please remember you are valuable, loved and cherished. It's a good idea to have someone walk through the messy parts with you - a loving spouse or friend.

Remind yourself:

God loves your weakness because it is perfected in His Strength (2 Corinthians 12:9). There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). We aren't called to forgive, or invited to forgive, or asked to forgive. It isn't a suggestion. We are commanded to forgive because we've been forgiven so much! (Colossians 3:13) It's something that we choose to do in faith and it's required again and again. (Matthew 18:21-22)

I am absolutely Guilty As Charged for being: selfish, self-centered, immature, touchy, controlling, sharp, envious, discontented, ungracious, suspicious, gossip-y and on and on. I've thought really bad things. I've said really bad things. I've done really bad things and yet I've been forgiven. So, I have no reason on earth not to extend that same inconceivable, no holds barred, lavish grace and mercy on those around me. Even those who have done the most harm. Even the remorseless.

It always comes down to Love, doesn't it?

Love changes the whole ballgame.

In a weird sense, what someone else chooses to do to you or me is none of our business. Hang on, you might be thinking WHAT?! Of course, it's my business! but hear me out.

It's God's job to bring justice, not yours or mine. It's God's job to speak to others' hearts, not yours or mine. As a wise preacher once said, you are not Holy Spirit, Jr. We might need to press into relationship with difficult people or through really hard situations purely out of obedience to God, even if that person doesn't see the harm they've done or feels self-righteous about it.

“Avoiding people who've disappointed you is an easy thing; moving towards them and praying for redemption is a Gospel thing.” - Scotty Smith

It doesn't mean that we cannot still pray for God to deal with injustices in His perfect way (which we usually do not understand and sometimes takes a long, long, long time to come about). Depending on the situation, we might need to make wide, tall boundaries, or put safe “bodyguards” in place to handle unpredictable circumstances. We might even need to make a clean cut and stay away from it all together for safety's and sanity's sake. Particularly in cases of repeated abuse, it's important to remember that there's no command to forgive & forget. For a lot of women forgiving & forgetting has been tremendously dangerous.

But, it's my job to be aware of my own sin and deal with that between me and God. Daily root out bitterness. Daily cut out self-righteousness. My heart and my standing with God is my concern. What I choose to do with His unimaginable love and forgiveness is my choice. I can either throw it away with scorn, and sarcasm, and division, and focus on anger and upsetness, injustice and resentment, or rejoice in the goodness and mercy of what He has done for me and choose to leave the rest to Him. That's easily said sitting in my comfy chair with a cup of pomegranate tea, but it is brutally hard in the face of radical betrayal, particularly unapologetic, radical betrayal. Especially the “deliberate, willful, presumptuous, impudent, boasting, malicious, frequent, obstinate, with delight, and continual” kind.

To tell you the truth, I started researching, studying and writing this a while back and then was dealt an awful, ironic and cruel injustice and had to start the battle from scratch again. I'm really glad that my initial response was Jesus, I cannot touch this thing with a ten-foot pole or I will get eaten alive! I choose forgiveness right now! God, this is Your problem, not mine. That helped, but it has been wicked hard. My heart is so easily filled with immature, selfish, petulant, vengeful thoughts, particularly when stung bitterly. It makes me daily cry out Oh, Father, please don't ever leave me as I am. Change my heart!

Forgiveness really is a scandalous decision.

For God to forgive me and forgive you when we still choose to betray Him and His covenant over and over again - it's nonsensical, preposterous. For you to forgive, for me to forgive - it's 100% counter-culture. A rebel yell of Jesus-culture.

It's an act of brazen defiance against my own flesh. Choosing soft-heartedness is choosing to have your heart tenderized with a meat mallet. It's painful. It's bloody. It changes the shape of you. It changes your malleability. Lord, whatever you have to pound out, pound away.

But, it's something we must do out of obedience to God and it is for our benefit. What do we get out of choosing to forgive others? FREEDOM! Freedom from the tarry, malevolent parasite of resentment, anger, bitterness. Freedom to love those around us wholeheartedly. Freedom to dream of and pursue happy reunions and beautiful reconciliations. Freedom to live the abundant life (John 10:10).

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. - Colossians 3:13