

To Forgive and Seek Forgiveness Versus Pride and Hierarchical Roles

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How do your kids see you handle the injustices in your life? How did you handle those altercations when you had wronged one of your kids? Are you repentant? Do you seek their forgiveness? Do you play the parent card saying, “do as I say, not as I do”?

While most of us know how important it is to seek God’s forgiveness, we are often not clear why it is so critical to our emotional, physical, mental and spiritual health to forgive others and ourselves, too. Unforgiveness might be the single greatest underlying issue that I have seen in our clinical practice. And from the accumulated internalized anger and the inability or unwillingness to forgive grows so many issues and disorders that severely compromise the quality of so many lives.

Only as we are willing, in forgiveness, to turn from trying to collect debts from those who caused them in our lives, are we free to explore and embrace more positive alternative solutions that will lead to the restoration of our well-being. But forgiveness must come first. It is the first step towards wellness. Especially as parents, we will establish the precedent regarding how our children will respond to mistreatment—whether it is healthy or not. We lay the foundation for how they will learn to interrelate with others by how we choose to initiate and respond to difficult people. We actually hold the power to ensure our children’s peace and joy in life if we are willing to live out and teach them the fine art of forgiveness.

Just as a heart that is full of anger cannot be full of love, cannot speak love, and cannot be tender (*Ephesians 4:15, 29, 31, 32*), An unforgiving heart cannot experience the emotional and spiritual freedom that God had intended for His children (*James 5:15-16*); and choosing to not forgive, either others or yourself, is living contrary to God’s will (*Matthew 6:14-15; Mark 11:25-26*).

Question: *How does God look at our choice to not forgive?*

You must consider and understand the profound severity of this destructive force, and the negative impact it will undeniably have upon your life. Regarding the unforgiveness toward *others*, it is a sin; because forgiving others is a command from Jesus Christ Himself. What we are called to forgive in other people is typically only a fragment of what God had forgiven in us. By not forgiving others, we are demonstrating that we do not understand the power of God’s forgiveness and grace in our own lives.

Choosing to not forgive others is also choosing an idol or another master over your life. By not forgiving others, you allow the one who hurt you to own a piece of your soul; you actually become emotionally enslaved to the one who offended you. Is it not foolish to be fettered and emotionally shackled by those who caused your pain simply because you will not allow God to control the wounds, circumstances and events in your life that hurt you? Instead, you allow the malefactor to have that control over your life.

Regarding *ourselves*, when we fail to forgive ourselves from our shortcomings, mistakes, and sins that have been repented of and forgiven by God, we are stating that the blood of Jesus Christ is not sufficient enough to cover our exceptionally horrible lives. We need to punish ourselves with guilt, shame, and various forms of self-destruction because the punishment that Christ received on our behalf was inadequate for the uniquely terrible choices we had made in our brokenness. Could we possibly ever make a statement that is more insulting to our Father in heaven?

Both forms of unforgiveness are rooted in pride and self-sufficiency. Although it is difficult to accept, the often-unintended arrogance of insisting on handling your life by your own resources and limited insight and strength is the same attitude and mindset that Satan championed as he stood, and still stands, in defiance against the King of Glory.

Unforgiveness makes a clear and bold statement to the world that you do not trust in God and His sovereignty over your life, and that you choose to do things your way because it is better than His. You also demonstrate that you do not trust in His Word, which promises He will work all things out together for your good, if you love Him, and if you have been called according to His purposes in Jesus Christ. This simply means that you have received God's gift of grace and forgiveness in Jesus Christ, and you are His child.

Furthermore, we cannot be filled with the positives and blessings that God has intended for us until we empty out the negatives. As human beings, we are inadequate psychological containers, and limited in what we can bear; this is a part of how God designed us because we were created to be in a relationship with Him where we perpetually cast all of our cares upon Him.

The human psyche was not intended by God to carry the weights of bitterness, resentment and unforgiveness. It ALWAYS manifests itself in a destructive, negative way as it seeps out of us, tainting our relationships, creating distrust, fear and a hypersensitivity to new affronts. Also, as time goes by, the one who lives in unforgiveness becomes more and more self-absorbed in his pain, and his world continues to shrink smaller and smaller, contained by foreboding walls of trepidation. Again, can you see how all of these suppressed issues skew your perspective when communicating with your children? It is very difficult to remain objective and model appropriate behavior when we are shouldering so much past pain.

Question: *Why must we learn to forgive?*

Because by understanding that as we practice forgiving others, we are better able to understand the price that God paid in forgiving us. Thus, practicing forgiveness helps us to internalize the very essence of God's character and personality, which is love, and it is required for that very reason (*Ephesians 5:1*).

As we learn this process of continually and consistently choosing to trust in God's provision and sovereignty—He who has an abundance of resources for our healing and growth—rather than focusing on those who have caused us pain, we *practice* the habit of the heart called forgiveness. In doing so, we set the precedent for our children that will be a part of our spiritual legacy, which points them to God.

How does this play out in a parent-child relationship? The same way it plays out in your relationship with God. God does not play the hierarchal role with us, rather, as C. S. Lewis said, "*He stoops to conquer*". He has no need to exert His authority because He is God. Similarly, your children know you are the parent too. They cannot usurp your authority as the parent. Yet, when your child attempts to challenge your authority, how you respond to them might be a relinquishing of your power.

These are the best opportunities to model the fruit of the Spirit with your children (*Galatians 6*), including love, patience, kindness and self-control. By doing so, you establish the precedent of how the discussion will go. As you pursue and respond to your child from the heart, you will notice that your focus will be on the relationship with your child, not your position over him. You will feel flexible in your approach because you choose to view the situation or confrontation through grace. Also, you will notice that you will not be so easily offended by your child's inappropriate expression of feelings.

This approach also creates a safe and secure framework for your child to communicate and allow himself to be vulnerable because you are demonstrating your authority as a parent by speaking the truth from a heart of love (*Ephesians 4:15*).

No one is perfect, nor do our children expect us to be. Yet, as long as we prioritize relationships over our rules, and people before our principles, we stand a very good chance of staying grounded and maintaining the proper perspective during our personal interactions. Being a parent is a continual challenge that requires patience and humility. Our children will stretch us as people; but that is okay as long as we stretch and grow together.