

## Forgiveness in the New Year

By: Whitney Stager, M.S.

Yes, everyone is STILL talking about it. All the talk show hosts, pastors, self-help gurus, and even your local family therapist. What are they talking about, you ask? They are talking about forgiveness - true forgiveness. Even Jesus still talks about forgiveness and is patiently waiting for us to have forgiveness in our hearts.

Why is everyone still talking about it? Perhaps because forgiveness seems to be becoming more and more difficult to understand and tougher still to act upon. Forgiveness in America seems to have been somewhat replaced by our view of justice/injustice. In our culture, we lean toward the societal ideals of wanting “justice” for those who have done us wrong, without adding the next step - the Christian ideals of forgiveness. Our society says that people should pay for their wrong doings by serving prison time or community service. Those who have harmed us or wounded us (physically or emotionally) should feel the pain they have caused others and suffer for their actions. Then justice will be served and we can move on. Or can we?

In the short term, this sense of “justice” may make us feel better. In fact, legal justice is oftentimes necessary and appropriate. However, this take on justice leaves out the important element of forgiveness. Without forgiveness, it becomes more difficult for both those harmed and those who caused the harm to move forward in their lives.

Forgiveness is not only for us to give to others, but also to give ourselves. What if the wrongdoer is you? What if it is you who has caused the injustice - real or imagined? Do you wait for your suffering that you “deserve” because of what you have done? Are you your own worst judge?

Forgiveness is not usually a one-time deal. Because of our humanness we cannot “forgive and forget” instantly. Rather it is a process that, like most important tasks, takes time. It is important to be patient as we move through forgiveness and all the emotions that come with it.

If we remain unforgiving, the negative and wide ranging emotions can include anger, bitterness, fear, sadness, vengeance, righteousness, hopelessness, depression, and anxiety. However, once forgiveness is truly given in the mind and heart, many positive emotions can replace the negative ones: peace, hope, calmness, trust in God, happiness and joy.

How can we move from one set of feelings to the other? The path to forgiveness will be different for everyone. There is no “right” way to forgive oneself or another. One step of the journey is allowing oneself to be angry, to want justice (and seek it when appropriate), and to grieve the wrongdoing. Another step is to talk with others who will be supportive and also challenge you to move toward forgiveness. Also important in this

process, if you are the wrongdoer, is to right the wrong if possible, ask those harmed for forgiveness, and ask yourself for forgiveness.

Finally, invite Jesus on your journey to forgiveness. He knows how you feel. Let Him guide you, help you to heal your wounds and infuse you with His love. He has already offered the ultimate forgiveness - for all people. "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...for he makes the sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust..." (Mt 5:44-45).

Yes, Jesus is still patiently waiting for us to have forgiveness in our hearts - for each other and for ourselves. Happy New Year!

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