

Forgiveness Before Amends

STEP 8 - We made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

For years many of us have blamed our parents, relatives or friends for the turmoil in our lives. In Step Eight, we are encouraged to admit our own responsibility in problem situations and relationships and take full responsibility for the damage our actions have caused. As we list the persons we have harmed, we prepare to make amends.

However, when we get begin to make a list of people we've harmed, we remember how they have harmed us as well. We may feel anger and pain. We may try to excuse our own mistakes by blaming those who harmed us. It's difficult to consider making restitution or being enthusiastic about saying "I'm sorry" when we keep seeing a mental picture of how that very person said or did things to us that hurt and disappointed us. Our responses sometimes seem almost fair when we remember our own pain.

Jesus understood that we'd be faced with these kinds of situations where there is a mixture of behaviours and he taught His disciples this: ***"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."*** (Matthew 7:3-5)

Jesus makes very clear that our behaviour is our first responsibility and the actions of others should not be considered until we've dealt with our own issues. It's impossible to see things as they really are until we've cleared our own conscience. We are to make a list of all persons we have harmed.

Jesus also told the story of a servant who owed his master millions of dollars. The master took pity on the man and released him from his debt. Then this man turned around and refused to forgive a fellow servant who owed him just a few dollars. When this was reported to master he had the unkind servant sent to jail until he paid the entire debt. Jesus used this story to highlight how much we've harmed others and been forgiven and how we ought, then, to forgive those who've harmed us. **Jesus said: *This is what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters.***" (Matthew 18:32-35).

How much chaos and pain did we cause people when we were active in our addiction? God knows all of our

thoughts, intentions, actions and reactions. God saw and heard things no one else remembers. Jesus has taken the punishment for the trouble we've caused over the years. How much is that? How does that list compare with the list we are holding against someone else?

When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's judgment. (Romans 5:6,8-9)

When we look at all that God has forgiven us, it makes sense to forgive others. In fact, God knows that this forgiveness is so important that he reminds us that: ***"If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your father will not forgive your sins"*** (Matthew 6:14-15).

How do we forgive someone? We chose to release our desire to punish them, or to get even with them. We release our need to continue to be hurt or angry about what they did. We tell God that we forgive the person and name the specific ways we were hurt. We tell God give the hurt to God and receive healing from Him. We hand over the pain, the sadness and the anger to God. We continue to give it away until our hearts and minds are at peace.

Forgiveness is an ongoing choice we'll need to make. How do we know we're living in forgiveness, particularly with someone who's harmed us in the past?

Jesus said: ***"Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Pray for the happiness of those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you...Do for others as you would like them to do for you...Love your enemies. Do good to them!"*** (From Luke 7)

Our list for making amends will certainly include those who've harmed us. As we forgive them, God will give us great healing and deeper freedom than we've ever know.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Who do I tend to blame for the turmoil in my life?
2. Who do I need to forgive as I focus on my own actions and reactions?
3. Why is it important to offer forgiveness to those who have hurt me before I go out to make amends with those I have hurt?
4. How do I become willing to make amends?