

Giving Up A Grudge

Most of us probably have relationships in which we are holding grudges. Sure, we've hurt them, but they've hurt us, too. We become like children quarreling back and forth: "You hit me first!" "I did not!" Somehow, it just doesn't seem fair to let them off the hook! Now, we're supposed to become willing to make amends to everyone? Even those who have wronged us? How?

The Bible gives us the following advice: *Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do your part to live in peace with everyone, as much as possible. Dear friends, never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God. For it is written, "I will take vengeance; I will repay those who deserve it," says the Lord. Instead, do what the Scriptures say: "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink, and they will be ashamed of what they have done to you." Don't let evil get the best of you, but conquer evil by doing good.*

This is difficult but not impossible. We are not called to create peace, only to be at peace "as much as possible." We are not required to say that others don't deserve punishment, only to turn the job over to God. We don't give up a quarrel because someone else is necessarily right, but for the sake of our recovery and our peace with ourselves and God. We can't change other people but we can ask God for the courage to change ourselves.

For many of us who have been victimized, forgiveness seems unthinkable. We are in pain and forgiveness rips at our sense of justice. We want the offender to pay; to suffer in return for the

suffering they have inflicted. But until we forgive the offender, he/she will continue to hurt us because we are tied to the past and to this person. Forgiveness is the only way to stop the pain.

Hanging on to our bitterness and seeking revenge only sickens the soul. It acts as a cancer that eats us up on the inside and spreads to others, injuring them as well. Someone has said, holding resentment or bitterness against another person is like eating poison and waiting for them to die.

If we've really experienced God's grace, we'll want to pass it on to others. Often the barrier to our letting go of a grudge is an unwillingness to let God heal us and to actually receive healing from God. We forgive as God forgives us. Jesus died for all the wrongs done to us and by us. By His stripes we are healed. Our violence of heart, attitude, or action only creates more hurt. The violence Jesus took for us on the cross heals us as we put our pain and resentment on Him and receive forgiveness and healing in exchange. This may seem all backwards, but God's ways are not our ways. As we turn our will and our lives over to God, we will

learn that His ways do work

THE MEANING OF FORGIVENESS

1. Forgiving is not forgetting.
2. Forgiveness is not seeking revenge. It is a decision not to use their offense against them. It is letting other people off our hook, knowing they are still on God's hook. Vengeance is God's. He will repay.
3. Forgiveness is not a "feeling". It's a choice we make, with God's help.
4. Forgiveness is letting go of resentment. We don't heal in order to forgive; we forgive in order to heal.
5. Forgiveness is something we do for our sake, so we can be free. Forgiveness is mainly an issue of obedience between us and God. God wants us to be free and this is the only way. Forgiving is how you stop the pain.
6. Forgiveness is from the heart. How do we do that? We allow God to bring to the surface the mental agony, emotional pain and feelings of hurt toward those who hurt us. We acknowledge the hurt and the hate in order to forgive from the heart. We ask God to touch our emotional core and to heal us and set us free from all that has wounded us through the incident.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. When is it fairly easy for me to forgive someone?
2. In what kind of circumstances does it seem difficult or even "wrong" to forgive?
3. How have I been forgiven?
4. What does God promise if I "clean up my side of the street" and leave others to Him?
5. How are we to go about living in peace with everyone?