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Christian Perspectives ? choosing to forgive

Have you seen the movie Unbroken? The book is much better (they usually are) but if you don't have time for the book definitely take time to watch the movie. The adventure, action and heroics were captivating but what struck me as I closed the book was Louie's decision to forgive. Louie was a POW during World War II and suffered terribly ? mostly at the hands of one man who seemed bent on destroying Louie. No one would fault him if he had remained angry about what happened to him. Yet he chose to forgive despite enduring injustice, beatings and other inhumane treatment.

Like Louie, we all have the ability to make the choice to forgive ? even when it's tough. The great thing is that it's not something we have to do on our own. God modelled forgiveness for us.

Ephesians 4:32 says: ?Be kind and compassionate, forgive others just like Christ forgave you.?

So what is forgiveness? Well, there are three aspects to forgiveness: 1) Grant free pardon for an offence or debt, 2) Give up all claim on account of it, 3) Cease to feel resentment.

When talking about forgiveness we have to begin with God ? and his forgiveness of us. It's the basis of our forgiving others. Do you understand the depth of God's forgiveness of you? Romans 5:8 ?But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.?

While we were still enemies of God, he chose to forgive us. We didn't ask for it, it was something he freely gave. Do you feel like you have the right to not forgive? God had the right to leave us in our sin, but God did not treat us as we deserve: Psalm 103:8-12 ?The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. 9 He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; 10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.?

Forgiveness is NOT optional. It's essential and absolutely necessary. It's easy to say ?it's ok?, but it's not forgiveness if we don't give up our claim on it. When someone offends or hurts us, how often do we shrug it off but at the same time tuck it away, keeping it available for use as a weapon or leverage if needed later on? We can't use past offences as ammunition.

In Matthew 18 we see just how important forgiveness was to Jesus. Peter came to Jesus and asked him how often he should forgive someone who sinned against him. Peter adds, ?Up to seven times??. Peter probably thought he was being generous! Jesus surprises him by answering, ?I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.? I remember reading that as a child and wondering how I would keep track of the number of times I forgave my brother! No, the point isn't that we count up to 77 but rather that there should be no limit to the number of times we're willing to forgive.

Forgiveness is a decision, it is an act of the will. We can do so because God gives us ?his incomparably great power? (Eph 1:19). If you're waiting for a feeling of forgiveness to come before you forgive, you might be waiting a long time. Humans are emotional beings ? our emotions go up and they go down - we can't rely on them! Choosing not to forgive can have devastating consequences. It can destroy us spiritually and emotionally. So why is forgiveness so important? Resolution and reconciliation are possibly only through forgiveness. Contrary to the old saying, time won't heal all wounds. Letting things fizzle out won't help - the hurt will remain, waiting for the right moment to come to the surface. Secondly, our testimony to the world is validated by our ability to forgive when it doesn't seem to make sense and finally (and most importantly), God is glorified as we live out forgiveness in our community.

Be kind and compassionate, forgive others just like Christ forgave you.

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