

Sometimes Forgiving is Hard

Mortals forgiving other mortals has to be at the top of life's Catch-22 list. How ironic that beings predisposed to weakness and who step on other people's toes...are required to magically produce enough strength of character to forgive others while they have their own toes stomped on.

catch 22: paradox, dilemma, predicament

“Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive...”

C.S. Lewis – Mere Christianity

Not to mention, hardly anyone spells out concrete steps of how to blissfully tame our thoughts regarding a problematic person or burdensome past episode in our lives. Instead, they sometimes preach forgiveness like our soul is equipped with an on/off switch labeled “forgive others.”

I've never found it quite that easy.

Reality is more like how the brother of Jared describes us:

“...for we know that thou art holy and dwellest in the heavens, and that we are unworthy before thee; because of the fall our natures have become evil continually... [and we feel like clobbering people over the head because of it]... (Ether 3:2 – liberally revised)

Forgiving is a Requirement

The predicament is, forgiving others is a hard-line REQUIREMENT if we are to experience a meaningful, precious relationship with God.

“And ye shall also forgive one another your trespasses; for verily I say unto you, he that forgiveth not his neighbor's trespasses when he says that he repents, the same hath brought himself under condemnation.” (Mosiah 26:31)

Forgiving those especially difficult or harmful people certainly does seem like a lot to ask of us. It's even ridiculously UNFAIR considering what we've been through. Yet, forgiveness ends up being our own powerful, liberating grace. Do we have to understand precisely why God requires it of us – as much as we need to know how much we benefit?

Lightness

Forgiving others strengthens hearts, dispels gloom, rejuvenates our well-being, releases pain and anguish...the list goes on. While authentic forgiveness takes intentional effort, reaching for that summit is worth the trouble. Forgiveness is one of the most positive experiences we can pass through – both to forgive and to be forgiven. The sensation can resemble extreme lightness or soaring on wings. I've been there.

Common Misunderstandings

How do we score the gift and peace of forgiving? Perhaps it helps to identify a couple of common misunderstandings about forgiveness. I love how C.S. Lewis explains forgiving tough people in his book – “Mere Christianity.”

“For a good many people imagine that forgiving your enemies means making out that they are really not such bad fellows after all, when it is quite plain that they are...”

“Christianity does not want us to reduce by one atom the hatred we feel for cruelty and treachery. We ought to hate them. But it does want us to hate them in the same way in which we hate things in ourselves, being sorry that the man should have done such things and hoping, if it is in any way possible, that somehow, sometime, somewhere, he can be cured and made human again...to wish that he were not bad, to hope that he may, in this world or another, be cured, in fact, to wish his good. That is what is meant in the Bible by loving him, [sending them on their way] and wishing his good, NOT feeling fond of him nor saying he is nice when he is not.”

Let It Go

Knowing we don't have to excuse people or downplay what they've done to forgive them is a notable boost upward. It helps us to the next step; visualize yourself setting them and their trespasses down at God's feet and leaving them in His hands.

These following verses are short and straightforward, and I especially love the instructions to “let it go” in verse 11:

10 I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men.

11 And ye ought to say in your hearts—let God judge between me and thee, and reward thee according to thy deeds. (D&C 64:10-11)

Forgiveness does not mean you're excusing what they've done or even letting them off the hook. All mean-spiritedness, cruelty, and hurting others have a hook. Instead, you're sending them down the road for the Lord to remedy, which enables your own soul to escape and clear out space for your peace. Furthermore, you hope and trust that God will work it out with them fairly and with mercy in the same way you hope He will work things out with you. That's how we love our neighbors as ourselves.

For me, it's a relief to know I don't have to pretend toxic people are nice if this isn't true. Nor that we're tight friends with those who behave poorly. It means I can be civil and kind on my part in that passing moment with them and not get sucked in – or try to prove anything. I can set healthy boundaries, wish them well, and emotionally send them on. In my bigger moments, I can pray their hearts may have the will to change, and above all, I trust God to handle those matters with them.

May you attain the serenity of peace, your soul would love to feel...