

Forgiving Is Not Forgetting

Dr Lois Dodds



Forgiveness takes faith. Resentment or bitterness creates stress in our bodies. I have felt that often. I can get an instant headache without trying when I get full of stress. They can raise adrenaline and cortisol and keep our blood pressure up. They can put us on edge. Physicians say that arthritis and other diseases may sometimes originate or get worse because we suppress resentment. Resentment is lack of forgiveness.

In Luke 17, when Jesus talks about forgiving our brothers seven times a day, or seventy times seven, he gives us a helpful insight into forgiveness. When he warns the disciples about not falling into a pitfall by lack of forgiveness he focuses on keeping an open relationship. Those who offend are to be confronted for correction and then forgiveness. The disciples' immediate response to Jesus' exhortation is, 'Give us more faith, you've got to be kidding - seven times seven, seventy times seven!'

Jesus' seemingly unrelated answer tells us more about faith, which he calls a grain of mustard seed. It shows an exciting connection between faith and forgiveness. It takes faith to forgive. First of all, our faith reveals to us that others have potential for change and that they may profit from our correction.

Secondly, affirming correction, that is confronting people in a loving and positive way, presupposes that the other person has a desire to change or improve, and that he or she is willing to know our point of view, to gain from our instruction. Forgiving ascribes faith to the other. In the reference to the mustard seed Jesus says that our faith, if strong enough, can even move inanimate objects, such as a fig tree, or even a mountain. How much more then, should faith exercised move the animate, or brother or sister?

The third thing is that faith at work through forgiveness can bring healing. We can heal our relationships, get them back to a harmonious level. Forgiveness becomes a bridge over which renewed love can flow. It spans the gap created by the offence. When we forgive someone we are saying, 'I believe in you, you can grow, I'm helping you back to the right path.' When we fail to forgive we say, 'You'll never change, there is no hope for you, I'm done with you.' This attitude maintains the gap instead of bridging it. And it precludes our stimulating any growth in the offender.

Forgiveness on a human level parallels our relationship with God. It is his faith in our potential which caused him to forgive us our sin. He restores us to our place as his own children when he extends forgiveness in Christ. Day by day we continue to experience restoration and healing as we seek his forgiveness and maintain a loving relationship with him. His constant loving correction and his recurring forgiveness demonstrate his desire to keep us on the right path and to lead us to maturity.

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Often in the Psalms the psalmist wrote about the people sinning before God and then he uses the phrase, 'God sent his Word and healed them.' And in the New Testament we read in 1 John 1:9, 'If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' Don't you want to be clean?

In most descriptions of healing in the gospels Jesus' key statement is, 'Your faith has made you whole.' As we continue to apply our faith, we acknowledge God's purpose for his love and we are healed. He heals us emotionally, psychologically, spiritually and physically.