Forgiveness—A Time For Healing

Ernest Hemingway tells the story of a Spanish father who decides to reconcile with his son who had run away to Madrid after a misunderstanding. Now remorseful, the father takes out a newspaper ad:

Paco,
Meet me at Hotel Montaña noon Tuesday. All is forgiven
Papa

Paco is a common name in Spain, and when the father goes to the square he finds 800 young men named Paco waiting for their father.

“All is forgiven,” and 800 responded. Forgiveness is the first step of heart turning.

What is forgiveness? Forgiveness is bearing the consequences of another’s wrongdoing and letting the wrongdoer go free.

True forgiveness is the beautiful fragrance that the flower sheds on the heel of the one who crushes it.

An abundance of recent research on forgiveness has come out of Stanford University and the University of Wisconsin. According to Witvliet (2001) most forgiveness-related health studies have focused primarily on the adverse cardiovascular effects of one type of unforgiving response: Hostility. Researchers have found that when hostility increases, forgiveness decreases. But when forgiveness increases, hostility and anger decrease.

Forty-five studies on hostility and physical health strongly indicate hostility as a risk factor for heart disease and premature death (Miller, Smith et al, 1996). When we become

light and free to continue with the journey. A great weight was lifted and Brenda was now able to get on with her life. We too can move on in life because we forgive.

“If You, Lord, should mark iniquities… who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You” (Ps. 130:3, 4). Thank You, Lord, for forgiving us for all our sins, blunders, and mistakes. We choose to also forgive others and ourselves. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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By John, Millie and Wesley Youngberg

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angry, our heart beats faster, our ears may ring, the blood pressure goes up, we have knots in our stomach, our blood sugar levels change, etc. And there are even many more possible side effects: chronic pain, lowered function of the immune system, tension, dental and jaw problems. Not only does anger damage our health, but it also affects the love relations we have for family members and others. It is a robber of love. Forgiveness clears the path for love and brings joy back into relationships.

During World War II, Edith Eva Eger, a Jewish teenager, was taken with her mother and sister to Auschwitz Death Camp in Poland. In the admission line the mother was pointed to the right and the daughters to the left. When Edith’s mother did not return, she asked, “Where is my mother?” Another prisoner replied, “See the smoke coming out of the chimney? That is your mother.” Edith never saw her mother again.

“In the concentration camp we were like animals” she recalled. She was told that she would leave as a corpse. By the end of the war many of the prisoners who had held on to life died. Their bodies were piled on each other like stacked wood. On May 3, 1945, an American soldier was passing one of these piles of bodies when he saw a brief flick of the wrist. He realized this emaciated body of a 17-year-old girl was still alive. She was quickly taken for medical attention and nursed back to life. Edith was a survivor. After recovery, she immigrated to US and trained as a psychiatrist. For 30 years she could not tell anyone about Auschwitz.

She recalls, “I was void of feelings…I didn’t feel anything. Part of me was frozen. It blocked intimacy in marriage. I was in chronic anger. After 20 years I was still checking out holding on to anger.” Edith was a captive of the past.

After 40 years Edith was asked to be a keynote speaker at Hitler’s bunker in Germany. While in Europe Edith returned to Auschwitz Death Camp and faced her emotions. “I visited the place I had been. I found the barracks where I was and reminisced.” Her thoughts went back to the choice of going left when her mother went right. “I realized that on May 22, 1944, that I had met an angel of death, Dr. Mandala. He pointed me to the left. I had survived.” At Auschwitz Edith processed her pain and made a choice—to forgive. Now she was at last liberated from her captivity. In her own words, she says,

“I refuse to be a hostage and prisoner of the past.”
“It’s OK to go through anger about our past. It’s not OK to get stuck in anger.”
“We create our own concentration camps.”
“I have a choice of being a victim or a survivor.”
“Go back to the lion’s den. Look the lion in the face and laugh.”
“The concentration camp is in your own mind and the key is in your pocket.”
“The captors are the real prisoners. If I would hate today, I would still be a prisoner.”
“Out of prison comes freedom, out of tragedy come triumph and victory.”

Brenda Hunter tells how after many years of marriage her husband asked for a divorce. She went through all the stages of loss: shock, disbelief, numbness, anger, loneliness, depression, and fear; but as the time lengthened, for her own sanity’s sake, Brenda began her road to recovery. She realized that if she clung to her pain she would be a victim of her husband for life. Her husband had ruined her past, but she would not let him ruin her future. She could make some choices. Brenda realized that Christ had forgiven her sins so she also could forgive her husband for the painful, devastating divorce. God’s healing therapy was at work. Let’s look at the pieces of the puzzle the forgiver begins to put together.

When the forgiveness process takes place, it does not mean that what was done to us was justified or right. We are only releasing that person’s wrong from our condemnation. We no longer blame or accuse them but we let them off—like when charges are dropped in court. We let bygones be bygones. We no long desire to have payback or get even.

We show mercy. I do not condone but forgive and overlook the hurt. I move from emotional captivity to freedom. They are pardoned! When I realize how much Christ has forgiven me, then I begin to have a desire to also forgive those who have wronged me. I forgive.

Now back to our story. Brenda had made up her mind. She picked up the telephone and called long-distance to Paris. Moments later she was on the line with the other woman, the one who had robbed her of her husband. It was not a moment to rehash the past. The past was past. But from a sincere heart Brenda was able to tell the other woman that she forgave her and that she wished her and her husband only the best.

Brenda Hunter says that in our journey through life we are like ships that have gathered barnacles on their sides. From time to time they have to go into dry dock and have these heavy barnacles scraped off. Then they are...