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The Power of Forgiveness

By Elise L. Moore

When it comes to forgiving others, sometimes we rebel. Why should I be the one to forgive the relative who hurt me, or the boss who dismissed my obviously great ideas, or the co-worker who undermined me, or the inconsiderate neighbor? Didn't they commit the wrong? I'll forgive them when they change, or stop hurting me—or ask for forgiveness!

But they aren't the ones stewing about the situation. They aren't hurt or offended in the least. *We're* the ones who want to feel free mentally and emotionally. That's why we should forgive. We don't need to suffer for another person's anger or misunderstanding or selfishness. Ultimately the decision becomes, "Who's in charge of my thoughts and emotions? Somebody else or me?" I don't need to wait for someone else to change before I stop feeling miserable. I can cease feeling resentment at any point.

To forgive, in the Greek, means "to let go." It benefits me to let go of hurt feelings and resentment. To hold on to unintentional or intentional hurts will only impede my own progress. But forgiveness isn't just in the words. It's in the heart. I know a woman who took Jesus' instruction to Peter that he forgive "seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:22) literally. She wrote 490 times on sheets of paper "I forgive so-and-so." But it didn't change her heart. In fact, she felt increased justification for harboring bitterness, since she felt she had obeyed Jesus. It's not the words or obeying the letter of the moral law, but the spirit of Christ that enables us to deeply and permanently forgive.

Jesus gave his own example of the power of forgiveness. On the cross Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). If Jesus had not forgiven Judas, if Jesus had not forgiven Peter, if Jesus had not forgiven his enemies at the cross, would there have been a resurrection? Jesus didn't take on other people's mistakes. His forgiveness neutralized Judas' misunderstanding of his message and the hatred of the people who had him crucified. Likewise, our freedom from being "crucified" by bad memories of another person's hatred or mistake rests on our willingness to

let it go and forgive. Our emotional progress depends upon it. Our spiritual progress depends upon it.

So how does a person really get past resentment? As I prayed for the answer to this question, an old resentment that had eaten at me for a long time came to mind. And I thought, "Well, I need to get rid of this resentment first, before I write about forgiveness." So I just turned to God and asked Him to completely take away any thought of the incident that was behind the resentment—not just the resentment but any thought or memory of the incident.

Something then occurred to me: Was I really *willing* to never think of this again? This incident had returned to my thought to hurt my feelings over and over again for years. It had become an old friend. Was I willing to let go of feeling justifiably hurt at mistreatment? Was I willing to so entirely let it go that it would be as if it had never happened? I checked my heart, and the answer was yes. And so I asked God again, in all sincerity, to help me never think of this incident again. Then I went back to writing.

In less than ten minutes, I honestly couldn't remember what it was that I had prayed to have God remove. It was entirely erased from my thought and has never returned . . . whatever it was. This kind of prayer is also effective when we need to be merciful and forgiving toward ourselves. Sometimes we have made a mistake that is painful to think about, even though we may have corrected the mistake long ago. It's no more valid to condemn ourselves than it is to condemn another person. The eternal Christ comes to save us not only from sin but also from the guilt and shame connected with it. So in all humility and with genuine repentance, we can petition God for our own total forgiveness, and we can feel forgiven.

When you develop a willingness to forgive, you're the one who will be set free and receive the blessing.