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Why Is Forgiveness So Hard?

Why is it so hard to forgive? C.S. Lewis said, “Forgiveness is easy until there is something to forgive.”

Is it possible we have trouble forgiving because we do not want to? No matter the depth of contrition or appeal for forgiveness, because we have been hurt or those we love have been hurt, we don’t want to forgive. Who is the problem here? The one who offended or the one who refuses to forgive? If we do not forgive because we do not want to, it says more about us than the one who is seeking forgiveness.

Is it possible we do not want to forgive because we think forgiveness is a feeling? Because we do not feel it, we do not forgive. We must recognize that forgiveness is a choice. We choose to forgive or not forgive. If we wait until we feel like it, we will never forgive. Even though we may not feel like it, we can still choose to forgive. When we choose to forgive, we will feel better. It is not the other way around.

Is it possible we refuse to forgive because we are not done wallowing in the grudge yet? When we have been hurt, we want others to know we are hurt. So, we take that hurt and let it fester into a grudge and until the one who offended us has pain. We want them to suffer and hurt like we have suffered and hurt. The grudge turns into spite which turns into hate. “You hurt me, and I will not forgive you until my pound of flesh has been paid. You will pay dearly!”

Is it possible we refuse to forgive because we are not ready? We don’t want to; we want to harbor the grudge and until we are good and ready, we will not move. The stubborn will that caused the hurt is now the stubborn will that inflicts the hurt. But the one hurt is not the one we refuse to forgive. The one hurt is us. We think we are making them wait, but we are just hurting ourselves.

Here is the big takeaway: We don’t have the option to forgive or not to forgive. The Lord said if we forgive others, He will forgive us. But if we refuse to forgive others, He will not forgive us. Extending forgiveness is not optional! Has there been hurt? Yes. But none of that matters. Either we choose to forgive and are therefore forgiven, or we choose not to forgive and will not be forgiven.

“Yeah, but you do not understand. They did not say it the way I wanted them to or do it in the way I think they should have.” Surely, we do not mean that! Surely, we have not thought that through! Is that the kind of justice we want? Oh, no, when it is me it is different. I really mean it. Wait! Now we are saying the person asking for forgiveness really does not mean it because they do not say the way we think they should or do it in the way we think it should be done? Hmmm? I think I see a log in one’s eye who is trying to remove the speck in his brother’s eye.

It is really very simple, yet hard to do. We either choose to forgive or we choose not to, in which case, if we refuse to forgive, take it up with the Lord, not the one who has offended.

—By Richie Jenkins