

CHAPTER TWENTY

Learning How to Forgive

Changing the Effects of the Past on the Present and the Future

- 1 - When we make choices that are out of touch with reality, we set ourselves up for suffering brutal collisions with reality.
- 2 - What is reality? For starters, reality is that I am not God! If I try to take responsibility for what is God's responsibility, I will damage myself and others.
- 3 - I am responsible for my own decisions. I am not responsible for God's decisions, and I am not responsible for other people's decisions.
- 4 - What is reality? Reality is that God is Judge. He has not given me responsibility to judge. Jesus said, "Judge not, that you be not judged." (Matthew 7:1)
- 5 - Reality is that I am a glorious being, created in the image of a magnificent God. My Father's love for me has no limits. Nothing can alter it.
- 6 - Reality is also that I am a fallen being. I have been severely damaged as a result of my own wrong decisions, and the wrongness all around me.
- 7 - As Judge, God has made a Way through whom I can be rescued from the guilt, dysfunctions and lostness caused by my wrong choices. This Way is Jesus.
- 8 - God extends to me his offer of forgiveness. He has the authority to do this. I desperately need to be forgiven, although I could never earn forgiveness.
- 9 - I must decide whether or not to accept God's offer. God has freedom to offer me forgiveness; I have freedom to decide how I'm going to respond.
- 10 - God's forgiveness comes to me through Jesus. He is the only Way. I tell him the truth about my sin. In prayer I bring my sin to him on the cross.
- 11 - I rely on Christ's cross to remove my guilt and all other effects of my sin. He bore my sin, my death. In exchange he now offers me his life. (Romans 6:23)
- 12 - Experiencing God's forgiveness begins to awaken in me a heart to forgive my enemy. I am growing in Christlikeness—becoming the kind of person who forgives.

13 - How can I become the kind of person who chooses to forgive? This doesn't just happen. It takes time and work. I have to learn and mature in the process.

14 - I learn this from Jesus in discipleship to him. Here are eight things I learn from him that inform and develop my capacity to forgive my enemy:

15 - **Forgiveness never denies or minimizes what is true.** It does not deny wrong; it is a choice in responding to wrong. Forgiveness opens the door to healing.

16 - If I have cancer, healing requires 1) that someone tell me the truth, and 2) that I respond with appropriate actions. Denying what is true can lead to death.

17 - **Forgiveness means I choose to leave "pay-back" to God.** Whether to retaliate, how much to retaliate, when to retaliate—these are God's decisions.

18 - If I were to make these decisions about pay-back, I might well decide unjustly, even vindictively. Do I possess the required objectivity, insight, wisdom?

19 - **Forgiveness means choosing not to assume the role of a victim.** As Jesus' follower, I am never a victim. Why? Because I have a heavenly Father!

20 - Jesus teaches me to trust my Father's wisdom and goodness even when I don't understand. Choosing to do so, I find I grow toward emotional adulthood.

21 - My heavenly Father is always with me, is all-powerful, knows everything, is fully just, loves me passionately and works all things for my good. (Romans 8:28)

22 - Seeing myself as a victim traps me in immaturity. An emotionally mature adult has the required wisdom to respond to all of life in productive, redemptive ways.

23 - "I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living! Wait for the LORD." (Psalm 27:13, 14a)

24 - **Forgiveness cultivates God's healing in me and through me.** It is to my great benefit. Bitterness can harm me more than anything my enemy has done.

25 - **Forgiveness is the best option for responding to past pain.** I cannot change the past, but I can change the effects of the past on the present and future.

26 - **Forgiveness opens me to deeper insight.** It brings my thoughts, emotions and soul to peace and clarity. Forgiveness opens the way to wisdom.

27 - Do I share any responsibility in the wrong that was done? What role might my own attitudes, words or actions have played? Am I seeing the past accurately?

28 - Wounded areas within may cause us to misinterpret the words or actions of another. Did I feel offense where no offense was intended?

29 - Pain in a current relationship may be related to unhealed pain in a past relationship. This is known as transference. Mature love is not easily offended.

30 - Often deep relational hurt between two people indicates they were once very close. Trust has been broken. Rebuilding it will take patience, kindness, mercy.

31 - Putting aside anger and pay-back opens the way for relational healing with my enemy. Nobody wants to be around someone who is trying to punish them.

32 - As I am healed by living in God's Presence, I become aware that I too need to be forgiven. My own need for mercy encourages me to extend mercy to another.

33 - Jesus said if I am unwilling to forgive those who have wronged me my Father will not forgive me. (Matthew 6:14-15) Strong words! Powerful motivation!

34 - **Forgiveness opens the way for reconciliation** in marriages, families, friendships, churches. Christ is making all things new. (Revelation 21:5)

35 - But I am only responsible for my own choices; I cannot demand something from another. If only one party is ready to forgive, reconciliation may have to wait.

36 - **Forgiveness forms Christlikeness in me.** I was created to be like him. In God's Presence is fullness of joy. (Psalm 16:11)