

Forgiveness

Readings

“Forgiveness is not always easy. At times, it feels more painful than the wound we suffered, to forgive the one that inflicted it. And yet, there is no peace without forgiveness.”

- Marianne Williamson

“The betrayal of my husband was not and will never be okay. If there is a word to better describe the process of putting the past in the past without the underlying approval, I don’t know what it is. I don’t like the word forgive anymore. I believe that there are situations and people that can’t be forgiven. When I discovered that quite a large part of my life was a lie, my understanding of the way the world works was overturned. What does forgiveness mean? I don’t know.”

-Author Unknown (excerpt from “Forgiveness” on Tapestry by Mary Hynes, CBC Radio, April 29, 2012 episode)

“Sincere forgiveness isn’t colored with expectations that the other person apologize or change. Don’t worry whether or not they finally understand you. Love them and release them. Life feeds back truth to people in its own way and time.”

-Sara Paddison

“What if I forgave myself? I thought. What if I forgave myself even though I’d done something I shouldn’t have? What if I was a liar and a cheat and there was no excuse for what I’d done other than because it was what I wanted and needed to do? What if I was sorry, but if I could go back in time I wouldn’t do anything differently than I had done? What if heroin taught me something? What if yes was the right answer instead of no? What if what made me do all those things everyone thought I shouldn’t have done was what also had got me here?”

-Cheryl Strayed

Consider This

Forgiving is letting go of the right to be angry in service of health and wholeness. But it is not easy. Indeed, it is the most difficult emotional and spiritual move human beings learn to make.

Since forgiveness involves our emotional life, we are not in complete control of the process. We cannot force ourselves to forgive, no matter how strongly we believe that we should. All we can do is lean ourselves into being willing to forgive, and our forgiveness -the fading of our anger-will come in its own time.

Sometimes we are so angry and hurt that we can only hope or pray for the desire to be willing to forgive. But even that means we are on the path of forgiveness, and that’s a step toward the health and healing we need in our lives.

In contrast to pardon, forgiveness begins by acknowledging the hurt, and only then explores the possibility of giving up the anger and continuing the relationship in spite of the offense. Forgiveness does not say, “That didn’t matter.” Forgiveness says, “That really hurt, and it really harmed our relationship, but I don’t want to be angry about it anymore.”

Sometimes we think we've forgiven someone, but find ourselves continuing to bring up the hurt over and over again. That's a big clue that we have not actually forgiven or have not found a way to be safe in the relationship. We have more work to do.

The first task of forgiveness is to honor the fact that we have been hurt; and not try to sweep it under the rug. Our next task is to hear or imagine the other person's side, hold-ing our hearts as open as we possibly can to the other person's reality and motivations. Next, we must step out of our self-righteousness and remember that we are not perfect ourselves and come to terms with the ways we might have contributed to the problem.

The work of forgiveness is the work of healing, which restores us when we have been hurt and allows us to continue our lives, free of the corrosive effects of anger and resentment.

-Adapted from Heart to Heart by Christine Robinson & Alicia Hawkins

Questions

- What does forgiveness mean to you?
- How easy or difficult is it for you to forgive yourself? Others?
- What about receiving forgiveness? Has there been a time where you received forgiveness unexpectedly, or felt the sting of withheld forgiveness?
- Should forgiveness always be a goal? Why or why not? Can there be a sense of peace and “moving on” without forgiveness?

Activities

Meditate on Forgiveness: Below are several possible translations by biblical scholar Neil Douglas Klotz in his book Prayers of the Cosmos. If one of these phrases speaks to you, use it as a prayer or a mantra. Do this several times during the week and let it work on you.

- *Loose the cords of mistakes binding us, as we release the strands we hold of others' guilt.*

- *Forgive our hidden past, the secret shames, as we consistently forgive what others hide.*

- *Untangle the knots within so that we can mend our hearts' simple ties to others.*

Write a Letter: If there is someone in your life whom you are willing to forgive, but who is no longer available to you because of death or distance, write the person a letter. Tell the person about what happened, how it affected you, and why you want to forgive him or her. You can keep the letter or make a ceremony of burning it.

Talk It Out: This gathering might bring to mind truly serious hurts that have not yet healed or even been acknowledged. If that's the case for you, this could be a fruitful topic to take to a counselor or spiritual advisor. Even one session of talking things out with a professional can often be very helpful.