

## FORGIVENESS

Last month I wrote about saying you are sorry and what that apology might sound like to the recipient. Once said, the recipient is in a position to accept that apology and forgive or not. When we are the person harmed, as nearly everyone has been, we feel wounded. When someone you care about hurts you, it is hard not to react with anger; think about revenge; or remain bitter.

“Forgiveness”, according to Katherine Piderman, Chaplain at the Mayo Clinic, “is a decision to let go of resentments and thoughts of revenge.” Forgiveness is necessary to achieve physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. “Forgiveness is for you and not for anyone else”, states Frederic Luskin, PhD, director of the Stanford Forgiveness Projects. Because it is for you, forgiveness can happen even when the person who hurt us isn’t sorry. However, in order for reconciliation to take place, both a full apology (with acknowledgement of responsibility, regret and restitution) and forgiveness must occur. When reconciliation is not possible or if it fails, forgiveness can still happen.

Why would someone forgive another who is not sorry for the harm they caused? Studies have shown that carrying around a grudge or bitterness can do additional damage. It may cause physical and emotional harm by increasing stress and anxiety; raising blood pressure; increasing the risk for depression and substance abuse. Because the people most likely to hurt us are close family and friends – people we trust – we feel betrayed, rejected or insulted. These feelings are a difficult hurdle to surmount because if not dealt with right away, our hurt can grow bigger and become more powerful. (Katherine Piderman) Our sense of injustice and anger may take over and prevent us from enjoying life.

Forgiveness is a process and takes time and commitment. Forgiveness does not mean absolving someone from the responsibility for what they have done or forgetting the hurtful event. But it does mean trying to find peace within you. Often our anger and bitterness cause more distress than the initial hurt and the longer we hold on to it, the harder it is to move toward your positive goals.

Forgiveness is universally acknowledged as starting the healing process. Dag Hammarskjold wrote, "Forgiveness is the answer to the child's dream of a miracle by which what is broken is made whole again, what is soiled is again made clean."

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