

Forgive

How in this world or the next, can we forgive anything? I mean, really. Does anyone really know what it means? I'm getting a little exasperated with the number of times I hear the words go around the room with the old 'how-to' mantra of 'just let it go'. They also talk about how, when you don't forgive, you are only hurting yourself, and that the person you can't forgive is not even bothered by your agony, (and I wonder how they imagine that this helps anyone). They teach you things to say and think that gives you a recipe for forgiveness. They sound pretty, but lack substance. For me at least, there is something missing from all of the talk about forgiveness that is never addressed, at least not in the years that I have been alive, or in my hearing. I've been to a lot of church meetings, a lot of self-help classes, read a lot of books, seen a lot of life and people, and I have never heard the real thing, you might say. In other words, I have never come across someone who talks about finding the knowledge, hence the real power, to forgive.

Now perhaps you will say: What's so special about what you can tell me that the rest of the world for centuries has been missing? Well, I'll admit, it does sound a little cocky. However, I believe the proof is in the eating of the pudding. In other words, if it works, great, and if not, you are only out the few minutes of time it took you to read this article and learn what I have to say.

So, a little bit about me. I am a small town girl who grew up in the Midwestern US with eleven, yes **ELEVEN** siblings. Each sibling, it seemed, wished to give their own special twist to the words 'sibling rivalry'. As a family, we were occasionally happy. As a child, I lived in hiding. I only came out when I had to, and usually, I regretted it. I grew up next to the bar that was owned by my parents, both of whom worked in the bar. A lot of stuff later, here I am, a mother of (you guessed it) twelve children, just like my mother. Life did not just 'happen' to me, but I can tell you, there has been a lot that has happened that I have needed to forgive.

Here are those words again: **Need to Forgive**. We all use them. Now I'm going to talk a little bit about some things you may not know about it. Things that I think are vital to making forgiveness not only happen, but happen repeatedly and happily and permanently. This is not psycho-therapy or self-help. This is just knowledge that YOU can use however you wish.

First, I'm a searcher. I like to know where things come from. So, I looked up this word, forgive. In my study of scripture, which is where this concept comes from originally, I learned that the first time a word occurs in the Bible, is the context by which a word is understood from then on. It gives a simple template by which to begin to understand the scriptures first, and life second. In the scriptures, the word, forgive, occurs first in Genesis 50:17. Joseph is asked by his brothers to forgive them for selling him, (wanting to kill him), into slavery. Boy, do I relate to Joseph here! So, when he 'frankly forgives' them, I had to ask myself: How did he do that? How did he do that completely counter-intuitive, impossible thing?! The more I thought about it, the more absurd it sounded.

Going one layer deeper, we look at the meaning of the word in Hebrew. The word happens to be (only phonetically, though) nasa. Hebraic-ally speaking, it has many possible meanings, but on a simple spiritual level, it represents faithfulness to and through the Spirit of God. In daily usage, the word means to lift, support, bear, carry, assist, accept or forgive.

Leaving this for a moment, go with me to Esther 4. Here, the queen is hesitant to enter the chambers of the King uninvited because the penalty for doing so might be death,... unless the king raises his golden scepter to her and lifts her up with it. Without the King's approval, Esther is dead. With it, she might live.

Back to 'nasa': to lift, support, bear, etc. Do you see the image that appears now, when we hear the words of the Lord's prayer: "...forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors..."? Jesus said that he was 'lifted up' upon the cross that he might 'draw all men unto him'. Jesus lifts us, and we all are lifted to him, through his lifting up. The paramount gift of this atonement is 'forgiveness' for all mankind

who believe on His Name. So where does that put ME? How do I lift up anyone and how am I lifted?

Again, Jesus addresses this problem in the parable of the unjust servant. Briefly, the servant owed the King a very large sum but could not pay, so he asked that extra time be granted him to pay the debt. The King had compassion and forgave the debt. Then that same servant went out and found a man who owed him a relatively small amount and instead of forgiving the debt upon the man's pleading for mercy and (as he seems to have forgotten his own drama), had the man cast into prison. Then the King, hearing that the servant had done this thing, immediately delivered him over to the 'tormentors'. (Matt. 18: 21-35)

We all have debt. We all have done that which we wish we had not. We all have gone against our conscience. Eternal law demands payment. Now, before you start railing on me about religion and nit-picky differences of belief, think for a moment about that concept of law. Do we not all live by law? Are we not all subject to the laws of the universe? Do we not all require air, water, and food? Are we not all bound by gravity, inertia and entropy? These are not accidental, arbitrary pieces of fate! There are laws by which all things are governed. But, if we are capable of seeing laws that we are subject to, just imagine that perhaps, just perhaps, God, in his infinite wisdom actually knows about laws that are not so visible, not so tangible as breathing, gravity, or entropy.

Justice is the most basic law upon which the universe, (and that includes us) is built. In my searching and discovering of life, I found within myself this law called 'justice' that resides in every cell of my body, and every particle of my soul. I saw it thousands of times in my children. I have witnessed it countless times in myself and the people around me. We are creatures of JUSTICE. From the time we are only days old until we approach the grave, we demand, call for, recognize and lean on justice. It holds up everything in our lives from traffic laws to human relationships, from the tiniest microorganism to the largest animal. Justice powers everything. If a man kills another man, especially if that man is your father, you will rise up and demand justice. If your neighbor steals your lawn mower, you will demand justice. If a bully beats up a smaller child on the playground, we want justice. It is everywhere and in every thing. There is not any situation with anyone or anything in your life that does not call for justice. People may have no religion whatever and still they will demand justice for them and theirs.

We are just beings. Children are born with this innate sense of justice. No one has to teach them to be incensed when the thing they wanted is taken from them. All they have to do is want it, and they are on the path of justice. YOU cannot get rid of justice just because you say to someone: "That's OK, I forgive you." No indeed. If you thought so, you were mistaken. Justice is there. Justice is real. Justice is powerful. Justice will get his due. There are NO two ways around that. This, I believe is the place where my life met the impossible task of forgiveness. My mind was unable, somehow, to wrap itself around the concept of forgiveness, in the face of justice. I just couldn't do it. And neither can you. This is the big thing that everyone ignores about forgiveness. You CANNOT get rid of justice for anyone. Forgiveness does not do it. Not your forgiveness anyway. But more on that in a little bit.

No. Forgiveness has no power over justice. If a man kills your child and you say, "I forgive you." Does that mean that he does not go to jail? Does that mean that he does not take the consequence of the pain he has caused? Does it at all mean that somehow it did not happen? No. No. No. Back to 'nasa'. The first meaning of that word is to lift. Lift. Nothing about pretending that nothing happened. Nothing about smiling and saying, "Well, OK, it doesn't matter anymore." It just says lift.

I'm seeing something here that no one else has talked about that I know of. If they have, I apologize to them. But if not, then I hope that this may help someone else who has struggled with this concept. You see, I CAN lift someone. That I can do. I can imagine that I am the King, sitting on my throne, and someone has come to me begging for mercy. I can lift them. I can see myself doing that act. I can imagine that I am Joseph and that my brothers are before me prostrate on the floor and I choose to lift them up. It looks very possible. Then, I can also see myself, after lifting this soul who

asked for mercy, turning around to see the Great King standing high in the air. I can imagine that my trespasses against justice have been as great or greater than the man whom I have lifted. I can imagine that he will say that because I was willing to lift the man behind me, (in spite of how bad I think he might be) that he should not die because of his trespass, that then, the Great King will find mercy for me and lift ME up that I shall not die.

Here again, though, how can HE, meaning the Great King, even do such a thing. How can he deny justice? How can HE get rid of it? How indeed. God cannot deny justice. He does not deny it. That is the beauty of it. He loves us so much that although he asks us to 'forgive' all who trespass, he does not ask us to deny justice. Justice will be served. Without this knowledge, how can we, as just beings, even think of forgiveness? It's no wonder that people see it as difficult or impossible. They feel that they would have to deny themselves and justice and right, in order to forgive another. And what makes us think that forgiveness is possible for us? Justice IS justice. It just is. It is extremely impartial. We break the laws, we pay.

At this point, we must delve into some deeper doctrine. God, being merciful and just, knew that we could not and would not live our lives without breaking law. The punishment, according to God, is death, after an unspecified amount of time. This is Justice. But Christ, the Son of God, is the one being upon whom justice had no power because he brake no laws, and thus has power to grant forgiveness to all who repent and believe on his Name and love and serve him to the end, and this according to the scriptures. But, the most important part is that he PAID for all the injustice. The eternal payment was his to give and he gave it willingly and nobly, knowing that most would not accept it in their behalf. But it WAS paid. His sufferings and death paid for our sins and the sins of all who believe in him and follow him. This IS the doctrine of forgiveness. Without it, you are simply in denial. With it, the possibilities are endless. Now, whether or not you choose to believe this is up to you. If there is such a thing as justice, then we, none of us, stands a chance, unless someone intercedes for us. The scriptures teach that Christ has done such a thing, for which I am grateful. It is this belief that gives me the power to go forward from pain to relief, to forgive in the face of terrible trespasses.

Christ, because he paid the full price, has the right to grant the conditions upon which that price will be granted and paid in our behalf. He has granted each of us the chance to repent and change. But, in order to forgive my 'brother his trespasses', I must believe that justice is still alive and well, that no one cheats justice, that all debts will be paid, all wrongs will be righted, and every injustice will be handled fairly, correctly and honestly. Thus, I do not, by myself, bring about the justice or punishment or absolution of sin of any offender by forgiving him. But I do have a very important function to carry out. That function is one of a witness.

Witnesses are those who saw or experienced things. We generally speak of them when talking of trials. Every cell in your body is a witness to everything you have been through in your life, just or unjust, as well as the memory of the ancestors whose DNA you have inherited. So, to even THINK about forgiving someone who has wronged you, goes against everything you are, everything you know and everything you feel. It screams at you until you want to run from the room of life in agony. "Forgive? Forget? I might just as well deny my own existence as that!" That is what we are being asked to do by those without knowledge of the payment of justice. Just forget it. Just let it go. Just forgive. It's like asking someone to Just Die! We, eternal beings that we are, cannot let go of injustice, any more that we can let go of the universe. It just is.

Christ, however, offers something else. His plan is different from the moral teachers one hears around. He is God. All justice is within his scope. He offers us a way to lift up our brother without denying justice or losing our sanity. He merely says: "Give the trespass and your brother to me, and I will do justice. I have all power, and all justice and all mercy. Trust ME." For me, it goes back to being a witness. Because I believe his words, I can speak to God in prayer, witnessing to him all of the injustice I have seen and experienced in my life. I can tell him and he will, like a good and fair judge, deal with the perpetrators with justice. As a mother, I learned this simple lesson with my children.

Often, when they had injured one another, I would say to them: "Tell me what happened." I would listen, console, counsel, and heal as needed. Then, with the one present who had done the injury, I would help them both to lift each other up, the injurer helping and healing his brother, the injured feeling vindicated by loving words of apology and invariably, the children were able to forgive one another and smile and move forward in their lives. If a mother or father is not there to perform this function, the child will harbor those pains, ills and injustices for the rest of his life, suffering the attendant heartache until death overtakes him. However, healing and hope are the results when parents do listen and judge righteously.

So often, we grow up in homes where there has been neither justice nor love, mercy nor forgiveness. We find families broken, torn and in pieces all over the world. We are not orphans on an accidental planet. God, our Father has put us here. He is just, fair and honest. He sent his Son, Jesus Christ to be this necessary mediator so that forgiveness might be possible. In my life, there has been only one thing strong enough to overcome the powerful feelings of justice that well up within me about my past. That one thing is the fact that Christ says that he will repay. He said: "Vengeance is mine and I WILL REPAY!" (emphasis mine) He will give to every man his due. If you do not believe that, then there is no way you can deny your entire being and forgive anyone, much less everyone. You can deny, pretend you do not remember, or ignore justice, but permanent relief and lasting forgiveness that is real and not imagined can only be achieved through Christ.

Joseph, sold into Egypt teaches us a few things about this. First, he didn't just forgive his brothers. First, he tested them, to see if they had changed. Also, he wept over the whole thing. He was very upset. He was also worried that they hadn't changed and that they would do it all again, given the chance. Again, he waited for the right opportunity to reveal himself. In other words, he wasn't altogether too sure about his brothers still. Then, when they bowed to him, and asked forgiveness, (basically, asking for their lives, since they knew that justice would demand payment for what they had done and their lives were forfeit) Joseph then tells them that he realized that what had happened to him, (their evil deeds) had happened for a good reason, and that because of it, Joseph had been able to save everyone. This is important because it helps Joseph to truly say, with his heart, that he did forgive. But, if not for God, showing him the 'mercy' of the situation, and knowing that God would repay, I don't think that even Joseph could have forgiven his brothers. I think he would merely have had them killed, in righteous indignation over their acts of betrayal. God IS the key. Without this, we are totally lost.

In the beginning, we talked about the meaning of the word, nasa : faithfulness to and through the Spirit of God. We cannot forgive another human being without the Spirit of God. It is the means by which this miracle is done. Every time forgiveness has been achieved by me, it has been by this miracle, and NO OTHER WAY. We do not have the power. God alone, because of his atonement, has made this possible. He said it, and we can believe it and find peace or we can deny it and remain in misery.

In addition to the difficulty of forgiving one another in the face of the powerful feelings of justice which well up within our souls whenever we have been wronged, is the powerful temptation and even trap, which tempts us to sin because someone has sinned against us. When we become angry, bitter, resentful, frustrated, fearful, or petulant because someone has hurt us, then we have sinned because they have sinned and we will be subject to the justice of God as much or more than they will. Our first job then, even BEFORE forgiving our brethren their trespasses, is to REPENT of OUR sins, especially if we have sinned BECAUSE of the sin of another. If you do not repent first, then it becomes impossible to forgive anyone. Once you have repented, then your eyes are opened and you can see the way to forgive, through the Atonement of Jesus and your wholehearted belief in his infinite justice AND mercy. Know absolutely, that mercy is ONLY applied to those who fully REPENT and keep God's commandments. If your neighbor who has trespassed against you HAS fully repented and is keeping the commandments and YOU are still in a state of unrepentant anger because of the

injustice, then YOU will be condemned, while your neighbor receives the healing mercy of Christ.

Belief is not all that easy either. But, honestly, it is the only way. If you do not believe in Christ, then justice is full, complete, constant and never-ending all the time for you. Not only that, but you would have to acknowledge that you yourself require justice to be done to you, for your trespasses against natural, eternal, and universal laws. To fail to believe Christ and his power to enable us to forgive is to deny ourselves the sweetest peace and greatest blessing that can be had in this life. And yet, how many do just that. God bless them and lift them up, as Christ has lifted me, and as I have in turn lifted my fellow beings.

In the Name of Christ. AMEN