

Relationships

Healing the hurt - Forgiveness

Modern Apologies

- Kanye West
Was less than contrite after bombing the MTV awards to say that Beyonce should have won over Taylor Swift. "I'm sooooo sorry to Taylor Swift and her fans and her mom Andrea ... I'm sorry to my fans if I let you guys down!!!! I'm sorry to my friends at MTV. I will apologise to Taylor tomorrow. Welcome to the real world!!!! Everybody wanna booooo me but I'm a fan of real pop culture!!!"

Not a convincing apology.

- Benedict Cumberbatch
After referring to black actors as "coloured", few could doubt his remorse. "I'm devastated to have caused offence by using this outmoded terminology. I offer my sincere apologies. I make no excuse for being an idiot and know the damage done."

A much better apology. Owning the problem, recognising the damage, no excuses.

Saying sorry is powerful – but difficult. Generally speaking we are not very good at – as though it diminishes our worth or may damage our self-esteem.

If someone does say sorry there is another hurdle – to offer forgiveness.

But there are times when you never get an apology but forgiveness is still needed. Because forgiveness is about you and the state of your soul – not about anyone else.

Let's think about the power of forgiveness to heal relationships.

Week 1 – find good friends – seek good character

Week 2 – false beliefs foil friendships – the truth will set you free

Week 3 – healing the hurts – forgiveness

Matthew 18:21-35

21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?'

22 Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.'

23 Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold

was brought to him. 25 Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

26 'At this the servant fell on his knees before him. "Be patient with me," he begged, "and I will pay back everything." 27 The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.

28 'But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. "Pay back what you owe me!" he demanded.

29 'His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, "Be patient with me, and I will pay it back."

30 'But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

32 'Then the master called the servant in. "You wicked servant," he said, "I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" 34 In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

35 'This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.'

We've all been hurt in relationships and we have all hurt others. The biblical response is all about forgiveness. Compare the Lord's Prayer (forgive us as we forgive others ...).

Peter comes and asks Jesus a question about forgiveness. How many times should I forgive my brother? You can imagine the back story:

- Peter has probably upset someone and is wondering how often they are going to forgive him!
- Or Peter has taken offense at something someone else has said, he was a bit prickly, and is feeling righteous about forgiving him but would like to be able to hold a grudge if the other person persists.
- Or it is a deeper question – what if someone says they are sorry but then just goes right out and does it again?
- Or worse, they won't even say they are sorry but you are having to live with this numpty who is always abusing you. "Jesus, I've done really well, this moron keeps parking in my space. I have forgiven him seven times. Is it okay for me to go and thump him now?"

Jesus' response is not helpful. **Just keep forgiving.**

- But what if there is no remorse or repentance? No “sorry”.
- What if they keep hurting me?
- What if nothing changes?
- Don't they at least have to try?

And then Jesus illustrates it with a funny story.

The King is in the mood to be gracious and forgiving and sort out his debtors.

Someone comes in who owes him a preposterous amount. Ten thousand talents was probably 100 times the whole of the money supply in Palestine at the time. I.e. £billions.

After the King gets over the shock he forgives the debt (there's humour in that!).

The servant goes out, free of debt, a recipient of extraordinary, undeserved, extravagant grace, but refuses to forgive the miniscule debt (£Greggs sausage roll) of the first man he meets (more humour).

The King loses his cool and throws the guy in jail (another chuckle).

Then Jesus turns to Peter and says, “This is how your heavenly Father operates – just forgive won't you”.

We are the recipients of extraordinary, undeserved, extravagant grace. The King has forgiven us all our debts – has set us free.

And we in turn are to forgive all those who sin against us.

Think about this in relation to your own life:

- Those in your life who have hurt you and against whom you harbour an ongoing resentment;
- Those whom you have hurt and you find it hard to say sorry;
- Consider the way the holy King of the universe has stepped across the cosmos with an amazing offer of forgiveness – just to make it right between you and him.

Where have you been hurt?

- at work, colleagues, boss
- family – grandparents, parents, siblings, children
- marriage
- friends
- within the church community

When there is some sort of hurt in a relationship the enemy uses it to bring division and pain - to fracture the relationship. All sorts of emotions are present: guilt, shame, anger, insecurities.

We can talk around the issues, who did what, what words need to be said, but all that time the enemy is sowing division and discord.

Forgive doesn't mean "forget", neither does it mean that there aren't consequences, it doesn't mean that you weren't hurt or damaged. It means simply that you choose to do the main thing which is in your power – forgive.

The disciple of Jesus is called to forgive, forgive, forgive and then to forgive again – without recompense or justification. With nothing held back as we stand before the King who has forgiven us everything.

Testimonies

Some years ago in one of my businesses I had a highly gifted salesman who decided to leave my firm and join a nearby competitor. He took our intellectual property, marketing ideas and business relationships etc with him. We ended up with lawyers involved and all sorts of grief. John Mumford, my pastor at the time said, David, sort it out, you're a leader in the church, it's messing with the family. So I had to forgive the guy and let go. No lawyers, no chasing after financial compensation. It was hard, but it was what I needed to do to be able to grow in my relationship with God and to lead with integrity.

A couple in this church hit a really difficult time in their marriage many years ago. They had been married for several years and had ministered side by side but then he had an affair and there was the threat of a separation. She had to decide what to do. She chose to forgive so that she would be in a place where God could continue to minister to her and she could continue to receive forgiveness. It is an obviously hard thing to do and needs to be done on an ongoing basis. Her husband had to get to a point where he could forgive himself and allow God to forgive him. This is also an ongoing process and he reflects that his wife has never ever, in many, many years, brought up the history by way of a mini-snipe or punishment.

Then there is another woman in the church who testifies to a catastrophic falling out with her older sister (also a Christian) over the distribution of a dishwasher from their parents' estate. She recounts how she went through the form of forgiveness but that it took a long, long time until she realised that she needed to take the offence of what had been said and done to her and give it to Jesus. Since then forgiveness has led to freedom for her.

A young man had suffered several years of semi-silent mental abuse from his parents and extended family, particularly after he married and left home and then had his first child. It was really painful and destroyed the family relationships and he found it really hard to forgive as they were certainly not saying sorry. But over time he managed to go through that process of forgiving them and in the last couple of years something has shifted and they have been able to rebuild a satisfactory relationship. Something akin to a miracle has taken place!

Alison and Michele told of a falling out between them over various misunderstandings and miscommunications and during a time of illness. It was painful because they were good friends and both empathetic sort of people. But eventually, they both found themselves at a meeting where we were taking communion and they served one another in a place of sacrifice and forgiveness given to us by Jesus and their relationship was restored.

An exercise for you to do if you would like to live in freedom and healing too.

Scott Peck wrote, in The Road Less Travelled, "Forgiveness is setting the captive free and realising you were the captive."

There is a graphic attached to this document which you can use to look back over your life and identify times or places or people where you have been hurt and where forgiveness is needed.

Spend some time thinking about the time-line of your life and those occasions when you have hurt someone or been hurt by them. Points when relationships have fractured.

Mark them on the line – by a name or a situation. Some will be minor things which are relatively easy to forgive. You can just do it.

Others will be more difficult even harrowing things which are, on the face of it, much harder to forgive. If so, seek help, find someone to talk with, get counsel. Share with your housegroup or see a counsellor.

You may find that you are angry with God and feel like you need to speak forgiveness to him – remember, forgiveness is recognising that you have been hurt but choosing to let go of the bitterness, anger or grudge. If you read the Psalms, David is always going to God with his pain and anger, "Why O God?" he shouts in Psalm 74:1; 88:14; 142: etc

And during worship – go to God with these broken relationships. Choose to forgive where you have been hurt. Choose to say sorry where you have been doing the hurting.

When you get to a point of being able to speak the words “I forgive you ... ” (whether to the person or on your own in the presence of God), write it down on the paper and then shred the paper, or burn it. This can be a symbol of forgiveness and repentance where the power of the enemy to interfere and spoil your life is broken for good.

Jesus’ answer to the question is pretty well always, forgive. You have received, now it’s your turn to forgive. When we obey and forgive at the “natural” level we find that something happens at the supernatural level and Jesus brings freedom and healing as our hearts change and are re-formed.

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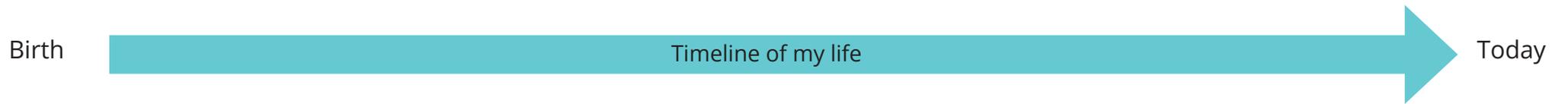
Other Resources

Scott Peck, The Road Less Travelled

William Faris, How healed do you want to be?

Mary Pytches, Set My People Free

Relationships



Points in my life when I have hurt someone or when I have been hurt by someone.