

CARING ENOUGH TO **NOT** FORGIVE SERIES #1
Don't Forgive - When "Forgiveness" Puts You One-Up
Luke 22:24-27, Philippians 2:5-11
Lent 1 March 1, 2023

We are commanded by Jesus to forgive one another for the sins we commit toward each other. But there are times when forgiving another creates uncomfortable and often, unworkable, consequences. Rather than quickly forgiving one who has hurt or angered us, or acted in an unjust way toward us, it is important to consider other options that will bring resolution to the problem to a truly forgiven state for both persons involved. Let me give you an idea what I'm talking about.

"Forgive you? Of course not."

"The man stiffened, confused, as his wife held him with her level gaze. He had just surfaced from the shame and guilt which had followed public exposure. 'Will you forgive me?' he had just asked, tentatively, doubtfully.

"No," she replied, but her face spoke acceptance, not rejection.

"He did not hear the gentleness in her voice. He froze into painful silence, then regrets spilled out again. He had betrayed her trust, the trust of the whole community, by becoming sexually intimate with two persons he was committed to help as a skilled counselor.

"No, I will not forgive you. I do not want the kind of relationship with you in which you are the offender and I the forgiver. I don't want you grateful and indebted to me for the rest of our lives. I want us to work through this until we both understand our parts in the problem, until we can accept each other."

"But I'm the one who hurt you... them... the community," he said.

"You did the active part. I did the passive part in helping create a relationship that was open to outside invitations. Let's work it out until we're back together."

"Now he can see the caring, the respect, the determination in her eyes. She's wanting an equal relationship where mutual acceptance is genuine, and one-way-forgiveness cannot create it. Instead it would freeze a relationship in permanent inequality and injustice. Having seen such a bloodless solution

to a marriage in trouble in her family of origin, she is not about to set herself up to repeat it in her own. So she says ‘no’ to quick solutions that assign the fault to one party in a two-or-more person problem.”¹

Forgiveness could finally come between the two individuals, however the woman was not about to forgive too quickly so that it would cause a distorted relationship from then on. That is the vice of the virtue of forgiveness - forgiving quickly to get it behind you, but one now taking a superior position over the other, one as the forgiver, the other as the forgiven.

You see, when quick forgiveness happens, there is the tendency for the one-up-forgiveness to create a condition of constant judgment and condemnation toward the one being forgiven. It also sets the one-down-forgiven to always be indebted to the other for the grace shown quickly. This inequality is demonstrated by one humbly recognizing their superior moral strength and the other their weakness; the one their consistent moral behavior and the other their inconsistent immorality. This puts one over the other in a way that the other will be forced to recognize their dutiful gratefulness from that day on.

In the one-up-forgiveness, the forgiven person then is constantly reminded of their subordinate position, permanently indebted to the forgiver. With their constant reminder of being “forgiven,” the forgiven person will find it hard not to feel resistance and resentment in that relationship, because they forever find themselves “under the thumb” of the forgiver. “Love does not flourish between unequals, and it does not grow when one is put down to meet the other’s needs.”²

When a relationship has one superior member and one inferior member, there is always a debt to be repaid. It happens over and over to the point that the inferior member, the one that has been forgiven, is never quite free from the debt that they owe. When there is a grievance against the superior member, how can it be shared without the debt card being played? When there is a real difference between the two, the superior member is always the winner. After all, how can the inferior member demand things to be different - the superior member is always right, and the inferior member is always in the wrong.

¹ (David Augsburger, *Caring Enough to NOT Forgive*, [Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1981] pg. 9-10)

² (Ibid., pg. 11)

When one is always in the red (that is always being reminded of their “forgiven” status), and the other is always in the black (that is clear from any blame or indebtedness in the problem), there is a constant reminder of the one who has made the mistake of how much they owe the one that has not blown it. This kind of “forgiveness” is never a gift to the inferior member, for they are always trying to earn the forgiveness over and over again, without success. The memory of the hurt or pain or injustice never goes away. And the “guilty party” is always at fault. Once indebted to the other, always and forever indebted to the other. One-sided-forgiveness never frees the debt, nor the debtor.

To truly care about the other, as forgiveness is given, neither can be in a position of constant indebtedness. There has to be a freeing of any debt so that the relationship can once more grow to become spontaneous and free. If the forgiven is never allowed to forget the incident, the debt is always used against them and the one in the black is able to hold the one in the red hostage emotionally and relationally. So there is never really forgiveness being given. It’s all a conditional acceptance of sin.

Another aspect of this one-sided-forgiveness, is an obligation being imposed upon the one shown grace. The one-up-forgiveness holds the forgiven obligated for the rest of their life, giving the forgiver superiority and complete control of any and every situation. Here’s another example.

A man named Friedrich explains, “I was an orphaned refugee kid when World War II ended. The childless couple who gave me a home until I left as a teenager were incredibly strict. Apparently I was in rags when they found me; I remember their giving me clean, unpatched, warm used clothes. They burned my old ones in the kitchen stove as I watched. All but the shoes. At the last moment, father rescued them, and placed them on the mantle. They stayed there, I heard, until he died. They were only the battered uppers, laced with twine. The soles had long since worn away, and the bottoms were stuffed with cardboard each morning to protect the bare feet inside.

“I soon learned how useful they would be to him. When I disappointed him in some way, he would walk to the mantle and pick up the shoes. When I resisted the strict control or complained about anything other kids were able to do and I was not allowed, he would look at the shoes. By the time I

was a teenager, he didn't need to haul them down to remind me how much he and my mother had done for me - a glance was enough.

“When at 16 I finally protested being intimidated with worn out shoes, father looked at me as if I had struck him. ‘I should think’ he said stiffly, ‘that you’d be grateful we never tried to make you feel grateful.’

“I’d have given anything as a boy to feel free of obligations, to give them my thanks as a gift, but it wasn’t possible. I owed them everything except my life, and they had saved that, so by the time I was able to put my predicament into words, I no longer felt grateful at all.”³

The “One-up-forgiveness” never creates an equal relationship between the parties involved. There is always one who is in the superior position and one who is in the inferior position; one who is always in the red and one who is always in the black; one who is always in control and one who is always obligated to follow orders and comply with the other. This inequality will remain until a resolution is worked out, or an end comes to that relationship. But it is best to start right of the bat by not forgiving too quickly. Take the time to deal with the sin that has been committed rather than take the short-cut and “forgive” too quickly.

Jesus told His disciples that they are not to be the ones to take “lordship” positions over others, but to become the servants to one another. “*The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call them Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves*” (Luke 22:25-26). Treat the one like you would want to be treated. Show love, not revenge. Give grace, not conditional forgiveness.

As followers of Christ, we are to respect each other, see the “sinner” as equal to any other person, giving forgiveness with no strings attached. Refuse to hold anyone hostage in their relationship with you. If you intend to forgive, make it equal between you so that you can walk alongside each

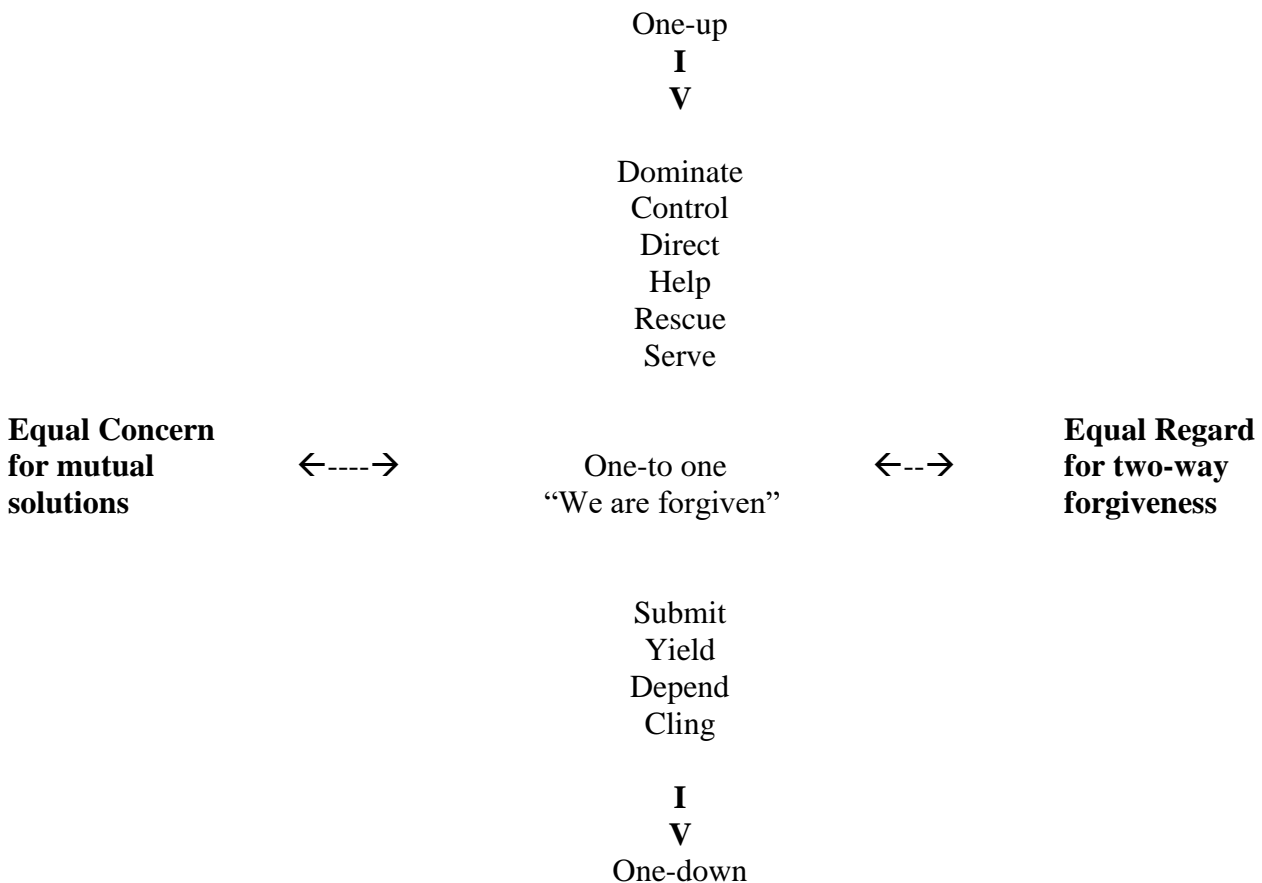
³ (David Augsberger, “*Caring Enough to NOT Forgive*, pg. 12-13)

other, caring enough about the other that you work out the problem, and reconcile with each other so that you can live in peace with each other.

“Superior “forgiving” [first] puts the offender down in a covert, hidden alienation. The second is the forgiver’s subtle revenge. The put-down into long-term indebtedness can be like signing a lifetime mortgage on one’s self-esteem, with the interest payable upon demand.

“Whenever any element of superiority or any feelings of coming down on the other rise within you, refuse it. Redirect it. Reach out to the other, not down. Stand over against, not above. Stand with, not over. Stand equal in working through to forgiveness; otherwise we are trading one sinful position for another.”⁴ Here’s the way it looks:

Generous benevolent one-way forgiveness



Indebted “grateful” one-way forgiveness⁵

⁴ (David Augsberger, *Caring Enough to NOT Forgive*, pg. 16)

⁵ (Ibid, pg. 17)

Jesus gives us the example of how we are to love and forgive each other. Paul describes the situation in Philippians 2:5-11. (READ Philippians 2:5-11) Rather than “lord over us” as the Son of God, Jesus, came to be with us, to walk with us and to expose our sin to us so that we could work out our salvation through Him. He gave us His grace so that we never have to earn salvation, but merely accept it from Him through His great power and authority as the Son of God. He desires that we do the same to one another so that we might walk in His peace together.

David Augsburger sums it up in this way: “Sin is any choice I make or position I take to live 1) **Over you** - in controlling, directing, superiority, by playing God; 2) **In you** - in absorbing love, over-invested caring, total commitment or over-attachment; 3) **For you** - in taking responsibility for and feeling responsibility to, rather than being responsible with; 4) **Off of you** - in parasitic clinging and attachment; 5) **Under you** - in submissive dependency by making you my idol, final good or god; 6) **Without you** - in isolation, rejection or withdrawal; 7) **Against you** - in hostility or enmity, making you my enemy; and 8) **In spite of you** - in individualism and ignoring or apathy, rather than 9) **With you** in loving and leveling, in caring and confronting, in grace and truth.”⁶

So care enough about the person in relationship with you to NOT forgive quickly when they ask for forgiveness after sin has been exposed, and then lead to a position that brings about more sin from you. Reject the one-up forgiveness and insist upon an equal, subject to subject, loving relationship that demands greater work and abundant grace. Jesus came along side of us, loving us truly enough to bring salvation to us and to identify us as ones He loved as He lived with us. He did not take a position of superiority over us, or reach down to rescue us with conditions, or serve down to us as His subjects. Jesus called His disciples “friends” and served them in order to help them see His example. And we are also encouraged to do the same with all those in our lives, bringing forgiveness in love. Let’s pray...

Father, thank You for Your complete forgiveness for us, with no strings attached. Thank You for Jesus’ example of loving enough to be with us so that we might find His Salvation from our sins. Guide us and encourage us to live among each other so that our forgiveness might be as complete, with no strings attached, to bring freedom and peace. This we pray in Jesus’ Name. AMEN

⁶ (David Augsburger, *Caring Enough to NOT Forgive*, pg. 19)