



PRACTICAL FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness does not sit still. It initiates. Forgiveness is not a frozen intellectual assent, rather it is action oriented. Forgiveness expresses itself with love and compassion. Forgiveness that lacks initiation is not true forgiveness. It is fake forgiveness. Forgiveness held back by the inertia of a begrudging spirit only gives lip service. Authentic forgiveness reaches out in a way that is unnatural. The values of this world would not expect you to initiate contact with one who hurt you deeply, but God does. The heart of forgiveness is giving something to someone that is undeserved. The natural man resists this, but the spiritual man embraces this.

Peace will come as you embrace forgiveness. Peace will invade and reign in your heart and the heart of your offender. Reconciliation will begin as you initiate forgiveness. Just the fact that you want to get together and discuss differences is an “olive branch.” It is a way to diffuse difficult understandings that evolved into resentment. As long as a form of forgiveness crouches in a corner of self-pity, licking its wounds, real forgiveness will lie dormant. Authentic forgiveness moves from the head to the heart to behavior. It is like our conversion to Christ. It may not come automatically, but over time the realities of what it means to be born again brings us to a point of receiving the grace and forgiveness of God.

The test of spiritual maturity is your ability, by God’s grace, to forgive another. It is not always easy, but it is necessary to go deep with Christ. Stunted growth in a relationship many times can be traced back to unforgiveness. The most meaningful relationships in the world travel down the road of forgiveness.

So where do you start? A great place to start is prayer. Pray for the person with whom you need to initiate forgiveness. Pray for them daily and pray for them with compassion. Pray that they will go deep with God and learn of Him. Pray that they will be open to your acts of forgiveness. Pray for yourself to receive God’s love and forgiveness. Pray that you will extend what you have received from the Lord to others.

Do not be stingy with the forgiveness of Christ. Forgiveness flourishes when it is given away. It is not meant to stay locked up in some surreal memory of the past. Authentic forgiveness is fresh. Pick up the phone and initiate a call to the one who has wounded you. Drive across town and buy a friend coffee or lunch. Listen intently to their fears and regrets. Write a loving letter

or an edifying e-mail to your offender. Extend the love of Jesus to them in words they can ponder over and over again.

God is bigger than any hurt or bitterness. His business is forgiveness. If you are a Christian, you are in the family business. Forgiveness initiates. Relationships explode with possibilities in an environment of forgiveness. Look into His face of forgiveness as Jesus hung on the cross. Let the face of Jesus be like the reflection you see upon your soul. Then initiate His spirit of forgiveness to others. The cross is God's initiation to us.