

Anger SOLUTIONS

THE MEANING OF FORGIVENESS

One of my clients, a quiet, young, single mother of two small children told me something that truly struck me. She said, "I carry my anger with me everywhere. I don't want to let go of it. It has been with me so long; it is like a friend to me."

Anger was indeed her friend. It was the source from which she garnered strength to fight for what was important to her. She used her anger as her stabilizer because she did not believe that she had the strength to stand on her own without it.

The problem with making anger your friend is that like the minister who lost his mother, bitterness takes over. My client struggled in relationships, made friends with people whom she knew would take advantage of her. She allowed herself to return to abusive situations because it fed her anger. She pushed away those who would show her real love and compassion because it was easier to fend for herself than to suffer loss at their hands later on. Bitterness coloured her view of life, of love, and all those other mysteries. Although she longed to be loved and to love her children, that kind of unconditional love eluded her if she continued to nurture her anger.

The sad truth is that many of us don't want to forgive others because we think that forgiveness somehow means we condone what was done to us. People think that those who forgive are weak, and that forgiveness is a sign of "giving in".

If I forgive, then I must forget; at least that is how the old saying goes. And I don't want to forget. If I forget, I leave myself open to being hurt in the same way once again.

To see the ability to forgive as a sign of weakness is to deprive oneself of a world of freedom. In all reality, it takes courage, strength, and a willing heart to forgive others. I have alluded to bitterness as an uncontrollable weed. If left untended, it will continue to grow and wind around all the chambers of one's heart until the heart finally dies for lack of room to grow. To experience true forgiveness – either as the giver or the recipient - is to find real liberation.

We all know that forgiveness is something we should do. The question most often asked is "How can I forgive that person for what they did to me?" This is a valid question; however, it is not a question that will necessarily produce the most effective answer.

Anger SOLUTIONS

The brain is a complex computer, which operates based on the programming we put into it. You also know that the process of self-evaluation is simply the process of asking questions and seeking out the answers. You can use the process of self-evaluation to help leverage yourself towards forgiveness.

I strongly suggest that you use the Dickens Pattern to create leverage in this area. Just think quickly of the ways choosing NOT to forgive has caused you pain in the past. How is being unforgiving causing you pain right now? How about in the future? If you continue not to forgive others, what do you see yourself becoming five, ten or 20 years from now?

You know that human beings will do much more to avoid pain than they will to achieve pleasure, so make your experience of unforgiveness as painful as possible. Then, do what you must to avoid the pain. Here are some questions to help you on your way.

- Why must I forgive RIGHT NOW?
- What will I gain in my relationship with this person if I forgive? What about my relationships with others?
- How might it benefit me financially to forgive?
- How will my emotions heal once I finally forgive this person?
- How will I grow spiritually if I forgive?
- How can I enhance my mental state through forgiveness?

Unfortunately, there is no magic pill that I could give you that will help you conjure up the will to forgive. The will to forgive can only come from within.

Look at these definitions according to Webster.

To pardon
To cease to bear resentment against
To cancel (as a debt)
To exercise clemency
To grant pardon

Forget: (v)

To lose remembrance of
To neglect inadvertently
To disregard

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Anger SOLUTIONS

In one of my groups a couple was talking about how tricky this whole forgiveness thing can be. We were discussing the popular concept of “forgive and forget”. The husband was saying that you can try to forgive and forget, except that whenever they get into a fight, he finds himself calling up things that his wife said or did five, ten or fifteen years ago!

I asked him why he does this. He replied, “Well, I bring those things up because I need *ammunition*.” My response to him was this, “I thought you were on the same side.”

What this gentleman said holds a great deal of truth. We hold on to events from the past because we need ammunition for the next fight. Why do we need ammunition to use against our partners? Think about it for one minute.

This is my theory. Nobody likes to be proven wrong in an argument. When you can't prove you're right, you lower yourself to intimidation tactics. If you can intimidate the other person, they will back away from the argument. If the other party doesn't back down, you need more leverage.

Since you already know you are wrong this time, you start digging for memories of times when *they* were wrong, and you bring it into this argument. If you succeed, the person takes the bait, and goes on the defensive.

Now you are back in control, because you have successfully diverted their attention from the issue at hand to one that died several months (maybe even years) ago.

A few problems exist with this tactic. The first problem is that the tactic often works; however, the feelings conjured up by this chain of events typically consist of more bitterness, resentment, and frustration for both parties.

Each time you revive a negative or painful memory, you relive that painful memory. Calling up old transgressions inflicts new hurt on the other party, and each time you bring up something that the other party thought was resolved, you will inadvertently dwindle others' levels of trust in you.

If you say you've forgiven someone, but you bring up the old transgression every chance you get, it's hard for them to trust that you've truly let it go. Your actions will speak louder than your words.

In the early chapters of this book, you learned that belief is the basis of action. In other words, what you believe determines how you behave. Therefore, what you believe about forgiveness will determine what you do about it. If you believe that forgiveness is for the weak and you do not want to be perceived as weak, then you will choose not to forgive others. In effect, you will be choosing to let

Anger SOLUTIONS

bitterness control your heart. You will be choosing to let love die in your life. You will be choosing to stop growing.

If you believe that you will only find the closure you need through forgiveness, then you will choose to forgive. Does that mean that you will forget? Perhaps, perhaps not. Part of getting past one's past means forgetting the things that happened in the past. But we should never forget what we learned from the events of our past.

When we talk of forgiveness, often people believe that we must "cancel" the transgression and behave as though it never happened. That may work well for financial debts, but not so for emotional ones. The fact of the matter is that transgressions against one's feelings inflict much more pain than financial indiscretions or irresponsibility. Expecting people to pretend that you never hurt them is asking too much.

What we really want when we ask for forgiveness is "pardon". We want to know that the anger has dissipated, perhaps that there is some understanding, and that the individual of whom we seek forgiveness will free us from ongoing punishment.

When we talk of forgetting, what we mean is not to entirely lose remembrance of what happened. Instead, we choose to disregard what has happened to the point that it no longer pops up every time we experience negative emotions. To disregard means to not give attention to something. In other words, we choose not to look at those events of our past for the purpose of using them against others! One of my favourite sayings applies here: *Forget your past; remember only what it taught you.*

There is one common word that runs throughout all these definitions; that word is, "choose". Forgiveness is a matter of choice. When you say that you can't forgive someone, you are really saying that you choose not to. At least be honest about it and say it like it really is. Just remember when you choose not to forgive, you are in effect choosing to choke love out of your life. The choice is yours.