

LESSON ESSENTIALS

FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

LESSON 4: STEPS TO RECONCILIATION

“When she returned to her village, she saw one of the men who had killed her father and brother. Immediately, he started running, fearing she had come for revenge.”

“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.”

(2 Corinthians 5: 18-19)

“Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able also to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and as horrible as that.”

-Corrie ten Boom

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2 Corinthians 5:18

When we have been wronged, it is very easy to feel justified in the anger, resentment, bitterness, and revenge that poison our hearts. However, the Lord never intends for us to give into or to act upon those feelings. His is a way of peace. He calls Himself our vindicator and our defender. By His grace, He often humbles us, revealing our great need for forgiveness and provides for us the grace to see others as Christ sees us: as sinners in need of forgiveness. Once we have that perspective, we will be ready to forgive our offender.

Many times we will not have the opportunity to meet face-to-face with our offender to forgive them. Or, if we do have that chance, they may not be willing to confess their sin against us and to be reconciled to us by the gift of forgiveness. What are we to do then? Live with unforgiveness and bitterness? No. We can be ready to forgive and we can live in a state of ‘potential and willing reconciliation’ with our offender even if the true healing of the situation never comes.

Corrie ten Boom, a Dutch woman who had been imprisoned for protecting Jews in World War II, described the healing and freedom experienced by those victims of the Holocaust who chose in their hearts and minds to forgive their captors. She said, “Since the end of the war I had had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality. Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able also to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and as horrible as that.”

Sadly, this ‘nursing of bitterness’ is what too many of us choose to do. There is a misconception that unless someone asks for forgiveness, you cannot forgive them. That isn’t true. True reconciliation and restoration of relationship does require an apology and a request for forgiveness. However, you can walk in the readiness to forgive, as these people that Corrie ten Boom worked with did, and then walk in freedom!

Gertrude has a powerful testimony of salvation, healing, and forgiveness. As a young girl, she watched her neighbours kill her father and brother. Gertrude was born with epilepsy and she watched her sister being burned for having the same thing. Gertrude ran into the forest hoping wild animals would kill her. However, the Lord spared her. Years later, she heard the saving message of the Gospel and decided to live for God. She received healing of epilepsy, but, most importantly, she felt compelled to forgive the two men who murdered her family!

As you might expect, when one of the men who murdered her family saw Gertrude again, he assumed that she would be out for revenge. He began to run from her knowing that she had reason to hate him, and expecting that she would seek to harm him. Instead, by the grace of God, Gertrude started singing a Christian song. She approached him, knelt and greeted him in the name of Jesus, and told him that God had prepared her for this meeting and had enabled her to forgive him. What a miracle! Even more astonishingly, sometime later this man became sick, and Gertrude returned to visit him, to care for him, and to pray with him.

Clearly, this is not a response that could come from sheer human determination. This is a working of the Holy Spirit working through the steps towards reconciliation in the heart of the wounded even before the opportunity to truly extend forgiveness presents itself.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are not emotions. They are deliberate, conscious decisions to do the right thing regardless of how you feel about a particular person or situation. In His mercy, the Lord does stir your affections to match the action, but most often the decision to forgive comes before the emotion. If you wait until you are face-to-face with your offender to consider reconciliation, chances are you will remain bitter and angry. By pursuing the steps to reconciliation away from the person, the Lord can do His work in your heart and mind so that when and if the opportunity arises, you can truly, freely extend forgiveness to the person who has harmed you.

Our heavenly Father has forgiven and reconciled us to Himself through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. We have been given this ministry of reconciliation, both between people, and between people and God. Let us not miss out on this great honour because of our unwillingness to forgive and to be reconciled with our enemies.

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IN REVIEW

- A person can be ready to extend forgiveness long before the face-to-face opportunity arises. In fact, even if that opportunity never presents itself, you can walk in the freedom of forgiveness by choosing to release that bitter anger in your own heart and mind.
- Reconciliation and forgiveness are not primarily emotions: they are conscious decisions to treat a person a certain way regardless of what emotions might dictate. So very often, the Lord allows the emotions to follow the decision which enhances the freedom of forgiveness with joy!
- As Christ has reconciled you to God, so ought you to reconcile with those who have wronged you, and so should you seek to direct them to be reconciled with God.

HAVE YOUR SAY

- Is there someone or some circumstance in your life that is causing you to live in bitterness? Have you pursued peace and reconciliation in that situation, even if you may not have an opportunity to make it right face-to-face? Even if your offender has died you can still seek a heart and attitude of forgiveness towards them. Pray and ask the Lord to reveal such a situation to you.

- Do you think that you may be a source of bitterness for someone else? Have you caused a hurt in someone's life that you ought to seek forgiveness for? Do not delay in making this right! If there is someone whom you have offended, pray for the courage and wisdom to go to them and to restore that relationship. Ask for forgiveness and trust the Lord to do His perfect will in that scenario. Write down specific steps you will take today.

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