

MAINTAINING A FORGIVING HEART!

Part one of a three part series!

Part One: Guarding Your Heart

Have you ever expressed to God your willingness to forgive someone's offensive behavior and then found yourself struggling with thoughts and emotions that begged you to renege on your decision to forgive? ***If your answer is yes, you are not alone.*** Furthermore, your feelings are not wrong.

Face it: Forgiveness can be given and yet the battle is not over yet. A serious challenge remains to follow through with your decision to forgive and maintain the spirit of forgiveness in order to love again.

I have discovered that when a couple has a wall of hurts between them it is not only hard to forgive but very easy to go through the steps of forgiveness and still hold on to all the hurts, anguish, bitterness, anger, etc.

If you have had one event or circumstance a week that brought harsh words, anger, bitterness, resentments, hostility, etc., -- then take 52 weeks per year times the years you have been married and note how many things you have between you. If they were cement blocks which were used to build a wall between the two of you -- how many pieces would be in your wall? ***If you have been married ten years and all these things are between the two of you because you have NEVER TORN THE WALL DOWN -- by forgiveness and reconciliation -- then you have 540 pieces in your wall. How sad!! WHAT will you do about that wall?***

Four major concerns must be addressed in order to move beyond forgiveness so that you can love again!

1. First, you must maintain your decision to forgive the person who has offended you when you face the temptation to entertain a grudge.
2. Second, you must determine how to resolve the residual emotional pain from the offensive incident. Emotions are often there for some time.
3. Third, you must prayerfully consider if God wants you to lovingly confront the person who injured you.
4. Finally, you must answer the question, "Can my relationship with the offender be reconciled and restored?"

YOU MUST WORK AT GUARDING YOUR HEART

Does God expect you to forgive a person for some horrendous affront and then moments later embrace that person as if nothing had happened? NO! God wants us to be realistic and He knows that in some situations this would only invite another assault. His counsel is clear: After you forgive, guard your heart!

After forgiving someone, we should heed the admonition of Prov. 4:23. "*Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.*" The Spirit of God makes this a priority for each one of us. We are to guard our hearts by building a wall of protection against an attack on the very core of our being. Satan will attack, and our emotions may well sway us away from our decision to forgive. (Col. 3:12-14; Eph. 4:32; Gal. 5:15-17, 24)

If you are being harassed by sinful emotions, immediately look for ways to guard your heart. If an encounter with the offender entices you to develop an unforgiving spirit, give yourself space and time to anchor your feelings on the Word of God. Truly seek to anchor your heart and your emotions on God's Word out of obedience to what He has said. (Rom. 6:16-18)

1. Keep your goal in mind. Guarding your heart is not a pious form of retaliation nor an attempt to run from the offender. You simply want and need some time to stabilize your emotions so you are better able to safeguard the forgiveness you have already extended.

2. View your caution as a short-term, not a long-term response! If you try to guard your heart by saying to yourself, "I'll never talk to her again, no matter what happens" you are wrong. If you pull your church membership five minutes after you have been maligned by a church leader, you are wrong! Don't do it in the name of guarding your heart. Remember: All you want is a little time to get your emotions under the control of the Holy Spirit so you can respond to the offender in love.

3. Don't guard yourself as a form of subtle retaliation! When you feel God would have you maintain some distance from the other person, don't do so as a counter attack.

Maybe you should not even speak to the other person during this time. But, if you find yourself in a situation where you must either run or face the person, consider the encounter as a divine appointment and extend a cordial greeting and then seek to solve the problem completely.

4. Don't be naive! Genuine forgiveness is not gullible! Unconditional love will produce certain character traits in our lives, such as His love through us... "*Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*" (I Cor. 13:7) We also are aware that sinful patterns don't simply disappear when we forgive an offender. There are people who are trapped in their sin, repeating episodes of infidelity, drunkenness, or outbursts of anger, resentments, hostilities, meanness, etc. We are called upon to endeavor to restore such a person. (Gal. 6:1) Forgiving another does not guarantee that mistreatment will end or the other person will change.

Forgiveness frees us to respond in a positive and a biblical way, but don't expect the other person's harmful behavior to simply disappear because you did what was right. It may be the other person is unsaved, or very carnal, or is in the throes of problems you are not even aware of. Give the person the benefit of the doubt. By God's grace, extend forgiveness with no strings attached. If you don't forgive you will encourage your own resentments, bitterness and personal failure. They will need to face their failures and sin problems and seek after personal victory.

***As you maintain a forgiving heart, what about the wounds, -- OH,
God will bring healing as you obey Him.*** (Phil. 4:6-7)

Your emotions can be calmed and peace become yours!

Part two of a three part series!
EXPECT INNER TURMOIL AFTER YOU HAVE FORGIVEN.

Our old sin nature generates ideas that trigger negative emotions -- it is easy for us to sin inwardly in sinful self-talk perceptions and evaluations. (Rom. 7:18; Eph. 2:3) Sin within us will challenge ever positive response we make toward the Word of God. It is a relentless war. On one side we may feel a strong pull toward hatred, discord, fits of rage, dissension's, and factions. (Gal. 5:15-17; 19-21) On the other side we feel the tug toward peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, etc., as found in Galatians 5:22-23.

When we forgive, we live according to the Word of God and the Christlike nature which the Lord seeks to produce in us and then we choose peace. At the same time, the sin nature within us seeks to counterattack with a strong drive toward resentment and indignation. (Rom. 8:28,29; 7:18)

Have you ever experienced this inner turmoil? The Apostle Paul knew the same struggle. Apply his words to the desire to honor your decision to forgive. (Rom. 7:18-19). Here is the conflict -- the inner strife comes from a desire that cannot be reconciled. Your sin nature desires to get even, while the Holy Spirit wants you to walk in love. The sin nature and your new nature are in conflict so you sometimes do what you don't want to do. (Gal. 5:17) What happens is that -- *"Though we have a desire to love again, we seemingly cannot carry it out. Disruptive memories and negative thoughts and feelings overwhelm us."*

Expect your sinful nature to harass you. Anticipate an assault on your mind designed to compel you to relive past offenses that you have already forgiven. But with the help of the Holy Spirit, you can continue to walk in Christlike love and forgiveness.

STAND YOUR GROUND AGAINST SATAN! (Eph. 6:10-18)

Our sin nature makes it difficult enough to follow through on forgiveness -- to make matters worse, Satan, the enemy of our soul, is the master of accusation.

In fact, he is even called the accuser (Rev. 12:10). He will challenge your decision to forgive. Satan has his forces; they are a horde of fallen angels or demons. We are in a lifelong battle against our enemy.

What does Satan use to attack us? Flaming arrows -- that can and must be extinguished (Eph. 6:16) These missiles are often ungodly thoughts directed at our minds and designed to disrupt us emotionally and spiritually.

Demons attempt to influence our wills, our minds and our emotions. Demonic activity of this nature is common among Christians. (M.F. Unger -- *What Demons Can Do To Saints!*) Evil spirits cannot read our minds but they **can** place ideas into our minds which are contrary to what God's Word says. Our struggle with the forces of darkness revolves around Satan's ability to mislead and deceive us, and he does so with ***mind games. Satan knows that if he can direct our minds, he also can control our lives.***

(Acts 5:1-11) Consider Ananias and Sapphira, who openly professed to be Christians and who were part of the early church. After selling a piece of property,

this couple gave part of the proceeds to the apostles, apparently saying that they were donating the total selling price. They lied. Why? Was the sin of greed at work? No doubt, But there was more! They had lied to the Holy Spirit.

How did Satan fill their hearts? How did he entice them? Satan used deceptive thoughts to set on fire negative emotions and gain control over them. Imagine what SATAN might have said!!! *"You worked so hard for that land; don't give your money away! Just give enough to look good in the eyes of the apostles. Sapphira, that money is your security, your nest egg, what if your husband died, what would happen to you? Who would take care of you? Why not give just a part of the money? Who will know the difference?"*

Consider the parallel in your life! The Holy Spirit brought you to the point of forgiving the one who offended you! Now Satan wants to challenge that decision. Mind games! Strong appeals to your sin nature -- that's Satan's strategy. When it comes to forgiving someone else, he uses the same tactic in an attempt to undo your decision to forgive. Do you hear his voice?

You may be in a situation where you can't forget the pain of your wife's infidelity or some other serious event in your life. Satan whispers in your ear -- *"Does God really expect you to let her off the hook after what she has done?"* When you encounter a brother who defamed your character, Satan utters a taunt, *"Did you see him smiling? See, God isn't going to bring justice to bear upon him for what he did. If you don't retaliate, nothing will ever be done about it."*

You may be faced with a husband who is battling with alcoholism. Satan's counsel: *"It's going to happen again and again. Stop being a doormat and get out of this mess. You don't have to live this way."*

After a verbal battle with your mate, Satan will prod, *"God does not really care about you or your marriage. If He did, He would not allow these conflicts to happen. You really ought to just walk out!"*

How do you respond when Satan attempts to refill your heart and mind with bitterness? Will you heed his endless accusations and innuendoes? Will you renounce your decision to forgive? Will you allow your negative emotions to get the better of you? You should not and need not! You can stand your ground and defend your decision against the accuser. ***How? By bringing your thoughts under the control of the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit!***

Need more help? go to our web site and look for materials in the area of counseling... about bitterness, resentments, etc.

Continue on to part three >>

Part three of a three part series!
CAPTURE YOUR THOUGHTS!
(II Cor. 10:3-5 I Cor. 3:19-20)

What you think generates how you feel! Ideas have consequences! Your thoughts ultimately determine your emotions. If your emotions are to be securely anchored after you have forgiven someone, proper thought patterns are absolutely essential.

We must demolish arguments and every pretense that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we must take captive every device of human reasoning and obey Christ. This is what is taught in II Corinthians 10:5.

We are to trust Christ and follow Him alone! The **key** to following through on your commitment to forgive is to capture every thought and subject it to the person of Christ and to the truth of the Word of God. Paul commands us to capture wrong thoughts and to destroy them!

There is no thought that is beyond God's reach! Paul said, "*He catches the wise in their craftiness. . . the Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile*" (I Cor. 3:19-20)

As you learn to forgive and to love again, you will be engaged in a spiritual battle. You must get your thoughts right by making sure they are aligned with God's Word.

If you are alert and on guard, you will be able to evaluate the thoughts that come into your mind. If you search the Word of God you will be able to compare all thoughts with the truth. In order to live a godly life, you must capture the thoughts that come from the World, the flesh and the devil. ***You must demolish any satanically inspired thought process. You must submit these evil thoughts to capital punishment. Destroy them with a vengeance.***

RENEW YOUR MIND!

If you have a limited understanding of God's truth, you will have great difficulty recognizing a counterfeit thought. The command from God's Word is precise: "*And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*" (Rom. 12:2).

1. Every thought that comes into your mind must be tested to see if it is a response in obedience to the Word and the will of God.
2. In order for this to happen, your mind must be programmed by the Word of God rather than by the world's thoughts.
3. If you are going to solidify your decision to forgive someone, you must allow you mind to be refreshed and renewed by the Scriptures daily, maybe even hourly.
4. You must read the truth every day in order to recognize error. And as your mind is renewed, your emotions will become the product of right thinking. Your feelings will be in tune with God's Word. But this can take time in some situations.

Here are some illustrations of capturing thoughts with the weapon of truth:

1. "I have been abandoned and no one cares about me." WRONG! God said, "*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*" (Heb. 13:5) This is in a double negative -- the strongest way that He could say... ***I will never leave thee.***

2. "I have been abused, and no one understands." ERROR! Jesus understands. "*For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities....*" (Heb. 4:15) He cares, He is deeply moved by those things such as abuse that touch His children's lives.

3. "I have been slandered, my reputation is destroyed." NO WAY! God's Word declares, "*If God be for us, who can be against us?*" (Rom. 8:31)

4. "I have been unfairly judged and made the object of ridicule." ANSWER! "*Who (the Lord) both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest (or expose) the counsels (or motives) of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.*" (I Cor. 4:5) Also vengeance is God's, He will repay, He will care for our cause, we can leave all our "*so called rights*" to Him. God will do right!

We have another study available that will help you... check out on the web site under counseling... and look for book... study on "Why Do I Feel/ Do As I Do?"