

## JACK'S CORNER

### Part I

**QUESTION:** When I fail as a parent, I ask my son to forgive me. He is usually uncomfortable for a while and then forgives me. Something about the whole situation doesn't seem quite right. Any suggestions?

**ANSWER:** I recently read an article by a respected Christian author and counselor about anger and conflicts in the home. The author had many valid and biblical observations and insights regarding the "how to's" of dealing with the times we, as parents, fail our kids. The last step the author offered in how to handle conflicts really bothered me. It wasn't unbiblical or even unrealistic, but it didn't take into account the subtleties of sin or the costliness of forgiveness.

When parents fail, the author recommended they should ask their child to forgive them. At first glance, how could anyone find fault with such a humble and honest request? What an opportunity! Give your child a chance to forgive!

Let me make a small but critical change in this approach to conflict resolution. Instead of asking the child to forgive you, **express your sincere and repentant HOPE that they will forgive you at some point in time.** Notice the difference? Doesn't seem like much until we look at the situation from the point of view of the child.

Often, we are quick to "repent" or apologize and shift the burden and responsibility of the situation onto the other person. In a selfish need for closure, and in a shallow response to our sin, we "go through the motions" of the reconciliation process. Somehow, **we believe that in admitting our failure, we have effectively put the "ball" in the other person's court.** Imagine what this feels like to a child... not only does he have to deal with his hurt, anger, and confusion about the situation.... but now, the burden of final resolution (i.e. forgiveness) is placed heavily on his shoulders while you get to "walk away". In addition, how can he say "no" or "not yet" to his father or mother?

Certainly, our children need to have the experience of struggling with forgiveness. Heart-felt forgiveness is hard work. It is far more than

mere words, and involves more than our just feelings. **The struggle of forgiveness will give him a glimpse of the heart of God and the meaning of the Cross.**

On the other hand, we parents also need to struggle with our deep failures. There is immense, life-changing value in deep repentance. The time spent in agony and self-examination while our children are deciding how and when to forgive us is time well spent. The forgiveness from our children whom we so deeply love will mean so much more, and be so life-changing, if it is hard won. Forgiveness is costly — and when it is given and received at such cost, it is truly transformational.

Moments when parents fail can be far more powerful than a string of successes... if these moments are pondered, deeply felt, and used as opportunities to draw near in relationship with our children. Love and forgiveness are interwoven... each impossible without the other... each only as deep and true as the other. Know the value of the struggle! Don't be too quick to put the situation behind you. Your gut was right; something is not "quite right".

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