

JACK'S CORNER

Part II

QUESTION: Regarding last week's *Jack's Corner* on forgiveness... What happens, and how does one handle the situation when the hoped-for forgiveness and reconciliation do not come forth?

ANSWER: *(Last week's article addressed forgiveness between a parent and child, considering the power differential.)* Let me begin by saying that children are **usually** far more forgiving and honest than most adults. Most children really want to set things right. They usually lack the bitterness, resentment, and punishing behaviors present in adults. (But they do learn these behaviors well from watching how we adults behave.) Forgiveness is usually much more honest and desired when it comes from children. Their relationships usually lack the sinful subterfuge of adult interrelationships.

Often, we adults, (particularly in the church): ignore a wrong, numb ourselves to a wrong, flee from a wrong or say some rote words... then we call it "forgiveness." Think of someone in the church who has wronged you... do you presently try to ignore or avoid him? Do you pretend the wrong really wasn't that bad so you don't have to acknowledge your true feelings? Do you no longer have much, if anything, to do with her? Do you relate to him with "polite aloofness"? Such behaviors do not demonstrate biblical forgiveness.

True forgiveness is continuing to involve yourself honestly and deeply in the life of someone who has wronged you, as if the wrong didn't happen, for the purpose of continuing genuine relationship and the possibility of transformation for both of you, regardless of your feelings. True forgiveness transcends mere feelings, although feelings toward the person might eventually change. It is tremendously costly in the sense of personal sacrifice because it is a reaction to our Savior's sacrifice. True forgiveness continues to transform both the giver and the receiver. True forgiveness is only possible with God's transcendence, as His Holy Spirit indwells us, and we respond with awe and gratitude to how Christ has forgiven us.

Rarely do adults enter deeply the life of someone who has wronged them, confront him/her in Christian love, and then continue in deep and rich relationship with him/her. Numbing, fleeing, ignoring or just mouthing the right words is the usual tactic. If there is confrontation, rarely is it done in Christian love; and hence, usually destroys the relationship (from that point on, at some level, there is emotional withdrawal from the person). If the relationship is continued, there is a measure of distance and withholding. Children are usually better at the “living out” of forgiveness.

With these thoughts in mind... if the “hoped-for forgiveness does not come forth”, there is a wonderful (but heart-breaking) opportunity from God to be on your knees consistently for the sake of your child. Such behavior in a child is a clear window into his soul and speaks volumes about your child’s spiritual needs, level of maturity, and your relationship with him. Things are far worse than you thought.

How will you pray for and live out the character of Christ in your child’s life? How does he see forgiveness demonstrated in your life? How has he experienced reconciliation through your actions and words? How will you make your relationship with him so attractive that he will be hungry to forgive and reconcile? Some parents don’t want to bother with this kind of internal wrestling and self-evaluation; they want a quick fix, a three-step plan, a standardized method of getting it over with. What a missed opportunity!

Some parents believe they can and should “command”, intimidate, or manipulate their children into forgiving them. You might be able to get your child to voice the words, but his heart will be violated in the process and the words will be a lie. Whether or not you receive the “hoped-for” forgiveness, there is opportunity for both of you to be transformed and to grow in your relationship with God. Rejoice, and thank God for the possibilities! God perfectly forgives, so he can require and inspire us to forgive as well (MT 6:12, 14,15).

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