

Forgiveness – When the Person You Need to Forgive Is You – by Karene Scott

Wally Driver handed me a book entitled 'How to forgive when you don't feel like it' and said 'I'd like you to write a message on this topic, bring what you've written next month when we meet' I thought now that's a challenge.

Over the years, I have heard many sermons on the subject of forgiveness and I'm sure a lot of you have too. We know that we are to forgive others. Matthew 6:14-15 says, 'For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.'

When Jesus was teaching his followers how to pray part of the prayer says, 'Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.' (Matthew 6:12)

Jesus tells us there is no limit on how many times we are to forgive (Matthew 18:21-22)

In addition, we know that we can ask God for forgiveness. Micah 7:19 'You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.'

Really, what more is there to say on the topic?

So, I read the book and when I got near the back, I came across a chapter entitled 'Buried under rocks of regret... When the person you need to forgive is you'. Ah... now that is something I have never heard a sermon on.

How do we forgive ourselves? How do we forgive ourselves for the part we played in wronging another, in hurting another, in our sin against God and Man? This I struggle with.

Surprisingly, forgiving ourselves is not always easy to do. In fact, sometimes it is more difficult than forgiving others. How do we get over the regret and the guilt, the sense of feeling unworthy to be forgiven?

Personal story ...

'When I was pregnant with Micah (so that's over 11 years ago) one of my closest friends rang me one evening to complain about the lack of a children's programme at the Easter Service. Now usually I can cope with this kind of criticism but for some reason (I can't really remember now) I know I was tired because I do remember saying that I was....anyhow I just exploded! I used words like YOU ALWAYS and YOU NEVER; I think I may have told her she was high maintenance... The phone call didn't end well with her crying and the friendship in tatters and we were on no speaks....

A while after that I went to a church camp at Queenstown. Some of you may remember it was with Te Anau Baptist. The speaker spoke and I can't remember who he was or what he said but I felt the need to chat to him after his message about my ruined friendship. I fully expected his sympathy In addition, I was a bit put out when he told me I needed to apologise to her. Bother, that wasn't what I wanted to hear....

So I did, I apologised to God and to her and she was amazing, she accepted my apology and has never once brought the matter up again... However, I just can't seem to forgive myself.... As time has gone on it's often in the back of my mind when I'm talking to her... 'How could you do such a thing, you know she has been terribly hurt in the past by family and you go and do that, what a nasty word

starting with B and the name describing a female dog that you shouldn't say in church...' on and on the dialogue goes... so today this message is as much for me as it is for you.

You see I find it relatively easy to forgive others and to come to God in prayer asking for His forgiveness, but I find it very hard to forgive myself when I stuff up. Are any of you like me in this regard? Or should I just go out the back and preach to myself?

In your newsletter under the 'Sermon Notes' heading you will see I have listed some scriptures on the topic of forgiveness and an Acrostic for you to refer back to.

FORGIVEN (an Acrostic)

Find the source of your guilt

Own responsibility for your sin

Realise that God means what He says

Give up dwelling on the past

Invest time in renewing your mind

Verify truth when Satan accuses

Exchange your life for the life of Christ

Notice that God brings your feelings in line with the facts when you obey Him.

Find the source of your guilt

There are two types of guilt; guilt that warns us that something is not right (this is a healthy type of guilt) and then there is the guilt that has no basis in sin but a feeling of being ashamed of who you are. This second type of guilt is unhealthy, it surfaces when we can't stop blaming ourselves, even though we haven't done anything wrong or have long since confessed and turned from our sin.

Bishop Robert South said 'Guilt upon the conscience, like rust upon iron, both defiles and consumes it, gnawing and creeping into it, as it does it eats out the very heart and substance of the metal'.

This unhealthy guilt instead of correcting and building you up in your faith destroys your heart and cripples your soul and spirit. It is defiantly not God's will for you as it says in **2 Corinthians 7:10** '**Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.**'

Own responsibility for your sin

Once you know the source of your guilt, the next step is to own up to it, confess, repent and provide restitution (if you are able). When you do God's response is guaranteed, **1 John 1:9** '**If we confess our sins, he faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.**'

Realise that God means what He says

God's forgiveness is free and enough. Did you hear that? His forgiveness is free and enough. However, those words aren't always accepted by us. We need to actively choose to believe what God says and thank Him for the gift of forgiveness that was made possible by the death of His son. Do this even if you don't feel forgiven.

Give up dwelling on the past

Who here, like myself, ruminates (now to ruminate means to think deeply and for a long period), going over and over conversations in your mind, replaying incidents from the past (it's often worse at 2am in the morning),... listen to this point (it may hurt but listen to it anyway) **If you cling to the past and refuse to forgive yourself, you 'play God' with your guilt and claim the right to undo what He has done.**

It is interesting that the very last words Jesus spoke on the cross were 'It is finished'. Sometimes we need to be reminded of His words, it is finished; there is nothing more for us to do. So next time you begin to dwell on the past, banish the thoughts from your mind and instead

Invest time in renewing your mind

Being free from the past allows you to live freely in the present. To renew our minds we must read, memorize and let your thoughts dwell on scriptures that emphasize the forgiveness of God and the grace He has extended to you in Christ Jesus. Spend time in prayer thanking and praising Him every day for His gift of guilt-free living. But we are not finished yet because there is someone who will attack us.... Satan.

Verify truth when Satan accuses

Take hold of the truth because Satan will accuse you. You can count on it, that's his favourite weapon. He'll whisper in your mind 'If you really were a child of God, how could you have done such a thing?' or 'Call yourself a Christian, that was very unchristian'. Fortunately, Jesus modelled how to counter Satan. Remember when Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness after His baptism and stayed there for 40 days being tempted by Satan. What did Jesus do? He wielded a weapon of His own, the Word of God, the truth found in the Bible. Three powerful words, 'It is written' sent Satan on his way. Each time Satan tested Jesus, Jesus came right back at him with 'It is written' quoting scripture and after three attempts Satan left him. You must do the same when you are tempted to believe that God's forgiveness doesn't apply to you.

It is written: **'He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.'** Psalm 103: 10-12 This is a great verse to use against Satan.

Exchange your life for the life of Christ

The truth is we cannot live a Christian life in our own strength. Without help we could very easily crawl back under a pile of guilt and regret. Instead we need to rely on the strength given to us from God by his Holy Spirit and dedicate our lives to following the leading of Jesus.

Notice that God brings your feelings in line with the facts

Perseverance in spite of what you feel pays off. Forgiving others and forgiving yourself – even when you don't feel like it – guarantees freedom. The will of God is that you forgive yourself as freely as He forgives you. **Romans 8:1-2 says 'There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.'** This 'no condemnation' clause releases you from the punishment for your failures.

Actor Kelsey Grammer has been among the most likeable and recognizable figures since his phenomenal two decades playing the endearingly know-all shrink Dr. Frasier Crane on the comedies Cheers and Frasier. Yet, at the height of Kelsey's success, alcohol and cocaine addiction took him notoriously to the edge of self-destruction. In an April 2015 Vanity Fair article, Kelsey said, "That was the time when I could not forgive myself for my sister's death.'

The sister he was referring to was 18-year-old Karen, who was abducted, raped, and murdered in Colorado by spree killer Freddie Glenn in 1975. Kelsey at the age of 20 had to identify his sister's body and then inform his stricken mother.

Kelsey admitted that he lost his faith in God for the first couple of years after Karen's death and the journey towards forgiving himself took 20 years.

More than 30 years later, when the killer was up for parole in 2009, Kelsey wrote to the parole board saying "I miss her in my bones, I was her big brother. I was supposed to protect her, I could not.... It very nearly destroyed me." When asked, "How could you have protected her?" "You were only 20. You weren't even living in Colorado." He said, "It's hard to explain. It's not rational. But it happens anyway. I know a lot of people who've lost their siblings and blame themselves." When he was able to let his guilt go after many years, he began to recover.

Nowhere in the Bible are we given a time limit. I take heart from Kelsey's story in that it took a long time for him to process the grief and forgive himself. God gives us time and space. Also nowhere is the Bible will you find a list of sins that are exempted from God's grace, that means no matter what you've done or how unforgivable you feel, or how long ago the event happened, as a Christian, redemption is already yours. You are F-O-R-G-I-V-E-N. Period.

Play the song by Toby Mac called Forgiveness

Pray this with me in your heart....

Dear Heavenly Father, I understand that there is nothing to gain by holding myself in unforgiveness and there is everything to gain by releasing myself from unforgiveness and beginning the process of healing. I want to move forward and make a positive difference in the future. I confess the ungodly accountability, self-abasement, and the vows I have made to never forgive myself. Because Jesus died for my sins, I choose to forgive myself--to no longer punish myself and be angry with myself. I forgive myself for letting this hurt control me and for hurting others out of my hurt. I repent of this behaviour and my attitude. I ask for Your forgiveness and healing. God, help me to NEVER again retain unforgiveness of myself or others. Thank you for loving me and for Your grace to move forward with You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.