

The Gift of Forgiveness

To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you. I don't know who Lewis Smedes is but those are his wise words.

The word "forgive" means to wipe the slate clean, to pardon, to cancel a debt. It is important to remember that forgiveness is not granted because a person deserves to be forgiven. Instead, it is an act of love, mercy and grace.

After presenting a program to an audience of caregivers I had a woman wait to speak with me in private. She shared that she had something she needed to ask me about but couldn't do so in front of everyone else. She has been caring for her aunt for some years. Though she's doing all she can for her, she doesn't find joy in giving of herself because her aunt is not a nice person. Her aunt says unkind things to her, is never grateful for the assistance but instead constantly complains. It's never enough! Despite that, she feels guilty because she wants to be a cheerful giver. Her words to me were "*what kind of a person am I that I can't give of myself joyfully when I know my aunt really needs my assistance? I'm there for her, and will continue to be so, but not with a kind heart.*" The pain on this woman's face was apparent, and I could see it went deep.

I responded by telling her about the person I was looking at. I saw a good person, with a kind heart and caring intentions. I explained that many people are caring for someone who is appreciative, that they love and want to support, and that helps to fuel them in their caregiving. Obviously she

doesn't have that. So despite the lack of respect and gratitude from her care recipient, she continues to give. That takes a special person. I know many people who couldn't do that. I followed that with a few moments of honoring and validating this incredible person standing before me.

Forgive Yourself

If we see someone else who is giving of themselves but not getting gratitude or support in return, we likely have empathy for them and wonder how they do it. We look at them with admiration. But when we are the ones in that situation we are less forgiving of ourselves. After all, they don't live in our head. They don't know our thoughts, the unkind words rolling around in our mind. Why can't we get past this and just give with a happy heart?

Because we're human. No one can beat us up better than ourselves. That act of love, mercy and grace I previously spoke of is something that we should give to ourselves as well. We have a right to be human. No, they don't hear the unkind words in your mind, but you don't hear theirs either. If those thoughts were amplified I suspect we'd all find a lot of common ground.

Forgiveness is giving up the possibility of a better past. I encourage you to accept your state of being human, then move on and allow your giving heart a chance to flourish without judgement.

*This article is a reprint of a blog posted by
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