

Beginners at Forgiveness

*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other,
just as in Christ God forgave you. (Eph. 4:31)*

Yesterday, we were outraged at one another over something that seems trivial now, but the fire of anger is not quite cooled beneath the surface ashes. Yesterday, I made her cry in frustration. Yesterday, she was mad at me. I know I drive her crazy sometimes. She's not always easy to live with either. Yesterday, old grievances were flung off the shelf where they are somewhat shakily stored.

Yet today we walked up the road to pick sweet corn from a neighbor's patch and walked back down the road hand in hand in our usual way. We're good at forgiving. We have to be. The weather of love comes and goes, and we must let it. It is a required condition of loving someone and being loved back. (Fulghum, 1991, p. 59)

If you never even want to forgive, never even try to remove a hateful memory and restore a loving relationship, you are in a lot of trouble.

If you are trying to forgive, even if you manage forgiving in fits and starts, if you forgive today, hate again tomorrow, and have to forgive again the day after, you are a forgiver. Most of us are amateurs, bungling duffers sometimes. So what? In this game nobody is an expert. We are all beginners. (Smedes, 1984, p. 151)

For group discussion:

1. What does the phrase "just as Christ has forgiven you" add to Paul's directive to forgive one another?
2. What do you think of Fulghum's idea that forgiveness is a "required condition" for lovers?
3. How does your experience verify his observation that "the weather of love comes and goes"?
4. Why is it that old grievances are usually "shakily stored" rather than put away for good in relationships?
4. What is appealing about Smedes' belief that forgiveness is a process not the act of a moment?

For couple dialogue:

1. New thoughts I have had about forgiveness in our relationship . . .
2. Times in our marriage when your forgiveness has meant so much . . .
3. Some old grievances that are still "shakily stored" on the shelves of our marriage . . .
4. Things I can do to open the way for forgiveness and healing in our relationship . . .

References

Fulghum, R. (1991). *Uh-oh*. New York: Ivy Books.

Smedes, L. B. (1984). *Forgive and forget*. San Francisco: Harper and Row.