

## FORGIVENESS IN MISSION SETTINGS A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

The missionary world is peopled with those committed to carry the message of reconciliation, of which forgiveness is the heart. However, forgiveness is neither a skill to be learned nor a theory to be explained and promoted. It is a truth to be practiced on a heart level, expressed in every relationship. But it is difficult! It is difficult because it is an unnatural act, because offense is so subtle, so frequent, so invasive, because we want justice to be done and forgiveness feels mutually exclusive with justice. The purpose of this paper is to explore these issues—the difficulties and dimensions of forgiveness, the foundational principles found in God's Word and illustrated by Jesus Christ, and the steps of forgiveness. The focus and challenge is to learn to live as a forgiven and forgiving person, who is committed to both integrity and spiritual generosity, one who leaves the administration of justice in God's hands.

Forgiveness is described by Yancey as “an unnatural act” (CT, April 8, 1991, p. 37), because deep within us is a desire for justice, recognition, and positive regard from others. When these are not forthcoming we feel slighted, diminished, perhaps angry, or retaliatory, and we feel justified in these reactions. To deny that we do, or be expected to act otherwise, seems unnatural and unreasonable.

Missionaries have many opportunities to practice forgiveness, because hurts, slights, and injustices come our way daily in an unending stream. A few examples of situations causing pain are:

1. The people we serve (nationals, indigenous group) may have rejected us, rejected the message of salvation, lied to us, stolen from us, or taken advantage of us—when our motives were pure and our only intention was to obey God.
2. The callousness or cruelty of institutions, of decision-makers within those organizations of which we're members, or seemingly harsh administrators whose decisions impact us painfully.
3. Colleagues whose work seems more successful, whose financial support is better, who are more popular and have more opportunities than we do, and whose children are brighter/more obedient/better adjusted than ours... Other singles whose partnerships work better than ours, who have more friends and seem to have more of everything than we do.
4. Thoughtless colleagues who make remarks that stab and wound.
5. Powerless people who engage in malicious gossip and slander.
6. Those with the short sword, people whom we think are friends and we allow them to get close, then they wound us by breaking confidences, betraying us, doing harm in a variety of ways. The 'short sword' is wielded by people we trusted and pierces to the heart.
7. Unending, unresolvable conflict with colleagues and administration.
8. The home church fails us in some way—inadequate support, little contact, no understanding or appreciation of the difficulties we experience regularly.
9. Our children who disappoint us in a number of ways.
10. Colleagues who are lazy or shirk their part of the load.
11. Colleagues who sin greatly and let us down; the sin demoralizes us and allows Satan to have a foothold within our group.
12. Our past—we are who we were and may bring memories of pain or unresolved issues with us into the mission task. That past impacts and complicates the present.
13. Ourselves, when we wound, hurt, harm, and discourage others, and don't live up to our own standards and commitments.

Missionaries are a flawed and fallible people. Are we then so different from, and worse than normal Christians in our sending constituencies? No, we are God's people, often failing, often struggling, still making a genuine effort to live the message as well as promote the message. These things, listed above, are part of the battle, a part for which we are often not prepared.

All of these situations must be faced and dealt with in a godly manner or our message of reconciliation will not be visible or credible to a watching spiritual and material world and we will not be living in victory and freedom.

[NOTE: We read over this list and admit that it's a subjective list. Some of these things do indeed happen, and may well happen to you and me. But some of them are only our perceptions—the reality may be quite different. Rather than resigning ourselves to a victim identity, let's check our perception to see if it's accurate, or examine our behavior to see if what we're experiencing is a consequence of our own behavior.]

Some people and situations are harder to forgive than others:

1. People we cannot see, touch, or may not even know (parents who have died; the mother who gave us away to be adopted, the invisible ghost/ethos behind an organization).
2. People who do not care, who minimize offenses by "it's your problem", "you're too sensitive", "that's the way we do things in this culture/entity/country".
3. Ourselves.
4. Monsters. Those whose acts are too horrible to be comprehended are hard to forgive.
5. God.

However, forgive we must! The concept permeates God's word. It is the heart of salvation and living forgivingly is the grounds of assurance of our own forgiveness. It is the only means by which we can remedy the inevitable hurts of history and live with grace in the present and future.

## SOME PRINCIPLES

1. Only God can forgive sins (Mk. 2:7; Lk. 5:21). When a person sins, no other person can absolve him of that sin; only God is able to do that. The enormity of sin is that it is against God—Ps. 51:4, "Against you, only you, have I sinned," said David, despite the fact that he had harmed Bathsheba, Uriah, Joab, the army, the entire kingdom, and his own wife and family. Jesus did not say from the cross, "I forgive you," though as God, He could have done that. But dying as a man, He said "Father, forgive them." James 5,16, "Confess your sins one to another and pray for each other so you can live together whole and healed" (Peterson, *The Message*). We can and must acknowledge our sinfulness, but it is only God who is able to cancel the debt. We struggle with the impact of the other's sin: and it is the impact, the results, and the residue of that sin that we must handle.
2. "When we see evil in another we can never see the amount of inward resistance the person has given to that evil or the amount of humiliation and sorrow the person has suffered for their own failures and defects. The violence inflicted by temptation is always invisible, and its peculiar oppressiveness, owing to heredity, education, or previous modes of life, can never be estimated by a fellow creature. The evil in our fellows strikes us with bold, startling proportions, whereas goodness is more quiet and hidden and often passes unobserved as something very tame. It must be observed that evil, by its own nature, is more visible than goodness" (Billheimer, *Love Covers*, ? 158-9).
3. In our opinions of others we may fail to distinguish between the sinfulness of sin and the deformity which has resulted from sin. We may see many things in truly good people that are extremely disagreeable, things which may not be real sin. It is this disagreeableness or deformity which can become magnified and affect our estimation of people to a greater extent than their actual sin, for this kind of deformity can infect their manners, taint their tone and atmosphere and be much more obvious than real sin.

We judge people, not so much by how they stand to God as by the inconvenient or disagreeable way in which they may stand to us" (Billheimer, p. 162).

4. "You who are spiritual restore him gently" (Gal. 6:1). What does it mean to be a spiritual person? Chapter 5 of Galatians (vs. 19-20) lists the evidences of unspirituality (which should not be present in a spiritual person), as well as the fruits of the Spirit which are the trademark of a spiritual person (5:22-23).

When we think of forgiveness we often think of the harm others have done to us and the scriptural injunction to forgive them. Let us always remember that we also are hurting and offending people around us, sometimes intentionally, sometimes thoughtlessly. We, too, are in constant need of forgiveness. The spiritual person is one who exhibits great humility and continuous repentance and who lives in awe and fear of God.

**We will not and cannot be facilitators of forgiveness in our organizations, our settings, our contacts, unless we fully know what forgiveness is, unless we have experienced it ourselves, unless we know what it means to live forgivingly, truthfully, and spiritually.**

Therefore, the rest of this paper will be devoted to understanding the two dimensions of forgiveness (vertical and horizontal), the stages of forgiveness, misapplications of the concept and how to avoid them, the time element, and the lifestyle perspective that not everything needs to be forgiven.

I challenge each of us to **be** a facilitator of forgiveness. **Forgiveness is not an interpersonal skill to be learned and practiced and added to our repertoire of techniques. Rather, it is a posture of the heart, a life stance flowing out of our relationship to God.**

## DEFINITION

Forgiveness is that benefit of Christ's death which I receive by faith which cancels the debt I owe to God for my sin. It is a gift I experience in an on going way as I, empowered by Christ, extend this same forgiveness to others who do evil against me.

This is not to say non-Christians cannot forgive. I believe they can because of the common grace available to everyone. But their forgiveness is likely to lack two essential dimensions—forgiving

because of having been forgiven by God (the power to accomplish this unnatural act), and forgiving because of wanting to live in a forgiven state (the results of this unnatural act).

## DIMENSIONS

### *THE VERTICAL DIMENSION*

The English novelist Charles Williams stated that forgiveness is only a game: we can only play at it, but essentially we cannot do it. He was right—unless we begin at the right place. And that place is the vertical dimension.

The foundation must be laid—I need to know that I am forgiven and redeemed because of Jesus Christ's death on the cross, which I acknowledge and accept (Rom. 3:10-12, 23:16-23, Ps. 103:10-12; Mk. 11:25; Col. 3:13-14).

1. I am a sinner and cannot by my own efforts earn forgiveness or a place as a child of God (Is. 64:6-7).
2. I know that God has made adequate and eternal provision for my redemption (Acts 4:12, Jn. 3:16).
3. I choose to accept that provision by faith (Eph. 2:8-9).
4. I rest in the assurance of eternal life, daily living out the implications of being a member of God's family (Jn. 6:39-4, Eph. 2:10).

There are two ideas implicit in this: debt and gift. I owe a debt I cannot pay; payment has already been made and pardon freely offered to me. The proffered gift is life changing for me, with past, present, and eternal implications and benefits.

This is the basis on which I can approach the wrongs done to me. Because of what Christ has done for me, I can acknowledge the debts others owe to me and extend to them His gift of forgiveness for the impact of that sin.

**Unless I begin here,** I will have impossible expectations (justice must be done; I deserve better than this).

**Unless I begin here,** I will have wrong attitudes toward others' sin—perhaps feeling self-righteous, superior and condemnatory. I need to have a sense of humility and trust in God who is the ultimate ruler and righter of all wrongs (Gen. 18:25b).

**Unless I begin here,** I will not have the resources of wisdom and insight furnished by the Holy Spirit, I cannot apply the standards of God's Word. I cannot fully and freely forgive others from a spiritual basis.

**Unless I begin here,** I will not have the resources needed to meet the obligations incumbent upon a member of the household of God (Rom. 12:17-21, 13:8), i.e., "Love your enemies" (Mt. 5:33-38).

### ***THE HORIZONTAL DIMENSION***

Having begun at the right place, I can then make my way through the five stages of forgiving my fellows.

#### **Stage One - Awareness**

Part of awareness is knowing/acknowledging that I am not perfect. I wrong others frequently. I offend often. Saul Kane, in John Masfield's novel, *Everlasting Mercy*, said, "Oh, the harm I've done by being me!" This must be followed by an awareness of the magnitude of Christ's sacrifice for me, which in turn must be followed by realization of the obligation I have to pay my debt to others (Rom. 13:8) by loving and forgiving them (Eph. 4:32).

In the process of awareness, then, I must both seek perspective and be introspective:

**a. Perspective.** In the presence of the cross I am stricken by my own liability to God (Ps. 51:3-4). The awful thing I have done to someone else ultimately falls on God. I must weigh the wrongs done to me against the wrongs I have done to God.

**b. Introspective.** Remembering the magnitude of my debt to God, my heart fills with love for him like the woman who washed Jesus' feet in the presence of a self-righteous Pharisee (Lk 7:36-50). Jesus' words to him were, "He/she who has been forgiven much loves much." Being forgiven so much, can I, dare I, refuse to forgive my brother? Rather than thinking how much or little he owes me, I should remember what it is that I owe him—a debt of love expressed in forgiveness (Rom. 13:8).

#### **Stage Two - Work Stage**

Avoidance of the debt owed is not forgiveness. The Lord did not ignore or minimize the personal cost to Himself of the cross. The work stage is an analysis, an audit. A wise steward tallies up his accounts. We too need to see what is owed to us. We can't do that until we understand fully how we have been wronged.

For example, a child molester may ask a 6 or 8 year old to forgive him, but at that age, she has no idea how deeply she has been violated and wronged. The full cost has not yet come to light.

I need to do the work of tallying up the debt. This may mean talking with someone, a counselor; it may include talking with the one who wronged me, letting them know, if and when I forgive, exactly what it is that I am forgiving. That person's agreement or disagreement does not change the size of the debt in any way.

[In this work of tallying up the debt, the wrongs done, if I choose not to forgive, I must estimate the cost of that too. The Scripture is clear that unforgiveness results in my own sin not being forgiven (Mt. 6:14, 15). What will it be like to live with a barrier between myself and God? The bitterness that can corrode my spirit and contaminate my relationships results from refusal to forgive.]

Maybe the audit will reveal that I am the one at fault or that this is not a sin to be forgiven, but a difference to be understood or a conflict to be negotiated.

#### **Stage Three - Cancel the Debt**

Part of canceling the debt is knowing what that entails. If and when I cancel it, I kiss payment good-bye. A lender who forgives writes off not only the debt but also the interest and penalties. In forgiving another I give up my demand for vengeance. I release my hold on the one who wronged me. I am not going to ask for payment again. I do not hold this debt against him. I will not malign him to others.

From the victim's point of view, it is costly to forgive. I must take this loss into account before I do the canceling.

That's how God forgave me; that's how He wants me to forgive others.

The difference between God's forgiveness of the person and my forgiveness is that I cannot fully remove the penalty, because only God can forgive sin and only God can interrupt its consequences. I can give up/forgive/let go of the impact of that person's sin on me, but it remains for the person to deal with God for the sin itself.

#### **Stage Four - Refuse to take it back**

The result of real forgiveness is to live forgiven and forgivingly. There will be reminders of the loss, and I may have regrets when I am reminded of that loss. I may have to re-forgive—restate my earlier commitment to forgive this offense. This is why some symbolic action or witnessing person can help remind me that I have forgiven the offender and that the debt is canceled.

All of this may sound impossible as we mentally rehearse some of the awfulnesses we have seen. How can I forgive the pain caused to someone I love? How can I ask someone else to release an enormous debt? It may feel impossible, disloyal, superficial, over-spiritualized.

I remind you of the interchange we used with each other as children—"You have to do this." And one childish question was, "Who said so?" Jesus Himself said so, the one who paid the greatest price of all. And think what it cost (God, the Father to see His Son go through such great suffering! It is the one with bleeding hands and side and broken heart who tells us to forgive (Mt. 6:14, 18:21ff), whose death was the price and means of forgiveness,

**When I give up the option of vengeance and refuse to take the debt back, to whom am I giving it up? To the one who wronged me? No. And this, I believe, is a key factor in forgiveness. God is the third party. I give up to God my feelings of vengeance and my longing for justice, I give up to God my pain and hurt, I give up to God my need for the resources to carry on. I trust Him to take the matter from there. I allow the perpetrator to deal with God Himself since it is only God who can forgive sin. And it is only God who can help me let Him deal with the sin of others.**

#### **Stage Five - Responsible Living**

We have become experts in the art of assigning blame and of explaining why we behave in certain ways: "I was abused as a child; therefore I abuse my children." "My father let me down; therefore I can't trust any man." "My explosive temper is the way I learned that adults manage stress and control relationships; that's just the way I am."

Perhaps we have been harmed, marked, patterned during childhood, but we are now adults. We have the challenge, the resources, and the obligation to live differently, responsibly. We can not treat lightly the need to live as God wants us to live.

I grant that it can be important to understand why we do certain things and to link our behavior with childhood experiences. A good therapist can help us to do that. However, rationalizing poor behavior is not the best response. Our aim must be growth toward freedom and health.

#### **MISAPPLICATIONS OF THE CONCEPT**

##### *What forgiveness is/What it is not*

**All forgiveness comes ultimately from God Himself, whether or not I forgive others or they forgive me for the impact of wrongs we do to one another. We can give forgiveness or withhold it, but His forgiveness is independent of that.**

**Forgiveness does not mean certain things.**

1. Forgiveness does not mean that I allow the other person's sin to go on, or that I say it doesn't matter (what he/she has done to me).
2. Forgiveness does not mean that giving up my right to demand repentance and restitution will be easy or quick.
3. Forgiveness does not mean that I need to or ought to interfere with the consequences so the perpetrator will not have to experience the penalty for his/her sin.
4. Forgiveness does not mean denying the pain that the other person's sinfulness cost me.
5. Forgiveness does not mean that the perpetrator can escape dealing with God for his/her sinful behavior.

6. Forgiveness does not mean that life can now be the same for me as before the offense; it may mean that some possibilities or opportunities have been destroyed for me forever because of it.
7. Forgiving someone does not necessarily restore my trust in the one who wronged me, nor restore our former relationship.
8. Forgiving someone does not erase the need for wisdom and discretion in the future.
9. Forgiveness does not mean condoning the wrong, discounting it, or calling it 'right.'
10. Forgiveness does not give the other person control over me. It takes back control for myself.
11. Forgiving is not forgetting. All that is needed in order to forget something is having a bad memory or a need to suppress it. I do the miracle when I remember and still forgive.
12. Forgiveness does not mean that I allow myself to be victimized again. I can forgive someone...and I must, but it is foolish to place myself where I can be victimized again. That is dishonoring to God.
13. Forgiveness is not excusing; I cannot forgive what I have explained away.
14. Forgiveness is not smoothing over things. Forgiveness cannot happen until I acknowledge that the offense was wrong and that I am hurt.

**Forgiveness is none of the above. Rather it means that I allow God to take over and forgive the sin. This is the only way I can be free. It will take time. It is a process of yielding to God that will probably have to be done over and over.**

This is the only posture that acknowledges adequately that God is the one who has the right to deal with sin and the power to bring justice (in this world or another). From a human perspective forgiveness is an act of faith. God is a better justice-maker than I am. I can leave these issues with Him. It is the only posture that will keep me from wanting vengeance.

It is the only posture that allows me to experience fully my own sinfulness and acknowledge my own need for grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

This posture makes me (and no one else) responsible for me and does not make my freedom, growth, or maturity contingent on whether another person agrees that he or she has hurt me and repays the wrong.

The alternatives to such forgiveness are that I either remain in bondage, waiting for God to strike down the perpetrator, become angry with God, because He doesn't act quickly on my behalf, or attempt on my own to retaliate. Not to forgive almost always results in resentment and anger; according to Heb. 12:15, bitterness results from turning away from the grace of God (*Good News Bible*).

So it would seem that when I am bitter and hold a grudge, I am unable or unwilling to receive God's forgiving and enabling grace. Bitterness has a corrosive effect on the one who refuses to forgive. It stifles growth, and keeps me at the mercy of someone else (by my choice).

***"Forgiveness is setting the prisoner free—  
and finding out that the prisoner was me."  
(Catherine Marshall)***

### THE HOW OF FORGIVENESS

Forgiving the one who harmed me is an act of the will and may need to be repeated again and again. I may continue to feel violated and have a perception of betrayal and broken trust. This cannot be denied, but neither can it be the basis for my actions. Getting emotionally free may be a long process, but God's grace is sufficient for emotional freedom, too.

How do we forgive? "I do not know how," said Lewis Smedes (CT, Jan. 7, 1983, p.26), "but by watching others, I notice some things about the way they forgive:

- ◆ They forgive slowly. There are not many instant forgivers.
- ◆ They may forgive communally, in the company of others who understand the degree of pain, who will witness the transaction, thus providing an answer to the accuser of us all (Rev. 12:10-11).
- ◆ They may forgive silently, invisibly, and alone, performing the miracle in private.
- ◆ They forgive as they are forgiven,
- ◆ They occasionally use symbolism to demonstrate their act of giving the gift of forgiveness, releasing the debt.
- ◆ They forgive graciously, not grudgingly.
- ◆ A little understanding makes it a lot easier."

And we keep on giving, stumbling, floundering in this work of forgiveness. Remember there are no experts in forgiving, only beginners.

**By living forgivingly, we acknowledge that sins need forgiveness, while violations of cultural norms, lesser grievances of life, require spiritual generosity. Not everything should be elevated to the level of a moral wrong.**

As I release the impact of another's sin on me, so also I can release the impact of annoyances, inconveniences, slights, and differences. The challenge is to live generously and with integrity and godly standards, not as a jellyfish, to whom nothing matters very much.

- ◆ **Annoyances**—for example, bother us but do not really hurt us. Gum chewing by a choir member, cutting in front of us in the super market, being late for an appointment with us—these are discourteous and irritating. They probably do not merit forgiveness. What I need is a generous spirit.
- ◆ **Defeats**—my article was rejected; my bid was overlooked at the auction; I was overlooked because I am an aging female, or a bald, fat male. Do these things need my forgiveness, or God's? No. I need to accept the defeat and not cast blame or make assumptive accusations.
- ◆ **Slights**—Getting a fishing license—"What color shall we say your hair is?" A favorite professor forgets our name two years after graduation. Our mentor falls asleep in the middle of our presentation. We are not included in an important dinner or are asked to serve as waiter because we are only 'staff and not 'faculty'. Slights are more problems of unmet expectations, rather than sins to be forgiven. They require spiritual generosity, because we live in a flawed world and remember that things will not always be fair or kind. Spiritual generosity refuses to attribute bad motives, take offense, and suspends judgment.
- ◆ **Differences**—the missionary task brings together people who are very different from each other on every scale. Differences can be magnified until they create a RUB (resentment, unforgiveness, bitterness) or they can be viewed as different, and nothing more.

We cannot forgive a person for being who they are. They may be depressed, because they are a burden to our existence (old, ill, feeling useless). They may file papers under "F" today because it is Friday (unskilled, preoccupied). They may be an embarrassment to us for not being more successful (handicapped in some way). Do we need to forgive these things? No, that's part of living in a decaying, imperfect world.

These things call for tolerance, magnanimity, humor, humility, patience, understanding, perhaps action—but not forgiveness. It is only forgiveness that can heal the wounds that are deep, moral, and damaging acts of betrayal and disloyalty, often intentional and premeditated. For these we need the amazing grace of God—and only His grace is sufficient for a Come Ten Boom to forgive Betsy's persecutor (the prison guard who treated her so cruelly), for a person to forgive the one who incested them, for a wife to forgive the husband who turned to another woman. The grace to forgive comes from God. The decision to extend it is our own.

Two disciples were disloyal to Jesus. One repented and was restored to a place of trust and leadership; the other was remorseful and took his own life. Both were forgiven by Jesus, but one refused to accept that forgiveness and experienced eternal consequences.

### WHAT IS THE GOAL OF FORGIVENESS?

The goals of forgiveness are three-fold:

- restoration of a right relationship with God. (Rom. 4:7-8; 8:1; Mt. 6:12, 14, 15; 18:21-35; Mk. 11:25)
- reconciliation and restoration with fellow believers (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13). (Admittedly, this is not always possible—i.e., the death of a perpetrator makes reconciliation impossible but personal healing (third goal) can still occur.)
- personal healing and freedom.

Expressed behaviorally, forgiveness is getting free, setting free, and living free from the penalty and power of sin, my own and others; an initial transaction (salvation), an ongoing appropriation of Christ's strength to extend forgiveness to others, and a dynamic lifestyle of freedom, compassion and responsibility, because of Christ's death on the cross and my acceptance of that transaction.

### STEPS OF FORGIVENESS

**Forgiveness can be achieved by the following five-step process presented by Smedes in a workshop entitled "From Freedom to Integrity," March, 1990.**

- a. **Surrender to God your "right" to need to get even.**
- b. **Review your caricature of the person who hurt you. We begin to label people almost entirely in terms of the wound they have caused. As we forgive, we need to gradually restore the correct image of that person. He/she probably is not the monster that has grown in our minds.**
- c. **Choose to be God-like. Bearing the sorrows, the burden of the pain we have received at the hands of others, and bearing the pain of letting go of vengeance offers us the opportunity to be like our God. What was He like? He was a wounded, bleeding, feeling God, expressed by Miriam Adeney as follows,**
  - The other gods were strong; but you were weak,
  - They rode, but you stumbled to your throne.
  - To our wounds, only a wounded God can speak,
  - And not a God has wounds but you alone.
- d. **Review your feelings toward that person. Rehearse aloud the good that they do or say.**
- e. **Become open to the possibility of a reconciliation.**

Sigmund Freud understood the law of nature. "One must forgive one's enemies," he said, "but not before they have been hanged." We want something radically different than this.

Charles Williams has said of the Lord's Prayer ('Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive...'), "No word in English carries a greater possibility of terror than the little word 'as' in that clause... The condition of forgiving then is to be forgiven; the condition of being forgiven is to forgive." It is one thing to get caught up in a tit-for-tat, dog-eat-dog cycle with a spouse or business partner, and another thing entirely to get caught up in such a cycle with Almighty God. Thankfully, He is the author of forgiveness, and it is He who calls us to a higher law." (Yancey, "An Unnatural Act," CT, April 8, 1991, p.37).

Our Father in heaven,  
Reveal who you are  
Set the world right;  
Do what's best— as above, so below.  
Keep us alive with three square meals.  
Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.  
Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.  
You're in charge!  
You can do anything you want!  
You're ablaze in beauty!  
Yes. Yes. Yes.

Peterson, *The Message*, Mt. 6.

From one who knew what forgiveness was and practiced it, Gail MacDonald:

"As James, the brother of the Lord, put it, Watch what you do and what you think; for there will be no mercy to those who have shown no mercy. But if you have been merciful, then God's mercy toward you will win out over his judgment against you. Love and forgiveness do indeed cover.

Love grows stronger when assailed;  
Love conquers where all else has failed;  
Love ever blesses those who curse;  
Love gives the better for the worse.  
Love unbinds others by its bonds;  
Love pours forgiveness from its wounds."

*A Step Farther and Higher*, p, 93-94.



## DAMAGE ON THE MISSION FIELD

“Perhaps the most atrocious damage of disunity is displayed on the foreign mission field. When missions and missionaries, all claiming to represent Jesus and the gospel, manifest antagonism and hostility to one another, Satan alone is the winner.

When inquirers and newly converted believers discover that professed followers of Jesus are fragmented, envious, and even belligerent in spirit, they are often totally devastated. To see the Body of Christ rent by proselytism, greed and jealousy is to them incomprehensible, inexplicable, and even unspeakable. It leaves the national believer totally confused, disillusioned, and undone. Perhaps nothing brings greater grief to the heart of the Master than the disgrace of disunity on the mission field” (Billheimer,p.31).

The answer to such tragedy is to exemplify, teach, and facilitate the forgiving grace of Jesus Christ.

## SOME PERSONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How have I been forgiven? For what? By God? By Others?
2. What remains in my life that I don't feel forgiven for? By God? By Others?
3. As I consider the parable of the two debtors (Mt. 18:23-35), with which one do I identify?
4. Do I know that I am forgiven? Am I fully aware of both my own sinfulness and God's great grace extended to me?
5. Am I still carrying the burden and pain of sins others have done to me? What have I failed to forgive? What am I continuing to use as a crutch to keep me from living responsibly?
6. What is my current level of spiritual generosity? Am I storing up little slights, and keeping a record? Or am I daily living more forgivingly/generously?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the ethos in the mission or church community that I am most familiar with, with regard to this matter of forgiveness? How do I know that?
2. Is it possible to be too forgiving? To be generous toward sins that should call instead for a sturdy challenge?
3. What one thing could I/we do to promote forgiveness in the Christian community I work with or am most familiar with?
4. What skills should we add to our workshops and seminars, in order to promote forgiveness (i.e., confrontation? promoting personal insight? managing differences?)
5. What one new insight will I take away from this material with regard to conflict and forgiveness?

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