

Christmas is For-Giving

Kids love Christmas. Can't wait for the presents, going to grandma's house, and sitting on Santa Claus' lap. Sometimes for us adults, not so much. Step one for season survival; forgiveness.



Matthew 18: 21-34

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

Reflections

Long before the internet, people communicated via letters – handwritten or typed, they were placed in envelopes and entrusted to the U.S. Postal Service. Like email, letters have no intonation, and are one-sided.

A close friend in New York was suffering from post-partum depression (a relatively un-researched condition then) and I had written a long letter. I thought I was giving her encouraging words that would buoy her spirits. She took those words the wrong way. A letter came to me with heated words and the warning that she no long wanted to hear from me ... ever!

True to her word, she returned my next attempts at communication unopened. So I stopped. Months and then years passed. Our children grew but our relationship did not. It had gotten stuck in the mire of misunderstanding.

I honestly don't recall what prompted me to write to her again several years later. Perhaps conscience. Perhaps a prodding of God's Holy Spirit through a sermon. Perhaps it was missing her friendship. But one day I poured into a letter all the sadness of the past years, and finally wrote those important words: "I'm sorry that what I said hurt you."

Miraculously (and I should add that all those years I had been praying about this broken friendship) she opened and read the letter. The Holy Spirit had been working on her as well, because those words fell on a receptive heart and she wrote back on tear-stained paper that she forgave me. We picked up where we left off. Now we correspond several times a week and are friends on Facebook. A few months ago we saw one another for the first time in over 25 years.

In my family, as I was growing up, saying "I'm sorry" simply wasn't

done. Shouting and fighting happened, and harsh – sometimes hateful – words were said. But when tempers waned, no one ever apologized. It was just understood that the argument was over and "all was well". Was it? Often not. Many of those issues resurfaced much later – sometimes years – because they were not resolved originally.

Saying I'm sorry is difficult. Sometimes we are not really sure what we did or why it was hurtful. Sometimes we are not sorry for what we said, but how we said it. It was a hard lesson to learn as an adult – to say I'm sorry. But it was a good feeling to ask for – and receive – the forgiveness of a friend.

God forgave us on the cross. Jesus paid for it. Now it is our gift to share - the gift of forgiveness fits everyone.

—Wendy Woods

Readings

Sunday, December 6

Psalm 25:11

To whom do you say “I’m sorry” the most often? Why?

Monday, December 7

Colossians 3:13

How do you usually handle it when someone has wronged you?

Tuesday, December 8

Mark 11:25

Which is easier for you – to ask forgiveness or give forgiveness?

Wednesday, December 9

Job 7:21

Do you find it easier to forgive others than to forgive yourself? If so, why?

Thursday, December 10

John 20:23

Is there someone you need to forgive today? Someone of whom you need to ask forgiveness?

Friday, December 11

Matthew 6:14-15

What was one of the worst things a sibling ever did to you? Have you forgiven him/her? Why or why not?

Saturday, December 12

Psalm 7:17

What would you do to celebrate if all your debts or burdens were suddenly canceled?

Don't have a Bible? Access these scriptures at biblegateway.com.