

God's Blessing of Forgiveness

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” ~Ephesians 4:32

God's word is filled with stories of how forgiveness makes things better. When Joseph forgave his brothers for selling him into slavery and telling his father he was dead, he blessed an entire nation. When Jesus died on the cross, he made possible forgiveness for all who have sinned against God.

Jesus forgave the very soldiers who crucified him on the cross. “Forgive them, father, for they know not what they do.”

This moment of Jesus, when Rome and the world seemed to have him at their mercy, turned the entire situation around. Now the moment was about forgiveness, even in the face of cruelty and darkness.

The entire mission of God is to bring reconciliation between people, and ultimately to reconcile us to God himself. The unbridgeable gap between heaven and earth has been bridged by Jesus. Each day is an opportunity for that to happen somewhere, sometime, for us and those around us.

Sometimes we can forgive simply because the alternative would be much worse. Stepping back to weigh the consequences of anger, or spur of the moment, actions will often help us to calm down.

“A man visited Yellowstone Park where he saw a grizzly bear. The huge animal was in the center of a clearing, feeding on some discarded camp food. For several minutes he feasted alone—no other creature dared draw near. After a few moments a skunk walked through the meadow toward the food and took his place next to the grizzly. The bear didn't object and the man knew why—It would cost the bear too much to get even.”
~ Dale Carnegie

Skunks, with their abominable odor and long-lasting effects, are the great equalizers. Not the kind which insist on their own way, or attack without good reason. The kind which seek forgiveness, joy, and love with their fellow skunks. That odor is a little like sin. It is very hard to remove that smell, or the effects of sin. God vanquishes sin, forgives his people, and waits to see those moments happen in his people as they interact with others.

Sometimes we must ask God to help us to stop thinking about how others have wronged us enough long enough to move on to better moments. It is surprising how

much better people can look the next day, if we spend time forgetting bad and embracing good.

Two little boys had quarreled. But the next morning, Johnny took his cap and headed for Bobby's house again. Surprised, an older member of the family said teasingly, "What! Going to play with him again? I thought you quarreled only last evening and were never going to have anything more to do with each other. Funny memory you have."

Johnny looked a little sheepish, dug his toe into the carpet for a moment, then flashed a satisfied smile as he hurried away. "Oh, Bobby and me's good forgetters."

How often should we forgive? As often as it takes. For us to heal, and for the situation to become better. How many Hatfield and McCoy type feuds continue for decades, because people cannot see a better way? How many churches are known as toxic, just because complainers and naysayers complain and naysay all the time?

God has blessed me over the years in the pastorate, in seeing very few situations, as I've seen very few of the skunks which might sometimes inhabit the church. Perhaps because I might not be able to forgive enough, perhaps because God has only put me in places where love was paramount.

Over and over, there are moments when we can put this very real power called forgiveness into action. Jesus said that we must forgive seventy times seven times. Some people say it means seven thousand or more. We must forgive as often as it takes, until there is no longer any need for it.

On personal, political, and world levels, people give us illustrations of moments in which forgiveness, in this adventure of loving our neighbor as ourselves, and doing unto others as they would do to us, would chart a better future. Most often they do not do it, and things get worse. But when they do, the future becomes bright and lovely.

Ultimately, the world begins with us when we walk out the door each morning. If we seek and give love and forgiveness, embracing both, as gifts of God to us, the day will be better no matter what might happen.

Bernard Melzer puts it this way, "When you forgive, you in no way change the past - but you sure do change the future."

My thought, dear reader, is that it changes the past, present, and future. God bless us all as we discover this vital and powerful truth!