

## **FORGIVENESS**

So many people seem to be constantly battling their negative feelings, or relying too heavily upon them. Everyone likes to feel good, and no one enjoys being depressed or tension ridden. While some people spend their entire lives in search of the ultimate emotional high, for some strange reason others seem to revel in feeling low.

Regardless of what kind of person you are, your feelings and how you respond to them play a major role in determining how much you can experience and enjoy satisfaction, or how susceptible you are to feeling overwhelmed by the negatives in life.

As we have already learned, being satisfied is not the same thing as being happy. Happiness is our emotional response to what happens to us and around us. Conversely, a truly fulfilled person remains stable in grief, under pressure, and during other times of negative emotional expression. Genuine satisfaction, then, is not an emotion, and it is not dependent upon a positive emotional response to a given situation.

Nevertheless, negative emotions, if dealt with improperly, can destroy our sense of well-being and joy. If we see our trials as coming from God in order to refine us and bring us to maturity, for example, we can remain composed even in the midst of deep tribulation. But if we resist trials and allow them to make us bitter, we destroy the possibility of beneficial gain. This is true for every kind of negative emotion and feeling.

### **Bitterness, resentment, and an unforgiving spirit**

Quite often negative feelings are an indication that there is something wrong in our lives. A personal failure, a broken promise, or something someone said has hurt us or undermined our sense of self-worth and self-confidence. As a result, we begin brooding over the situation and harbouring critical thoughts. Then, before we realize it, we find ourselves on the threshold of bitterness and resentment, baffled and bewildered.

One of the most negative attitudes we can experience is an unforgiving spirit. Nothing is more damaging to a person's spiritual and emotional well-being. Yet, often we find it so difficult to forgive, but it is essential if we are to be released from the bondage of an unforgiving spirit. Otherwise you will cause yourself harm physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually by refusing to forgive.

On one occasion in the life of the Lord Jesus, Peter came to Him and asked, "*Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?*" [Jesus answered,] *I say not unto thee, until seven times: but, until seventy times seven.*" (Matthew 18: 21,22). The Saviour was saying that there can be no limit to the number of times or the depth of forgiveness with which we are to forgive. None of us has a right to withhold forgiveness from another.

We are not left with an option of whether to forgive. Jesus went on to emphasize this truth in a parable, telling of a man who had been forgiven of a massive debt but was unwilling to write off a debt of a few Rand (equivalent) someone owed to him. The foolishness of that man's stubbornness shows just why we must forgive - because God has forgiven us of so much.

Forgiving a person for a wrong committed against us is costly. It may cost us our pride, it may cost us money, or it may cost us in terms of violated rights. But God's forgiveness to us cost far more - it cost His Son, who paid the ultimate price for our sins. Jesus died to pay the price for our forgiveness, and in that dreadful moment that surpassed time and eternity as He hung on the Cross bearing our sin, God the Father had to forsake His only begotten Son. It was an incredible price to pay to forgive undeserving sinners.

### **Forgiving and forgetting**

Sincere, effective forgiveness also includes another important element - forgetting. In her book, 'It Feels Good to Forgive' Helen Hosier has penned an irreversible truth: "Regardless of how many times you may say to someone who has wronged you, 'I forgive you,' if you have not forgotten then you have failed in forgiveness. If you find it necessary to remind the individual of his or her betrayal, unfaithfulness, or untrustworthiness, then you have not truly forgiven the other person."

Forgiving and forgetting is truly God's way, for this is exactly what He does for us when we come to Him through Christ. "*This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.*" (Hebrews 10:16-17).

If God can forgive and forget our terrible iniquities which sent His Son to the Cross, surely we cannot do less. In fact, He will give us the power to accomplish this task, for "*We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.*" (Philippians 4:13). Many times our bitterness and resentment become so imbedded within us that we actually extend our anger beyond the person or situation that has hurt us, and begin blaming God.

Even Christians are prone to ask, "God, where were You? Why did You let it happen? I thought You loved me. What about your promise of guidance and protection in Psalm 121?"

Pastor Erwin W. Lutzer has a most enlightening answer for such questions. In his book, 'Living With Your Passions', he states: "God's love does not prevent us from the tragedies of sexual abuse or any other kind of mistreatment. Christ was God's beloved Son, yet the Father didn't shield Him from the torture of the Crucifixion. That crime, despite its horror, has become for us a fountain of blessing. The horror of Good Friday must be understood in the light of the joy of Easter Sunday. God can do the same with the ugly hurts of life."

He then admonishes his readers to confess their bitterness toward God. "Concentrate on His infinite grace and be forgiven and accepted," he says. Only in this way will you be able to experience the deep spiritual release and sense of relief which are the beginning of true satisfaction. "

### **How to have a right attitude**

Perhaps you are struggling with bitterness or an unforgiving spirit, and wonder how you can ever come to the point of confession, forgiveness, and be set free. Let me share with you the secret to removing wrong attitudes and negative feelings. It is the power of the Word of God.

Hebrews 4:12 says, "*For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*" In other words, when you let Scripture fill your heart, it transforms what is in there. It seeks out wrong attitudes, exposes them, and then makes them right. Your spirit is hereby transformed from the inside outwards.

The best way to let Scripture do that is to get to know it better. Read it every day, memorize it, and meditate on it. James 1:21 speaks of "*the engrafted Word*", which is able to save your souls. When Scripture gets into your life and becomes a living part of you, it has incredible transforming power.

Peter wrote something very similar. "*Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.*" (1 Peter 2:1,2). Again, Scripture is the antidote to wrong attitudes.

It is vital that we not only memorized the Word, but also put it into practice daily. This is the essential element in building right attitudes, namely a willing and submissive obedience to the teaching of God's Word. James says we should be *"...doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving our own selves."* (James 1:22). Knowing the Bible intellectually without practicing it experientially can actually harden us to its truth!

God's ideal for you is a life of victory over negativity. He wants you to cut out all roots of bitterness, regardless of how painful the cutting process may be. He also wants you to receive the engrafted Word, which is able to transform your soul. This enables us to reach the pinnacle of satisfaction / fulfilment, namely spiritual enlightenment.

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