

# THE QUEST FOR FORGIVENESS

GERRIE MALAN



There have been many times when Martie and I were brought to the place of forgiveness. Have you been there this year? Maybe further back in the past? But you certainly know the battle it can sometimes be, can't you? Often we hear someone say, "I'll forgive, but I won't forget!" Where precisely does that bring us in terms of Jesus' forgiveness command (Mat. 6:14, 15)?

I regularly consult Jewish web pages to learn aspects of the Jewish culture in biblical times so that I might properly understand what has

been written in the Bible. Some ten years ago I came across a Jewish essay on forgiveness and it certainly enlightened my understanding.

Forgiveness manifests on three levels:

- On the first level one does not wish the other party harm. Despite still being upset, angry or hurt, you don't seek revenge or wish the person to come to harm. You even pray for his or her well-being.
- Level two brings release of anger and resentment. Although it's still difficult to relate to the other party as before one is able to move on and let go.
- Forgiveness becomes complete in the third stage, a place at which the other party is reconciled. One is ready to be as close to the offending person as before.

According to the Jewish Talmud it is expected of us to find the strength to forgive at least on the first level. Absence of even this level of forgiveness is regarded as cruelty. To wish badly or seek revenge on someone represents a weakness of personality that requires rectification. Of course the second stage is more difficult and may take a long time of healing and soul searching before the feelings of resentment disappear from your heart.

The ideal form of forgiveness comes on the third level, where relationships are fully restored. But is this always possible? The writer of the essay states that some relationships are so toxic that the responsible thing is to walk away from them.

Nonetheless, it need not be an "all or nothing" approach. One can still move on to a position of basic respect and dignity. Every small improvement of a damaged relationship is significant. In the end it is I who has to take the first step by a decision of my will. (From: Must I Forgive Everyone? By Michael Gourarie, on chabad.org).

The Bible also carries different nuances and it is important to study the context of the specific Scripture. Nonetheless, it seems that a primary meaning is to show mercy and favour, and to be gracious to someone.

- **Grace** means that I give someone a free gift he or she does not deserve.
- **Mercy**, on the other hand, means I do not give someone what he or she deserves.

And oh boy! Of myself I must confess that it is not always easy to forgive. I say I do, but then thoughts of anger might still pop up in my mind from time to time. Today I understand that I am in fact battling in my mind to move beyond that first level of forgiveness. And I realise it is only through the indwelling Holy Spirit that I am able to achieve that position of victory.

Today, more than ever before I understand how spiritually impoverished I had been for most of my life, having been raised in a church that hardly gave any attention to the manifest presence of the Ruach HaQodesh.

---

Photo by Ben White, availability provided by UNSPLASH.

This was first written in 2007