**Unforgiveness**

Have you ever heard a child say, "I am sorry," without truly meaning what he or she said? Adults do the same thing when they go through the motions of forgiveness but don't forgive from the heart. Hurts and disappointments come from all directions. People can often hurt, reject by word or deed, criticize, or disappoint you. Unless you learn how to properly deal with your reactions, unforgiveness can grip your heart and become a stronghold.

Learning how to deal with unforgiveness often begins with your relationship with your parents. While some people grow up in dysfunctional families, even loving and well-meaning parents make mistakes in childrearing or fall short of their children's expectations. Some parents don't teach their children the value of forgiveness because they never learned or practiced it themselves.

Check your heart for bitterness. Is there anything you are still holding against your parents? Are you remembering something about your spouse, brothers, sisters, or other relatives: Perhaps friends, teachers, colleagues, bosses, or members of your church hurt you. Is then anyone you have not forgiven? As you think about each person, do you feel resentful, troubled, or peaceful? Offenses are part of life. The question is, how do you deal with that offense' You can choose to not take offense at the situation, but to instantly forgive and forget.

Jesus is our example. As He was crucified, He prayed*, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do"* (Luke 23:34). Even as He endured suffering, Jesus interceded with the Father, mercifully pointing out the weakness of His tormentors. He also taught His disciples the importance of unequivocal and perfect forgiveness:

*Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt" (Matthew 18:21-27).*

Jesus, "moved with compassion," forgave all your sins. Who are you to refuse to forgive others? Forgiving those who have sinned against you releases God's love and compassion to flow through you. The effect of this decision is peace in your heart and health in your body If you choose not to forgive, the destructive effects of unforgiveness will boomerang on you. Unforgiveness is a poison that you drink, hoping that the other person is going to get sick. If you refuse to forgive, you are the one who will get sick. Unforgiveness leads to resentment, fear, and stress, which lowers the immune system and opens the door to arthritis and other diseases. Unforgiveness also keeps you in spiritual bondage. It clogs the conduit from you to God. You have to choose to end this never-ending cycle and clean this garbage out of your life. Jesus said:

*...If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Matthew 6:1445).*

Go through your checklist and pray. Does the thought of any person on your list cause feelings of anger, bitterness, resentment, or discomfort? That could be a sign that you need to forgive him or her. Jesus told Peter to forgive people "not...seven times, but up to seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:22). Just as Jesus forgave those who killed Him, the Son of God, you are not to forgive based on who was right or wrong, but in obedience to God.

**Prayer for Forgiveness**

**Father, I forgive for hurting me. Separate this sin from and put it on the cross, never to he held against again. Father, bless \_\_\_\_\_. (Repeat this prayer for anyone else you need to forgive.) I ask Your forgiveness for the anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness in my heart against \_\_\_\_\_\_\_. I receive Your forgiveness. Thank You, Father, in Jesus' name.**