

MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF PARENTING - Part III FORGIVENESS (identifying anger)

I initially titled this article anger. As I started writing, that did not seem to be a very attractive title. So I changed the title to forgiveness. Forgiveness sounds and feels more appealing. Kindness, grace, mercy, amnesty, pardon, and remittance are all synonymous with forgiveness. These are all feel-good words. Isn't that what we're all trying to achieve? We all want to feel better. We are constantly seeking a state of emotional regulation. The Post Stress Model says we are either in a state of love or fear. Forgiveness is an expression of love. I believe that we all want to be forgiving people. The journey of forgiveness is not always an easy one. I am challenging you to be honest with yourself. Explore and find out if you truly have forgiven. It is much easier to say I have forgiven someone than to take a look at the pain that caused the need for forgiveness.

I experience two extremes when talking about forgiveness to families. There are those who think they have forgiven but haven't. Then there are those who know they haven't forgiven. The latter either believes it is impossible for them to forgive or are not willing to forgive. It is important to understand what forgiveness means. Forgiveness does not say that what happened was okay. Forgiveness does not give the persecutor permission to continue hurting us. Forgiveness does not mean that those involved have to become best friends. Forgiveness is all about the person who has been harmed. Forgiveness is a gift that we give ourselves. We make a decision that we do not want to carry resentments around any longer. Resentments rob our emotional buckets of joy and peace. Forgiveness allows us to move past terrible situations. Forgiveness allows us to heal. Many times forgiveness opens the door to restoration of relationships. Carl Menninger (unsure of exact quote) - "If patients in psychiatric hospitals would believe that their sins could be forgiven, 70% of them could walk out the next day." United News International KRSS March 6, 2009 - "Forgiveness is God's gift to us to be able to live in a world that is not fair."

I ask people to not shut the door on forgiveness. I'm convinced many people think they just can't forgive. If this is their reality, then I try to move them closer believing forgiveness is possible. A word search finds 136 references to forgive or forgiveness in the NIV Bible. This many references tells me forgiveness is an important concept. Especially when it appears in red ink. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Luke 23:34 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Colossians 3:13. I believe we need the mercy and grace of Jesus to forgive those things that have hurt us the most. By ourselves, we don't have it in us to forgive at that deep a level.

My experience with others tells me that anger is the number one indicator that there is a need for forgiveness. Many people avoid anger. This happens because their experiences with anger have not been pleasant. Anger alerts us that something is wrong. It is a primitive, survival response to a threat. The threat can be either real or perceived. Anger is also an emotional response to a perceived or real injustice. Post Stress Model principle: "It is through the expression, processing and understanding of the primary emotion that you can calm the stress and diminish the behavior." This means that we have to find out our truth in any situation. The

more we process our experience, the more it becomes ours. It is through this integration, not resolution, of trauma that we heal. We are then free from the chains and bondage of the past. Helping people do this is difficult. It is difficult because of the intensity of the emotions people need to experience. It is much easier to deny anger. It's much easier to be angry all the time. It is very difficult to experience the pain and hurt underneath the anger. Anger is power that causes other things. Anger is a cognitive rendition of a deep seeded fear. "Fear creates a form of spiritual amnesia. It dulls our miracle memory. It makes us forget what Jesus has done and good God is. We become abandoned barns, rickety and tilting from the winds, a place where humanity used to eat, thrive, and find warmth. When fear shapes our lives, safety becomes our god. The fear-filled cannot love deeply. Love is risky." *Imagine Your Life Without Fear* by Max Lucado.

You may wonder why I'm focusing on anger. Forgiveness is an event, not a process. In this process, anger is the starting point. If you don't believe you're angry, then how do you identify your anger? I suggest that people pay attention to their bodies. Anger symptoms can be experienced physically. Headaches, sweaty palms, dizziness, getting red-faced, stomachaches and grinding your teeth are a few physical symptoms. Emotionally you may feel like running away, feel guilty and resentful, lash out, become anxious, or get depressed. Anger may be expressed through your behavior. Substance-abuse, sarcasm, withdrawal, yelling or screaming, and any form of physical or verbal abuse may be signs of anger. Resentments are part of our anger. We carry resentments around with us for a number of reasons. Living with universal criticism, always being put down, and never being good enough fuel resentments. Being discounted and not having our feelings validated are another source of a resentments. Other sources of resentments are: sibling comparisons, comparison to another relative, any kind of abusive touch, being expected to know how to do things without being taught, not being allowed to make mistakes, and body shame. If you are still struggling with this, I recommend taking additional help. There are many tools and books to help you with this. It is imperative to own and understand your anger and resentments. This is your truth. Otherwise, it will be very difficult to initiate a healthy forgiveness process. Remember this is a process. Become honest with yourself as you can. This may be a painful process.

Hopefully, this newsletter has helped you identify either a need for forgiveness or a need to identify your anger or both. Next month's newsletter will focus on the forgiveness process and practical solutions. I am closing with two scriptures to help encourage you in this process. Psalm 138:8 - "The Lord will work out his plan for my life-for your faithful love, O Lord, endures forever. Don't abandon me, for you made me." Romans 8:28 - "And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them." Before you enter this process, pray and seek God's guidance. Include a trusted support person or persons. This will help keep you safe and provide encouragement to keep going.

In Christ,

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