

MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF PARENTING - Part IV
FORGIVENESS - Solutions

During the month of September, God continued to reveal to me how important forgiveness is for healing. Time after time forgiveness was the focus of my attention. I had to re-visit situations in my life that needed a deeper level of forgiveness. Challenges for those I work with had to do with forgiveness. Forgiveness is an ongoing process verses being an event in our lives. It would be nice if it were an event. That way we would never have to re-experience pain and hurt from our past. I will briefly re-visit anger before I move onto some practical solutions to help with the forgiveness process. You have a legitimate right to be angry if you have been hurt, cheated, abused, or miss treated. Your anger is valid. Don't let anyone take that away from you. The important thing to do is to move beyond the anger to forgiveness. Until your anger is brought out and talked about, it owns you. It consumes you night and day. Repressed anger distorts your view of the world and you lose your personal empowerment. Unresolved anger turns into resentment. Resentment is an emotional cancer that destroys. Anger creates stress. Stress causes regression, even if the anger is suppressed and you don't feel angry all the time. The emotional energy that it takes to keep the anger repressed causes stress. Stress causes confused and distorted thinking. Stress interferes with short term memory and learning. Basic 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.

Here's some simple, not necessarily easy steps, to take to help deal with anger. These steps require that you think about yourself. After all, you are the only person that you can change. It also requires you sharing and processing with someone else. Don't try to do this all by yourself. If you don't have support that provides emotional safety, the process may be too frightening for you. Fear of facing the past may be the biggest factor contributing to you not being able to forgive. The process can just be too painful and scary. Therefore, you don't do it. I understand that. I get it. Find a trusted person or persons. Do what you can do a little at a time. Feedback and support will help get you through this process. Tap into your spiritual resources as well as having a person(s) in the flesh to help you. In Matthew 11:30, Jesus says "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Allow Jesus to carry your burden through this process. Begin by identifying who or what you're still angry at. Ask yourself - how long have I been carrying this around? Then make a decision that you don't need to carry this around any longer. Identify if you're in a situation that is currently abusive and causes anger. It will be hard, if not impossible, to make progress if you are still in a situation or situations that cause significant anger and stress. Take time and write down on paper what those current life situations are. You will need to become willing to deal with those situations. Ask yourself - what do I need to do about these situations? Determine what decisions you need to make. Many times just identifying the source of anger and making a decision to do something about it creates a sense of relief. You may have been shut down under the pressure of indecision. It may be that you need to change your attitude about a situation. Simply decide what's going on and what you are going to do about it.

The next step is to being processing and ventilating. Many people begin by writing or

journaling. Write out your memories and your perceptions. This is a very powerful tool to begin to release your emotions. It's also important to talk to your support system about your hurt and pain. This is where true healing takes place. Matthew 18:20 assures us that "For where two or three are gathered in My name, there I am with them." Putting words to our anger and pain is important. The Psalmist David is a great example of that. Throughout Psalms David verbalized, put words, to his despair, fear, and pain. The word of God is powerful. Putting words to your emotions is powerful. By doing this, you are following God's example. Remember, God spoke the world into existence. He did not think it into existence. Include some physical activity in your process. Exercise, walking, and bike riding all help release pent up energy. Exercise increases blood flow, oxygen, and nutrition to help refresh and heal stressed cells in your body. Exercise increases your energy level during the day and promotes deep sleep.

Those were simple steps, but not necessarily easy steps. Hopefully after you've done some processing you will begin to feel some relief. You may have to repeat the process more than once for any given situation. I've heard many people say "I talked about it 10 years ago." Quite honestly, that was probably not enough. I know for myself that issues I think are resolved some how can be triggered again. How do you know if you're making progress? Pay attention to your body. Increase self awareness of your stress symptoms. Pay attention to tension in your body. Begin to trust your gut. If something feels uncomfortable, it probably is uncomfortable. Don't ignore it as you may have done in the past. Take control and don't let the past keep you in bondage. I want to stress the importance of a support system. You need to have people you trust. You need to have people that you can be open with. Feedback and support helps you take the blinders off. Support helps you face those hard things in life. Love and support from others helps you make better decisions. Some decisions are painful and scary to make. Remember that stress causes distorted and confused thinking. Having a support system helps keep you regulated. You make better decisions when you're regulated. You are able to follow through with your decision. Many times you don't follow through because of your fear. A big part of not doing it alone includes prayer and meditation. Make prayer and meditation a big part of your life. Hear from God. There is strength, power, and wisdom in conscious contact with God. Take time to breathe and relax. It's hard to hear from God or anyone if you're stressed. It's difficult to hear from God if you're in a state of fear.

There are some additional steps you can to help you forgive and not slide back into being angry and resentful. Make a conscious decision to pay attention to anger and resentment in your life. Unresolved anger eventually turns into resentments. Resentments are a direct link to our pain. Pay attention to negative thoughts and behaviors that can lead you back into resentments. Verbalize affirmations telling yourself that you are going to forgive. Tell yourself that you are letting go of the past. Affirm that you will not let the past determine your future. There may be situations where you can talk to the person who harmed you about forgiveness. I would approach this with caution and with insight into that person. There are some individuals that you may not be able to reconcile with. They may not be approachable. Any discussion with them could cause more harm to you. Remember that your forgiveness is not contingent on what some one else may or may not do. It is all about you and what you are doing for yourself.

I know that this may be a painful journey for many of you. I encourage you to celebrate your opportunity for healing. God is with you and has always been with you. Jeremiah 1:5

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; . . .” God has been down your path and is waiting for you to reach out and trust him to get you through your challenges. I’ll close with a verse that was clearly planted in my heart by the Holy Spirit many years ago. Joshua 1:5 “. . . I will never leave you or forsake you.” There are at least four more references to this in the Bible.

In Christ,

Ken Thom, LPC