2026 07- July CCH Times Ink

On Forgiveness

A friend I've known since college was visiting this week. We talk. A lot. In over a half-century, we've talked over every significant (and trivial) event from our lives multiple times, from every possible angle. This week she asked me how, as a Christian, I knew I had truly forgiven someone who had deeply scarred me as a child. And I realized I had a hard time articulating an answer. I think all I said was something lame, like: forgiveness doesn't mean we forget, but that we have released the wrong that was done to us to God. I don't think that was particularly enlightening or helpful.

We all know that when we've been physically or emotionally hurt, especially by someone we love or trust, it can cause us to feel angry, sad, and confused. The longer we sit with those feelings, the more likely it is that we'll start to hold a grudge or feel bitter. The reality of this is that whatever it is that occurred, the other person is rarely held captive in the same swirl of negativity that we are. Perhaps forgiveness is actually a gift given to us by God to help release us from those wounds by turning them over to Him, allowing Him to be the ultimate administrator of justice. Because, as long as we continue to replay the hurt in our minds, demand the offender apologize to us, and wait for some sort of atonement, we will remain bound to that hurt and it will fester and most likely even grow.

When 1 Corinthians 13:5 says "Love keeps no record of wrongs" it doesn't mean we have to erase whatever hurt us from our memory (which is, in all probability, impossible to do) and we most certainly don't have to like or agree with the actions or events which hurt us. It is, in fact, wise to be discerning and learn to protect ourselves from having the hurt repeated. I think this passage is about not feeding specific wounds that have happened to us by replaying them in our minds and revisiting the pain as though it were happening to us all over again. Perhaps this ties into why we are taught that we should hate the sin but still love the sinner.

The question of forgiveness got me thinking about Matthew 18:22 where Jesus said we are to forgive not seven times, but seventy-seven times. Did He mean that there will be multiple times in our lives that we will be wronged and need to forgive others? Or, did He mean that some hurts would be so deep, so painful, that they would require a commitment to reaffirm our forgiveness over time? I thought He meant the first. But on reflection, I know He knows that forgiveness doesn't mean we forget. I think Jesus also meant that when the memory of a time when we've been significantly, even devastatingly wronged returns, we have a choice: we can re-open the wound or we can re-release it to God. I believe Jesus wants us to continue our obedience to God by re-surrendering the hurt and forgiving once again, so that its grip becomes weaker, its weight becomes lighter, and God's healing can enter deeper and deeper into our hearts.

I found this prayer for forgiveness by Mary Southerland: *"Father, please forgive me when I allow anger and bitterness to fill my heart because I refuse to forgive someone who has hurt me. Teach me how to lay down my rights and choose to forgive in the same way You have forgiven me."*

I love that through Jesus we can always be learning, always be growing, and always be changing in order to become more and more the person He wants us to be. We invite you to join us Sunday mornings at 9 am for worship service and Wednesday evenings at 6 pm for Prayer & Bible Study.
(www.CommunityChurchOfHuntington.org)