

Gram Goes to the Gym

The following article is the author's opinion, reflecting on conversations with Charlotte Moultroupe during the final season of her life before God called her home.

One of Gram's (Charlotte Moultroupe) many life lessons was related to forgiveness, specifically situations in which our forgiveness muscles are not always as strong, solid, and enduring as they should be. I had never heard of forgiveness in the context of muscles, but Gram's lesson and insights gave me a new understanding of why forgiveness takes muscles.

Gram described forgiveness as a moral virtue, being good to others who have not been good to you or not excusing or dismissing their behavior lest it happen again. She would often speak about it in the biblical sense. Being a Christian woman familiar with many Bible stories, she knew forgiveness scriptures like Matthew 6:14 (NIV). If you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. She followed it with a bit of a grin and added, "Of course, we all are sinners, including me." She was a wise woman and knew we had ALL sinned at some time in our lives, and we should take our "forgiveness muscles" to the gym, strengthening our ability to forgive. She knew it was an essential and convicting message for all of us. She would quip, "The blood of Christ has forgiven us. When we repent, we are fully forgiven because Jesus died on the Cross and was resurrected for us." For such a tiny little woman, I witnessed how strong and enduring her faith muscles and belief in repentance were.

But Gram admitted that her forgiveness muscles were not as strong as needed. She also knew forgiveness was a fundamental aspect of the Christian faith. She provided examples of different situations at different ages when she knew she was not being as forgiving as she should be. She said she would feel anger and frustration creep up on her like a slowly dripping faucet, drip...drip...drip...until she felt her emotions reaching a boiling point, with angry head and heart thoughts filling her body and mind with resentment. She professed knowing she was not living a Christian life when this happened, sharing she might even begin to feel a slight depression creeping in. She was not happy in her "own skin," as she would coin it, and ultimately, would end up not liking herself. That is when she knew she needed to return to the gym to work on her forgiveness muscles.

I wanted to know how she turned those feelings and emotions around. I asked her for answers to questions, the most difficult one being, how do you forgive someone? How do you turn those deep feelings of anger, resentment, intense dislike, and depression around when the faucet dripping has pushed you to that point? We all know how irritating the sound of a dripping faucet can be, especially when we feel helpless to fix it! How do you forgive another person, especially when you feel wronged by them?

For Gram, the process involved prayer, reading, and lifting scripture repeatedly throughout the day and night. She would add that it was like lifting milk buckets, bales of

hay, or weights in the gym. If you repeatedly remember scripture, like Ephesians 4:32(NIV): Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you, or Mark 11:25 (NIV): “And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.” She emphasized that faith in God's forgiveness and the power of prayer were crucial on this journey.

She stated that it takes time and patience to build forgiveness muscles, but slowly, the feelings that caused her stress or frustration started dissipating, and she returned to a state of peace and love for herself and others. She said she would slowly but steadily get her life back on track. She stressed the importance of patience, reassuring me that the process may be slow... but is worth it.

I suggested this sounded like a lot of work, and not being a weightlifter or someone who went to the gym; I asked her if anyone could use this practice. Quizzically, she looked at me and remarked, “Well, would you rather be ill, unhappy, and miserable, or healthy, happy, and live your life peacefully? Start strengthening your forgiveness muscles! This is when the healing starts to begin.” Taking some time to reflect on her comment, I could see how choosing to forgive someone might counteract the toxicity of anger and reduce and even eliminate the effects of trauma and stress that one might feel. But Gram, just how many times do I have to forgive someone?

Gram always had an answer, often different from the one I expected or wanted to hear. She replied, As many times as it takes, and remember, it is a choice. Do you know The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant?” I did not recall it, so she shared it with me, Matthew 18:21-22 (NIV):

21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times

22 Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

Blessed be the person doing the forgiving; the healing begins in the forgiver's heart. Thanks, Gram, for this lesson. I learned it is not about the other person but me and my forgiveness muscles.

I will go to the gym with you, Gram, and build my forgiveness muscles.

*Heavenly Father, it is hard sometimes to put aside my hurt and anger towards those who sin against me. Please help me strengthen my forgiveness muscles and remember that Your Word invites us to forgive **seventy times seven times**, as You have done for me. I strive to be more like You every day and ask that You give me the strength to forgive even under painful circumstances so I may show Your love to others. Amen.*

The author, Donna C. Stafford, is writing about lessons learned from conversations with Charlotte Moultrou, family matriarch, wife of Henry

Moultroup (deceased), and mother of Bruce Moultroup (deceased). Charlotte passed away in June 2024, one month before her 93rd birthday. This article is written with permission from family members.