

## Preparation for Forgiveness

There is power in forgiveness. Think about the awful shooting this past year in Charleston. Nine people were gunned down during a church Bible study. The perpetrator was invited to join them and had participated in the Bible study for a while, then just took out a gun and started shooting.

What we may remember most about that incident that made it so powerful, was how one by one the relatives of the fallen spoke forgiveness to the shooter, even before their loved ones were buried. It boggles the mind to think of how these bereaved family members could even do that. But what was most amazing was the power that forgiveness had for the whole community. It had the power to keep the peace, it had the power to make souls ponder, and it had the power to remove the Confederate flag from the Capitol grounds!

Gregg Easterbrook, in “Forgiveness Is Good For Your Health,” discusses the benefits of forgiveness:

Increasingly, psychological research has begun to show that being a forgiving person is essential to happiness. Even when someone wrongs you, feeling anger or hatred only causes your life to descend into misery and resentment: You are the one who suffers, not the person you’re angry at. Forgiving, on the other hand, can lift the burden. When Buddha and Jesus and other great spiritual figures taught us to forgive those who sin against us, they weren’t just pronouncing holy philosophy. Rather, they were giving practical down-to-earth life advice.

Among a number of other recent studies, a study of elderly women published in the journal *Psychotherapy* found that those who scored well on a standard test of forgiveness traits had higher self-esteem and fewer episodes of anxiety and depression compared to those who scored poorly. None of this makes forgiveness a panacea. [Researcher Kenneth Pargament notes that] when people have first suffered a wrong or a tragic loss, it’s often pointless to speak of forgiveness immediately: that can only come with time.

### *On Forgiveness by Murray Kennedy*

Let me say how I see it. When one is holding a grudge, feeling victimized and hurt, and entertaining blame and resentment, the soul contracts. That’s the consequence. And who wants to go around in life with a contracted, hurt, bitter, soul? Many people do this because they don’t know any other way. It’s a great human tragedy. They perpetuate and multiply some original pain. They stay victims for life. Being for - giving is the key to freedom from the terrible burden of what happened in the past. But it isn’t easy. When you are for - giving what are you giving? You are giving up your claim to being the injured party. You are giving up your grievance. You are for - moving on. You are saying “they are no longer in debt to me” . . . which means you are no longer keeping that old relationship going, you are no longer keeping them in jail. You are no longer holding on. You are letting go. It is a matter of what you are for. If you are for holding on—to grievance and hurt, if you are for being right and getting revenge, you remain the prisoner of the past. That’s how it works.

Forgive me if along the way somewhere . . . I have killed your hopes and dreams . . . with my own disbelief in everything good.

Forgive me if I could not see with your vision the beauty of this world and the infinite possibilities for peace.

Forgive me my restlessness . . . that I could not pause on the path . . . to allow wisdom to come forth.

Forgive me that I have not treated each new day . . . with the same ultimate joy that you know . . . for another chance to be worthy.

Forgive me for not listening . . . when the very atmosphere is so charged . . . with universal music . . . and ideas too many to grasp.

Forgive me my foolishness . . . that I have believed . . . there only existed those things . . . which I could see and touch.

Forgive me that I have not thought . . . deeply enough or outside the limits . . . of the ordinary mind . . . to believe and overcome.

Forgive me that I have not sensed . . . the intense value of life . . . the infinitesimal beauty everywhere . . . in the smallest to the most majestic of God's creation.

Forgive me that I have not said thank you.

*Joyce Kilmer, To Everything a Season*

## **Questions to Ponder**

1. Think of a story you could share about forgiveness. This question will be a part of the sharing at the meeting.
2. How does forgiveness happen?
3. Are some things unforgivable?
4. How easy is it to forgive another, or to forgive yourself?
5. What is the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation?
6. Has forgiveness (or lack of forgiveness) affected your life? In what ways?
7. Is there something unforgiven in your life?
8. Is there anything that you would like to be forgiven for? What do you feel when you think of this?