



Forgiving God

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Does forgiving God sound like an unusual concept, a contradiction in terms? It does to many people, yet that is the best phrase I have discovered to describe a need I have found in myself and in many of the people who ask for my help. This life is filled with injustices, small and large, tragedies we can't understand, prayers we think are unanswered, needs we find un-

fulfilled. In our immaturity we try to deal with these disappointments as best we can, but in spite of our efforts we often find we feel anger or hurt at having to contend with them. Hurt or anger must have an object. It could be ourselves or "Fate" or it could be God. What I mean by "forgiving God" is that we need to pull those emotions out of the dark places in which we have hidden

them, face them squarely, and release them.

Many times it is God that we have blamed whether we realize it or not. As we grow to adulthood we are taught many beliefs about God: He is all-powerful, he can do no wrong, he holds out impossibly high standards for his followers. Our logical minds reason from these beliefs. One conclusion frequently drawn is the familiar, **“If God is all-powerful, why does he allow bad things to happen to good people?”** Another: “God can do no wrong, and he wants me to live that way too. He will reject me if I don’t live up to that expectation. And I don’t even know what he wants of me many times!” These conclusions are based on inadequate knowledge about God and the way the universe works, but they are **powerful and destructive errors** to have to live with. They are bound to result in frustration, fear and anger—at God.

Of course, it is not acceptable in most belief systems to be angry with God. After all, God is perfect; it must be our fault. Yet the anger we feel is still there and hasn’t been dealt with, only hidden away and denied. Many people with whom I work deny any anger against God. They honestly don’t believe they have any. In order to help them discover if they are truly free of anger against God or if they have simply hidden the anger away from everyone,

including themselves, I suggest that they ask themselves these questions:

1. When I am thinking about God in any way, do I ever feel fear, anger, frustration, any negative emotion?

2. Do I feel any irritation, anger or bitterness because I have asked for something in prayer and don’t feel that I got what I asked for?

3. When I think of an injustice which life has dealt me, do I feel anger or hurt that God has let this thing happen to me or that Life has treated me this way?

4. If I have lost a loved one prematurely, do I feel anger or frustration toward a higher power (the Grim Reaper, God, etc.)?

5. When I think of a problem which has not worked out to what I feel is my good, do I still feel discouraged and rejected or frustrated at an unknown force?

6. Is there a situation in my life where I prayed for help, received what I thought was God’s answer, only to have it turn out to be a failure? If there is, do I still feel angry emotions about the situation?

There are, of course, many such questions that could be asked, but these examples give a picture of the technique I use to spot a need to release the anger and other destructive emotions. Each of these situations is one in which we may have some emotional reactions. As we grow more mature and understand more about God

and the universe, we will gradually stop reacting with disappointment, fear, anger, hurt, and frustration toward such life situations. But for most of us those emotions are still very much a part of life. If we didn’t handle our emotions in a productive way at the time, we need to do something about them now.

If a friend I am helping discovers some leftover emotions, I suggest that he or she get off by himself and use the following exercise on each of the situations where emotions need to be released:

Use whatever method you know to relax in a quiet, private place. Recall to mind one of your experiences. Start with a less intense case. Tell God that you would like to release these harmful emotions and to forgive him for anything you might be holding against him. Ask his help in this.

If you do not feel a relief from the negative emotions you know are there, then go ahead and express those emotions to him. I call it “shin-kicking.” Get angry. There are many times when the first thing we need is to be heard, to describe our hurt, our indignation, our anger. Later we can think more clearly and begin to take constructive steps toward recovery of our good humor. Well, God is a great listener—even when you have no one else to blame and feel angry at him. He is big enough and good enough to take it. He is loving enough to allow you to kick his

shins. Tell him how you really feel emotionally—out loud or to yourself.

Get it all out. Then tell him you forgive him and state why you forgive him. Don’t be afraid to discuss it. Ask him to help you release all resentment, anger, hurt—all negative emotions about this event. He can do it and he will.

When this exercise works for someone, I suggest that they use it as many times as they have old unresolved emotions. Many of them have found a relief from feelings which had been interfering with their full enjoyment of life. I also urge them not to store up future problems of this sort but to deal honestly with them as they arise in the same manner. I even have an emergency measure which I use. If something triggers my emotional response and I want immediate relief from my own reactions, I relax briefly and ask God to help. I call on him to help me deal with this right now, to interrupt those feelings and get rid of them. I don’t want them. This little preventative measure can save a lot of remedial effort later!

Emotions are a complicated part of life in the flesh. We can’t just whisk them away because we “shouldn’t feel that way.” But with a little ingenuity and a lot of help from God, we can rid ourselves of the troublesome ones and grow in the process.