



Forgiveness and Apologies

Bless the Lord who crowns you with tender mercies (Psalm 103, NKJV).

As a mother of a one-time prodigal son, I've often thought of the concept of forgiveness. Of course, I forgive him of those past grievous sins against me. In fact, I'm convinced that forgiveness is imbedded in the DNA of motherhood. Has he asked for my forgiveness? Carlton prefers to let bygones be bygones. And that's okay. In fact, I'm wondering if that might be the most appropriate way to come together after a rupture. It is how I was raised. Did we five siblings ask for forgiveness each time we wronged one another? No. In fact, I can think of dozens, if not hundreds, of times we should have begged for forgiveness and didn't.

One such episode was right after trucks and rollers paved our country road. On the edges loose asphalt was begging to be fisted into tar balls. Eight years old, I had a plan and a lieutenant in my younger brother. We hid in the ditch when our older brother was returning from crow hunting and hurled our balls at him. Missing our target, we managed to stain our own clothes. Our mother was furious. She didn't ask for an apology, and she wasn't prepared to forgive. Rather, she would make us kneel in the front yard while she spanked us with her wooden spoon. But not right away. She put it off for several days. It was torture. We begged her to get it over with.

I'm not recommending this kind of punishment for the guilty one—nor a lack of apology. But I wonder if this is one way as adults we already do—and should—move beyond serious offenses. In some cases, when the offense is appalling, as in sexual abuse, insisting that the one assaulted forgive the attacker is not only shortsighted but also unreasonable. That might happen after an extended period of time and after the guilty individual confesses, shows remorse and clear evidence of a transformed life. But we dare not

cavalierly quote Jesus on forgiving seventy times seven. Those lines are anything but the whole of biblical teaching and modeling on forgiveness.

Over the past two decades I have been seriously wronged by several individuals, including a relative, a co-worker, and a neighbor. If I were to lay out my grievances, I have no doubt that most fair-minded people would agree with my position. For example, some years ago my nearby neighbor on the Trail along the Grand River accused me of poisoning his pets. He claimed he had a night video

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showing me sneaking into his yard with the poison. I learned about it only when a sheriff deputy stopped by to give me a copy of the report from the neighbor. The deputy warned me to keep my distance. Those of us living along the river refer to ourselves as river-rats, which is what we are. During floods, sometimes our stuff ends up in neighbors' yards, so it's hard to be entirely separate from each other. In this case, however, there were other factors present. Our neighbor was at times drinking so heavily that he hardly made sense.

There would be two things that changed our relationship. Our beloved dog had run off and I was frantic. He felt bad and joined in the search (though giving us wrong information as inebriated people sometimes do). And he had a run-in with the law and ended up quitting alcohol cold turkey. Once sober, a warm neighborliness slowly returned. I was delighted. I did not ask for, nor did I expect, an apology for his reporting me as a pet poisoner. I have forgiven him. The same has been true with other broken relationships. I celebrate the renewed warmth, each one a tender mercy. □

—Ruth Tucker