



## Freedom to Forgive

*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom* (2 Corinthians 3:17, NIV).

*Freedom is what you do with what's been done to you.*—Jean Paul Sartre

*Freedom lies in being bold.*—Robert Frost

I've been thinking about the words Freedom and Forgiveness a lot of late, considering how the two words may both work together and support one another. You see, two close friends of mine have recently had a falling out. These two close friends have had a falling out over a common source of strong opinion and emotional tension these days.

Unfortunately, hurtful words have been exchanged and harmful events have taken place. A bitter difference of political opinion, made personal, is to blame. At this point, there looks to be little chance for forgiveness and reconciliation. Sadly, my friends' falling out is not unique in the times and circumstances in which we live. Many once-close friendships have been strained.

As I consider these two words in the context of what has happened, it seems to me that *forgiveness* requires a space, a *freedom*, if you will, around a hurtful word or a harmful event. That space, that freedom, can allow time to process the reoccurring thoughts and strong emotions around what has taken place. The act of forgiveness may be terribly difficult. The space, the freedom, required to forgive, may need to be quite wide and

long in its duration. In time, if one of my two close friends first considers the freedom to forgive, he or she will most likely need to be bold. Taking that first step toward forgiveness is not for the faint of heart.

Jesus had much to say on the topic of forgiveness. When Peter came to Jesus asking how many times he should forgive a brother or sister, Jesus' reply of *seventy-seven*

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*times* to Peter's suggestion of a mere *seven* times is telling (Matthew 18:22, NIV). I wonder, why is *forgiveness* so important? Why did Jesus give us this teaching? Is there a *freedom* that can come from the act of *forgiveness*?

St. Augustine was famous for saying: *Unforgiveness is like me taking the poison and expecting the other person to die.* I read St. Augustine's words to say that to be unforgiving hurts us. To be unforgiving forces us to hold on to and replay hurtful words and harmful events. In a real sense, to be unforgiving binds and enslaves us.

That's been so true for my two close friends, who just seem to be stuck in the story, stuck in the ugly words and destructive events of

what happened. Neither can seem to break free.

Jean Paul Sartre's words, *freedom is what you do with what's been done to you*, strike me as truly profound. Sartre's words present us with a real challenge. Will we allow the things that have been done to us bind and enslave us? Are the things that have been done to us going to keep us stuck in the story, in the endless replaying and retelling of hurtful words and harmful events? What about the things that we ourselves have done to others? *Freedom* can only come as a result of forgiving others, and while we're at it, forgiving ourselves.

As Christ-followers, we live *free* in Christ Jesus. Our lives have been redeemed and *forgiven* and given to us anew, free from the hurtful words and harmful events of our past. Believing and acting from this, we transcend what has happened in our lives.

We live boldly in Christ Jesus knowing *where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom*. We can then extend the *freedom* and *forgiveness* we've received to others. We can extend that *freedom* and *forgiveness* to those who have hurt or harmed us.

Although my two close friends are nowhere near forgiveness and reconciliation at this point, I hold out hope. I hope that with time they will come to see the opinions and tensions differently. I hope that with space, they will both heal. I hope that by living boldly, they will set one another free with the act of forgiveness. □

—Ed Dunn