

Forgiveness / Prodigal Son

Girl 1: I'm so angry! You would not believe what happened to me.

Girl 2: Well, what did happen to you?

Girl 1: Okay, so last week I shared a secret with my sister and it was something I had never told anyone before. Well, she's my sister, right? So, I thought that I could trust her not to tell anyone, but no, the next thing I know everyone I talked to since last week seems to know all about it. How could she do that to me? Oh, I'm so angry!

Girl 2: Well, I can see why that would hurt you. But you really need to work on letting it go...it's not worth staying upset about it.

Girl 1: What! How can I just 'let it go'? That would be so unfair!

Girl 2: Being angry will only make *you* feel worse! She's probably not going to care about it anyway.

Girl 1: Well / don't care... I'm mad and I'm going to stay mad!

Girl 2: Okay.

Carol: Welcome to Women of Hope. Have *you* ever felt like that?

Tammy: / have, Carol. And sometimes I'm the one who hurts someone else, and that's a bad feeling too.

Carol: When we live and work with other people, there are *always* times when we upset each other. Have *you* ever been hurt by someone close to you?

Tammy: ...or found that you have really upset someone else?

Carol: Sometimes I think it's the people we love *most* who we hurt the most, and they hurt us. I suppose it's because we really care about those relationships and we feel so upset when something goes wrong.

Today we're talking about how to deal with those things that come between friends and families. Our friend Fran, the counselor, is with us again today, and she may be able to help us think about this. Welcome, Fran.

Fran: Thanks, Carol. Hi, Tammy...and hello to *you* too. It's nice to be with you again. This problem is something we *all* have to deal with...people hurt each other all the time, whether they mean to or not. In my work as a counselor it's one of the biggest issues. I often talk with people who are angry...and people who feel guilty; and these feelings are making them sick and breaking up their relationships.

Tammy: What do you mean, 'making them sick'?

Fran: I mean they can become physically sick, or mentally and emotionally sick, especially if it becomes a big thing in their minds, and they go on brooding on it and thinking about it all the time.

Tammy: So what should we do when there is hurt in a relationship?

Fran: Well, sometimes you just need to stop and think about it, rather than say angry words. Think... have you understood them correctly or could they have meant something a bit different from what you thought? ...Are *you* extra sensitive right now and maybe feel offended when you don't need to? ...Are *they* under pressure and not thinking about their words? Sometimes you just need to let it pass; other times you need to have a talk soon, and make sure you really understand each other. It might be just a misunderstanding.

Carol: I think that could often happen early in a marriage.

Fran: I agree: you come from different backgrounds and it's easy to say the wrong thing without meaning any harm. Couples need to talk quickly about these things. I remember my husband used to feel upset if the house was not really tidy when he came home from work, because *his* mother always did that... So he thought I didn't care about looking after my family. But *my* mother thought it was more important to play with the children and make sure they were happy. So I didn't think a few toys on the floor mattered...or dinner being a bit late. We just needed to talk about what we were thinking and feeling and then we understood each other better.

Carol: I suppose those little things are easy enough to fix if you really want to.

Fran: Yes...but often we prefer to stay angry and feel we are in the right...rather than really talking openly and understanding each other. Then we may have to say sorry too (smile).

Tammy: It's hard to say sorry, isn't it?

Fran: Why do *you* think it's hard?

Tammy: Umm... maybe pride... or I can be afraid of opening myself up when I admit my mistake... they might bring it up against me in the future. Sometimes I am so concerned with *my* feelings, I don't want to listen to theirs.

Fran: But what happens when you *do* say sorry? Usually a sincere apology is enough, and they forgive you. Isn't it such a good feeling when you are forgiven?...much better than feeling guilty and afraid.

Carol: Here on *Women of Hope* we're talking with Fran about forgiving each other.

Fran: Here's another memory from when I was first married: I used to make up all sorts of excuses if I made a mistake or forgot to do something that was *my* job. One day my husband said gently, 'You could just say sorry, you know'... and I thought, 'Of course! He's not my enemy or even my boss, he'll forgive me!' That made a big difference to me.

Carol: But what about when you *are* in the right and someone has done something really wrong against you? That can be very hard to forgive and to let go.

Fran: Why do you think it's so hard to forgive, Carol?

Carol: Well, if I'm in the right, I feel better than you!

And sometimes I just feel too hurt to think about forgiving. But...if someone has done something *really* wrong, then it feels - sort of *unjust* - to forgive them! Like saying it wasn't really wrong, when it was!

Fran: I know what you mean. And if it *wasn't* really wrong, they wouldn't need forgiveness!

Forgiveness is *not* saying it didn't matter, or making excuses for them. It's saying, 'That was *wrong*... It did a lot of harm... But I'm not going to insist that you must continue to suffer for what you did.'

Carol: That's what happens when we forgive our children.

Fran: And it's what God does when he forgives us. You could put it like this: forgiveness is giving up my right to revenge, so that we can have a chance of being friends again. That means I need to see the ways I'm punishing this person.

Tammy: What do you mean about punishing them?

Fran: If I'm angry at my friend, I may be cold to her... or not talk... or spread gossip about her... or avoid her. If I'm angry with my son I might burn his dinner or 'forget' his birthday!

Carol: Oh, I see what you mean. I can show my anger by my actions, what I do or don't do.

Fran: I think there's another reason forgiveness is hard... I like to be in the right! If I forgive, it might make me notice that *I* need forgiveness too. Perhaps I am more like the other person than I like to admit.

Tammy: If I forgive someone, does that mean we will be friends again?

Fran: It might, but that depends on other things. Like - are they willing to say sorry? ...Are they continuing to do the same thing? You can forgive a person, but still know they are not safe to be around. If someone hurts you or your children, you can decide not to hate them, but you don't have to keep putting yourself or your children in danger.

Tammy: There are things that were done to me that I can never forget. Yet people say 'forgive and forget.' Is that necessary?

Fran: You can't make yourself forget the past. But when you choose to forgive, you can decide to stop going over it in your mind. After a while the memories lose their power to hurt you so much. You can remember that God knows all about what happened, and he judges fairly...so you can leave it to *his* justice.

I found something that helps me to forgive - I begin to pray for the person who has hurt me, even if I don't feel like it. That means I ask God to bless them, and teach them what they need to learn. That sets me free to live my life without the bitterness and hatred. Hatred hurts *you* and your family more

than it hurts the person you feel you hate. Forgiveness lets you stop going over and over it, and feeling angry all the time. It means you don't have to keep being the victim. You can be responsible for your feelings and your actions now, and not be controlled by what was done to you in the past. It sets you free, and it sets them free to change, if they choose to!

Carol: So I think we have learned some important things about how to handle hurts in relationships. Did anything seem helpful to you?...

I remember these: to stop and think... to talk it over...

Tammy: ...to say sorry for my part in the problem...

Carol: ...and to be ready to forgive - so that we can live in freedom. I like that! And next, we're going to hear from Ros about the way God forgives us. He really shows us *how* to forgive.

Ros: Jesus often sat with tax collectors and people whom others considered bad company. The tax collectors of the day were dishonest, and the religious leaders and teachers of the law complained about Jesus spending time with them. He even ate with them – they thought that was a terrible crime!

So one day, Jesus had the opportunity to explain to these leaders why he did this. The reason was simple... this is what he said:

(Luke 15: 4-7) "If you had one hundred sheep, and one of them strayed away and was lost in the wilderness, wouldn't you leave the ninety nine others to go and search for the lost one until you found it?" And then you would happily carry it home on your shoulders and call your friends together to celebrate with you?"

Of course they would have agreed I'm sure.

Then he went on to say, (v7) 'In the same way, heaven will be happier over one lost sinner who returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are respectable people.'

This made them think...but Jesus wanted them to understand more than this. So he told them another story. He told of a woman who had ten valuable coins and she lost one. He asked them this question: "Won't she light a lamp and look in every corner of the house until she finds it? ...Then she'll gather her friends and neighbors to help her celebrate because she has found her valuable coin." He then said to them, "In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels when even *one* sinner says he's truly sorry.

But Jesus wanted to tell them another story, just to make his point very clear. This time it was not a story about a lost sheep, or a lost coin, but about a father and his two sons.

Let me tell you this story from the Bible:

(Luke 15: 11-24)

'A man had two sons. One day, the younger son said to his father, "I want my share of your money now, instead of waiting until you die." So the father agreed to divide all his money between his two sons.

A few days later, this younger son packed up everything he had, including the money his father had given him and went off to a country far away. There in that far off place, he wasted all his money on wild living!

Just about the time that all his money ran out, there was a famine in the land, and he had nowhere to stay and nothing to eat. He was desperate, so he persuaded a local farmer to hire him to take care of his pigs. The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good. But no-one gave him any food – not even the pods.

Before long he came to his senses. He realized that the only thing to do was to go back home. He said to himself, “Even the people who work for my father have enough to eat. I will go home to my father and say, “Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am not worthy to be called your son any longer. Please give me a job working for you.”

Now let’s stop here for a moment and think about how this young man was feeling. Do you think he was sorry for running off with his father’s money? After all he should have waited until his father died before inheriting all this money shouldn’t he? But he had been greedy, and wanted it now!

If you were the father, what do you think you would say to the son when he returned home? I think I know what I might have said...maybe something like this: “Well it serves you right to go running off like that and spending all your money on wild living. You will have to work very hard with my servants to earn some more money wont you!” I would have thought that my son needed to be punished for what he had done!

But let’s go back to Jesus’ story and find out what happened next:

‘So he traveled back to his father’s home. And when he was still a long way away, his father saw him coming. Instead of turning *away* from him, the son saw his father begin to run *towards* him. When the father reached the son, he hugged him and kissed him. His heart was filled with love and compassion for his son.

As they came near to the house, the young man started to say what he had planned to say to his father. But his father didn’t seem to be listening. He called out to his servants, “Quick, bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his bare feet.” Then he went on to say, “Kill the calf we have been fattening in the pen. We must celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead and now he has returned to life. He was lost but now he is found.” So the party began.’

Now I’ve been thinking about this story...I wonder if the father just *happened* to see his son coming a long way off? What do you think?

I think the father must have been looking down the road for a *long* time. Maybe every day since his son left he would come outside, shield his eyes from the sun and stare down the road to see if he could see anyone coming. And on this day, his heart leapt with joy as he saw him a long way off. He probably waited until he was sure it was his son...then he ran to him. Do you know that people in those days, and maybe in your culture too, did not usually run like this? It was not a dignified thing to

do. Maybe the rest of the family and any friends would have looked on the father's behavior as shameful. And to make it worse, he didn't even *punish* his son for having run off with half his money...and wasted it all.

One person who was watching all this was the older son. He became *very angry*. He wouldn't join in any celebrations...even when his father came out and begged him to! He said to his father, and I imagine he may have shouted, "All this time I've worked hard for you and you've *never* given me *any* kind of celebration. And this son of yours comes back after wasting your money on prostitutes and all you do is *celebrate* – with the finest calf we have!! Imagine his voice getting louder and louder!

But his father said to him, "You are very dear to me, and everything I have is yours. But your brother was *dead* and has come back to *life*. He was *lost* but now he is *found*."

God is like the father in this story. We are like the son who ran away. God is our father, he is the one who made us. But when we turn away from him and go our own way, he doesn't try to stop us, or run after us. He gives us a choice. He lets us decide what we're going to do. And we do many things that make our father very sad.

But what do you think Jesus was telling these people? Did you notice what he said at the end of each story?

When the sheep was found, he said that when one person who was lost is found, heaven is happy. When the coin was found he said, "There is joy in the presence of the angels when even one sinner says he is truly sorry."

And when the son came back, the father said, "My son was *dead* but now he has returned to *life*. He was *lost* but now he is *found*."

You see God is a God who longs for us to come back to him. He made us, he loves us and he is waiting to forgive us when we come back to him. And do you know what? He is waiting, and watching for us to come...he is looking down the road, shielding his eyes to see if he can see us...and he has a party planned!

Carol: What an amazing God we have – did you notice that Ros said, 'He made us, he loves us and he is *waiting* to forgive us! He's watching and ready to run and greet us when we come back to him!

Tammy: What a lot we've learned today about forgiving others. We may be angry and hurting because of something someone has done to us, and we may feel like God doesn't care. We may even feel angry with God. You know what? God wants us to tell him about it. He understands our hurt and our pain. ..and he can help us through it.

Carol: And if you are the one who has hurt someone else – it can never be too bad for God to forgive. God says in his word, in the Psalms: (65:3) 'Though our hearts are filled with sins, you forgive them all.'

Tammy: And King David wrote in another Psalm (86:5) 'Oh Lord, you are so good, so ready to forgive, so full of unfailing love for all who ask for your help.'

Carol: We have to go now...If you would like us to pray for you, or if you have some questions you would like to ask us, you can contact us. Our email address is TWRWomenofHope@TWR.org. Our website address is TWRWomenofHope.org. And please visit our Facebook page.

Tammy: Remember – we can live in freedom if we learn to forgive!
Bye for now...

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