Nearly everything you will read here comes from a book entitled *The Art of Forgiving* by Lewis B. Smedes. Large portions of this lesson are copied verbatim from the text. Paraphrasing them would only soften their impact. Readers should credit this work to Lewis Smedes, not City On A Hill.

**The Parable of the Prodigal Son**

*Luke 15:11-24*

11 Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

13 "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. 14 After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. 16 He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

17 "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! 18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' 20 So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

21 "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

22 "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.
POINT ONE: GREED IS GREED


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\text{in the world does not cancel out } \text{at home.}
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*We are accountable for the wrongs we do, even if they bring a positive change in our earthly circumstances.* The offense of this young son was the worst thing any child could do to his family. In the Hebrew culture, each child was expected to serve the father until the time came for the sons to take care of Dad in his old age. So when his son grabbed whatever cash had been put away for his future and headed off for who-knows-where without so much as a forwarding address, he was not just another grown-up leaving home to carve a life out for himself. For a Hebrew son, this offense was the same as killing his own father. Through his actions, the son said, “*You may as well be dead. Give me my inheritance. I cannot be bothered to wait for your death to leave home and spend it. I want it now.*”

Notes

A *parable* is a story meant to teach a *moral lesson.*

POINT TWO: WHO SHOULD KNOW?

Repentance must often be done ________________. If you are truly sorry for what you have done, you will be more concerned with confessing your ______ than protecting your ________________. If someone who wronged you publicly is not willing to apologize publicly, *they may not truly be sorry for what they have done.*
POINT THREE: WHEN DOES IT STOP?

Those who sin against us may never come to repentance until they hit _____ ___________.
Humans are a prideful race, and as long as we think we’re getting away with something, we will keep doing it until our conscience no longer allows us to breathe, but the Prodigal had totally ruined himself in what he had done, and there was no temptation to ever go back. The father, seeing his son’s broken heart, took him back as a member of the family to which he no longer deserved to be a member. He showered favor upon the son who our natural minds tells us he should have shut out at the front door. He took the finest, most expensive goods in the house and gave them to the son who just wasted the family fortune on prostitutes and thieves. To the natural mind, this is an incredibly stupid thing to do. But it is the way God works. He is in the forgiving business, and you and I should grateful that he is.

Before I rejoin you as a friend, I demand a price from you. That price is

The currency of honesty is ____________

and

There is no

until that price is paid.

Notes

POINT FOUR: IS IT TIME TO MOVE ON?

Forgiving does not obligate us to _____ ____________ if there is no sign that the person who has hurt us will ever ________________. If you have been hurt by a person time and time again and they show no sign of remorse, it is not your duty to stand by them and allow the abuse to continue.

I forgive you to release my own pain over what you’ve done to me.

I do not run back to you with arms open wide as if nothing had happened.
Every victim goes through three stages of unfair pain. The first is the original wallop. The second is remembering what happened. The third stage is vengeance, the futility of wishing at least equal pain on the person who gave her pain. If the victim stays mired in vengeance, she allows the person who hurt her once to go on abusing her in her memory until she dies.

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**Point Five: Guilty or Not Guilty?**

Forgiving is for the tough-minded. It is not for the soft-headed who cannot abide people who make judgments on other people’s actions. If we dare not blame, we dare not forgive, so we only forgive the ones we _____________. So how do we know the person who wronged us is to blame? There are three simple tests.

- **He ________ it.** We know he did it. He knows he did it. Maybe he admitted it, maybe someone saw him do it. Maybe you were right there taking it on the chin when he did it. However you came to know it, you are sure that he is the one who did it.

- **He ___________ to do it.** He may not have intended that what he did should hurt you so much as it did. But he intended to do it. He made the conscious choice to pick up that bottle and take a drink, which started everything in movement. And that is why he is either a candidate for forgiveness or revenge.

- **He initiated the _____________.** Sure, his dad was a drunk. His uncle is a drunk and his brothers are all drunks. It’s all in the genes. But it was he who got the notion to drive. It was he who turned the ignition key and put his foot on the pedal. And it was he who drove into the path of a car that was headed his way.

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**Point Six: In closing...**

Forgiving is when we let go of our wishes for divine justice and truly leave the other person in God’s hands because we no longer dwell on the crimes committed against us. Surrendering our right to get even is the surrender of a very bad pain in the neck. What are you hanging on to from your past? Who has wronged you? Was it done in public? Or in private? Have they asked for your forgiveness, or is that impossible now? The important thing to remember is IT DOESN’T MATTER ANYMORE. If you’ve allowed your hatred of that person to take over you mind, heart and soul, it’s time to let it go.

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