

Reflections

thoughts for the journey

JUNE 2003—*A Lovely Idea*

*Everyone thinks forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive...*¹

C.S. Lewis

Most people find it relatively easy to forgive minor offenses, especially those which are unintentional. But, what about serious transgressions: physical or sexual abuse, marital unfaithfulness, betrayal of friendship, deception, personal rejection, fraud—sadly, the list is long. It is when we encounter these hard cases that forgiveness goes from being a lovely idea to an extremely difficult challenge.

Knowing that offenses were bound to come and that humans are prone to hold grudges and seek revenge, Jesus spoke starkly about the necessity of forgiving *all* who sin against us. First, he teaches us to pray “forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.” Of this verse, C.S. Lewis says, “there is no slightest suggestion that we are offered forgiveness on any other terms. It is made perfectly clear that if we do not forgive we shall not be forgiven.”² (See Matthew 6.12, 14-15)

Lest we somehow miss the point or rationalize it away, Jesus later tells the story of a king who forgave one of his slaves an enormous debt, only to learn that the slave had subsequently forced a fellow-slave into prison for not repaying him a very small debt. Enraged, the king turned the unforgiving slave over to the torturers. Jesus concludes by saying, “That is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.” (See Matthew 18.21-35)

Those who have received God’s magnanimous grace cannot stingingly withhold forgiveness from their fellow man. To do so dishonors God, hurts our neighbor and poisons our own soul.

Difficult though it may be, we *must* forgive—and with God’s help, we can. As we do, we will taste the sweet freedom and joy known only to forgiven and forgiving hearts.

*Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other,
just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*

Ephesians 4:32 NASB

¹ *Mere Christianity*. C.S. Lewis. © (1943, 1945, 1952) 1960 The Macmillan Company. p. 104.

² *Ibid.* p. 104.