



Counting the Cost of Forgiveness



Several years ago, my home was invaded when my siblings and father were all at home except for me and a younger brother. The invader burned the house on my family and attacked my mother, who was trying to escape. The invader threw a spear at her, which went through her left ribs, missing all the sensitive organs but causing much internal bleeding. He also used a machete, slashing and trying to cut my mother on her head. She shielded her head with her arm and managed to bear the brunt of his repeated strikes on her forearm, leading to broken arms on both sides. After repeatedly bludgeoning her arms, the attacker fled into the night, leaving her for dead.

My mother survived, and the man was brought up on criminal charges and went to prison. God had revealed the incident to me the night it happened, and I spent the night in prayer at the school soccer field. When my brother brought me the message that my mother was stable, I fasted and prayed for a spirit of forgiveness.

A year later, I learned I had not passed the exam to be accepted for a Bachelor of Economics program, which I had so much wanted to take at the university. I blamed the poor result on the attacker, because the incident forced me to leave school to take care of my siblings.

Four years later, word reached me that my mother's attacker had been prematurely released. I burned with anger. For weeks my mind was constantly seething, and I felt that if I saw the man, I would kill him.

One day, as I was riding to town on my bicycle, I abruptly met my mother's attacker as I was going down a slope. Seeing him, I fainted and fell from my bicycle, creating teasing from onlookers. I turned around and went home. In my closet, I wept before God for my unforgiving heart. I asked Jesus to forgive me for harboring bitterness over my enemy.

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want."

— Matthew 26:36-39

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

The message is that God forgives us, though we are thieves and murderers in our hearts, and in his grace requires us to forgive others in the same way. At first, I recoiled in anger, rejecting the message and refusing to release my grudge. But God's spirit softened my heart, and I knew I had to repent of my rage and forgive my mother's attacker. I wept and pleaded with God for the strength and will to forgive. God visited me in my closet and gave me a song, and it changed my heart. I began to pray for the man's health and well being, and God continued to wash away my stubbornness and anger.

One day, I saw the man from a distance. My heart leapt with joy. I turned off my motorcycle and ran towards the man. He did not see me until I was upon him; he flinched and braced himself for a blow. Instead, he was wrapped in an embrace. "You are my brother. I love you," are the words that came from my mouth. The man sputtered—confused—and then broke down in tears. We cried on the street as the man issued forth a stream of apologies and begged forgiveness. I granted it and insisted he come to my home and visit with my family. He obliged, and we dined together. We had peace and thanked God for healing.

Days later, I received a message from my mother: "You are no longer my son." My mother felt so betrayed by my forgiveness of her attacker that she would not eat. She bought poison to kill herself, but she was rescued by my father at 3:00 a.m. Though my mother was a Christian, it took nearly two years and months for God to mend our broken relationship and make her understand his forgiveness.

—DELEO MOSES OCEN, DIRECTOR
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Forgiving costs us our sense of justice. We all have this innate sense deep within our souls, but it has been perverted by our selfish sinful natures. We want to see "justice" done, but the justice we envision satisfies our own interests. We must realize that justice has been done. God is the only rightful administrator of justice in all of creation, and His justice has been satisfied. In order to forgive our brother, we must be satisfied with God's justice and forego the satisfaction of our own.

— Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness* (NavPress, 1996), 207-8.

REFLECT

- What stood out to you in today's readings?
- What was the cost of forgiveness for Deleo? For his mother?
- Share a time when the Holy Spirit has empowered you or someone you know to forgive.
- Are you accustomed to making sacrifices for a greater purpose? Has your Lenten sacrifice felt like one of these?

IN SONG | It is Well with my Soul | Horatio Spafford, 1873

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

(Refrain)

It is well, with my soul,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul.



RESPOND

God, you declare that your Son's death is sufficient to pay the price for all our sins. May it be sufficient for us to forgive others too.