

Pass It On®...

Forgiveness Heals Us

Forgiveness isn't always as easy as it sounds. Sometimes we think it needs to be earned rather than freely given. As a young father, Davis was working to remodel and maintain his home. There's nothing like the pride you take in that first home, no matter how much work it needs, it's yours by sweat and sacrifice. So when he came home one night and caught two local teenagers breaking into his garage he was angry. They ran off, but he recognized them. And the following day confronted them and their parents. You'd expect a moment of truth, a reconciliation. But none came, only denial and character witnesses by the parents. A few weeks later Davis confronted one of the boys and threatened him. The boy confessed to some of the theft but Davis wasn't satisfied. He stewed over the lies and the reluctant admission. Fathers of teenage boys know this feeling of incomplete restitution. It takes time for emotional maturity to develop to its completeness, so sometimes half an apology is just going to have to do. Years later Davis again ran into the now young men. They had grown up. They thanked Davis for not doing more when he caught them, like calling the police. They talked about college life, the future. For a moment, Davis was oddly unsatisfied; that is until he too apologized. He was sorry for losing his temper, and for not developing a better relationship with the boys in the first place. That's when the tight strings around his heart loosened.

Remorse can motivate us to strengthen our character and see people differently, even seek forgiveness. But ruminating on the past will only hold us back. On the last day of Junior High School, the bell had rung and the exuberance of school ending turned into rowdiness. A shy girl had just cleaned out her locker and one of the rowdy boys kicked the books and papers out of her hands. They spilled everywhere, down the stairs and into the herd where her art projects and journals were trampled. In tears, she tried to collect a year's worth of work. Ross watched briefly until his friends pulled him away and off to end-of-year parties he knew this girl would never get invited to. His eyes were fixed on the futility of a girl who didn't fit in and was now cast out. He would regret not helping her the rest of his life.

Forgiveness sometimes comes slowly, a piece at a time. Sometimes it comes at unexpected moments so completely it overwhelms us. And sometimes, the hardest person to forgive is our self. Ross may never forgive his 14-year-old self. But he should. He should let the confusion of emotions he was feeling belong to his youthful lack of social courage. He should learn from it and forever be aware of other's feelings so that he can become the person who will stand up for the unnoticed and unpopular members of his community. Because it is in those moments we all find redemption.

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