

The Bible is very clear about the importance of forgiveness. The prayer that Jesus taught us says, “forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.”¹ Other scriptures make the connection between our forgiveness and our forgiving even stronger. Jesus also related this to prayer in Mark 11:25-25:

"Whenever you stand praying, forgive, *if you have anything against anyone*, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions. "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions."

This so clear that I have previously thought past that if I could not forgive everyone completely, I would not be saved. But now I don't think it is quite so simple. We are all a work in process! It takes time for us to forgive when someone really hurts us, like a wound that heals if given the proper care.

Can we be 99.9% forgiving, and only have something against one or two people as compared to the masses that we know? Must I be perfect in this category of behavior when I don't have to be in others? The real question is, “Is God's grace capable of covering our lack? Is it powerful enough?” When it is put this way, I breathe a bit easier.

When I think of the meaning of forgiveness, I try to capture the essence of it by examining different levels of effort:

- Not wanting to kill, harm, hurt them
- Wanting a good life for them
- Wanting them to be saved eternally
- Wanting to re-establish a relationship with them
- Wanting to be in a close relationship with them (be with them all of the time)

I have to move from step to step as I work at forgiving. I realize that I may never get to the last step, especially when I think about having setbacks when the person I want to forgive continually offends me (without remorse). Forgiveness is about restoring relationships (not just with God).

That leads me to ask the big question: “What does God do in His forgiveness of us?” Well, I believe that He achieves all of the steps – He especially wants to be in a close relationship with us. And He has arranged for us to be able to be with him forever.

I am so awed by this that it motivates me to push my forgiveness as far as I can. I want to be as much like Him as I can, and I want to dwell in His Presence for all eternity. And I am sure that I will be able to live closely with those there with whom I once had issues.

1. Luke 11:4