

Please Try This at Home

Monthly Tips for Increasing the Joy in Your Life

A Tale of Two Loans

C.S. Lewis once said, "If we want to work on forgiveness, perhaps we'd best not start with the Nazis."

Now, there's probably a few of you who just read "work on forgiveness" and suddenly discovered that you have other urgent things to do. Being forgiven for the intentional or inadvertent nastiness that we have visited upon our fellow human beings can be wonderfully freeing. But forgiving others for their harm against us is not nearly so enthralling, especially forgiving *those* others—you know the ones I mean—those whose past wrongs turned our lives into an emotional minefield that continues to injure us, even though the traps were laid long ago.

One of the reasons we tend to hate forgiveness, despite all the studies that rave about its potential for increasing health and improving quality of life, is because of phrases like: "It's okay," "Don't worry about it," "It's nothing," "Water under the bridge," etc. These phrases only work if they are true because the offense against us was so minor that we would probably forget about it without effort in a week or two. But typically, these phrases are *not* true. What happened to us was not okay and the water that went under the bridge keeps evaporating, raining down, and returning to the bridge again.

Since the "It's okay" model of forgiveness only works when things actually are okay, and because so many of the things that happen aren't okay, we need a new model of forgiveness. We need an approach that gives us all the joy and health benefits of being set free from the prison of our resentment, but that also doesn't pretend that the hurt meant nothing. So let's see what we can do, starting with an analogy.

The Transferral Model of Forgiveness

Several years ago, I bought a condo. When I set out to buy, I had a congenial relationship with Loan Company A. I could have called them at any time and we might have talked about anything, really. But on March 30th, there was a change that would taint our interactions from that point forward: I took quite a bit of their money and they wanted it back. This debt was not "nothing" to them. I received no notice saying "it's okay" or "water under the bridge." I had taken from them and they would hold it over me until I made it up to them by working myself to the bone for years and years to come. Or so it seemed.

On April 15th, the unexpected happened. Loan Company A decided that even though my debt was not "nothing" to them, regularly demanding that I make it up to them had become too painful for them. They wanted to return to the way our relationship had been before. But since my debt was not "okay," they had to do this by calling up Loan Company B and saying, "We want to be free of the burden of making Jen pay us back. Can we hand the debt over to you so that getting her to pay will be your responsibility and we can be free of her?" Company B agreed and from that day forward, Company A was free of their resentment for me that resulted from my taking their money. I still owed it, of course, but Company A did not have to collect

from me. As far as they were concerned, my debt to them was forgiven, not because it was canceled, but because it was transferred.

In this "transferral" model of forgiveness, we who have been wronged do not have to say that the wrongs done against us were okay. In fact, we uphold the opposite: that the wrongs against us were so abundantly "not okay" that it is actually beyond our ability to collect the full debt that is owed to us. There is simply no way that we can muster up enough anger, resentment, revenge or despair to collect what is owed to us and make things truly, deeply right again. Because the wrongs against us are so significant, we have to give the "collection" responsibility to someone more powerful and wiser than we are. Thus, this approach may be particularly helpful for those who believe in God or a greater force of justice whose job it is to set things right now and in the end.

7 Steps toward Setting Yourself Free

To begin the journey toward setting yourself free through transferral forgiveness:

1. Start by looking closely at the wrongs done to you and the hurtful consequences that have resulted from these wrongs in your life.
2. Admit to yourself that the wrongs done against you were significant, not "okay."
3. Take a look at the ways that your efforts to "collect the debt" from the person who wronged you through resentment, obsessive thoughts, anger, or other actions have affected your life.
4. Admit that there is no way that you can ever control the other person or your circumstances sufficiently to make everything right again with the past, present, and future.
5. Symbolically hand over the responsibility for "collecting the debt" to God or a power greater than yourself.
6. Whenever you think of the wrong done against you, tell yourself, "What was done to me was not okay *and* making it right is now God's problem, not mine."
7. Enjoy the freedom that comes from giving up the responsibility for making the person who wronged you change. It may not be wise to trust those who wronged you in the same way that you did before the hurt, as they may or may not be capable of earning back your trust. But you can still enjoy freedom from making yourself miserable with attitudes and actions aimed at forcing them to change.

If you or someone you know would like some help with forgiveness, *call me at 303-931-4284 for a free 20-minute consultation or email info@jenniferdiebel.com.*

Thanks for reading!

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