

Forgiveness Friday #7

22 October 2021



My prayer buddy and I spoke recently about forgiveness and acceptance. If you forgive someone, does it mean you have to have them back in your life irrespective of hurt or damage they have done? Does forgiveness mean letting them off the hook? In short, are we expected to forgive others the way God forgives us?

It wasn't our first conversation on this topic. The thought that we can only 'tick the box' on forgiveness if we can break bread with someone whose behaviour has been brutal or even criminal or just plain mean is daunting. For some, that thought is enough to slam shut the door on forgiveness before the journey has even begun. I know that's been true for me. I start to open the door, think about reconciliation as a possible consequence and, in horrified terror – or terrified horror (possibly both) – quickly close the door for another decade or two.

Over the last seven weeks, though, something has shifted. As mentioned in [FF#4](#), 'setting' an act of forgiveness helps the forgetting. It certainly dissolves the emotional charge that blame delivers. You might recall that in week 4 I was responding to inconsiderate drivers. It's one thing to forget the mildly problematic behaviours of drivers whom I've never met, haven't looked in the eye and am unlikely ever to speak with, but what about those workplace bullies I mentioned last week? Experimentation was called for.

One of the people on my bullies list had been my supervisor. I know she is still working, so I imagined having her as a boss again and concluded that, yes, I could work under her again . . . if I had to. As I filled out the workplace scene in my mind's eye, I realised I was adjusting to the situation by adjusting my own behaviour. In one scenario, there I was, speaking up and calling out the behaviour. Hmm. That felt a bit uncomfortable and even unlikely for someone who avoids confrontation but, strangely, it was imaginable. It was a possibility. Two weeks ago it would have been unimaginable and quite impossible.

Then I imagined myself resigning, walking away from a hurtful situation as is my habit. But, again strangely, this time I withdrew without blame. "I don't like this; what has happened is not right. I'm not happy working here and I'm going. I sincerely wish you well. Goodbye." And, quite joyfully, I was able to bless that person.

Of course, while workplace bullying is a far more intense experience than a travel inconvenience, if we were to rank forgiveness challenges on a scale of 1 to 100, workplace bullying might just rate a '2'. That's not to say the bullying I experienced was not serious or did not have serious consequences; rather, the level of control and self-determination one has in the situation, and whether there is an opportunity to walk away must be taken into account in the rating. Having your children killed by a drunken driver in a random accident is a quite

different situation and possibly deserves its own rating scale. Even so, I was encouraged to learn that setting forgiveness through blessing holds as well for rating 2 challenges as it does for rating 1 challenges. Only another 98 to go . . .

I began to wonder whether it is actually possible to imagine the outcomes of forgiveness before we have forgiven. Although forgiveness can lead to the restoration of our relationships with other people, that's not really the aim. First and foremost, forgiveness is all about our relationship with God. Restored relationships may just be a happy by-product of pursuing our relationship with God.

It's thinking about God that drives our desire to forgive and seek forgiveness. On the other hand, have you noticed that thinking about the people we aim to forgive can actually distract us from forgiveness? That thinking about them can stop us from wanting to forgive? Bang! Door shut. Remaining focused on God is the key to keeping the door open.

So far, I've learned these very basic steps in the forgiveness journey:

1. Open the door.
2. Start the journey.
3. Stay on the journey.
4. Let God determine the end of the journey.

It's a beginning.

Love, Lyndal