

**Forgiveness**  
**February 9, 2003**  
**By John Van Sloten**

This week I had a chance to speak with my Aunt and Uncle in Edmonton about how they were doing re: the loss of their future son in law, Ainsworth Dyer. Ains was engaged to my cousin Jocelyn, and was one of the four Canadian soldiers killed in Afghanistan. We talked about the continued pain that they were feeling, and how they continue to mourn what might have been. My Aunt still cries when she thinks about the beautiful 'Chocolate Babies' Ainsworth and Jocelyn had hoped to have one day. (Ains was Black, my cousin caucasian) We also talked about forgiveness. I asked her how that was going. She shared a bit about the impact of the recent hearings down in the States and expressed anger at how the one US soldier didn't express true remorse like the other did. She also talked very honestly about how hard its been to truly forgive those pilots.

She was just so hurt by it all, and couldn't find it within herself to forgive, not yet. But she knew that she should, partly because of her faith in God, and her knowledge of Christ's call to forgive. Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses as we have forgiven those who have trespassed against us." And said to his disciples, "Forgive and you will be forgiven..." The call of God to forgive is abundantly clear in the Christian faith. She also knew that she should forgive for another reason; herself. While she didn't quote this truth, she definitely knew it to be true, "The first one to benefit from forgiving is the one who does it." Lewis Smedes She knew in her head that she needed to let go of her anger, and her right to avenge, for herself, so that she could be free and move on. While she knew it

here [HEAD] she was still having trouble knowing it here [HEART].

She just couldn't let go. We then talked a bit about the potential punishment that the pilots faced, and speculated as to what might happen, I asked if she knew that forgiving was not the same as freeing the pilots from all consequences. Forgiveness is not necessarily pardoning, or reconciliation, or dismissing. You can forgive and they can still have to face the consequences. I then asked if she was able to separate the two, and she said she could. Thinking back, I could have also reminded her that forgiving also does not mean forgetting. I think sometimes we refuse to forgive because we think we'll forget and somehow dishonour those who are victimized. I could tell she would never want to do that either.

When I asked her how her faith in God has been influencing the whole forgiveness process, her first thought was to acknowledge how God's presence has been a comfort and healer, but as for his specific input into the forgiveness transaction... Well, other than knowing she ought to forgive, she wasn't too sure. I then asked if she'd ever thought about how much God has suffered in relation to Ainsworth's death. "Think about it, God created Ains, he loved him like his own son. And he loved him with a perfect love, more perfect than our love could ever imagine. And God was there when the bomb fell, he saw it rip up his boy. He watched him suffer. God did not turn away, go into denial, or in any way not fully experience that moment. In a sense, God suffered perfectly in that place. Even more than us... Because he knew and loved Ainsworth even more intimately that we did."

She paused and said, "I've never considered that before." I then went on to tell her of a story my Dad told me during a visit this week. My father lives in TO and one day he heard a debate playing out on a local

radio station. People were calling in and offering their opinions on how the US pilots should be punished for their actions. The discussion was pretty boisterous, and the issue of forgiveness was being hotly debated., and I guess the tone was pretty vindictive toward the perpetrators at the time. Then my dad phones in and tells them about what his brother, my uncle said at Ainsworth's funeral. Right there, at the burial, my uncle said that 'we cannot forget the pilots at this time, and that we need to forgive them and be praying for them.' (Talk about turning the other cheek, and loving your enemies!) My dad said that the radio guys had no response. PAUSE... It was like the debate was stopped... stopped because someone who was family... Someone who was more the victim of this crime had spoken. It was like there was a moral authority that came with my uncle's words. Because he was the most 'victimized voice', his opinion mattered most. In a sense he, because he'd been there, because it was his future son in law, because he was intimately close to Ainsworth, he had the greatest right to decide to either forgive or 'not forgive' in that debate.

I'm not sure why that is... what moral authority or rule is at work... I'm not sure how to put it into words, but I know its true. I can be mad at a victimizer for hurting another person and I can choose to not forgive that victimizer, but if the other person, the one who is truly more the victim than I chooses to forgive, then where does that leave me? Its like my unforgiveness has less legitimacy, and has lost its moral foundation. Not forgiving somehow seems less justified... Less right. It may even begin to feel wrong. Its like a moral alarm goes off deep within our consciences. "Well if they can forgive, then perhaps I need to rethink this again..." A US writer cited my uncle's offer of forgiveness in an article published last May in Macleans magazine. In it she poses the question, "If this man is

able to forgive, then we must reconsider why we can't" (GET EXACT QUOTE).

Anyway, so I'm talking with my aunt, and I then ask her this question, "How does knowing God as the one who suffered most (the greatest victim) as a forgiving God, the God who calls us to forgive others as we have been forgiven, the God who has the greatest moral right to offer forgiveness, impact your ability to forgive?"

Now we never went much further with the discussion. I think she needed to think about it a bit. I needed to think about it a bit!! Maybe you do too... what does this mean to you? Now we don't know if those pilots have asked God for forgiveness or not, but if they did, odds are God did or will forgive them. And it can certainly be argued that God's heart is bent in that direction, he desires to forgive us our transgressions.

So what do you do with that? Apply it personally... To a specific hurt in your life that you've struggle with in terms of real forgiveness. If God's the greatest victim, was hurt the most in that circumstance, and he chooses to forgive.... Your father... mother... Boss... Lover.... sibling... friend... then what does that do to your 'unforgiveness?'

I think the single greatest contributing factor in the proliferation of unforgiveness in our world today is the inordinate sense of victimization that many people carry. They have the right to insist on revenge, they have the right to hold onto anger, they have the right to withhold forgiveness... no one else understands what they've personally gone through and no one else has had to suffer as much as them because of the victimization. **PAUSE...** What happens when God becomes the prime victim and you get moved to second place? What happens when he chooses to forgive? "If God can do it, ought not we?" (Parallel Macleans

quote)

And to look at it from another angle... What happens when we consider the fact that God has forgiven us? The Apostle Paul wrote these words.... the Apostle Paul (murderer of innocents... Blasphemer of God... imprisoner of the innocent) wrote these words, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” Ephesians 4:32 **PAUSE...** “Ya, but I’ve never done anything that

needs forgiving that’s as bad as what that person did to me!” **PAUSE...**

Be careful... and consider this story that Jesus once told... **[PARABLE OF UNFORGIVING SERVANT MT 18:18ff NLT]** Before you judge which sins are forgivable and which are not... before you do the math that says that what that person did to you is not forgivable, its just too big or too bad... Consider Christ’s words. In relative terms, God has forgiven a 100,000 debt for you. How can you quibble over \$10.? And I say that with absolutely no disrespect for the pain and hurt that you may have suffered in your life. Please do not hear this as an attempt to minimize that suffering in any way. All Jesus is saying here is that compared to the injury that we have put on God... compared to the debt we owe him... **PAUSE...** The breadth of forgiveness offered by God, in his perfection, to us in our imperfection is infinitely greater than that required to forgive a fellow sinner.

If you truly want to learn how to forgive those who trespass against you then you need to know, contemplate on, experience the depth of forgiveness that God has extended to you. Yes, think about God forgiving those who’ve hurt you, but also think about God forgiving you.

I don’t think any of us fully understand the immensity of the chasm that God spanned in forgiving us.

I don't think any of us fully understand the immensity of the love that stimulated him to do that!... A love so high... so deep... so wide and so long "I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can't and life can't. The angels can't and the demons can't. Our fears for today and our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away. Whether we are high above the sky (in an F16 jet) or (buried) in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:38-39 Words written by Paul, murderer, prisoner....

His love is what inspired him to forgive, no matter what the cost. Its only his love in us that can do the same. And believe me, this is no walk in the park this forgiveness business, not at all. Its hard work. (Pastor Layne's going to talk about that a bit more next Sunday)... That's why we need him working in us to truly forgive.

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