

Healing Power Of Forgiveness

How could she forgive the woman who had gone after her husband and ultimately married him?

I thought about her. I dreamed about her. I saw her in every woman I met. Some had her name, Cathy. Others her deep-set blue eyes or her curly dark hair. Even the slightest resemblance turned my stomach into a knot.

I felt trapped with my thoughts

Weeks, months, years passed. Was I never to be free of this woman who had gone after my husband and ultimately married him? I couldn't go on like this. The endless rage, resentment, guilt, and anger drained the life out of everything I did. I went into counseling. I attended self-help classes, seminars, workshops. I read books. I talked to anyone who would listen.

I ran. I walked the beach. I drove for miles to nowhere. I screamed into my pillow at night. I meditated. I prayed. I blamed myself. I did everything I knew how to do--except surrender.

Then one Saturday, twenty-something years ago, I was drawn to a day-long seminar on the healing power of forgiveness sponsored by a church in my neighborhood. After some discussion and sharing, participants were asked to close their eyes, then locate someone in their lives they had not forgiven--for whatever reason, real or imagined.

I did not want to forgive her

Next, the leader invited us to look at whether or not we'd be willing to forgive that person. My first thought was Cathy. My stomach churned again. My hands were suddenly wet, and my head throbbed. I felt I had to get out of that room, but something kept me in my seat.

How could I forgive a person like Cathy? She not only had hurt me but she'd hurt my children, also. So I turned my attention to other people in my life. My mother. She'd be easy to forgive. Or my friend Ann, or my former high school English teacher. Anyone but Cathy. But there was no escape. The name persisted, and her face grew large in my mind.

Then a voice within gently asked, "Are you ready to let go of this? To release her? To forgive yourself, as well?"

My unforgiveness was destroying me

I turned hot, then cold. I began to shake. I was certain everyone around me could hear my heart beating. Yes, I was willing. I couldn't hold onto my anger any longer. It was killing me. In that moment, without doing anything else, an incredible shift in my perception took place. I simply let go!

When I let go of the anger - I couldn't believe the freedom I experienced

I can't describe it. I don't know what happened or what prompted me at that moment to do something I had resisted so doggedly for months. All I know is that for the first time in four years I completely surrendered to the Holy Spirit. I released my grip on Cathy, on my ex-husband, on myself. I let go of the anger--just like that.

Within seconds, energy rushed through every cell of my body. My mind became alert, my heart lightened. I saw things I had not seen before. Suddenly I realized that as long as I separate myself from even one person, I separate myself from God.

How "righteous" I had been. How arrogant and possessive. How important it had been for me to be right, no matter what the cost. And it had cost me plenty--my health, my spontaneity, my aliveness.

I had no idea what was next, but it didn't matter. That night I slept straight through till morning. No dreams. No haunting face. No reminders.

If it had been up to me alone, I don't know if I would have had the courage or the generosity to make the first move. But it was not up to me. There was no mistaking the power of the Holy Spirit within me.

I wrote her a letter and truly forgave her

The following Monday I walked into my office and wrote Cathy a letter. The words spilled onto the page without effort.

"Dear Cathy," I began. "On Saturday morning..." and I proceeded to tell her what had occurred.

I told her how I had deliberately continued to separate myself from her, to judge her for what she had done and, as a result, how I denied both of us the healing power of forgiveness.

On Wednesday afternoon of the same week, the phone rang.

"Karen?"

There was no mistaking the voice.

"It's Cathy," she said softly.

Surprisingly my stomach remained calm. My hands were dry. My voice was steady and sure. I listened more than I talked--unusual for me. I found myself actually interested in what Cathy had to say.

She thanked me for the letter, and she acknowledged my courage in writing it. Then she told me how sorry she was--for everything. She talked briefly about her regret, her sadness for me, and more. All I had ever wanted to hear from her, she said that day.

Her words of apology paled in comparison to the deep peace God gave me

As I replaced the receiver, however, I realized that as nice as it was to hear her words of apology, they didn't really matter. They paled in comparison to what God was teaching me. Buried deep in the trauma of my divorce was the truth I had been looking for all my life without even knowing it. God is my source, my strength, my very supply. He alone can minister healing.

For four years I had been caught in the externals, the reasons, the lies, the excuses, the jealousy, the anger. But now I had a clear experience of what had formerly been a stack of psychological insights. Now I really knew that no one can hurt me as long as I am in God's hands. No one can rob me of my life--unless I allow them to.

My life is mine and every experience, no matter how painful or confusing it seems, can serve my spiritual growth. Every moment has its purpose if I am serving the Lord.

Since then I have started over again in another city--free of the binding ties of jealousy, anger, and resentment, free to experience all that God has for me. "For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" ([Jeremiah 29:11,12](#)).

God desires that you discover freedom and strength

God wants to be our leverage in living, empowering us to feel better about ourselves, more excited about our future, more grateful for those we love and more enthusiastic about our faith in Him. He made a personal relationship possible between each one of us and Himself through His Son Jesus Christ.

You can receive Christ right now by faith through prayer. Praying is simply talking to God. God knows your heart and is not so concerned with your words as He is with the attitude of your heart. As you learn more about your relationship with God, and how much He loves you, you'll experience life to the fullest.

Credit – Karen O'Connor