

WEEK FIVE: THE STAGES OF FORGIVENESS...

Statement...tracking forgiveness from start to finish, we consider what is involved and how we move through different stages. Forgiving, the act itself, is simple but it always happens INSIDE A STORM OF COMPLEX EMOTIONS. We FORGIVE IN 4 STAGES and if we travel through them all, we do reach our ultimate destination: reconciliation.

WE HURT...we get HURT. How WE GET HURT/BY WHOM makes a big difference in how well forgiveness works. We are talking about the KIND OF HURTS that strike us to our core, not flesh wounds. We must sort out pains: some require action, justify the miracle of forgiveness; others can be borne with a sense of humor. Deep hurts cause a crisis: the longer we let them fester, the more they cripple us.

WE HATE...when we are hurt deeply, it takes our breath away. We feel RAGE/HATE. Hate is a strong word that carries negative baggage. We may claim that we've NEVER HATED ANYONE. Hate is our soul's INSTINCTIVE BACKLASH against anyone who wounds us wrongly. It not only separates us from those who wronged us; it divides our own souls: one part of us hates and the other part loves. Hate is like CANCER; left untreated, it is deadly. Don't confuse hate with anger. Anger is a sign that WE ARE ALIVE; hate is a sign that WE ARE SICK, need HEALING. Anger energizes us to change things for the better. Hate doesn't want things to improve; it wants them to worsen.

WE HEAL...if left unchecked, hate will undo us. Our healing may require a HEROIC SURGERY or just a CAUTERIZATION. Forgiveness is LOVE'S ANTIDOTE TO HATE. How do we know if/when FORGIVENESS HAS BEGUN? When we can RECALL THOSE WHO HURT US and feel THE POWER TO WISH THEM WELL.

WE COME TOGETHER...the last stage is for there to be a reunion, a coming together of former enemies. What is required of both parties? The answer may be one that we do not want to hear:

OPENNESS/VULNERABILITY ON THE PART OF WRONGED AND HONESTY ON THE PART OF THE WRONG-DOER

The wronged must be VULNERABLE because they are often the ones who take the 1st steps across the bridge of forgiveness. The wrong-doer must bring honesty; without it, a reunion is false. They must be honest about their intentions and show a WILLINGNESS TO LISTEN. We can't TURN BACK THE CLOCK but we can BEGIN AGAIN. Our coming together may only lead to PARTIAL REUNIONS, not HAPPY ENDINGS.