

WEEK FOUR: THE HARD PEOPLE WE FORGIVE...

Statement...we meet difficult people whom we'd like to eliminate from our lives though we often can't. We mustn't confuse FORGIVING with FOREBEARING. Forbearing is just tolerating people, keeping them at a distance. God wants us to risk forgiveness. That may involve forgiving people who are hard to forgive.

HARD-TO-FORGIVE PEOPLE...

MONSTERS...real-life monsters who destroy lives. What is their name? What did they say/do to you? Are some people unredeemable or unforgivable? Does forgiving monsters reduce their horror or shame their victims? Calling them unforgivable, we give monsters a power they shouldn't have. The thing that they most want is the last word. They don't want to be forgiven, just left alone to vindicate themselves.

INVISIBLE PEOPLE...Some people enter our lives, hurt us, then move away where we can't see them. They are INVISIBLE to us. They're no LESS REAL than people we see each day but harder to reach/contact. The bad neighbor who moved away, the disloyal friend who betrayed us but now lives far away, or the abusive parent who died.

THOSE WHO DON'T CARE...a person who mocks efforts to forgive, "I COULD NOT CARE LESS" It's why many never risk forgiveness: we fear the other party may shut us down. Why forgive one who mocks us? What if they show no sign of remorse? We can't make them repent. Must we demand penance before we forgive? The one refusing to forgive is the BIGGEST LOSER in the game of GETTING-EVEN. We always HURT OURSELVES more than one who HURT US.

FORGIVING OURSELVES... by far the toughest person to forgive: OURSELVES. We are our worst critic. Forgiveness is releasing PERSON WE ARE TODAY from the SHADOW OF THE WRONG WE DID YESTERDAY. This requires honesty. Without it, self-forgiveness is a self-indulgent joke. Our inner judge or conscience may be an UNREASONABLE NAG, or a DOTING FOOL, sweeping real guilt under carpet. We need God, not a cruel inner judge.

THOSE CLOSEST TO US...those closest to us often cause painful wounds. The STAKES are high; emotions RUN STRONG; the EFFECTS of NOT FORGIVING are critical. This is when FORGIVENESS GETS PERSONAL: in the family or between GOOD FRIENDS, when we know each other almost too well, and that knowledge can work against us taking the steps of forgiveness.