

Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime;
Therefore, we are saved by hope.

Nothing true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history.
Therefore, we are saved by faith.

Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone,
Therefore, we are saved by love.

No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as from our own.
Therefore, we are saved by the final form of love, which is forgiveness.

- Reinhold Niebuhr.

From *How Can I Forgive You?* by Janis Abrahms Spring

One day two children are playing in the sandbox. They are having fun, sharing and getting along nicely. Their laughter can be heard ringing in the air. And then, all of a sudden one of the children gets mad and storms away. As he runs to the swings nearby, he turns and cries out to his playmate, "I hate you and I'm never going to play with you again."

However, not ten minutes later, the two are back together, playing and laughing and enjoying the day. To anyone who has children or has had the opportunity to observe children, this may sound very familiar. Siblings or friends have some kind of falling out, then, within a short time are back together, as if nothing happened at all.

If only it were so easy for us adults. We often have a harder time rebounding to spats, slights and hurts. There seems to be more to hang onto, it seems so often that it is harder to let go and move on.

In the above interaction with the children, as their parents watch the unfolding events, one father shakes his head and says to the other with a mix of admiration and amazement. "How do kids do that? How can they be at each others throats one minute and get along so well the next?" "It's easy," the other father explains. "They choose happiness over righteousness."

I suggest that forgiveness is a process that we move through as we become ready to heal and reclaim what was lost. In many ways, the healing brought by forgiveness is similar to the healing gained when we grieve well...with forgiveness, hurts are acknowledged and thus can be healed.

A common barrier to forgiveness is confusion between forgiving and reconciling. I like to say “forgiveness is a me thing and reconciliation is a we thing.” Forgiveness is a gift we give ourselves that may benefit another. Reconciliation is a gift we intentionally share with another. It is always healing to forgive. It is not always healing or even safe to reconcile. As an example, there is no benefit in attempting to reconcile with an ongoing abuser...

...to be a person of forgiveness requires risk taking. It says the past will no longer dictate me today. It means we choose to give up familiar things like anger, resentment and bitterness.

JoAnn Huber, Licensed Clinical Social Worker

In his book, *Tuesdays with Morrie*, Mitch Albom writes about his visits with his former professor Morrie Schwartz. They occur during Morrie’s last years of life as he struggles with Lou Gehrig’s disease.

During one of these visits, Morrie focuses his conversation with these words: “Forgive yourself before you die. Then forgive others.” He tells Mitch, “There’s no point in keeping vengeance or stubbornness. These things”—he sighed—“these things I so regret in my life. Pride. Vanity. Why do we do the things we do?” Then he asked me a question, pointing to something on the shelf, “Do you see that sculpture?” The sculpture was a bronze cast, the face of a middle-aged man, wearing a necktie, with a tuft of hair falling across his forehead. “That’s me,” he said “A friend of mine sculpted that maybe thirty years ago. His name was Norman. We used to spend so much time together—swimming, trips to New York. He sculpted that bust of me down in his basement. It took several weeks to do it, but he really wanted to get it right.”

“Well, here’s the sad part of the story. Norman and his wife moved to Chicago, and a little while later my wife, Charlotte, had a pretty serious operation. Norman and his wife never got in touch with us, though I knew they knew about it. I was very hurt, so I dropped the relationship. Over the years I met Norman a few times, and he always tried to reconcile, but I didn’t accept his explanation. I was prideful. I shrugged him off. Mitch . . . a few years ago . . . he died of cancer. I feel so sad. I never got to see him. I never got to forgive.” The tears rolled off the side of his face, rolled down to his lips, as he said “You need to make peace with yourself and everyone around you. Forgive yourself, forgive others. Don’t wait.”